The Evening Star

With Sunday Morning Edition

Published by THE EVENING STAR NEWSPAPER CO., Washington, D. C.

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A-8 .. MONDAY, MARCH 3, 1969

Garrison's Fiasco

For more than two years, Jim Garrison had been loud and insistent in his claims that he had "solved" the assassination of President Kennedy. He would explode the hoax of the Warren report. There would be arrests, convictions—and a limitless future for the district attorney of New Orleans.

Then the loose talk was replaced by legal reality. And it has taken a jury one quick ballot to pierce the bubble that Garrison had worked so hard and so long to inflate.

The chief victim of Garrison's obsession, Clay Shaw, can never be fully compensated for the nightmare that enveloped him for the past two years. But perhaps he can derive some measure of satisfaction in the knowledge that his ordeal was the instrument which exposed the gossamer fabric of the New Orleans "conspiracy" and the insubstantial nature of much of the Warren report criticism.

The quick verdict in New Orleans disposed of the case against Clay Shaw, but it raised another, far more difficult legal problem. What should be done about Jim Garrison? The immediate problem may soon solve itself. The district attorney is up for re-election in six months, giving the voters a perfect opportunity to relieve Garrison of the burdens of office.

Beyond that, the American Bar Association has announced that it will probe the case. It can be expected that the investigation will focus on the fact that the district attorney based a major case on patently unreliable testimony. And despite the prosecution's protests that they were forced to "take the witnesses as they found them," there is a growing suspicion that the district attorney's office laid a heavy editorial hand on the stories that were finally told in court. The implication of possible bribery, coercion, intimidation, promises and threats applied in pursuit of a story to support a preconceived theory should certainly be investigated fully by the bar association.

But the probe should not stop there. The ABA should seek some means by which society can be protected against any legal representative of government who, driven by political ambition or paranoid delusion, starts abusing the power of his office. Some machinery is needed to prevent the court from being used by a district attorney as an instrument of legal torture.