

NEWSMAKERS

Inspiration for 'JFK' dies

Conspiracy theorist Garrison, 70

By Sean McNamara and Steve Marshall USA TODAY

Flamboyant former prosecutor and judge Jim Garrison, whose theories about John F. Kennedy's assassination inspired the movie *JFK*, died Wednesday.

Garrison, 70, a former New Orleans district attorney, was with his family at home when he died. An unspecified illness kept him bedridden most of the past two years.

He never stopped believing that CIA assassins killed Kennedy to keep the United States involved in Vietnam. He was critical of the Warren Commission — the panel that concluded Lee Harvey Oswald was JFK's lone killer.

Garrison called that conclusion "the official fiction," and maintained that Oswald was set up to divert attention from the CIA.

One of three books Garrison wrote about the Nov. 22, 1963, Kennedy assassination became the basis of Oliver Stone's 1991 movie. In that film, starring Kevin Costner as Garrison, the New Orleans DA is portrayed as a man who will do anything to get at the truth about Kennedy's killing.

"Jim Garrison was a great American who will be recognized as such in time," Stone said in a statement released by his publicist. The director is currently making a film on location in Thailand.

The film — in which Garrison plays the role of panel chairman Earl Warren — has been criticized for high fictional content.

Garrison conducted his own probe after the assassination and is the only person ever to bring charges in Kennedy's slaying.

But the man he put on trial, local businessman Clay Shaw, was acquitted in less than an hour on March 1, 1969.

"I don't know what went on in his mind," said Harry Connick, who succeeded Garrison as district attorney. "You have a citizen who was charged with a crime and prosecuted, and there was just no evidence to substantiate it."

"Garrison is an important figure because he did bring someone to



'JFK' CONNECTION: Jim Garrison, shown in 1988, wrote 'On the Trail of the Assassins,' the book that inspired Oliver Stone's film.

Successor discounts importance

By Sean McNamara USA TODAY

The man who replaced Jim Garrison as New Orleans district attorney discounts Garrison's historical importance, claiming all he did was bring an innocent man to trial.

"People who are aware of what happened in the case have some real strong misgivings about it. We think that it was miscarriage of justice," says Harry Connick, city district attorney since he defeated Garrison in 1973.

"There was no evidence to use against Mr. (Clay) Shaw," said Connick, whose son is singer Harry Connick Jr.

"That was a very bad thing for a prosecutor to do — to charge a citizen with committing a serious crime and not to have enough evidence to even charge him with, much less prosecute him and convict him," Connick says.

But the district attorney says his problems with Garrison didn't affect him when Garrison later became a state appeals judge. "He was very fair in the opinions affecting my office."



Warner Bros. **COSTNER:** Played Garrison in 'JFK'

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The president's blood hardly had cooled before the well-organized cover-up began.
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— Jim Garrison, in his book



Bettman Archive (1968) **GARRISON:** 'JFK' based on his book

trial about the assassination," said Larry Howard, administrator of the JFK Assassination Information Center in Dallas. "Not only that, but he did things like get the Zapruder film shown for the first time, which is very hard evidence in the assassination, especially if you can see the way the head goes back when it's hit."

The Zapruder film, an amateur movie of the assassination, was first made public at Shaw's trial.

"I am saddened to say that Jim Garrison has died leaving a legacy of lies about the Kennedy assassination," said David Belin, a Des

Moines lawyer who was counsel to the Warren Commission.

"In Mr. Garrison's book, as in the movie *JFK*, there are more than 100 major misrepresentations, omissions and lies," he said.

The furor over Stone's movie prompted Congress to pass legislation Sept. 30 authorizing the release of hundreds of thousands of pages of secret government documents regarding Kennedy's death.

"Every American owes him a debt of gratitude. He kicked open a door that had been closed too long," said Frank Mankiewicz of the Hill and Knowlton lobbying

firm and a former aide to Robert Kennedy.

Garrison won his high-profile prosecutor's job in 1962, as a reform candidate.

Dubbed "the Jolly Green Giant" because he was 6-foot-6, Garrison allowed reporters and camera crews to accompany raids on French Quarter vice dens.

In 1973, he was charged by federal prosecutors with taking bribes to protect illegal gambling interests. He defended himself and was acquitted, but the trial left him with only a month to campaign for a fourth term, and Connick won.

Garrison also lost his next election bid, a campaign for the Louisiana Supreme Court. But in 1978 he won a seat on the state's 4th Circuit Court of Appeals. He retired in 1991 due to heart trouble.