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Jim Garrison: Tried to prove plot to kill JFK

By Michael Dorman
Sur Flamboyant former prosecutor Jim Garrison — renurturer of the flame of truth in the John F. Kennedy assassination — died yesterday at his New Orleans home.

illness was not disclosed. lived — with a hint of mystery. Although it was known he had been ill for months, the nature of the He was a month short of 71, and he died as he had

ing well more than 200 pounds, and was nicknamed "the Jolly Green Giant." He had a booming voice and yard said Garrison died of natural causes. But longtime friend and coroner Dr. Frank Min-Garrison was a big man, 6-foot-7 inches tall, weigh-

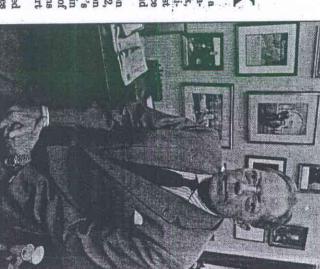
an ego as big as Louisiana. He served 12 years as the New Orleans district attorney and later served another 12 years as a judge of Louisiana's Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals before he retired in 1991. which Kevin Costner played Garrison in what many He returned to the public limelight late last year with the release of Oliver Stone's movie, "JFK," in

> tion. The movie was based in part on Garrison's book, "On the Trail of the Assassins," describing his investigation of the Kennedy case. The movie ironically cast Garrison himself in the role of the late Chief Justice conspiracy was responsible for Kennedy's assassinano evidence of a conspiracy in the assassination. Earl Warren, whose investigating commission found contended was a fanciful account of attempts to prove a

presumed killer, had spent the previous summer in New Orleans. He assembled a bizarre aggregation of witnesses in an attempt to prove that a New Orleans business executive named Clay Shaw had taken part and information that Lee Harvey Oswald, Kennedy's Garrison began investigating the assassination shortly after Kennedy was shot to death Nov. 22, in an assassination conspiracy. 1963. All he had at the outset was a native suspicion

showed up at the courtroom wearing a toga. Asked to were trumped-up charges, one of these witnesses When Shaw came to trial on what many argued

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Jim Garrison

AP Photo

Garrison; Probed JFK Conspiracy

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60 people had hypnoptized him against his will. Asked communist conspiracy. He testified that at least 50 to be sure a spy hadn't assumed her identity. A third witness claimed he was the victim of some sort of how he knew he was being hypnotized, he replied: daughter each time she came home from school — to witness, a psychiatrist, testified he fingerprinted his "When someone tries to get your attention - get identify himself, he said: "Julius Caesar." Another

your eye—that's a clue right off."

Garrison could never seem to decide who was behind the assassination — blaming everyone from Cuban exiles to right-wing Minutemen to "the invisible re." Nor could he decide how many accounts, no ewer than 18 people were involved. Nor could he settle on one story describing the source of the fatal bullets. taken part in the plot. By one of his

out the charge, accusing Garrison of intentionally us-ing the arrest of Shaw "for his own purposes, with complete disregard for the rights of Clay Shaw." The next day, Garrison filed a new charge — perjurya-— against Shaw. But a federal appeals court threw mony, took less than an hour to find him not guilty. The jury in Clay Shaw's case, after 34 days of testi-

> The court said Garrison had "a significant financial interest in the continued prosecution of Clay Shaw"
> — since he had written another book, "Heritage of Stone," about the case and held a contract for three additional books.

mently that there had been a conspiracy. And, for every critic who called him a fraud, there were many more assassination buffs who lauded him as a hero. Until his death, Garrison continued arguing vehe-

jury on charges of taking bribes to protect gambling interests in rollicking New Orleans. He beat the charge, but the effort left him little time to campaign and he was defeated at the polls. Next, he ran for the Garrison's career. In 1973, while serving his third term as DA, Garrison was indicted by a federal grand Louisiana Supreme Court but again was defeated In 1978, he was elected to the Fourth Circuit Court This hero-worship survived further setbacks in

was a very sad day, I think, when he [Garrison] focused on Clay Shaw because that indictment and prosecution was totally unfounded." New Orleans District Attorney Harry Connick Sr., who unseated Garrison in 1973, yesterday said: "It when he reached the mandatory retirement age of 70. of Appeals. He stepped down from the bench last year

But Frank Mankiewicz, a spokesman for Stone and political aide to Robert Kennedy, said Garrison's

investigation was important.

"Every American owes him [Garrison] a debt of gratitude. He kicked open a door that had been closed unavailable for comment, Mankiewicz added. too long," said Mankiewicz, now of the Hill & Knowlton public relations firm. Stone was in Thailand and

book "Crossfire: The Plot That Killed Kennedy." to bring legal-action in the case of the assassination of President Kennedy," said Jim Marrs, author of the alizes Jim Garrison was the only public official to try "Anybody who knows anything about this story re-

tling sounds of a wife, Leah, and five children. one time, his ranch-style house echoed with the busgraduate of Tulane University and its law school. At But by last year, he was left with with no one to Garrison was a native of Dennison, Iowa, and a

his bedside. house was almost empty. Jim Garrison was alone dren were gone. Most of the furniture was gone. The share his reborn fame. His wife was gone. His chil-At the time of his death, the family reassembled at

dren and one grandchild. Garrison is survived by his wife, a sister, five chil-

A funeral service is scheduled for tomorrows:

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