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From Darkest America

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Paris.

On the western side of the Atlantic, New Orleans can claim to be the most European, most Old-World of American cities. The way it is now being made to look from here, there is nothing more exotic and sinister in the heart of the Congo.

In fact, from the stories Europeans read these days, New Orleans does not sound like a city at all but some kind of giant television screen inhabited by "Big Jim," the district attorney; "Ferrie the Wig;" "Torpedo," a mysterious Cuban killer-monster; and a large cast of shadowy, cowering characters called Americans.

"The Kennedy investigation: 'I've already talked too much. I'm afraid for my life,' says David Lewis"—was one splash headline in the mass circulation France-Soir. The paper has been running a gaudy series from New Orleans on District Attorney Jim Garrison's efforts to find a conspiracy behind the President's assassination. FBI and even White House skepticism about Garrison's show is mentioned. But at the same time, the stories say there must be something in it.

Die Welt, read all over Germany, has been following it all less garishly but as closely. It warned, "It's clear now that nobody who had any connection with the assassination has a healthy life."

A national English paper had an actuary make up a table of the life expectancy of 10 "involved" people who have died in the three years since the President's death. It purported to show they should have lived from 15 to 40 years longer.

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The press feeds but also reflects popular eagerness for discovery of a plot. There is an emotional yearning for satisfaction of the feeling that the tragedy of Dallas made no human sense. The logical devil one knows is easier to accept than the freak that surpasses understanding.

But this continued harping on mysteries, on revelations to come, on unsavory types flushed from foul dens, tends at this distance to color the whole picture of America. If it weren't so insist-

ently real, it could be taken as a comic invention, hilarious in the absurd exaggeration of nastiness.

If gun-toting district attorneys are going to insist on shooting from the mouth, the European press cannot be stopped from making the most of it. Still, there are quiet, sober Americans who hold to the principle that it takes evidence to prove a charge.

They are scarcely heard amid the rumpus.

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The hardest thing in the world is to prove that something did not happen. But it would make a difference to bewildered people here who ask, in good faith, "What should we believe?"

They will understand that the answer cannot be, "Here is the truth and the whole truth." But an answer clearly reaffirming that in the opinion of the most prominent, best-informed Americans nothing has emerged to disprove the conclusion of the Warren Report would aid in restoring balance.

This has become necessary because it is not just a matter of personal views any longer. It is a matter of the face of the country. We spend great sums of money around the world each year on improving America's image. Here is a case where the cost is only forthrightness and, in a very special way, personal courage.

Because the voices that would be heard most readily, that would count the most, and be remembered longest are the voices that have been mute—those of the Kennedy family.

It is fully understandable that for the President's widow, his best-known brother, the other members of the family, the pain of the loss makes speaking of it unendurable. To ask them, or one of them, to speak out now on whether or not they are satisfied that the essential truth has been told is asking very much.

But it is no longer a private question, not a political question about relations between the family and President Johnson. It is a national question. So it is not asking too much.