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Covering the Campaign--1969

Garrison Image: Mystery Man

By DAVID SNYDER

Jim Garrison, perhaps the most professionally astute public relations man in town, has decided to become the Howard Hughes of New Orleans. He is harder to find than a Saints victory. Big Jim is around during these waning days of the Democratic primary, but only where the folks are friendly.



Garrison had two chances to discuss the issues with his opponents Wednesday night but passed up both of them. His opponents — Harry Connick, Ross Scaccia and Charles Ray Ward — talked about law enforcement, the record, and Garrison at a session on the West Bank, then moved over to WYES-TV for another two-hour appearance. Garrison ducked out on both sessions.

Another opportunity presented itself Thursday night. He was the only one of the four Da candidates who skipped a confrontation at a downtown debate sponsored by Issues Forum. His assistant, James Alcock, filled in. The word "issues" apparently had an offensive ring to it. WAS THE incumbent incapacitated? Obviously not. By 9 p.m. he was attending an Old Regular rally, even breaking out with a little speech.

In exceedingly brief remarks, Garrison told a packed house his probe of the Kennedy Assassination is not over. Stay tuned, folks, for more thrilling, even fantastic, chapters. Garrison doesn't like to stick around too long. The air of mystery wears off. He moved right out after the talk, making his way with another assistant DA, Andrew "Moo Moo" Schanbra, to a rally at a Magazine Street bar.

As was the case at the RDO rally, the bar was plastered with James E. Fitzmorris and Jim Garrison signs and stickers. At the bar, Garrison slouched in a chair by himself near the band, speaking intermittently to backers who came over to wish him well. The band blasted at his ear, but Garrison didn't seem to hear it. * * *

IT IS NORMAL for candidates to seek as much publicity as possible, but Garrison's appearances have been so exclusive that television network crews are stalking him like a rare bird. An American Broadcasting Company crew was elated to catch up with him at the RDO rally after two days of frustration.

Is this any way to run a campaign? Garrison apparently believes it is. Voters will see him only on his own terms and his own terms are alone, without irritating questions.

His preference is the quiet of a television studio, with, perhaps a prop library to the rear. He certainly does not favor those sweaty meetings

Report
City Hall

with the electorate and his opponents where he is expected to defend the record.

Politically, it makes sense. But the performance is driving his opponents out of their collective skulls.

They show up time after time at debates hoping to confront the incumbent. In the last eight or 10 outings, they have had to shadow-box with themselves or tear each other apart.

SAID A frustrated Connick following the WYES-TV session, "I'd just like to sit down across a table — just the two of us—in a situation where we could cross-examine each other.

Ross Scaccia was equally frustrated. The former assistant DA said he got into the race because he expected to debate the issues with Garrison. Alas, no Garrison.

Normally, the name of the game in politics is exposure. Garrison has become so elusive that a certain mystery has evolved. Voters come to meetings hoping to see the DA. When he does not show, they drift away disappointed. Perhaps there has never been a campaign like it.

The rumors have Garrison supremely confident — confident enough to cut back on television expenditures.

He may be wrong. A poll now underway shows that, among a segment of undecided voters, Connick actually leads Garrison. The latest study is based on an earlier poll that showed Garrison leading Connick, but with 35 per cent of the voters undecided.

The pollsters went back and questioned this 35 per cent. The results: 60 per cent of those questioned said they favored Connick. Another 40 per cent were for Garrison.