

The Evening Bulletin

# FOCUS

26¢

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 28, 1976

LMZB

Jim Garrison Finds Warmth in the Cold Glare of Post-Watergate Revelations

**A Warrior Worn Down;  
His Quest Just a Footnote**

By LESLIE BENNETTS  
Of The Bulletin Staff

Some people always regarded Jim Garrison as a brave crusader for a long-buried truth.

Others thought he was merely a nut. For years, the former New Orleans District Attorney carried on a lone battle to prove his contention that John F. Kennedy was murdered — not by Lee Harvey Oswald alone, not by a single assassin at all — but by a conspiracy of CIA employees enraged by certain Kennedy policies.

For all practical purposes, such as obtaining substantive convictions on the responsible parties, Garrison failed — although this he denies, stoutly maintaining success.

But today — more than 12 years after the assassination, and almost a decade since the start of Garrison's self-imposed mission — Americans know a great deal more than they used to about the capacity of government officials and agencies to lie to the people they serve.

And in the cold light of 1976, Garrison's insistence there was a plot — originally carried out by a small group of men and later concealed by any number of government agencies, in a cover-up he now describes as "the biggest conspiracy in the history of the country" — surely seems less paranoid and more possible than in those relatively innocent days of the early 1960s.

### Obsession Gone

Jim Garrison, 54, a towering six-foot-six, swears that the public climate of acceptance can mellow as it may, but that he's given up on his magnificent obsession.

After 12 stormy years as New Orleans D.A., he finally lost his 1973 reelection bid and today maintains he's just "trying to survive" and earn a living as a lawyer in private practice, and as an author.

Accordingly, he has just come out with his second book, a first novel called "The Star-Spangled Contract" (McGraw-Hill), which brought Garrison to Philadelphia last week on the usual author/salesman circuit.

But it's a funny thing about that "novel." A lot of the details are oddly reminiscent of...something or other. Who could fail to feel a pang at the mention of Foley Square, a presiden-

tial motorcade, or an opened umbrella twirling slowly on a sunny day — followed by a volley of gunfire? President, There's this President, you see, a nice Ivy League type, and then there's this plot to kill him.

Or plots, actually, because the Byzantine complexity of overlapping intrigues in this book is enough to baffle even the former CIA man at the center of the story, let alone the hapless reader. By the time Garrison gets through, everyone from the CIA to the FBI to the Pentagon to the President's advisers to a giant all-knowing computer is in on the action, not to mention the carnage.

### No Parallels, He Says

But Jim Garrison fixes you with those cold eyes (which, as befitting a hard-boiled law enforcement officer, have often — and accurately — been described in standard detective-story style as "gimlet eyes") and says firmly that this little novel of his is in no way an extension of his crusade, that in fact there are no parallels at all with certain chapters of our more unfortunate history.

"All events and action in this book are imaginary," he intones with his customary deadpan expression. "It does not pretend to be the scenario about John Kennedy's assassination, because I already wrote a book about that."

That was in 1970, and it was called "Heritage of Stone." It was this book which Garrison feels finally freed him from the bonds of the Kennedy debacle. "You reach a point where you've done all you can," he shrugs, adding that it was an emotionally cathartic experience to write it and get out of his system everything he "knew."

"It was not based on speculation," he asserts stiffly, still sensitive to words like "theory" being used to describe what he regards as fact. "That book spelled out in footnoted detail what we encountered." And whatever bitterness or frustration he may have felt before were, he insists, thoroughly exorcised by that effort.

Bitterness and frustration though there were, however, Garrison looks back today and believes he couldn't have done otherwise, even knowing from the beginning that his quest was doomed and that it would be at great

personal cost. The latter he will not discuss, except to say that the toll was severe: "It was very hard, extremely hard on my family, but I can't go into it beyond that, it's too personal," mutters the father of five, whose wife sued for divorce in 1972, after 15 years of marriage.

### Feared for His Life

The public and professional price was high as well, although not as high as Garrison originally feared: for years, he explains, he assumed the eventual cost would be his life.

"When I realized the intelligence community was involved, I took it for granted I wouldn't live. I'm surprised I did, but looking back, I realize that nine years ago when we told the press what the CIA was doing, I acquired life insurance. If I had been killed overnight that would have given credibility to everything I said."

In Garrison's novel, "terminations," as they are called, are carried out nonchalantly and with great frequency whenever someone becomes inconvenient to whichever intelligence agency (and they are legion) is concerned. Garrison stresses that the book's exceedingly paranoid point of view, in which there is virtually no one who isn't conspiring at something or other, represents not his view of present reality, but rather a projection of what he believes will come to pass if the American intelligence community isn't curbed sometime soon, in its power and its proliferation.

Nonetheless, Garrison's view of "reality" is paranoid enough. According to him, the Kennedy assassination was the work of a group he refers to as "the Bay of Pigs alumni," CIA agents and related individuals who were upset with the President's refusal to bomb and invade Cuba (due to a certain reluctance on Kennedy's part to start World War III, Garrison explains).

"He had also split with the warfare sector of our government in his decision to withdraw all our advisers from Southeast Asia. However, the CIA had already begun what was in effect its own private war in Laos, even aside from the situation in Vietnam."

These die-hard cold warriors were also displeased with Kennedy's drift toward rapprochement with the Soviets, fearing the detente which would

eventually be achieved years later.

### 'Worth Billions'

"The Cold War was worth billions and billions of dollars, not only to the warfare sector but also to the CIA. And in addition to money, of course, there was simply power."

It was that power, in Garrison's scenario, which eventually defeated his own drive. "The CIA is so powerful there is nothing any individual could do, except perhaps the President himself."

Which is why, Garrison figures, even John Kennedy's devoted brother didn't expose the conspiracy: "Robert Kennedy undoubtedly understood what happened, but he seems to have felt he could do more about it if he remained silent until he was President."

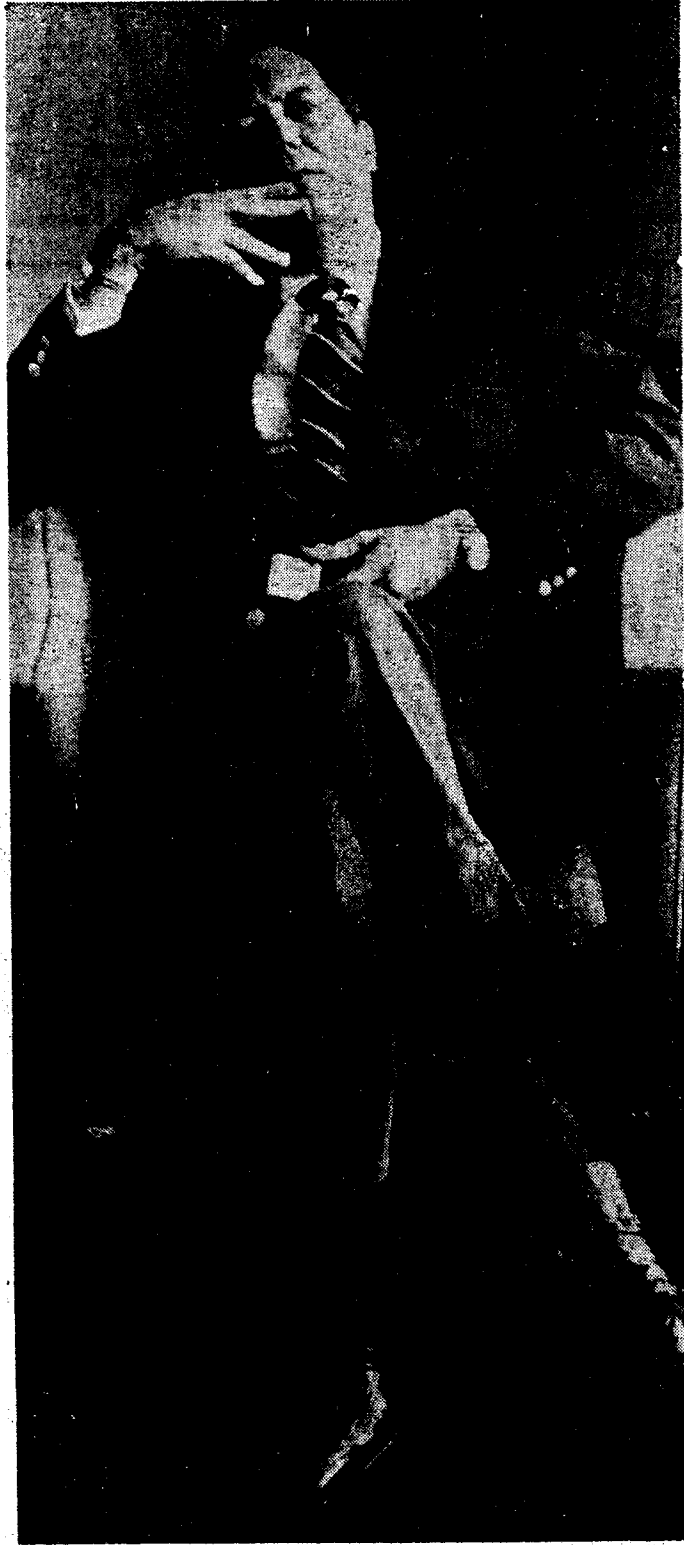
Needless to say, Robert Kennedy never made it to the White House — only to an untimely demise — "in terms of probability" at the same hands, says Garrison.

The crusading De survived, a difficult proposition at times. "I have regrets about having stumbled across the truth in the first place, because it brought an enormous, unwelcome burden to me. At an early juncture it became apparent to us we were dealing with federal intelligence, the power of which we could only guess at. And I knew I had everything to lose and nothing to gain.

"Still, we accomplished quite a few things, which may not be apparent till further down the road. In my other book I listed the evidence, so that at some future date, that much will have been preserved in detail. I don't think the federal government in the foreseeable future will ever do anything to make the truth available.

"As for me, I don't regret having done my duty. Would I do it over again? Yes, because it had to be done. But I would go into it most reluctantly. A more sophisticated or practical man would have said from the beginning, this thing is too big to fight — which it turned out to be. But I was extremely idealistic. And I didn't know what the consequences were.

"I have been more successful than anyone else in this area, but what other independent critics officials ever even investigated? In the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is king."



Bulletin Photo by Anthony Bernato

Jim Garrison . . . *thought he'd be killed*