

Getting Spooked

BY GAETON FONZI

A Heritage of Stone, by Jim Garrison, G. P. Putnam's Sons, \$6.95.

When New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison began his investigation into the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, he called on Philadelphia lawyer Vincent Salandria to assist him. Salandria was among the leading critics of the Warren Commission Report and one of the first to take his analysis beyond a perfunctory examination of the evidence. The evidence did not support the Commission's conclusion that the assassination was the act of a lone gunman. In fact, to Salandria, the evidence shouted that Kennedy's murder was a well-planned conspiracy, one that could only have been successfully accomplished by a trained, highly skilled and perhaps even experienced group of men—in other words, an existing organization. Garrison turned to Salandria because the new information he was uncovering pointed in the same direction.

What, Garrison initially asked Salandria, would be the best way to investigate such an organization?

"I told Jim," Salandria recalls today, "that he would discover less from the details of his investigation than he would from being aware of the way the organization reacted to it."

Jim Garrison has been made to look like an ass. He has, at times, been gullible and too quick to act, but he also has been conned, led down blind alleys and framed in the most clever and sophisticated ways. He has suffered a tremendous amount of calumny and ridicule, been termed a publicity hound, been alleged to have Mafia connections and been rumored to have a history of mental illness. Although fairly treated by members of his local press, who know him as an honest but tough prosecutor, and by the people of New Orleans, who re-elected him to office even after he lost the Clay Shaw trial, Garrison has nevertheless been characterized by

much of the national press as a fool and/or a nut.

It is difficult to believe that what happened to Garrison is irrelevant to his decision to start an investigation of the Kennedy assassination. At least, it cannot be ignored. But what also cannot be ignored is the fact that of all the public officials in the country with the responsibility and authority to take some action (and that includes every member of Congress), Garrison was the only one who did.

"Three years after the assassination," he writes, "two-thirds of the American people did not believe the official conclusions of the government about John Kennedy's murder. Nevertheless, the highest government officials continued to pretend that no serious questions existed, that nothing was wrong."

Vince Salandria had felt that something was wrong right from the be-

ginning. He was suspicious of how quickly the American people were told that the assassination was the work of a deranged lone gunman, how the press refused to think the unthinkable and look at the facts objectively, how the news flowed out of Dallas with almost orchestrated reassurance that Lee Harvey Oswald was the only one involved. (President Johnson received word that there was no conspiracy while *Air Force One* was in flight back to Washington. The word came from the White House's Situation Room, the top-secret intelligence communications center, before Oswald had been given a paraffin test to determine whether or not he had fired a rifle that day. The test later indicated that he had not.)

Salandria was also suspicious of how the great investigative resources of certain federal agencies became suddenly rank with inefficiencies, how



One of the unanswered questions: How could suspected assassin Oswald be liquidated within 48 hours surrounded by armed policemen?

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contradictory reports were filed, vital testimony not taken and important documents destroyed. (For instance: No stenographic notes or tape recordings were made during Oswald's 12 hours of questioning; and the Naval doctor who performed the autopsy inexplicably burned his original notes.)

Thus Salandria brought to Garrison's investigation not only a detailed knowledge of the evidence that invalidated the Warren Commission Report, but also a tenacious determination to confront the questions raised, regardless of how frightening the implications. The results are obvious in Garrison's book. (Garrison, by the way, readily acknowledges Salandria's role and gives him top billing in his opening sentence.)

Evidence and implications. Those are the two key words. Everything that has previously been written about the Kennedy assassination has dealt with one and ignored or carefully skirted the other. *A Heritage of Stone* is the first totally unmitigated analysis of both.

Garrison argues that the implications of the evidence are inescapable: The assassination of President John F. Kennedy was the work of the Central Intelligence Agency, which he calls "the clandestine arm of our military industrial complex and . . . the most effective assassination machine in the world."

The President's murder, maintains Garrison, was nothing less than a coup d'état, a concept the American people find indigestible. However, he points out, if on November 22nd, 1963, we had learned that the premier of Russia had been shot from a Moscow office building by a lone capitalist sympathizer, and then if the assassin himself were liquidated within 48 hours while surrounded by armed policemen, we would have immediately recognized that strong and well-organized forces had seized control of the Russian government.

"The main reason for the inability of the American people and the press to recognize the conspiracy to kill President Kennedy," writes Garrison, "was the fact that its operations all occurred in another dimension, a dimension which generally is not known to exist in our nation. Few Americans are aware that one of the by-products of the cold war has been the development of a huge intelligence structure within their country."

Garrison lays it out: Kennedy had finally become aware of the enormous power of the military and intelligence combine and was moving to curtail

its operations. "The split, which began when the Bay of Pigs debacle was laid in his lap, had widened by the time of the Cuban missile crisis, when he rejected the advice of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to bomb Cuba," says Garrison. "It further widened when the President set up negotiations with Fidel Castro, looking toward a possible détente with Cuba. It further widened when he authorized the signing of the nuclear test ban treaty in Moscow, again over the objection of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. It further widened when Secretary of Defense McNamara announced Kennedy's intentions of having most American troops out of Vietnam by 1965, a move which would have constituted a complete abandonment of our military foothold in Asia. . . ."

"This steady, ineluctable course toward ending the cold war placed Kennedy on a collision course with the strongest forces in the United States government. . . . It meant the beginning of the end of the dominance of the Pentagon and the CIA over American foreign policy, and, indeed, over much of the domestic policy as well. It meant, in sum, the beginning of the end of two empires, one international and the other a bureaucratic structure internal to our government and more powerful than all the rest of the government put together."

Garrison points out that *The New York Times* quoted Kennedy as stating that he was going "to splinter the CIA into 1000 pieces and scatter it to the winds."

Garrison's implications are, admittedly, too wild to accept easily when not considered in context with the evidence, or in the perspective of the conclusions of the Warren Commission Report. But the Commission insisted—and had a staff member named Arlen Specter devise a highly convoluted "single-bullet" theory to support its case—that a deranged warehouse worker named Lee Harvey Oswald, a man completely without any sinister connections or associations, murdered Kennedy in a display of fantastically accurate high-speed shooting. The Commission said it found "no evidence" of a conspiracy.

Those familiar with the details of the evidence and the nature of the Commission's investigation know what Garrison means when he refers to "the cosmic irrelevancy of the government's inquiry." (Key elements of the Commission's investigation were detailed in two *Philadelphia Magazine* articles: "The Warren Com-



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mission, *The Truth and Arlen Specter*, August 1966; and *"Loose Ends,"* January 1967.) The Commission's approach was limited by the fact that it assigned itself the task of trying to find out *why* Lee Harvey Oswald killed the President, not *if* he killed the President.

There were areas of investigation which the Warren Commission simply refused to pursue. Whenever the evidence appeared to be leading away from the presumption of Oswald's guilt, or leading towards an indication of conspiracy, the Commission quickly dropped the lead. (Garrison points out that four of the seven members of the Commission had direct associations with military or intelligence agencies.)

The evidence, however, is there and it is abundant. The 27 volumes of hearing testimony and documents issued by the Commission itself months after the release of its Report contain in themselves enough information to obliterate the Commission's conclusions that Oswald killed Kennedy. (It's interesting that Oswald, contrary to the image the Commission painted of him as a deranged Marxist ideologue, refused under heavy questioning to admit that he killed the President; he kept insisting he was, in his own words, "a patsy.")

More important, however, is the available evidence—a good deal of which is hard and uncontradictory—which indicates that Oswald was far from just a lone, pathetic soul driven by a warped mind to emerge from obscurity and perform a historic deed. Oswald was, in fact, trained for intelligence work in the military, given a top-secret clearance, lived 27 months in Russia as a defector (yet was later given preferential 24-hour treatment in his request for a passport), operated his Fair Play For Cuba Committee out of the office of a former FBI agent who was coordinating CIA aid to anti-Castro guerrillas, was a close associate in Dallas of a former intelligence agent and was known to be friendly with a pilot who did contract work for the CIA. (Telephone records show, by the way, that this pilot, a man named Dave Ferric, called the number of a contact in Chicago shortly before Kennedy's assassination. The Warren Commission's own evidence reveals that Jack Ruby met with that contact on the evening of November 21st, 1963. Footnote: Ferric died mysteriously shortly after Garrison began his investigation.)

Evidence and implications. Those

are important, says Garrison, in analyzing the actual details of the assassination, but any relevant analysis must go further. "Our invisible government begins and ends with deception," he writes. "Perceiving this deception is the key to understanding how the assassination of President Kennedy was accomplished. Understanding the motivation for his assassination is the key to understanding what has happened to America."

The course of the nation has changed since the Kennedy assassination, argues Garrison. Against the wishes of the American people, it has become more deeply involved in a war in Asia. Its economy is straining

Salandria says that the importance of Garrison's book is that it explains what has happened in America since Kennedy's assassination both in Asia and here at home.

under the re-ordering of priorities for warfare expenditures. Decisions on foreign policy and war are no longer in the hands of the president or Congress. Chaos and division stalk the land and provide the necessary environment for the military-intelligence power apparatus to pursue its ultimate goal of maintaining and expanding control.

Vince Salandria says the importance of Garrison's book is that it provides a model of explanation against which the data of current events can be analyzed. If at any point the data does not fit the model, then the model should be discarded and considered wrong. That, so far, he maintains, has not been the case.

In fact, says Salandria, the model may take on new relevance, not only in relation to what's happening in

Laos and Cambodia today and the seemingly uncontrollable direction of the war in Asia, but also in regard to what's happening at home. He points to Garrison's contention: "As our military adventures become more absurd in terms of cost and failure to achieve worthwhile results, it will be increasingly necessary for the CIA to engage in domestic activity in order to continue to provide reasons for the power elite to maintain its control."

"Just as the cold war provides reasons for the existence of autocratic power, so does chaos within the nation operate as a source of power. As chaos continues, the populace will tend to be less concerned about abridgment of individual rights and will more willingly grant to a strong centralized government such power claims it needs. . . . The government's domestic intelligence can supply chaos in good measure by stirring the embers wherever there is social discontent, and in a society depleted by years of war there will be much to that."

Salandria now takes Garrison's analysis a step beyond. If a highly skilled intelligence apparatus wanted to perform an assassination quietly and secretly, he maintains, it could have easily done so. The blatant method by which Kennedy was killed and the resulting performance by the Warren Commission were engineered, Salandria argues, to undermine the American people's confidence in the democratic institutions of government. The obvious inability of two Presidents to extricate the nation from the war in Vietnam has done the same thing, he further maintains. The Chicago Conspiracy Trial, so obviously a set-up, was a manipulation aimed not at repressing leftists but at ridiculing the system of justice. The prosecution of the Berrigan brothers another too obvious manipulation according to Salandria, will do the same thing.

Event after event, predicts Salandria, will be designed to instill cynicism and disenchantment with various elements of democratic government and, perhaps, induce further revolution and chaos. Then the power elements within the government, but outside of democratic influence, will move to maintain law and order and in the process, further expand their base of control. Then will the tyranny of power be belatedly obvious. Then will the model of explanation that Garrison offers take on the patina of an impotent historical document.

Right now, you better read this book. ■ ■



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