



Wearing reformer's determined look, Garrison tours Bourbon Street home of B-girls and "bust-out" bars.

TO OLD NEW ORLEANS ... *Saturday Evening Post June 8, 1963*

## THE VICE MAN COMETH

*District Attorney Jim Garrison's rough and tumble crusade against corruption will launch him in politics—or land him in jail.*

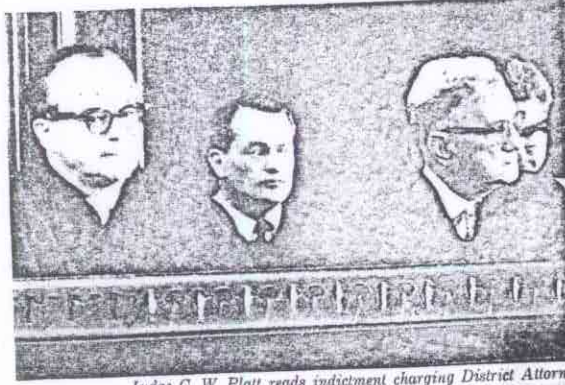
**T**his week in New Orleans a big, broad-shouldered man named Jim Garrison will announce his candidacy for the office of attorney general of Louisiana. The event could seem routine enough. Garrison is the reform district attorney of New Orleans, and Americans have always loved reformers, as long as they do not try to reform away our own favorite form of sinning. Garrison's case, however, is not at all routine. Even while he aspires to his state's highest law-enforcement post, he himself is in imminent danger of being tossed in the clink.

To make things even more interesting, the man Garrison plans to run against, Attorney General Jack Gremlion, is the same man who prosecuted and convicted him. This should make for an unusual campaign, even for Louisiana. But nothing that happens is likely to upset Garrison. Ever since he became D.A., he says, he has felt like a character in Lewis Carroll's famous classic about Alice. "When I was elected, I fell down the rabbit hole and landed smack in the middle of Wonderland," says Garrison. "Nothing I've seen since has surprised me."

Garrison burst from complete anonymity during last year's primary campaign. He had been a complete unknown, with two campaign contributions totaling just \$100, when he was invited to appear on a television program featuring all the candidates. With that one appearance, New Orleans fell in love with him. He looked like Perry Mason and sounded like Eliot Ness, and he said that if he was elected, he would enforce the law and clean up the town. He won easily. Then, to everyone's amazement, it turned out that he had meant exactly what he said.

By JAMES PHELAN

# "Somebody's gotta stop that"



Judge G. W. Platt reads indictment charging District Attorney Garrison.

Racket-busting on television is one thing; if you get tired of *The Untouchables*, you can always punch a button and turn it off. But in real life, particularly in a rowdy tourist town like New Orleans, a district attorney who means business is bound to upset a lot of appellants. For one solid year now a great many people have been frantically groping for some button that will turn off Garrison, but when they punch at him, he punches right back. Last winter he punched back so hard that he was charged, tried, and convicted of criminally libeling eight New Orleans judges in just one press conference. He is appealing the case, which currently puts him in the peculiar position of prosecuting criminals on one hand, while defending himself from a possible jail term on the other.

This week's candidacy announcement will do nothing to calm the furor in fun-loving old New Orleans. It will inspire devoted enthusiasm among Garrison's fans, an unorganized but impressive body of voters to whom he is a latter-day Sir Galahad. At the same time, it will evoke some unprintable comments from many professional politicians, who view his continuance in politics as a china-shop proprietor might contemplate a long-term lease to a bull.

But while he delights many people and infuriates others, Garrison himself remains something of a puzzle. To begin with, he doesn't fit the stereotype of a reformer. His enemies say that he did his own share of roistering on Bourbon Street back when he was a private lawyer. "So what?" Garrison says. "Sure, I went in some of the better bars before I was D.A." And he has never claimed to be a moralist. "I didn't make the laws against B-drinking, prostitution, gambling, and drunk-rolling," he says. "But those are the laws, and I'm supposed to prosecute violations, and I'm going to do it. I'm going to end the rackets here, and the only way anyone can stop me is to kill me. People keep asking what motivates me. I've got the simplest motive in the world—I just

want to run the best D.A.'s office New Orleans ever had."

These are wonderful words, and they are catnip to the voters, but they do not represent Garrison at his sardonic best. He is an avid reader and a frustrated writer, and his speech—particularly when he is on the attack—is highly colorful.

At one time, when New Orleans Mayor Victor H. Schiro was wavering on a decision, Garrison issued a press statement which began: "Not since Hamlet tried to decide whether or not to stab the king of Denmark has there been so agonizing a political decision." On another occasion he referred to a former D.A. as "the Great Emancipator—he let everybody go free." In his libel trial, it was reported he had likened the criminal-court judges to the "sacred cows of India" and on another occasion described the barristers who defend them as "tribal elders rushing to the defense of their institutions."

He describes his early days in office in equally colorful terms. "There I was," he says, "going down the one-way street in the direction the arrow points. Up the street, the wrong way, comes an assortment of judges, police, and miscellaneous officials. *Crash*, we tangle head-on. Then they all start yelling, 'What's the matter with Garrison?'"

Unlike Alice in Wonderland, however, Garrison knew exactly what he was doing and where he was going. And he was elected with the kind of support every candidate dreams of: Nobody but the people. He ran as the candidate of a tiny, self-proclaimed "Nothing Group," which consisted of five young lawyers—Garrison and four friends—who claimed to be embittered at what they considered the cynicism, lethargy, and general low estate of law enforcement in their home town. The "Nothing Group" chose that name because they had no money, no prestige (Garrison had run twice for other offices and got walloped) and no political backing whatever. Then he went on TV.

"It was the damndest thing anyone ever saw," recalls one cigar-chomping

urban Street to see such artists as stripper Rebecca charge that Garrison's raids have ruined business.

guy," complains a cabbie, "before he turns this town into



Garrison with criminally defaming eight New Orleans criminal-court judges.

old politico. "One day Jim was running in his own tracks, and we're all yawning at him? Then *hoo-wee!* The next day he had the whole town talking about him."

"When I went off camera that night," Garrison says, "my phone started ringing with offers of help and money, and it never stopped."

"That fellow just *looked* the way the public thinks a D.A. ought to look," says a New Orleans civil-court judge. "In no time, everybody was watching him. He killed the old-time political rallies, just plain killed them. I went to three or four, and there'd be only a handful of people, and always the same ones. Everybody else was home watching Garrison."

#### Ominous announcement

To the dismay of New Orleans political organizations, Garrison won the Democratic nomination over the incumbent, Richard Dowling, 78,000 to 71,000. More significantly, when he went on to defeat his Republican opponent, 84,700 to 12,000, he ran ahead of everyone else on the Democratic ticket.

Such is the stuff that Walter Mitty daydreams are made of. Garrison found himself district attorney with no debts or obligations, no favors owed anyone. His opening announcement had an ominous ring. "My office may not be a popular office in the next four years," Garrison said. "But it will be honest and efficient. No favors will be granted. A little old lady with a problem will receive as much attention as the mayor of the city."

New Orleans, a sophisticated city that had heard such talk before, sat back to watch what would happen. It has seen scandal and corruption on a scale and of a persistence that few American cities can match. Between 1868 and the 1890's it was the home of a legalized lottery that ostensibly had the pious purpose of raising money for a charity hospital. The lottery enriched its private operators with millions annually, while yielding the hospital fund a \$40,000 dribble.

New Orleans has housed such legendary corruptors as Frank Costello, Dandy Phil Kastel and the Lansky's, who moved in with casinos and illegal slot machines and turned law enforcement into the satrapy of the rackets. It has had a police chief of detectives like Johnny Grosch, whose wife testified that he had accumulated \$150,000 in cash in a steel box—while on a salary of less than \$200 a month. It has seen the Grosch story spread out before the nation by the Kefauver crime committee—and then watched him picked as chief investigator for the District Attorney.

New Orleans has its own definition of a reformer. A well-known New Orleans madam named Norma, who is a sort of magnolia-blossom Polly Adler, defines it by implication. "Listen, dear," Norma says, "I've seen D.A.'s become ex-D.A.'s, and police chiefs become ex-police chiefs, and mayors become ex-mayors. But I've never become an ex-madam. When I retire, I'm going to write a book and tell why. It will be called *Norma and Her Partners*." An old judge puts it more explicitly. "In this town," he says, "a reformer is just an outsider who wants to get on the inside. So he hoots and hollers and wins office—and gets gentled down."

Of all the things that are said about Garrison, no one has accused him of being gentled down. "I wouldn't want to suggest," he says, "that no one has tried."

He had no more than settled in his chair, Garrison says, than he began getting suggestions for appointments to key positions on his staff. "Everyone wanted to help me," he recalls with broad sarcasm. "I had suggestions from Governor Davis, Mayor Schiro, and a number of judges. Some of the nominees were real bums. I picked my own people and I take responsibility for them, which is the way it ought to be."

He began by appointing his fellow "Nothing" groupers, Frank Klein and

*City's jails are jammed. Garrison said so—and judges were insulted.*



## Garrison: "The only way anyone can stop me now is to kill me."

D'Alton Williams, as his top assistants, and then named a former policeman and one-time Army buddy, Pershing Gervais, as chief investigator. The appointment of Gervais, who had been discharged from the police force some years back, bitterly antagonized Police Superintendent Joseph Giarrusso. "I just don't like the idea of my men working under a discharged policeman," Giarrusso says. During a roaring police scandal in the 1950's, Gervais testified that graft was handed out to police officers. "It was passed out in envelopes by your superiors, like a fringe benefit," Gervais said. "I took my lousy \$21 a week when they gave it to me, but I never hustled a dime from anyone in my life. I got stoned for admitting it, while there were higher-ups who were sucking up thousands. They know it and they know I know it."

Garrison vouches for Gervais's integrity, as do a number of other New Orleans figures, including the head of the Crime Commission, Aaron Kohn. But there are undoubtedly many people around New Orleans who are not happy to see a man with his knowledge in a position of such authority, and who will continue to attack Garrison in the hopes of also depositing Gervais.

While Garrison's enemies were still buzzing over Gervais's appointment, the new D.A. enlisted the unpaid help of still another old ex-Army buddy, Max Gonzales, and planted him in the Parish Prison to look into rumors of bail-bond irregularities. Gonzales, actually a reputable auto salesman, posed as an auto-theft suspect and made bond with a payment of marked bills to one Peter Hand, a former state legislator and convicted gambler, whose license to write bonds had been revoked. Gonzales's undercover work resulted in charges against Hand, who has since died, and against a licensed bondsman from whom the marked money was eventually recovered. In addition, other conditions which Gonzales observed during his stay in the badly crowded prison resulted in a grand-jury investigation and press exposé. All this did nothing to endear Garrison with the sheriff and prison officials.

Garrison then took out after vice on Bourbon Street, in the colorful French Quarter. So far, this was a standard maneuver. The incoming D.A. traditionally squares off against Bourbon Street, throws a few light punches, and then retires to his corner while the fun and games resume. Instead of shadowboxing, however, Garrison began clubbing the gamier operators to their knees. His particular target was B-drinking, a method of separating a lonely male from his money that Bourbon Street had developed into a high art. It employs one or more females, often strippers from the showbar, who ply a customer with promises of indescribable future delights in return for the purchase of vast quantities of low-grade champagne at \$30 a bottle.

While this is a well-worn dodge familiar to any sailor over the age of 18, Garrison

charges that some Bourbon Street establishments do not follow Marquis of Queensberry rules in wheedling money out of the customers. He says that some bars have elaborated upon B-drinking with actual prostitution in remote and dim-lit booths, and that they resort to such unfair devices as serving the chloralhydrate cocktail, known familiarly as the Mickey Finn. Gervais asserts that it was not uncommon for a more voracious B-joint to take a well-heeled visitor for more than a thousand dollars in a few hours.

Garrison instituted padlocking proceedings against a number of places, and harassed others by invoking a little-known state law requiring that bars be illuminated enough so that a patron can read a newspaper. Although few visitors go to Bourbon Street to catch up on the news, lighting up the bars inevitably restored a certain decorum. It also sharply reduced the income of the "bust-out" bars, so-called because nonreaders among the clientele invariably end up relieved of their funds.

Garrison's Bourbon Street raids of last year set off a controversy that still rages in New Orleans. The French Quarter, which contains some fine hotels, many charming apartment houses and shops, and internationally known restaurants (Antoine's, Brennan's, and Arnaud's) tends to take a defensive attitude toward Bourbon Street. "The nice people in the Quarter look upon the street as a sort of sister with an indiscreet past," says a New Orleans *States-Item* newspaperman.

"She may not be respectable, but she still belongs to the family. They feel that Garrison is giving the Quarter a bad name just for the publicity it gets him."

"I don't know why Garrison is doing this to us," complains a veteran of 17 years on Bourbon Street. "I run a clean place, not a brothel. Business is down 40 percent since he went on a rampage. Bourbon Street is one of the biggest tourist attractions in town, and without tourists this town will go dead. And you know something?" he asks, shaking his head. "I still like the guy."

A cabdriver takes a less enthusiastic view. "They gotta stop that guy," he growls, "before he turns New Orleans into a Des Moines!"

"He's magic politically," says a New Orleans political writer. "He's off and running and he'll be hard to stop."

Not everyone agrees with that estimate. The Bourbon Street raids and Garrison's whiplash tongue have brought him into bitter controversy with the New Orleans police department and with the city's eight criminal-court judges. Together, along with their friends, allies, associates, and underlings, they constitute a fairly awesome array of political strength.

The big D.A. has accused police officials of offering "nothing but steady, sullen resistance" in the drive against prostitution, B-drinking, and gambling. "are like an army that has a mission to capture an enemy hill. Years ago they went out,

surrounded it, and then dug in. They've been dug in for so long that they've forgotten what they're supposed to do. They've made friends with the enemy, and even exchange birthday and Christmas presents. So why capture the hill and end all the fun?"

The trouble between Garrison and the judges started in the fall of 1962. The jurist brought his raids to a jarring halt when they shut off money for his undercover investigators. This money had come from a fund called "fines and fees," made up of bond forfeitures and criminal-case fines. Louisiana law says that the fund may be spent at the discretion of the district attorney, with the approval of any one of the eight criminal-court judges. At the height of Garrison's vice raids, the judges began to question his expenditures and decided that thereafter, five judges, not just one, would have to approve his spending.

Later they ruled that his vice investigations were infringing upon police functions, that he had no authority to investigate B-drinking or prostitution, and that he was setting up a "second constabulary" in competition with the police force.

"If you want to get a mule's attention," Garrison is fond of saying, "hit him with a piece of stovewood." When trouble began to develop, Garrison swung some verbal stovewood at a highly sensitive area of the criminal-court judiciary.

### Don't rock the boat

His battles with the judges resulted in his being charged, tried and convicted of criminal defamation. At the trial, evidence was introduced that, in a luncheon speech before the Temple Sinai Brotherhood, Garrison had likened the jurists to "sacred cows" and had asserted that they enjoyed as many as 206 holidays a year "not counting legal holidays like All Saints' Day, Long's birthday, and St. Winterbottom's Day." He further complained that one prisoner had been held in jail awaiting trial for 19 months while a codefendant had pleaded guilty, served his time, and gone home. "One of the judges who could have tried him," said Garrison, "has had 300 days' vacation since this man was jailed."

It was further testified that after the luncheon Garrison had dictated a statement to the press charging that the eight criminal-court judges "are not in sympathy with vice investigations."

"As a matter of fact," the district attorney was reported to have said, "so opposed have the judges been . . . that they completely blocked us off from our Bourbon Street investigations of B-drinking and other forms of vice. . . . The message is clear: 'Don't rock the boat, son. You are not supposed to investigate anything.' This raises interesting questions about the racketeer influences on our eight vacation-minded judges."

A newsmen who interviewed the judges shortly afterward described them vividly. "Most of them," he said, "had turned a

kind of amazing purple color." The judges charged Garrison with criminal defamation. As district attorney, with the authority to decide who gets prosecuted, Garrison promptly dismissed the charges against himself. The judges then requested Garrison's superior, State Attorney General Jack P. F. Gremillion, to prosecute the charges. In 24 hours, Gremillion filed charges against the New Orleans D.A., and then came down from the state capitol in Baton Rouge to prosecute Garrison in person. Because all eight criminal-court judges were parties to the litigation, an upstate jurist, Judge William H. Ponder, had to be brought in to hear the case. Garrison was tried in January, and in February was found guilty and sentenced to a \$1,000 fine or four months in jail.

"It is amazing how swiftly the courts can move down here under certain circumstances," Garrison says.

In the trial, each of the eight judges took the witness stand and swore that no racketeers had ever influenced his judicial decisions. They testified that Garrison's remarks had subjected them to public ridicule and insult. The D.A.'s reference to them as "sacred cows" had brought humiliation and embarrassment, one jurist testified. "People holler 'Moo!' at me," he said.

The trial elicited some other unusual testimony. One of the defamed judges admitted under cross-examination that his parents ran a lottery for years while he was a criminal-court judge. Another conceded that when elected to the bench, he had been guest of honor at a party tossed by Mike Callia, a well-known New Orleans gambler, and that several other judges had joined the fun.

Garrison has appealed the conviction to the Louisiana State Supreme Court, and says that if necessary he will go to the U.S. Supreme Court. Throughout the trial he sat at a table writing on a pad, apparently making elaborate legal notes. Actually, he was composing a bitterly satirical parody of Shakespeare's *Richard the Third*, with a cast of New Orleans characters. With anybody else you would assume that this is no more than a harmless form of mental therapy, but Garrison might just be foolhardy enough to try and get it printed.

He is not known for self-restraint, heaven knows; and neither the shut-off of his funds nor his conviction for defamation have slowed him down. When the funds were withheld, he simply borrowed \$5,000 from a bank and carried on as before. After the judges ruled that he had to curb his investigatory work, he staged a lengthy undercover investigation of a major lottery and ordered a predawn raid which resulted in the arrest of 12 runners with a \$1,000-a-day operation. "To those who say that the district attorney cannot investigate," he stated, "let last night's operation be our reply."

What makes Jimmy Garrison run is a favorite topic of debate in New Orleans. Some residents think he is simply another

From empty garage in French Quarter, Garrison and aide Pershing Geravis (left) direct raid.

ambitious politician who has  
 a new trail—the unused path of  
 a dot—to higher terrain. Others  
 he is a nihilist, another Lion in  
 robes. Says Aaron Kohn, director  
 of New Orleans Crime Commission:  
 "His institution isn't really too im-  
 portant. Before Garrison, everyone in  
 the city was in love with everyone else,  
 and the lowest denominator set the tone.  
 For the first time, we have a system of  
 checks and balances at work."

Garrison is acutely aware that he is  
 watched sharply by many people  
 who have unresolving doubts about him.  
 "If I wanted to go wrong," he says,  
 "I could fall past the point of no return.  
 As things stand now, this whole town would  
 be in a tizzy on me."

away from his office, Garrison is re-  
 laxed, articulate, and surprisingly intro-  
 verted. He lives with his attractive  
 wife and son and daughter in an  
 elegant home in a middle-class  
 section of town. He is intensely devoted  
 to his son, who is four, and hopes the boy  
 will go into medicine or some such field  
 where there is at least a little concern for  
 the individual. "I have a very dim enthusiasm about  
 entering law or politics."

Despite that disclaimer, Garrison has a  
 great deal of interest in the political scene and takes  
 particular relish in his role as a lone-wolf  
 politician. He has a high regard for Ayn  
 Rand, the high priestess of unfettered in-  
 dividualism, and says that her novel, *The  
 Fountainhead*, had a profound effect on  
 his thinking. "What she had to say about  
 the importance of the individual, even if  
 it meant loss, is true," Garrison says.  
 "The statement is regularly made that  
 the individual can do nothing. The answer  
 is that the individual can do anything.  
 We should worry about the crime syndi-  
 cates. The real danger is the political  
 movement, power massing against  
 the individual. It is a goliath that has 1,000  
 heads and 800 tons, and is all over the  
 place. As an individual, I am not going  
 to be pushed around by all the power in  
 the state."

His next big tilt with this power will  
 come next December, when he enters the  
 race for attorney general against Jack  
 McMillan, the man who prosecuted him  
 for defaming the judges. At this writing  
 Garrison is subject to removal from office,  
 because of the libel conviction, by any  
 court judge who is properly peti-  
 tioned to do so. No one, including Gar-  
 rison, is quite certain whether he will  
 end up in the attorney general's office or go  
 to jail. By successfully running for the  
 office he should improve his chances for  
 avoiding the latter, but nothing is certain  
 in Wonderland.

While Garrison may be motivated by a  
 desire to attain the office of the man who  
 prosecuted him, he explains the an-  
 nouncement of his candidacy in some-  
 what loftier terms. "There is a certain  
 irresistible tendency to climb where op-  
 portunity presents itself," he says. "It is  
 somewhat like the reason men try to climb  
 Everest—because it is there." THE END

—Photographs by Larry Fried

