

NEW ORLEANS BORED**Shaw Trial an Anticlimax**By HAYNES JOHNSON
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NEW ORLEANS — Clay Shaw sits in front of the mahogany bench, gazing at the parade of people who saunter past him to take their place briefly on the witness stand, and then pass on, dismissed as potential jurors.

From time to time, he leans back, lights a cigarette, twirls his horn-rimmed glasses and stares at the large courtroom windows with the drawn blinds. If you didn't know better you would think he was indifferent to being charged with conspiring to kill a president.

Judge Edward A. Haggerty Jr., a patient man with iron-gray hair and a ruddy Irish face, proceeds with his business, hour after hour, day after day, never losing his cool composure.

"Do you know any reason that will prevent you from being a fair and impartial juror?" he asks, again and again, to the faceless procession seated to his right.

And over and over he hears the same response, "I have a fixed opinion." Then he calls out the next number and another prospective juror marches forward.

It has been going on this way for two weeks now. More than 1,100 persons, whites and Negroes, young and old, men and women, have trooped through the small second-story courtroom of the criminal courts building. Today, only one person — the last alternate — remained to be chosen before the formal testimony can begin and the John F. Kennedy conspiracy trial is finally under way.

2 Years Since Announcement

In one way, it is all anticlimactic now. Two years have passed since Jim Garrison, the theatrical New Orleans district attorney, announced dramatically that he had "solved" the Kennedy assassination.

Then, the press of the world



CLAY SHAW

flocked to New Orleans, clamoring for the next sensation.

A host of characters figured in the headlines—David Ferrie, the tormented former pilot who quoted Socrates and died mysteriously as Garrison's investigation began; Guy F. Banister, the militant anti-Communist private detective who supposedly maintained an arms cache in his office and has also died; the anonymous Cubans being trained for the Bay of Pigs; the equally anonymous Central Intelligence Agency men who outfitted them; Perry Russo, Dean Andrews, Gordon Novel, Alvin Beaubouef, and others.

Nearly All Forgotten

Nearly all have been forgotten by the public now. Indeed, New Orleans itself seems bored by the interminable preliminaries of Garrison's vaunted investigation. It is not a topic of conversation; it is not a top newspaper

headline; it is not even a lead item on television (the principal news here concerns a school book censorship controversy in Jefferson Parish).

New Orleans, on the eve of Mardi Gras, is going its own casual and lusty way.

And Americans in general, who love a conspiracy, seem to have lost their interest in the New Orleans investigation.

At this moment, they even have a second Kennedy assassination trial to contend with, if they care to do so. They don't seem to be concerned with either.

Yet it is not too much to suggest that a great deal is on trial here in New Orleans.

Trial by Publicity

Jim Garrison's case so far has been largely a trial by publicity.

He has used the press to indict a presidential commission charged formally with investigating the circumstances of John F. Kennedy's murder in Dallas. He has fed on fears of conspiracies operating with the highest levels of the American government.

He has accused persons now dead of the most monstrous crimes. He has arrested a respected businessman of his own city as the mastermind of a conspiracy to kill the president.

He has, as a result, raised questions about the length of time it takes to bring a major case to trial.

Not the least of these concerns involves the position of the defendant, Clay Shaw. As he himself put it in an interview earlier this week with Michael Parks of the Baltimore Sun:

"There isn't even a shadow of truth in the charges against me. But I'll never be able to prove that to the world.

"Even if I'm acquitted, I'll always be the man accused, as the newspaper puts it every day, of conspiring with Lee Harvey Oswald to assassinate the president."

He went on to say, "I feel that it's the 'Book of Job,' 'Alice in Wonderland' and 'Through the Looking Glass,' Kafka's 'The Trial' and Gogol all come to life at once."

Frustrating Task

In referring to the press, Shaw put his finger on the present problem in moving the case to trial. It has been a frustrating task to find anyone who does not have a firm opinion on the case.

As one man said yesterday in answer to Judge Haggerty's

question about his ability to remain impartial, "As far as my opinion on Mr. Shaw goes, no. As far as the publicity surrounding the case, I can't help but have some opinions."

Another responded:

"Due the great deal of publicity, your honor, I'm afraid I do have feelings."

Both were immediately excused.

At one point yesterday afternoon, it appeared as though the problem had been solved.

Negro postal employe with five children who works at night and who, by his testimony, seldom reads or watches television, said he had no fixed opinions. He did say, in response to questioning, that he thought he might have seen Jim Garrison giving his views on the case on a Johnny Carson television program.

"I remember something about that, but I think I went to sleep," he remarked.

He, too, eventually was excused.

The judge is trying again today with another large group of potential jurors. One of them, if

not today, then tomorrow or the day after, will finally complete the panel and the trial will begin.

There is only one final, disturbing thought. After all this time and speculation, many Americans will never know what to believe is the truth about the assassination of the 35th President of the United States, no matter what happens at the old gray building on Tulane Avenue, where a carved inscription reads: "Impartial administration of justice is the foundation of liberty."