

Mr. Andrew Sciambra
6151 Pratt St.,
New Orleans, LA 70119

7/30/91

Dear Moo,

Thanks for your note and the enclosed slippings.

Garrison looks ghastly! His face is so shrunk! I fear he is more seriously ill than the story indicates. If I recall correctly Frank Winyard is an old friend of his. I can't believe that as a doctor he can attribute this shocking change in Garrison's appearance to "infected ankles and inflamed blood vessels in both legs." But if this is an accurate description of his illness, that "his family told the hospital to release no information" seems to me to be inconsistent with it. I fear it is as you'd heard, cancer.

"His family?" Has he remarried? If he did and had children they could hardly be old enough for the paper to refer to them as instructing the hospital. Or does this refer to his children who were so small when I knew them?

If it is cancer, which is what caused Clay Shaw's death, expect Shaw's remaining friends and supporters to refer to poetic justice.

Mel Leavitt's letter is eloquent and, tragically, correct in its criticism of Jim and what he did to Shaw. I do not recall him, although the name is familiar. The only one I recall having any contact with at WDSU-TV in those days was Walter Sheridan's flunky. I've forgotten his name.

You say that Stone is shooting in the court house this week. If it works at it did in Dallas he'll have closed the judicial system down. If there are any stories on this I'd appreciate them for the historical record. In Dallas Stone hired off-duty cops to keep everyone out of Dealey Plaza except those he permitted there.

A Garrison pal of more recent years, Ted Gandolfo, told me several weeks ago that he'd heard from Jim and that Jim had told him he'd had only pneumonia but had gotten over it. At the time Gandolfo offered me what I came to suspect was a booby-trap for Jim. I then and since asked him to validate what he proposed and he has been silent. I know he spent several months with Jim just before the book appeared. His uncle is maitre d' at ~~THE~~ Kolb's restaurant. He and Jim also made joint appearances in the New York area when the book was out.

If this is true, then poor Jim still can't be honest with himself about what he did and in this visible state of poor health still is motivated by vengeance.

Last time I saw him I was in New Orleans as Ray's investigator. I did not look him up. He located me and invited me to lunch. Monk Zelden was there. We spoke for a while as I recall when Jim left. Monk asked me to borrow the DJ transcripts of the wiretapping and bugging Pershing Gervais arranged. The skunk never returned them. Are he and Dean Andrews still alive?

Thanks for the good wishes about our health. Best,

Hal

Stone should film real hero story — Clay Shaw

New Orleans

Oliver Stone's diatribe on his film "JFK" (Letters, June 27) dismisses Rosemary James' account of Jim Garrison's circus trial of Clay Shaw (Letters, June 20) as "riddled with factual errors." How absurd!

It is Mr. Stone's letter that is riddled with errors. His rambling dissertation shows the same disregard for truth and reliance on fantasy that characterized Garrison's witch hunt.

This sickness, born of fear, paranoia and distrust of the federal government, the FBI, CIA and all federal agencies, incubated Garrison's "fraudulent case." Disregard for truth and contempt for individual civil rights was the poisonous brew that resulted.

As a television reporter, columnist and chief editorialist for WDSU-TV, I witnessed the humiliation heaped on Clay Shaw and the international ridicule it caused New Orleans. I'll never forget the day one of Garrison's chief investigators, the late Bill Gurvich, resigned. "Clay Shaw had nothing to do with it," he said, flatly. Plagued by his conscience and a bleeding ulcer developed "chasing Garrison's phantoms," he told me, "Garrison is hanging on to anyone and anything to keep the case open ... and in the international press, no matter what the cost to others."

Gurvich then sought out Robert Kennedy. "What I told him, the exact words were (Gurvich wrote) 'Senator, Mr. Garrison will never shed light on your

brother's death.' Earlier, Garrison's chief assistant Pershing Gervais defected, stating that Garrison had no case. He stressed the DA's "obsession with any and all conspiracy theories," an obsession Oliver Stone apparently has wholeheartedly embraced.

Garrison's witnesses were not, as Stone claims, kept from testifying by officials who refused to extradite key witnesses. He had no key witnesses. He had no hard evidence.

Stone claims Garrison's files were plundered. To the contrary, Garrison's files existed mainly in his head. Bill Gurvich revealed that Garrison's paranoid belief that the FBI bugged his every movement caused him to propose to his staff an incredible plan: an assault on the local FBI office using "red pepper guns."

One night I delivered an editorial in which we carefully assembled at least 14 separate and distinct assassination theories the great Crusader had invented, revised, espoused or discarded.

Afforded equal time on WDSU, Garrison brushed it all aside and instead cautioned me to, in the words of Mark Twain, "First get the facts, then distort them." Unfortunately, he never heeded his own counsel.

Certain facts are so grotesque that they are in themselves "distortions." Garrison's Mardi Gras of "key witnesses" was a circus sideshow of oddballs, psychopaths, grudge bearers and sensation seekers. In time, an honest

and respected man's reputation was slowly eroded and finally destroyed.

After two years twisting in the wind, Clay Shaw was declared not guilty by a jury that deliberated less than half an hour. Clay Shaw died three years after the trial. He had been stripped of his reputation, his money, his position in the community, but not his pride.

If Oliver Stone sincerely "seeks the truth," he should consider telling the story of Clay Shaw's ordeal. It could be a timeless commentary on the abuse of power and the systematic destruction of an innocent man.

If Stone wants high drama, he need only review this statement from an interview I conducted

with Clay Shaw after the trial. "I often had the feeling I was living through a Kafka novel ... the impotent anonymous, dispensable 'K' ... unable to communicate with the Castle."

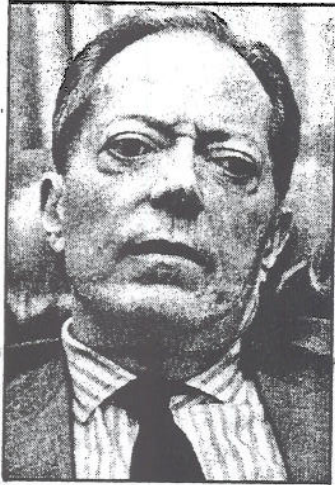
The late James Kirkwood wrote in his definitive study of Shaw's ordeal, "American Grotesque":

"Garrison cried wolf at a lamb, then slaughtered the lamb. That cry should be remembered."

Kirkwood published "American Grotesque" in 1970. He concluded this masterful piece of investigative reporting with a prophetic admonition:

"We must all watch out and speak out. Otherwise, in twenty years people will be asking, 'How did Jim Garrison ever get this far?' And the answer will be: We let him."

Mel Leavitt



Jim Garrison
In Tulane University Hospital

Garrison in hospital since July 9

For nearly two weeks, while Oliver Stone has been shooting his big-budget movie about one of the most important phases of his life, Judge Jim Garrison has been in Tulane University Hospital.

His family has told the hospital to release no information about the former Orleans Parish district attorney except that he was admitted July 9, Tulane Medical Center spokeswoman Fran Simon said.

Staff members at the 4th Circuit Court of Appeal, where Garrison has been a judge since 1978, were equally tight-lipped.

Orleans Parish Coroner Frank Minyard, who has visited Garrison twice in the past week, said he had infected ankles and inflamed blood vessels in both legs.

But after treatment with antibiotics, Garrison looked much better, said Minyard, a doctor who maintains a private practice.

Garrison's investigation of President Kennedy's assassination is the subject of "JFK," which Stone has been shooting for the past two months. Kevin Costner portrays Garrison.

Garrison plays Chief Justice Earl Warren, but he filmed his scenes before his hospitalization.