

[The Jim Garrison phenomenon relates intimately to its environment. Here was a mere parish district attorney digging into a question that had preoccupied a top-level federal commission for nine months, challenging its basic conclusions, and announcing to the world in general that the most successful and momentous political assassination in modern times -- in Dallas -- had been hatched in the supposedly somnolent southern city of New Orleans.

[An essential legal underpinning of this situation is the heritage of the Napoleonic Code in the ~~code~~ Louisiana state constitution, which by all accounts seems to make the district attorney "the most powerful local elected official."

[While this makes it possible for the outsider to conceive of more and broader initiatives available to Garrison than might be the case with a district attorney in some other state, it does not explain the anomaly wherein this same parochial DA, at the same time he was widely accused of grabbing headlines to further his political ambition, was found to be warring with the local press. Indeed, he was so browned off with the way the monopolistic New Orleans news establishment was bird-dogging his expenditures of public money in his investigation that he arranged to have it financed instead by a private club of local businessmen, mostly oil men.

[When Clay Shaw was arrested, the spectacle was served up of one of the most respected figures in the ~~area~~ international business community being charged with helping to plot the assassination, and at the same time portrayed, implicitly by the disclosure of certain evidence, as leading a highly irregular personal life. The sudden death of David Ferrie, and subsequent revelations of his exotic career, made it plain that strange things indeed were going on in New Orleans.



Basic questions arose: What precisely is the political environment in the lower Mississippi estuary? Can it support a political life form like Garrison who is anything more than the publicity-seeking, politically ambitious buffoon he was immediately and widely painted?

The near-unanimity ~~with~~ with which Garrison was thus depicted provided perhaps the first sensible ~~can~~ clue to a sensible reality. If he were such an ambitious clown, why all the fuss? Would he not dig his own grave sooner and deeper than anyone else could dig it for him? If he had no case, had he not chosen the shortest possible route to political suicide? It became apparent very soon that, headstrong fool or not, he was operating in an area which very influential people found intolerably sensitive; hence the fuss.

There were certain exceptions. Gov. John McKeithen, a Johnson supporter, made it clear he had no intention of tangling with Garrison, at least to the extent of anything resembling an open challenge. And certain reporters began to work into their stories meaningful bits of information about Garrison: He was a voracious reader. He played chess. He clearly was something ^{apart} ~~next~~ from the common Gung Ho stereotype of the ambitious prosecutor; as an Air Force officer he had seen Nazi concentration camps at the end of World War II and certain ideas about human dignity and freedom had jelled in his mind; he had challenged a corrupt local judiciary system and had fought the case all the way to the Supreme Court and had won. If he were a simpleton, he was an oddly complicated one.

The next clue ~~was~~ in the ~~the~~ torrent of ridicule loosed upon him was the charge that he was another Huey Long. This was a revealing mistake, since it recalled the interesting circumstance that Long was assassinated by a scion of the Old Guard in Louisiana and suggested at the same time that assassinations at least are not unthinkable there. ↓

It also recalled the old Louisiana saying that everybody was against Huey except the people. Long was an unabashed demagogue, but the fact that he was returned to office again and again can mean only that he delivered on some of his promises -- enough, at least, to motivate the entrenched establishment to get rid of him.

What is the nature of this Old Guard? For an outsider it is difficult to say. Among states, Louisiana is relatively self-contained in some ways. It has a rich port serving a vast interior trading area; it has oil, gas, sulfur, an offshore fishing industry, and the richest of all land, a vast river flood plain and delta. New Orleans is an old city, in American terms. It is rich from generations as a great port. It is cosmopolitan, considerably Roman Catholic and yet somehow part of the Old South.

In the city as in the state there is no real two party system as outside the South. There is the traditional rivalry between two factions of Democrats. One is the Old Guard, bent on maintaining its historic dominance of the economy and politics; the other is the new element willing to flirt with the people -- as Huey Long did -- in order to gain power.

In any nature society the incidence of social aberration, including homosexuality, usually rises with the age of the culture and the spread of cosmopolitanism, and the ruling class sooner or later is affected. Thus in New Orleans a Clay Shaw, an apparent aberrant if one is to accept his collection of whips and chains as indicative, was a respected and successful businessman who had occupied an important position in the international trade community for many years. Here he had exercised his undoubted talents, and in an earlier Army career, without, apparently, encountering serious difficulty. If there can be a Clay Shaw high in the power structure of New Orleans, there can be others like him. In fact the assumption that he was not unique in his community ~~is~~ is all but inevitable. A clique of sorts is implied, battenning upon the ~~xxx~~ preservation of the old order

as a means of insuring its own survival. It would not take too large a clique: ~~ax~~ a few strategic bankers, a Clay Shaw in the International Trade Mart, a team of talented lawyers, a judge or two, and the stranglehold upon the business community could be well-nigh unbreakable. Except by a troublesome rabblouser like Huey Long. Or a DA like Garrison.

[If one postulates such a coterie of aberrants high in the political and business levels of the state and city, their probable political orientation and methods automatically follow. They gravitate naturally to the far right segment of the political spectrum (in spite of, and to a certain extent because of, the unusual atmosphere of tolerance in such a city) and find it natural to support right-wing causes not only in Louisiana but also throughout the Latin-American trading areas with which they do business. They would deal with the Mafia as long as such dealings further their own ~~ends~~ ends and ~~do~~ do not menace them. (Is the privately financed New Orleans Metropolitan Crime Commission a symptom of this situation?)

[In such a milieu a man like David Ferrie might find ~~refuge~~ a kind of refuge and relative security, and like other homosexuals return again and again to this relatively comfortable, tolerant base.

[One additional factor must be noted here: the combination of a great trading port, with its connections with many foreign governments and bankers, and the cosmopolitan environment of New Orleans made the International Trade Mart almost an absolute certainty as a base of some kind for the Central Intelligence Agency. The CIA could scarcely neglect such a facility. Consequently the probability of a connection between Shaw and the CIA must be considered a very strong one.

[If this is a reasonable picture of the political climate in New Orleans, what of the opposition that might seek to challenge it?

[Since Huey Long there seems to have been no serious challenge to the Old Guard, although McKeithen appears to represent a more liberal

epoch than many in the past. Long's brother, Earl, clowned his way through the statehouse, but never with Huey's skill or firmness, and he ended looking far more ~~like~~ the buffoon Huey was supposed to be than Huey ever was. Huey's son, Russell, projects the old shoe type of Senator, but he did not get to be majority leader in the Senate by being altogether stupid, and yet he too lacks the drive and dynamic of his father. His relatively mild approach to things, his long-standing alliance with Johnson, all indicate he feels he does not have the popular base his father had although he obviously has enough to remain in office.

As to Garrison, whether he is ^{is} ~~an~~ ambitious politically as his critics claim is still not answerable and not too directly relevant. What can be said is that he has enough appeal ~~to command financial support for his investigation~~ to command financial support for his investigation from a group of businessmen. Most of these are independent oil men and it seems reasonable to assume that they find the political and financial setup

in Louisiana restrictive enough that they are willing to back Garrison, and with money. In so doing they stray from the ~~normal~~ normal orbit of newly-rich oil men, who commonly concentrate on holding on to such delights as the oil depletion allowance and the tidelands gravy train. As businessmen, they unquestionably see advantage to themselves in backing Garrison, and it would appear that they have their sights set on unhorsing the Old Guard, which characteristically would regard them as neuveaux riches and therefore lacking in the recognized qualifications for the Louisiana aristocracy, and therefore ~~not~~ for the best clubs, the best business contacts, and so on.

Whether they actually want to take over control of the state politically is far from clear at this distance. What is clear is that they want to loosen the grip of the Old Guard on the state and city and are willing to back Garrison in order to bring it about.

