

Books of The Times

Who Killed John F. Kennedy?

By JOHN LEONARD

AMERICAN GROTESQUE. An Account of the Clay-Shaw-Jim Garrison Affair in the City of New Orleans. By James Kirkwood. 669 pages. Simon & Schuster. \$11.95.

A HERITAGE OF STONE. By Jim Garrison. 253 pages. Platoon. \$6.95.

New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison... Clay Shaw... Garrison... Kirkwood... perjury... conspiracy... charges to the injury of "conspiracy" accusations. Unfortunately, Mr. Kirkwood is so conscientious in his reportage that one wonders why so many people claimed to have seen Mr. Shaw with Oswald and Ferrie. Were they all mistaken or lying? To be sure, conspiracy wasn't proved, and the state embarrassed itself with surreal incompetence. But "conspiracy" is no longer the charge against Shaw; perjury is. We have only Mr. Kirkwood's emotional word on innocence to go by. Such a word

isn't conclusive, not even in a book reviewer's court. Mr. Kirkwood's loyalty to a friend is admirable; his taped interviews with all the principals in the first Shaw trial are fascinating; his attention to trivia is in the best parajournalistic tradition—the little boy who died Tom Wolfe. But legitimate questions about John Kennedy's assassination aren't answered according to the buddy system.

Which brings us to Jim Garrison's "A Heritage of Stone." The District Attorney of Orleans Parish argues that Kennedy's assassination can only be explained by a "model" that pins the murder on the Central Intelligence Agency. The C.I.A. could have engineered Dallas in behalf of the military-intelligence-industrial complex that feared the President's disposition toward a detente with the Russians. Mr. Garrison nowhere in his book mentions Clay Shaw or the botch his office made of Shaw's prosecution; he is, however, heavy on all the other characters who have become familiar to us via late-night talk shows or television. And he insists that the Warren Commission, the executive branch of the government, some members of the Dallas Police Department, the pathologists at Bethesda who performed the second Kennedy autopsy and many, many others must have known they were going to the American public.

Mysteries Persist

Frankly, I prefer to believe that the Warren Commission did a poor job, rather than a dishonest one. I like to think that Mr. Garrison invents monsters to explain incompetence. But until somebody explains why two autopsies came to two different conclusions about the President's wounds, why the limousine was washed out and rebuilt without investigation, why certain witnesses near the "grassy knoll" were never asked to testify before the Commission, why we were all so eager to buy Oswald's brilliant marksmanship in split seconds, why no one inquired into Jack Ruby's relations with a staggering variety of strange people, why a "loner" like Oswald always had friends and could always get a passport—who can blame the Garrison guerrillas for fantasizing?

Something stinks about this whole affair. "A Heritage of Stone" rehearses the smelliness; the recipe is as unappetizing as our doubts about the official version of what happened. (Would then-Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy have endured his brother's murder in silence? Was John Kennedy quite so liberated from cold war clichés as Mr. Garrison maintains?) But the stench is there, and clings to each of us. Why were Kennedy's neck organs not examined at Bethesda for evidence of a frontal shot? Why was his body whisked away to Washington before the legally required Texas inquest? Why?