

Inside Report

'Plot' Probe And Politics

By Michael Harris
Chronicle Correspondent

New Orleans

The outcome of the investigation into the death of President Kennedy is probably beyond any one's ability to predict, but its political effects seem likely to weigh on the Nation for many years.

District Attorney Jim Garrison, whose ambitions extend at least to a seat in the United States Senate, may become a powerful force—in and out of the South—no matter how the trial of the suspected conspirators turns out.

In waging his solitary campaign without the help of any police agencies, the 45-year-old District Attorney is the first politician to make massive political capital of doubts about the Warren Commission shared by many voters.

His target, Clay L. Shaw, 54, who served for many years as the city's



JIM GARRISON
Ambitious D.A.

thoroughly respectable promoter of increased trade with Latin America, might be described rather frighteningly as the most improbable suspect since Alger Hiss.

If he gets his man, the

See Page 10, Col. 1

six-foot-six Garrison is expected almost automatically to take over the leadership role once held in Louisiana by the kingfish himself, Huey P. Long.

Garrison is an impressive figure, a photogenic man who dresses conservatively, wears striped ties, speaks pleasantly and lets it be known that he reads books. He won the district attorney's office five years ago when he appeared on television and defeated the city's vulnerable establishment. He soon showed an uncanny ability to destroy his opposition.

ENEMIES

Perhaps the most impressive tribute to Garrison's ability as an in-fighter came from Governor John J. McKeithen of Louisiana.

"I have learned that most of Jim Garrison's enemies are buried . . . in a political sense," the Governor said. "and I don't propose to join the list of the various decedents."

His enemies hope that the man they like to call "the jolly green giant" has gone too far at last. He has had half a dozen major crises before and has apparently gained strength in each of them.

He denounced the community's criminal judges about "racketeering influences" in the courts, only to have his fine and sentence for defamation overturned by the U.S. Supreme Court.

STRIPPER

The decision, upholding the right to make charges — true or false — against public officials, won no lasting gratitude from Garrison. He soon attacked the Supreme Court for "strangling" police officials and prosecutors by overturning lower court convictions.

Garrison promised to close down all French Quarter striptease clubs and then intervened to help one of his friends, Linda Brigette, win a pardon from Governor McKeithen after a police raid.

Garrison smiled through the public ridicule that followed, and Miss Brigette is still titillating the customers on the Gray Line tours.

ALIBI

He accused nine police officers of brutality and then, without apparent embarrassment, dropped the case.

This time the alibi — if things go wrong — couldn't be better.

A prime witness in the alleged conspiracy, pilot David W. Ferrie, is dead. Without Ferrie it may not be possible to build a case.

A possible scapegoat for the District Attorney is the New Orleans States-Item, an easy-going afternoon paper that kept Garrison's secret for weeks. It broke the story after its editors heard Life magazine had been promised an exclusive account of the investigation.

WARREN

And finally, there are many who will be convinced because it is popular to attack Chief Justice Earl Warren in the South and to play on the theme that the liberal Warren presided over a committee whose legacy was an inconclusive report.

A force of businessmen, "The Truth and Consequences Committee," is providing Garrison with the money he needs for his private research.

The New Orleans police are excluded from the investigation, and so are the grand jury, the state police and the FBI. The one arrest made for the extraordinary offense of conspiring to kill the President has taken the form of a simple police booking.

JURY

"You send something to the grand jury only if you want to bury it," declared Pershing Gervais, an ousted New Orleans police graft collector who served for four years as Garrison's chief aide.

Though the Grand Jury has announced plans to call in witnesses in the case, it is operating entirely on its own, with no indications that it can expect — or even that it wants — any help from Garrison.

Today the job of looking into President Kennedy's death is being handled by Garrison himself, some of his aides and by three private detectives who also act as the District Attorney's only spokesmen.

Garrison himself has remained far out of sight since shortly after the story broke. New Orleans is being treated, for the first time in five years, to the disappearance of its publicity-conscious district attorney.

The list of Garrison's enemies has grown over the years, and it included many of his former friends and campaign workers. But they are prudent enough not to discuss their feelings on the record.

They are afraid of him.

The nice-looking man who is the cause of this turmoil is a native of Iowa. He was reared in New Orleans and won his law degree at Tulane.

He served for a few months in the FBI and then was in the National Guard for a month during the Korean war.

His opponent in a 1962 election bought time on all three New Orleans television stations so he could wave before the camera a copy of Garrison's medical discharge for an anxiety reaction — but the program was knocked off the air by hurricane Betsy.

With the war over, Garrison was readmitted to the Guard as a captain, and the voters have seen him in uniform.

He is married. He lives in a neighborhood of \$50,000-to-\$60,000 houses, and he does not pretend to lead a stodgy, stay-at-home life.

Norma Wallace, a madam who used to run what she likes to call a "sweet shop" in the French Quarter, recalled that Garrison conducted part of his campaign as a "reform" district attorney from her house. But, she added loyally, he was never there as a customer.

Like most of Garrison's targets, Shaw has his troubles. A collection of whips and chains was seized in the stunning home of the gray-haired bachelor, and even in easy-going New Orleans this was a shock.

Ferrie, for his part, was a blatant homosexual who looked grotesque with pencilled eyebrows.

The District Attorney promises to produce a witness this week to tie Shaw, Ferrie and assassin Lee Harvey Oswald together. The rest of his strategy against Shaw is still secret.

The pathetic Ferrie, whose

supposed getaway plane was grounded the day of the assassination, may be the perpetual enigma in the case.

Garrison said Ferrie killed himself, but Coroner Nicholas Chetta, a reputable physician, found otherwise.

"Death was due to the rupture of a vessel at the base of his brain — in other words hypertension," Dr. Chetta said.

"He had a previous history of hypertension and he was under the care of a physician at the time of his death.

"He most certainly was under a strain."

So is the whole city of New Orleans.