

Garrison Flops on the Conspiracy Theory

Jim Garrison gave the power of paranoia a nice little workout over the last couple of years, but when the cards were finally called yesterday it took the jury a coincidental but significant 50-minute hour to acquit Clay Shaw of conspiracy to murder President Kennedy.

Surely there were moments during the five-week trial when the 12 men tried and true, listening to the procession of prosecution witnesses, must have felt like original spectators at Marat-Sade.

Thus, a "mystery witness" from New York who supposedly overheard Mr. Shaw talking conspiracy at a party turned out to be a man who once fingerprinted his own daughter before allowing her into the house because his "enemies" had often impersonated his relatives in their efforts to destroy him.

One key witness recalled a "bull session" wherein Mr. Shaw and Lee Harvey Oswald discussed plans for the assassination, but the recall had to be jogged out of him by hypnosis. And like that.

All of which was indeed a far cry from what Mr. Garrison, the erstwhile Jolly Green Giant from Gumboland, was promising on national television, in the pages of Playboy and in numerous background discussions with men of letters and otherwise in his New Orleans digs.

It was Mr. Garrison's contention that he had "solved" the murder of the President. The solution, never fully spelled out but mysteriously hinted at by the Giant, involved a C.I.A. cell made up largely of Cubans, a shooting gallery that featured "triangulation" of shots coming from different parts of Dealey Plaza including a manhole, and even an implication that Lyndon B. Johnson gave the nod to the operation.

Heady stuff indeed for a significant part of a nation that at the start of the Garrison investigation had already come to doubt the conclusions of the Warren Commission which put the sole blame for the assassination on Lee Harvey Oswald.

In fairness to Jim Garrison it must be noted that few who

spoke to him during the last two years doubted his sincerity. He apparently believed, to the point of obsession, that the Warren Commission report was a tissue of lies, a sophisticated cover story that had no relationship to what really went into the murder of the President.

Indeed, columnist Max Lerner spoke for many people recently when he noted that it took him weeks to shake off the Garrison spell after a long talk with the District Attorney in New Orleans.

Surrounded as he was by "assassin buffs" such as Mark Lane and Mort Sahl, the Jolly Green Giant was able to portray a conspiracy that for pure theater was virtually unparalleled. Or, in the lyrics of Cousin Joe, the Vieux Carré blues singer, Mr. Garrison had an "Elgin movement would make a rabbit hug a hound."

Yet the fabric he wove, like the suits they used to sell on Delancey Street, couldn't stand up in the sunlight. And this has been a grave disappointment not only to the buffs but perhaps to millions of Americans who be-

lieved that Mr. Garrison was on to something very big.

Of course, one does not have to disbelieve the Warren Commission. But the debacle in New Orleans has clearly dealt a significant blow to the conspiracy theory. Concomitantly it is likely that the Clay Shaw case has restored the credibility of the Warren Report in a manner as unforeseen by those who tried to stop the trial as it was unintended by the Jolly Green Giant.

This is not to suggest that the plot theorists will close up shop, for they are missionaries with all that the word implies in terms of resiliency. It is not too much to expect that the world will soon be treated to a revisionist treatise or two on the Clay Shaw trial if not on Mr. Garrison himself. Indeed, one young man was heard to surmise yesterday that it was "conceivable" that Jim Garrison was actually a C.I.A. agent since why else would he have put on such a shoddy case.

Is anybody interested in writing a book called "Catch-22"?

—SIDNEY E. ZION