

# Clay Shaw Case Remains Alive

By MERRIMAN SMITH

*Editor's Note: The following views are those of the author and are presented here to give readers a variety of viewpoints. The Tribune's opinions are expressed only in editorials.*

## SAN CLEMENTE

The Jim Garrison-Clay Shaw case in New Orleans continues to come alive from time to time, due largely to energetic efforts by various journalists to bring this episode into some kind of perspective.

One of the more recent efforts was by Warren Rogers, chief of the Look Magazine Washington Bureau who in the recent issue of his magazine, accuses Garrison, the New Orleans district attorney, of having built his John F. Kennedy assassination conspiracy case on a "jerry-built house of cards" and for having "cajoled, threatened, bribed, drugged and hypnotized witnesses."

Ultimately, Garrison lost his conspiracy case against Shaw, but then he had Shaw indicted for perjury. Garrison may pursue the perjury case, but it appears doubtful he will get a conviction if, indeed, it ever comes to trial.

The Rogers article recalls some of this reporter's experiences with Garrison in early March of 1967.

UPI at that time reported in a 7,000-word article that Garrison's conspiracy case was based at best on the self-serving whispers of informants who for the most part were aberrational strangers in the night.

One recalls sitting in the den of Garrison's lovely suburban home, watching him drink a nauseous concoction of gin and cream soda.

Garrison, an enormous man, paced around his study with his suit jacket off and an empty .38 revolver holster flapping on his hip. This visitor inquired about the empty holster. Garrison explained that because of threats in the case, he and his top staff members were wearing concealed weapons for self-

protection; that they even held occasional practice sessions on a target range, but that he had an awful habit of forgetting the gun and wearing the holster.

This was in the period when the D.A. was maintaining stoutly in public that he knew who killed JFK and arrests would be coming along shortly. He also professed what seemed to be a dream or ambition to nail at least one member of a prominent New Orleans private club to which he had no access, and involve at least one member of the management of a New Orleans newspaper as pals, cronies or accomplices of Shaw.

I told him I had heard that in his office safe down at the court house he had what he claimed was the original Kennedy murder weapon.

"How did you know that?" he shot back over another gin and cream soda.

Before I could respond, big Jim continued with a wink and whispered (there was no one else in the room; his wife had given up mixing his drinks and gone upstairs):

"Well, let me tell you this, just between us — that rifle I have downtown is exactly like the one that killed Kennedy and no one will ever know the difference."

At another point, he claimed Kennedy was shot from the

front by a bearded man who had disguised a sawed-off rifle as an umbrella.

When I returned to my hotel in the predawn hours, one of the chief figures in the Garrison case whom I had been searching for with some difficulty, telephoned.

He wanted to warn me that I was being slowly gassed to death by enemies unknown with deadly fumes seeping in through tiny holes hidden in the wallpaper design.

I told him the walls of my room were not covered by wallpaper, but consisted of stark white plaster.

"They're getting more clever all the time," he said and hung up.

Such was the atmosphere at the start of a celebrated case in which the chief suspect was quickly cleared by a jury of his local peers; a case which the district attorney of Orleans Parish lost ignominiously while leaving a trail of flamboyant publicity and a few broken lives behind him.

As Warren Rogers wrote in Look:

"Public apathy and official indifference to the plight of one man have allowed another, armed with enormous power conferred by the ballot, to subvert our legal system. Perhaps more. In a land supposedly governed by laws and not men, what have we all lost?"

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