



Max Lerner

Garrison's Troubles

As with Job, afflictions have descended on District Attorney Jlm Garrison from every side. Several men have reported that his staff offered to make it worth their while if they testified to confirm Garrison's contention that President Kennedy was killed as a result of a New Orleans conspiracy. Serious doubts have been cast on the two witnesses whose testimony led to the indictment of Clay Shaw. An NBC program has made a withering case against Garrison and his methods, while a more detached CBS series has reaffirmed the basic position of the Warren report. And Bill Gurvich, a private detective who was Garrison's chief assistant, told Sen. Robert Kennedy that Garrison had no case, and Garrison promptly fired him.

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One of Garrison's difficulties is that by now the trail of Kennedy's assassination is terribly cold. Of the four chief figures in the conspiracy, as he reconstructs it, three are dead—Oswald, Ruby, and Dave Ferrie. When Garrison started, Ruby and Ferrie were still alive. Ruby died in his hospital cell, all but mad, still denying that his killing of Oswald had been part of any conspiracy. Ferrie died soon after the news of the investigation broke: by his own hand, says Garrison, to avoid having to confess; of natural causes, says the New Orleans coroner, although he agrees Ferrie left a suicide note behind.

This leaves Clay Shaw as Garrison's only major target still alive. But Garrison's effort to prove that Clay Shaw and "Clay Bertrand" are the same man will depend on being able to break down Dean Andrews Jr. (who first introduced "Clay Bertrand" as a shadowy figure into the New Orleans story) and overcome his current refusal to talk. He will also have to overcome the doubts that have developed about the two men whose testimony was meant to link Shaw with the conspiracy. One was Vernon Bundy, drug addict and former convict, who swore he saw Shaw hand Oswald a roll of money on the lake front. (Two other convicts now assert that Bundy manufactured the scene, one of them quoting him as saying he did it "because this is the only way I can get cut loose.")

The decisive witness against Shaw in the pre-trial hearing was Perry Russo, who testified (after a sodium penathol session) that he had sat in on a key meeting with Ferrie, Shaw and Oswald at Ferrie's apartment when Ferrie mapped out the theory and strategy of killing Kennedy. When Garrison is attacked for using sodium pentathol on Russo, his answer is that it was not used to put words into his head by post-hypnotic suggestion, but as an "objectifying" device, to lean over backward and make sure that the state's own witness was telling the truth.

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There are several possible ways of trying to explain Garrison and his present activities. One is the publicity-hound theory, which I don't happen to go along with. What's the use of getting all this publicity if so much of it is bad, and if the methods may backfire and blow Garrison to kingdom come?

A second theory is that Garrison has been dwelling on the "conspiracy" so long and intensively that he has become neurotic and compulsive about it, and is determined to make it come out

with all the ragged ends tied together even if he has to use some pretty rough tactics to do it. This is my own view at the moment, reached partly from the long conversation with Garrison which I described in an earlier column, partly from the dramatic anti-Garrison charges since that time. This theory doesn't exclude the possibility that there is some valid core to the New Orleans story, even if a small one.

A third theory, compatible with the second, is that Garrison does have some sort of a case, but that by its very nature the cards are stacked against him and he will never be able to prove it. The fact is that Jim Garrison is not just building a case against a man. He is trying to solve an almost insoluble historical puzzle—that of the assassination.

Hundreds of people have tried to solve that puzzle by the conspiracy route, and a score have written books about it. Jim Garrison is the only one who has had a District Attorney's office and staff to help him.

But the trail is cold, and the major figures are dead, and the small fry (like Dean Andrews) are uncooperative, and the power of the Establishment (including the CIA) makes the whole thing a formidable obstacle-race. That, at any rate, is very much how Garrison himself sees it in his more objective moments.

My own view is that a district attorney, who has to use the process of law and the adversary proceeding, can't possibly solve a historical puzzle like this one. If he persists he has to violate due process, outrage the public mind and ultimately expose himself to the suspicion of being delusional and paranoid.