

## The Lie That Linked CIA to the Kennedy Assassination

Max Holland

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**Paese Sera’s successful deception turns out to be a major reason why many Americans believe, to this day, that the CIA was involved in the assassination of President Kennedy.**  
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**Max Holland** is a Research Fellow at the Miller Center of Public Affairs, University of Virginia. His current book project—*A Need to Know: Inside the Warren Commission*—won the J. Anthony Lukas Work-in-Progress Award for 2001.

On 2 June 1961, just weeks after the Bay of Pigs debacle, the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee convened to take testimony from Richard M. Helms, then an assistant deputy director of the Central Intelligence Agency. In those halcyon days of the Agency’s relationship with Congress, it was rare for a CIA official to give a presentation that senators had every intention of making public. The subcommittee, dominated by some of the fiercest anti-Communist members of the Senate, undoubtedly wanted to help repair the Agency’s tarnished image. The hearing, entitled “Communist Forgeries,” would surely remind Americans of the threat that Communism posed to Western interests and the Agency’s frontline role in containing that threat.<sup>1</sup>

Helms began his testimony by describing an episode that had just faded from the headlines. It proved just how virulent and resilient a lie can be when everything around it seems to fall into place. Although Helms never used the precise term, the scheme he described would eventually become better known by its KGB appellation: *dezinformatsiya* or disinformation.

For years, Soviet propagandists had sought to impugn the United States by linking it to France’s brutal

colonial war in Algeria. The effort was a mediocre success until 22 April 1961, when four Algerian-based generals organized a putsch against President Charles de Gaulle, who was trying to extract France from the seven-year conflict. Coincidentally, one of the plotters, Air Force Gen. Maurice Challe, had served in NATO headquarters and was unusually pro-American for a senior French officer. This fact provided the basis for a fabrication that the plotters enjoyed the CIA’s support.<sup>2</sup>

“This lie was first printed on the 23rd of April by a Rome daily,” Helms testified. In English, the headline in *Paese Sera* read, “Was the Military Coup d’état in Algeria Prepared in Consultation with Washington?”<sup>3</sup> The very next day, *Pravda*, citing *Paese Sera*, ran a story alleging CIA support for the revolt, as did TASS and *Radio Moscow*. Other Soviet Bloc and then Western outlets picked up the story, which gathered credibility with every re-telling. Eventually *Le Monde*, the most respected and influential newspaper in France, ran a lead editorial that began, “It now seems established that some American agents more or less encouraged Challe.” The vehemence of the US Embassy’s denial was primarily taken as an indication of the allegation’s truth.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Senate Judiciary Committee, *Communist Forgeries* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1961). In September 1961, “Communist Forgeries” became the first Senate hearing ever translated into three foreign languages (Spanish, French, and Italian).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 2-4.

<sup>3</sup> “Preparato in accordo con Washington il colpo di stato militare in Algeria?” *Paese Sera*, 22-23 April 1961.

<sup>4</sup> “Communist Forgeries,” pp. 2-4.

As the story spread to this side of the Atlantic, the controversy grew to such a pitch that it threatened to disrupt President Kennedy's state visit to France, scheduled for May 1961. Relations remained testy until Maurice Couve de Murville, France's foreign minister, went before the National Assembly and sought to quell the allegation.<sup>5</sup> Altogether, Helms observed, the episode was an "excellent example of how the Communists use the false news story" to stunning effect. And it had all started with an Italian paper that belonged "to a small group of journals published in the free world but used as outlets for disguised Soviet propaganda...instead of having this originate in Moscow, where everybody would pinpoint it, they planted the story first in Italy and picked it up from Italy...."<sup>6</sup>

Helms's testimony reveals that the CIA's Counterintelligence (CI) Staff had a sophisticated understanding of how *dezinformatsiya* worked by no later than 1961.<sup>7</sup> Yet six years later, a grander and more pernicious concoction originating in the

<sup>5</sup> "Paris Rumors on C.I.A.," *The New York Times*, 2 May 1961, and "French Minister Tries to Halt Rumors of U. S. Role in Mutiny," *The New York Times*, 6 May 1961.

<sup>6</sup> "Communist Forgeries," pp. 2-3.

<sup>7</sup> The KGB's emphasis on *dezinformatsiya* as a particularly useful "active measure" (the Soviet term for covert activities) is a staple in intelligence literature. Among the earliest reliable accounts is Ladislav Bittman, *The Deception Game: Czechoslovak Intelligence in Soviet Political Warfare* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Research Corporation, 1972). See also Vladislav M. Zubok, "Spy vs. Spy: The KGB vs. the CIA, 1960-1962," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington, DC, Issue 4, Fall 1994, pp. 22-33.

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same newspaper, *Paese Sera*, would go unexamined, unexposed, and unchallenged. This lapse, while understandable in context, proved a costly one for the Agency over the long run. *Paese Sera*'s successful deception turns out to be a major reason why many Americans believe, to this day, that the CIA was involved in the assassination of President Kennedy.<sup>8</sup>

**Garrison Opens His  
Investigation**

The complex story begins in early February 1967, when the FBI and CIA learned about a striking development in New Orleans. Two years after the completion of the federal inquiry into President Kennedy's death by the Warren Commission, the local district attorney, Jim Garrison, had opened his own investigation into the November 1963 assassination.<sup>9</sup> Whatever Garrison was up to, he did not seem intent on involving the federal government. So both the Bureau and

<sup>8</sup> Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *Secrecy: The American Experience* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), pp. 219-220. On the 30th anniversary of the assassination, according to national polls cited by Moynihan, three-quarters of those surveyed believed the CIA had murdered the President.

<sup>9</sup> Lee Harvey Oswald, the accused assassin, had lived in New Orleans for five months prior to the murder, which provided the pretext for Garrison's probe.

the CIA simply awaited the next development, believing, like most Americans, that no responsible prosecutor would dare reopen the case unless he truly had something.

On 17 February, the *New Orleans States-Item* revealed Garrison's reinvestigation to the world and ignited a media firestorm. The first legal action, however, did not occur until 1 March 1967, when Garrison ostentatiously arrested an urbane local businessman named Clay Shaw and charged him with masterminding a plot that culminated in President Kennedy's death.<sup>10</sup> Both the Bureau and the CIA rushed to their respective files and ran name traces on Shaw, a man who had never been linked to the assassination despite Washington's painstaking investigation. Insofar as the Agency was concerned, only one sliver of information was noteworthy. The businessman now charged with the crime of the century had once been a source for the CIA through its Domestic Contact Service (DCS).

The CIA's concerted effort to gather foreign intelligence from domestic sources had its roots in World War II. After the conflict, careful analysis revealed that a coordinated effort to collect information known to American citizens might have averted some bitter failures. Thus, when the CIA was formed in 1947, it was handed responsibility for the

<sup>10</sup> For the circumstances of Shaw's arrest, see Patricia Lambert, *False Witness: The Real Story of Jim Garrison's Investigation* (New York: M. Evans, 1998). At the time of the arrest, Garrison had no knowledge of any actual or presumed link between Shaw and the CIA.

overt collection of foreign intelligence within the United States, and DCS offices were discreetly opened in several major cities. DCS officers sought contact with American citizens who traveled abroad and were in a position to acquire significant foreign intelligence as a routine matter. The highest priority, naturally, was attached to debriefing Americans who traveled behind the Iron Curtain or to international conferences where they met Soviet Bloc citizens. Although all DCS relationships with individual Americans were routinely classified “secret,” the information gleaned was often no more confidential than what could be gained from a close reading of the *Wall Street Journal*. By the mid-1970s, DCS files contained the names of 150,000 Americans who had willingly provided information or were promising sources.<sup>11</sup>

Shaw had volunteered his first report to the DCS in 1948, the year that the division of Europe into antagonistic blocs hardened. His offering concerned Czechoslovakia, a country whose fate had gripped Americans’ imagination. Until February 1948, Czechoslovakia had been a pluralistic, democratic state, mindful of Soviet national security concerns but linked economically and intellectually to the West. Then, in the space of seven days, it was abruptly transformed into a Communist dictatorship, a shattering development because it suggested a replay of events that had led to the last

world war. In December 1948, Shaw informed the CIA about the new regime’s effort to expand exports via the New Orleans Trade Mart. He shared details about a lease for exhibition space that had been negotiated with a Czech commercial attaché based in New York.<sup>12</sup>

That voluntary report led to an extended relationship on matters involving commercial and international trends. Shaw was an observant businessman who traveled widely. It was effortless for him to pick up the kind of information useful to analysts inside the US Government. Over the next eight years, Shaw relayed information on 33 separate occasions, his fluency in Spanish helping to make him a particularly astute observer of trends in Central and South America. His reports about devaluation in Peru, a proposed new highway in Nicaragua, and the desire of Western European countries to trade with the Soviet bloc—a subject of keen interest to Washington because of worries about technology transfers—were invariably graded “of value” and “reliable.”<sup>13</sup>

Why the relationship ended after 1956 is not revealed in any of the recently declassified CIA files or Shaw’s own papers. Whatever the

reason, the documentary record is clear: Shaw was not handed off by the DCS and developed as a covert operative by the CIA’s Plans (now Operations) Directorate. The relationship just lapsed. He had never received any remuneration and probably considered the reporting a civic duty that was no longer urgent once the hostility between the two superpowers became frozen in place and a new world war no longer appeared imminent.<sup>14</sup>

Upon reviewing Shaw’s file after the businessman’s arrest, Lloyd Ray, chief of the New Orleans DCS office, expressed some concern but saw no reason to be alarmed. “While I do not expect that this office will become involved in the matter,” Ray wrote in a 3 March 1967 cable to CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia, “nevertheless there is always the possibility of this.” Ray had joined the DCS in 1948 and knew Shaw personally. A lawyer by training, he suggested briefing Lawrence Houston, the CIA’s general counsel, on the facts of the relationship “to be on the safe side.”<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Memo to Director, DCS, from Chief, New Orleans Office, re Clay Shaw, 3 March 1967, JFK-M-04 (F3), Box 1, CIA Series, Memorandum re Garrison Investigation, Queries from Justice Department, 28 September 1967, Box 6, Russell Holmes Papers; various Information Reports, JFK-M-04 (F2), Box 1, CIA Series—all JFK NARA.

<sup>12</sup> Memo to Chief, New Orleans Office, from Chief, Contact Division, re Case 20791, 4 June 1956, JFK-M-04 (F2), Box 1, CIA Series, JFK NARA.

<sup>13</sup> Memo, Director, DCS, from Chief, New Orleans Office, 3 March 1967, JFK-M-04 (F3), Box 1, CIA Series, JFK NARA.

<sup>14</sup> Commission on CIA Activities Within the United States, *Report to the President* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, June 1975), pp. 208–210.

<sup>15</sup> Subject: Clay L. Shaw, Enclosure 21, Microfilm, Box 23, HSCA Segregated CIA Collection (hereafter HSCA CIA Collection), John F. Kennedy Assassination Records Collection, National Archives (hereafter JFK NARA). See also Information Report No. 00 B-9381, Central Intelligence Agency, 27 December 1948, File JFK-M-04 (F2), Box 1, Miscellaneous CIA Series (hereafter CIA Series), JFK NARA. Seven of Shaw’s reports are contained in this file.

### European Leftists Fan the Flames

The day after Ray's cable, on 4 March, the left-wing Roman newspaper *Paese Sera* published a "scoop" that would reverberate all the way to New Orleans and Langley. According to the afternoon daily, Clay Shaw was no mere international businessman. That profession was a facade for his involvement in "pseudo-commercial" activities via the Centro Mondiale Commerciale (CMC), a trade-promotion group headquartered in Rome from 1958 to 1962. The defunct CMC had been "a creature of the CIA," according to *Paese Sera*, "set up as a cover for the transfer to Italy of CIA-FBI [sic] funds for illegal political-espionage activities." Revealingly, one of the CMC's most nefarious acts, according to *Paese Sera*, was support for the "philo-fascists" who had attempted to depose Charles de Gaulle in the early 1960s.<sup>16</sup>

The plausibility of the *Paese Sera* allegations was strengthened immeasurably by a contemporaneous media firestorm. On Valentine's Day, *Ramparts* magazine had ignited a controversy over CIA subsidies.<sup>17</sup> As elite news outlets raced to outdo *Ramparts* by revealing the methodology and extent of covert CIA funding around the world, it became known that

<sup>16</sup>"Clay Shaw (arrestato per Kennedy) ha svolto un'oscura attività a Roma." ("Clay Shaw Carried Out Obscure Activity in Rome") *Paese Sera*, 4 March 1967. The "scoop" ran for three successive days in *Paese Sera*. An accurate description of the CMC's purposes is found in "Rome's Trade Center—How It Came To Be," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 17 September 1960.

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anti-communist elements in Italy had been among the beneficiaries of the CIA's overseas largesse. Moreover, as was the case in 1961, *Paese Sera's* 1967 scoop was built around certain undeniable facts: the CMC had existed in Rome; Shaw had been a board member; and now he was charged with having conspired to murder President Kennedy.

The Italian defense, interior, and foreign affairs ministries denied the allegation of a link between the CMC and the CIA, and mainstream Italian newspapers limited themselves to pointing out the Roman connection of the businessman arrested in New Orleans.<sup>18</sup> Other outlets, however, showed less restraint. On 5 March, the day after *Paese Sera's* scoop, *L'Unità*, the

<sup>17</sup>On 14 February 1967, *Ramparts* and *The New York Times* simultaneously revealed that the National Students Association had knowingly accepted cash subsidies from the CIA. See Michael Warner, "Sophisticated Spies: CIA's Links to Liberal Anti-Communists, 1949-1967," *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence*, Vol. 9, No. 4, Winter 1996/97, pp. 425-433; Sig Mickelson, *America's Other Voice: The Story of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty* (New York: Praeger, 1983), pp. 121-124; and Cord Meyer, *Facing Reality: From World Federalism to the CIA* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980), pp. 85-94. In addition to lending the *Paese Sera* story credence, the *Ramparts* exposé may have helped precipitate the disinformation to begin with.

newspaper of the Italian Communist Party, published a front page story headlined, "Shaw... was a Rome agent of the C.I.A." Moscow's *Pravda* picked up the story on 7 March, publishing it under the simple headline, "Clay Shaw of the CIA." The same theme appeared in the 8 March edition of *L'Humanité*, the newspaper of the French Communist Party, which reported that the "CIA used [Clay Shaw] for its activities in Italy... where [he specialized] in the financing of political groups considered to be 'intransigent anti-Communists'."<sup>19</sup> Similar stories then popped up in the leftwing Greek and Canadian press, all of which echoed *Paese Sera's* observation that "in this complex and still obscure matter the CIA certainly has a hand."<sup>20</sup>

Oddly, despite its vast intelligence-gathering apparatus, the Agency missed the seminal article.

<sup>18</sup>*Corriere della Sera*, for example, ran a story on 5 March entitled "Shaw fu nel consiglio di un centro economico di Roma." ("Shaw Was on the Council of an Economic Center in Rome") that did not mention the CIA at all. <sup>19</sup>"Clay Shaw a travaillé à Rome pour les services US d'espionnage." ("Clay Shaw Worked in Rome for US Intelligence"), *L'Humanité*, 8 March 1967.

<sup>20</sup>"Vasta eco alle rivelazioni di *Paese Sera* sull'attività italiana di Clay Shaw." ("Vast Echoes from *Paese Sera's* Revelations on the Italian Activities of Clay Shaw"), *Paese Sera*, 6 March 1967. It is possible, of course, that the stories simply reflected sloppy and sensational journalism rather than intentional disinformation. Yet one of the entries pertaining to Italy from the so-called "Mitrokhin archive" suggests a KGB provenance. Vasili Mitrokhin, the former KGB archivist who defected to Britain in 1992, brought with him 25,000 pages of handwritten notes about highly sensitive documents. One brief note refers to a disinformation scheme in 1967 that involved *Paese Sera* and resulted in publication of a false story in New York. See Max Holland, "The Demon in Jim Garrison," *Wilson Quarterly*, Vol. XXV, No. 2, Spring 2001.

probably because *Paese Sera* was not a strict Communist party organ, and therefore not monitored daily.<sup>21</sup> Once the accusation began appearing in organs like *Pravda*, however, the story grabbed the attention of the CIA's CI Staff, which ran file traces on CMC and PERMINDEX, its Swiss-based parent corporation. The results were uniformly negative. Neither company was a proprietary or front, nor had either been used to channel funds to anti-Communists as alleged. Agency files also proved that Shaw had never been asked, after 1958, to exploit his affiliation with the CMC for any clandestine purpose. "It appears that all of the *Pravda* charges are untrue," reads the Agency's most detailed review of its links to Shaw, "except that there was a CIA-Shaw relationship."<sup>22</sup>

This emphasis—that there was a "relationship"—marked a conceptual turning point. By focusing on a tangential truth rather than the overwhelmingly falsity of the allegation, the Agency effectively donned a set of blinkers. With its attention fixated on the DCS link, it never dawned on the CIA that a disinformation scheme was at the root of its problem with Garrison—

<sup>21</sup> Though not the official organ, *Paese Sera* was a proprietary company of the Gruppo Editoriale PCI, and thus owned by the Italian Communist Party. Gaetano Fusaroli, *Giornali in Italia* (Parma, Italy: Guanda Editore, 1974), pp. 300–301.

<sup>22</sup> Memo for Chief, CI R&A, "Trace Results on Persons Connected with Centro Mondiale Commerciale," 24 March 1967, and "Subject: Clay L. Shaw," Enclosure 21, both in Microfilm Box 23, HSCA CIA Collection, JFK NARA. Counterintelligence officers retrieved Italian coverage of the story as it appeared in *Corriere della Sera* and *Il Messaggero*, but not the seminal *Paese Sera* article.

despite *Paese Sera's* well-documented involvement in *dezinformatsiya* and the fact that efforts to link the CIA to the Kennedy assassination had been a staple of communist-oriented publications for three years.<sup>23</sup>

For the Agency, the eight weeks between 4 March and 25 April 1967 were the calm before the storm. During this period, Clay Shaw's alleged connection to the CIA went unremarked in the United States save for a brief reference in a leftwing New York newspaper, the *National Guardian*.<sup>24</sup> Still, the "gruesome proceedings" in New Orleans, as DCS Director James Murphy labeled them, were grounds for concern if not alarm. Garrison seemed intoxicated by the world's attention and was acting like a carnival barker rather than a DA investigating a grave matter.

Helms, who had become Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) in 1966, asked Ray Rocca, chief of Research & Analysis for the CI Staff, to stay abreast of the situation. During the lull, a lively debate took place between the CI Staff and the DCS over what to do. The latter

<sup>23</sup> Memo from Rocca to Houston, 1 March 1968, Box 85, HSCA CIA Collection, JFK NARA. Though outdated, the best work on Soviet exploitation of the assassination remains Armand Moss, *Disinformation, Misinformation, and the Conspiracy to Kill JFK Exposed* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1987). See also Christopher Andrew & Vasili Mitrokhin, *The Sword and the Shield: The Mitrokhin Archive and the Secret History of the KGB* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), pp. 225–230.

<sup>24</sup> "New questions raised on JFK killing," *National Guardian*, 18 March 1967. The New York-based *Guardian* may well have been the publication referenced in the note from the Mitrokhin archives.

argued against devoting more time and effort to what already seemed to be a "sensational hoax." Rocca, however, wanted to stay ahead of the disclosure curve, and ultimately his position prevailed. The CIA intensified its monitoring weeks before Garrison actually trained his sights on the Agency. "We regret to have to burden you with this sort of coverage," wrote DCS Chief Murphy in a 20 March letter to the New Orleans office, "but [it] could be damaging to the Agency if some link could be exploded by enterprising news hounds."<sup>25</sup>

Unbeknownst to the Agency, Garrison had been convinced by the *Paese Sera* article that Shaw was linked to the CIA; that association, in turn, implicated the CIA in a cover-up of the Kennedy assassination. A diary kept by Richard Billings, a *LIFE* editor who worked closely with the DA in the early stages of the investigation, corroborates the timing and impact of the foreign disinformation on Garrison. Billings's entry for 16 March, less than two weeks after the publication of the first *Paese Sera* article, notes that, "Garrison now interested in possible connections between Shaw and the CIA...article in March issue *Humanities* [*Humanité*] supposedly mentions Shaw's company [CIA] work in Italy."<sup>26</sup> Six days later, the DA had at least one of the articles in hand. Garrison "has copy [of story about

<sup>25</sup> Memo to Chief, New Orleans, from Director, DCS, 20 March 1967, JFK-M-04 (F2), Box 1, CIA Series, JFK NARA.

<sup>26</sup> "Clay Shaw a travaillé à Rome pour les services U.S. d'espionnage," *L'Humanité*, 8 March 1967.

Shaw] datelined Rome, March 7th, from la presse Italien [sic].” Billings records. “It explains Shaw working in Rome in ‘58 to ‘60 period.”<sup>27</sup>

*Dezinformatsiya* thus exerted a profound influence on the prosecution of Clay Shaw. Overriding the opposition of his top aides, who had begged him to drop the case, Garrison now persisted because the DA believed he had nabbed an important “covert operative.”<sup>28</sup> Under the duress and publicity of indictment, Shaw would surely fold. And the moment he cracked, Garrison imagined that it would be easy to unmask the sequence of events leading to the assassination in Dallas.

### US Media Pick Up the Thread

Despite the flurry of articles in Europe’s pro-Communist press, the sensational revelation about Shaw was not playing well at home. This was a problem for a DA whose *modus operandi* required a steady drumbeat of positive publicity. Garrison dared not bring up the allegation openly, as he later explained in a letter to Lord Bertrand Russell, the famed British philosopher who was also an avid conspiracy buff. Doing so might hand skeptics in the media the

<sup>27</sup> “Dick Billings’s Personal Notes on Consultations and Interviews with Garrison,” p. 25, Richard Billings File, Assassination Archives and Research Center, Washington, DC.

<sup>28</sup> “The Case That Never Was: Former Aides Attack Garrison’s Case Against Shaw,” *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, 20 November 1985. When asked in this article why aides opposed Shaw’s prosecution, Garrison said that most of his assistants were not privy to the behind-the-scene workings of his inquiry.

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ammunition to destroy his controversial probe.<sup>29</sup> Critical articles had begun to appear, including a devastating exposé of Garrison’s sources and methods that ran in the 23 April *Saturday Evening Post*.<sup>30</sup> Garrison wanted the Italian story in the news, but via a hidden hand.

On 25 April, the *New Orleans States-Item* published a front page, copyrighted story. The headline read, “Mounting Evidence Links CIA to ‘Plot’ Probe,” and the primary source of the article was “Garrison or one of his people.”<sup>31</sup> The story went on to report that Shaw, the pivotal figure in Garrison’s investigation, had been linked to the CIA “by an influential Italian newspaper.” It took more than 20 column inches before the article noted that *Paese Sera* was “leftist in its political leanings.” (The US State Department routinely labeled the afternoon daily a “crypto-Communist” newspaper.) Inexorably, the Associated Press picked up the *New*

<sup>29</sup> Letter, Garrison to Russell, 27 August 1967, New Orleans Public Library Microfilm #92-83, JFK NARA.

<sup>30</sup> James Phelan, “A Plot to Kill Kennedy? Rush to Judgment in New Orleans,” *Saturday Evening Post*, Vol. CCXL, 6 May 1967, pp. 21-25.

<sup>31</sup> Interview with Rosemary James, 24 February 2000, and interview with Ross Yockey, 1 March 2000. James and Yockey were two of the five reporters credited with writing the story.

*Orleans States-Item* scoop for distribution on its national wire. It was reprinted, in truncated form, in hundreds of newspapers nationwide on 26 April. Even the august *New York Times* ran a brief item from the wires about the “mounting evidence of CIA links” in District Attorney Jim Garrison’s probe of the assassination.<sup>32</sup> As Richard Billings noted in his diary, “Now Garrison is hard on the trail of the CIA.”<sup>33</sup>

The *New Orleans States-Item* exclusive confirmed the Agency’s worst fears. Just as the media were beginning to catch on that Garrison’s case was flimsy, the DA was moving to draw the CIA into the maelstrom. In a long memo prepared on 26 April, Rocca concluded that it would be “unwise to dismiss as trivial any attempts by Garrison to link the Agency to his plot.” Though it is impossible to discern what the New Orleans DA “knows or thinks he knows,” wrote Rocca, the grim truth, given the *Ramparts* exposé, was that the “impact of such charges...will not depend principally upon their veracity or credibility but rather upon their timeliness and the extent of press coverage.”<sup>34</sup> From this point on, Garrison would not utter a word without it being parsed inside Agency headquarters.

Having laid the groundwork with his calculated leak to the *New*

<sup>32</sup> “A Newspaper Links ‘Plot’ Figure to C.I.A.,” *The New York Times*, 26 April 1967.

<sup>33</sup> Billings’s Notes, p. 27, Assassination Archives and Research Center, Washington, DC.

<sup>34</sup> Memo for Assistant Deputy Director for Plans from Rocca, 26 April 1967, Box 6, Russell Holmes Papers, JFK NARA.

*Orleans States-Item*, Garrison now unleashed a barrage of sensational accusations. In no particular order, Garrison alleged that Kennedy's alleged assassin Lee Oswald had been under the control of the CIA; the CIA had whitewashed the real assassins; the CIA had lied to the Warren Commission and concealed evidence with the FBI's connivance—no, the CIA had lied to the FBI too!<sup>55</sup> As with Senator Joe McCarthy, the legitimacy conferred by public office gave Garrison a license for audacious mendacity, a privilege he exploited to the hilt. These charges made for new accusatory headlines in New Orleans and elsewhere throughout the month of May, but also served a second purpose. They had the simultaneous effect of blunting the increasing number of articles criticizing the DA's probe. The impression left was that Garrison was being put under siege because he dared to tell the truth.

### A Rock and a Hard Place

The CIA occasionally responded to a specific allegation from the barrage, but never issued a substantive, thorough rebuttal for fear that it would only create a larger problem for itself and for Shaw. Disclosing the Shaw-DCS connection was ruled out as too explosive, given the nature of Shaw's indictment and the spotlight the Agency was already under because of the *Ramparts* exposé. At the very least, DCS sources and methods would be scrutinized, and virtually all Americans traveling

<sup>55</sup> The *Times-Picayune* and *States Item* published these allegations, and many others involving the CIA, during the months of May and June 1967.

abroad would fall under suspicion. Every businessman or scholar who had ever cooperated voluntarily would think twice before doing so again. The DCS as a whole would likely be damaged, perhaps irreparably. Then, too, the Agency had to contemplate the cost of disclosure to Clay Shaw. Garrison's scapegoating of the CIA left officers more persuaded than ever that the DA knew about Shaw's DCS contact, and that he probably intended to distort the connection during Shaw's trial.<sup>56</sup>

Despite the surface placidity of the CIA's "no comment" responses, internally the Agency was seething. The "Red Flash" and "Red Comet" editions of the *New Orleans States-Item*, in particular, were received with the kind of enthusiasm normally reserved for *Pravda*. The CIA had weathered public debacles like the Bay of Pigs and the *Ramparts* exposé; had deflected criticism in the press and from books; and had resisted attempts to broaden Congressional oversight. Never in its 20-year existence, however, had it confronted such a challenge from an elected public official with legal, albeit limited, authority. Garrison's allegations—the "grossest we have seen from any responsible American official"—gave the Agency fits, just as they did Shaw and Shaw's lawyers.<sup>57</sup> For months, the tactics of what Rocca called "that wild man down there" preoccupied senior

<sup>56</sup> See, for example, Memorandum No. 7, Re Garrison and the Kennedy Assassination, 13 September 1967, Box 6, Russell Holmes Papers, JFK NARA. In point of fact, Garrison was ignorant of the Shaw-DCS relationship and would remain so for the duration.  
<sup>57</sup> Memorandum, Garrison TV Interviews of 21 May 1967 and 28 May 1967, Box 84, HSCA CIA Collection, JFK NARA.

CIA officers. When Shaw's trial appeared imminent, DCI Helms ordered an *ad hoc* committee to formulate a strategy—six of CIA's highest officials comprised this "Garrison Group."<sup>58</sup>

Ray, the New Orleans DCS chief, sent reports back to headquarters about efforts to goad the Agency into a reaction that would be good for a few more headlines. Ray also expressed concern over the possibility that Garrison might bug DCS offices or tap its telephones, so a secure communications link with CIA headquarters was established. As the "bizarre and unsubstantiated" campaign to implicate the CIA reached a fever pitch in the late spring, an Agency internal memo dated 6 June observed that Garrison had "attacked CIA more vehemently, viciously and mendaciously than has any other American official or private citizen whose comments have come to our attention. In fact, he [has] outstripped the foreign Communist press, which is now quoting him delightedly."<sup>59</sup> Left-leaning and Communist organs presented Garrison's allegations as affirmation of America's deeply confused and corrupt political system. The KGB delighted in such Garrison quotes as one saying that the CIA was "infinitely more powerful than the Gestapo [had been] in Nazi Germany."<sup>60</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Memorandum for the Record, Garrison Group Meeting No. 1, 20 September 1967, Box 46, Russell Holmes Papers, JFK NARA.  
<sup>59</sup> Memorandum, Garrison TV Interviews of 21 May 1967 and 28 May 1967, Box 84, HSCA CIA Collection, JFK NARA.

<sup>60</sup> Memorandum No. 3, Garrison and the Kennedy Assassination, 1 June 1967, Box 84, HSCA CIA Collection, JFK NARA.

With the benefit of hindsight, it is apparent that the Agency never gained its footing amid Garrison's blizzard of accusations, even though there were scattered clues as to what was going on behind the scenes.<sup>41</sup> On 1 May, for example, Jack Miller, a former assistant attorney general in charge of the Justice Department's Criminal Division, called the CIA's general counsel to offer some intelligence that had come to Miller "from within Garrison's office." Miller's inside information was that a "left-wing newspaper published in Rome, the *Paese Sera*," was the source for the story that Shaw was a director of the CMC and that the CMC was a "CIA organization." Miller apparently did not know, or did not convey, how much importance Garrison attached to the ostensible revelation. There is no evidence that the CI Staff followed up on his inside information.<sup>42</sup>

### The CIA Continues To Play It Low Key

Like the Agency, Shaw's lawyers were groping their way through the fog of charges generated by Garrison via the media. Shaw's lawyers

<sup>41</sup>A July 1968 letter to Senator Richard Russell from DCI Helms is an excellent summary of the CIA's perception of the Garrison probe. Nowhere does Helms mention a disinformation scheme as the wellspring of Garrison's accusations against the Agency. Letter, Helms to Russell with Attachment "Jim Garrison and the CIA," 24 July 1968, Box 85, HSCA CIA Collection, JFK NARA.

<sup>42</sup>Memo for the Record, Report Concerning Garrison Kennedy CIA, 1 May 1967, Box 84, HSCA CIA Collection, JFK NARA. Miller's source was Walter Sheridan, then a reporter for NBC News and formerly a top aide to Attorney General Robert Kennedy.

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**The CIA general counsel's recommendation...was stark: other than active resistance to any subpoenas from Garrison, the best course of action was to do nothing.**

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were confident that their client was leveling with them and publicly denied that he was a clandestine CIA operative.<sup>43</sup> In September 1967, however, when a trial appeared imminent, there was a revealing contact between Shaw's attorneys and the Justice Department. The defense team was "confused by the [CIA] smoke-screen Garrison was raising," and wanted to talk to someone in the federal government "who could steer them as to the true facts and circumstances," according to an 18 September CIA memo.<sup>44</sup>

Some sharing of information might have helped, but Agency officials found the request for cooperation too risky, newly available documents show. "New Orleans is such a seamy maze that the risk of under-the-table deals is always present," concluded a 25 September Agency memo. "Moreover, if Garrison learned of federal assistance to Shaw's lawyers, he'd play it to the hilt."<sup>45</sup> Shaw's defense

<sup>43</sup>"Oswald Depicted as CIA Agent, Sources Here Say," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, 6 May 1967.

<sup>44</sup>Memorandum for Executive Director Comptroller, re Garrison Investigation, 18 September 1967, Box 85, HSCA CIA Collection, JFK NARA.

<sup>45</sup>Draft Memorandum for the Record, 25 September 1967, Box 85, HSCA CIA Collection, JFK NARA.

team thus returned to New Orleans empty-handed and puzzled over the government's apparent nonchalance, given that Washington was very much on trial, too.

Via this brief contact, the CIA learned that one of its assumptions was wholly incorrect. All along, Agency officials had presumed that Shaw told his lawyers about the DCS relationship once his alleged link to the CIA became an issue. But after meeting with Shaw's defense team, Justice Department attorneys shared their "very clear impression" that Shaw had not confided in his own lawyers.<sup>46</sup>

Overhanging everything, insofar as the CIA was concerned, was the upcoming trial. The Agency had to proceed on the assumption that Garrison would play his trump card in the courtroom and flummox the jury. "The fact that Garrison's charges against CIA are false," noted a 13 September memorandum, "does not mean that when he goes to court his case will collapse like a house of cards."<sup>47</sup> The decision on how to prepare for that dreaded day was outlined in a memo submitted by Houston to DCI Helms in October 1967. It is perhaps the most revealing CIA document generated during the entire affair, as it lays out all the sundry allegations of CIA involvement and the truth in each instance. The CIA general counsel's recommendation, developed in

<sup>46</sup>Cable to New Orleans from Office of General Counsel, 29 September 1967, Box 86, HSCA CIA Collection, JFK NARA.

<sup>47</sup>Memorandum No. 7, Re Garrison and the Kennedy Assassination, 13 September 1967, Box 6, Russell Holmes Papers, JFK NARA.

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**The trial lasted 35 days.  
Despite two years' worth  
of allegations...**

**Garrison's case was  
decidedly anticlimactic.**

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consultation with other members of the Garrison Group, was stark: other than active resistance to any subpoenas from Garrison, the best course of action was to do nothing.<sup>50</sup>

The catch, Houston acknowledged, was that a tight lip threatened to leave Shaw at Garrison's mercy. Shaw's lawyers would have no way of refuting allegations without documents and testimony from the CIA. Yet a controlled disclosure of exculpatory information seemed unachievable. A local judge would be under intense pressure to rule that the federal government could not both submit material evidence and hide behind claims of national security or executive privilege. Under these circumstances, Houston reasoned, the best thing to do would be to take no action whatsoever, and hope that the defendant would win acquittal without CIA intervention. If Shaw were to “be convicted on information that could be refuted by CIA,” concluded Houston, “we may be in for some difficult decisions.”<sup>51</sup>

As it turned out, the dilemma Houston described did not materialize for more than a year. Shaw's talented legal team, determined to win an acquittal, introduced several motions (including a request for a change of venue) that had the effect of postponing the trial repeatedly.

Meanwhile, Garrison kept fine-tuning his theory about the

assassination. In February 1968, he unveiled what would be his final and enduring explanation during a Dutch television show hosted by a left-wing, anti-American journalist named Willem Oltmans.<sup>52</sup> According to Garrison, it was no longer the case that the CIA was an unwitting accomplice to the murder and then an accessory after the fact. No, the truth had turned out to be much worse. Garrison now averred that the Agency had consciously plotted the assassination, executing the plan in concert with the “military-industrial complex.” Both had a vested interest in the continuation of the Cold War and the escalation of the hot war in Vietnam. President Kennedy wanted to end both conflicts; that was why he had to be assassinated.

The shift in Garrison's line went largely unnoticed at first—except at the CIA, which was monitoring the DA's every utterance. As Rocca observed in a March 1968 memo, “Garrison has now reached the ultimate point in the logic of his public statements.... This is by and large the Moscow line.” For a fleeting moment, Rocca, one of the Agency's most esteemed counterintelligence experts, seemed to be musing about the possibility

of a Soviet hand in all that had happened, given that the statement fit so neatly with Moscow's known goals. But Rocca's insight never went further than this brief speculation.<sup>53</sup>

Around the same time in 1968, Garrison began to recognize that an adverse legal outcome would detract from what he had achieved in the public mind. Many of his key assistants didn't believe the accusations about CIA involvement; moreover, none of them could be proved in court. While expressing confidence that the Shaw indictment would never actually be tested in a courtroom, Garrison remarked to Tom Bethell, one of his investigators, that we have “made our point.”<sup>54</sup> On this one issue, the undesirability of a trial, the CIA was in complete agreement with its New Orleans nemesis. The Agency vastly preferred no trial, even if it meant Garrison prattling on forever about CIA involvement, uncontradicted by a decisive verdict. By the time Shaw finally achieved his day in court on 21 January 1969, he was probably the only party who wanted to be there.

### The Trial

The trial lasted 35 days. Despite two years' worth of allegations and a specific promise of testimony that would “rock the nation,” Garrison's case was remarkably unchanged

<sup>50</sup>Memorandum for the Director from Lawrence Houston, 2 October 1967, Box 85, HSCA CIA Collection, JFK NARA.  
<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup>Memorandum for Director, FBI, 2 March 1968, re Garrison and the Kennedy Assassination; Interview of Garrison on Dutch TV, 1 March 1968, Box 85, HSCA CIA Collection, JFK NARA.

<sup>53</sup>Memo from Rocca to Houston, 1 March 1968, Box 85, HSCA CIA Collection, JFK NARA.

<sup>54</sup>Tom Bethell Diary, 9 March 1968, Box 3, Edward Wegmann Papers, JFK NARA.

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**To anyone who would listen, [Garrison] claimed that the “company” (a.k.a. the CIA) was the all-powerful entity that had thwarted his investigation.**

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from the loopy account presented at Shaw’s preliminary hearing in March 1967. As such, it was decidedly anticlimactic. Nonetheless, the Agency’s apprehension was palpable throughout the trial. It closely monitored news accounts and ran name-checks on the jurors and some witnesses. Officers were in attendance throughout.

The prosecution, to the Agency’s surprise, never mentioned the CIA in the courtroom. The stance of the lead prosecutor, James Alcock, was probably decisive in this regard. No one on Garrison’s staff had belittled the notion of CIA complicity more than Alcock.<sup>53</sup> The closest Garrison came to articulating his conspiracy theory about CIA involvement was during the summation, when he appealed to the jury to deliver a message to those who had plotted the coup d’état.<sup>54</sup> The jurors were not impressed, and rendered a unanimous verdict of “not guilty” after deliberating 54 minutes.

Ultimately, it had been left to Shaw’s attorneys to raise the issue that had caused such anxiety within CIA headquarters for two years. They did so with dispatch, in one question during direct examination of their client. “Have you ever worked for the Central Intelligence Agency?” asked lead defense attorney F. Irvin Dymond. “No, I have not,” replied Clay Shaw, reserving for himself a small kernel of truth

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*, 22 February 1968.

<sup>54</sup>Jim Garrison’s Closing Argument, 28 February 1969, State of Louisiana vs. Clay L. Shaw, Criminal District Court, Parish of Orleans, State of Louisiana, 198-059, Box 5, Jim Garrison Papers, JFK NARA.

that no one else in the courtroom needed to know.<sup>55</sup>

### Bittersweet Victory

A “glorious, a wonderful, a sweet, and a very grand victory,” one of the defense lawyers called it. Yet for Shaw, relief was short-lived. Within 48 hours, Garrison rearrested Shaw on two counts of perjury, neither of which pertained to Dymond’s question. If convicted, he faced a 20-year prison sentence. Garrison’s private correspondence right after the verdict makes clear that he hadn’t wavered from the conviction that Shaw was an “important CIA operative,” although he still never uttered those words in public.

With the media now firmly on Shaw’s side—even the *New Orleans States-Item* had done an about-face after the verdict—the defendant’s lawyers allowed their client to begin speaking publicly. That openness resulted in the most expansive answer Shaw would ever give on the subject of the *Paese Sera* allegation. Still, he chose to keep concealed his unpaid cooperation with the DCS.

<sup>55</sup>Lambert, p. 153.

*The idea [behind the CMC] was to have one place where buyers coming into the Common Market area would find all the Common Market countries represented in one (trade) center. . . . It turned out to be either badly planned or badly organized and it closed very shortly, and that was the last I ever heard of it. I never heard that it was a CIA operation and I don’t know that it was. . . . Other than what I’ve told you, I know nothing more about the Centro Mondiale Commerciale. I have never had any connection with the CIA.*<sup>56</sup>

In 1971, Shaw’s lawyers reached a court willing to put an end to Garrison’s abuse of prosecutorial authority. On 27 May, Federal Judge Herbert W. Christenberry enjoined Garrison from prosecuting the perjury charges and, for that matter, ever hauling Shaw into a courtroom again in connection with the Kennedy assassination.<sup>57</sup> The CIA let loose a sigh of relief along with the long-suffering defendant. The Agency had been cautiously following the case all the while, even though it no longer generated adverse headlines—in fact, it was getting almost no headlines at all. “Looks like Mr. Garrison is on the ropes and will have all he can do to keep the hornets away,” noted DCS Director Murphy in October 1971, as he officially closed the file.<sup>58</sup> Garrison’s pursuit of Shaw was now widely regarded

<sup>56</sup>Clay Shaw Interview, *Penthouse*, November 1969, pp. 34-35.

<sup>57</sup>Lambert, pp. 174-175.

<sup>58</sup>Memo to Chief, Dallas Field Office, from Director, DCS, 6 October 1971, File JFK-M-04(F3), Box 1, CIA Series, JFK NARA.

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**That chance encounter [with filmmaker Oliver Stone] eventually led to the endorsement of *Paese Sera's* disinformation by a major Hollywood film.**

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as a legal farce and a fraud. The episode had even precipitated a bitter split among the many critics of the Warren Commission report on the assassination, nearly all of whom had flocked to Garrison's side in 1967. Now many of them considered the Orleans Parish DA to be the Joe McCarthy of their cause. Just as the Wisconsin senator disgraced anti-Communism by making reckless charges that ruined innocent peoples' lives, they believed that Garrison had irrevocably set back the case against the Warren Report by persecuting an innocent man.

### Battle Over Perceptions

Although 1971 marked the nadir of Garrison's legal quest, the Agency was mistaken in assuming that the struggle over public perceptions had ended. An abject failure in courts of law, Garrison's probe achieved a latent triumph in the court of public opinion. The DA's message became part and parcel of what has been called "the enduring power of the 1960s in the national imagination."<sup>57</sup>

Garrison triumphed in this sphere partly because his thirst for vindication was unlimited. He sloughed off Christenberry's decision and adopted the position that the validity of his investigation ought not to be judged on its legal results. To anyone who would listen, he claimed that the "company" (a.k.a. the CIA) was the all-powerful entity

that had thwarted his investigation. The defiant mood in the DA's camp was captured in a 10 July 1971 letter to Garrison from Ralph Schoenman, Bertrand Russell's former personal secretary and a like-minded conspiracy theorist who remained staunchly supportive. Schoenman proposed the strategy that Garrison would eventually pursue.

*I have thought about the situation with the company right now. One of their primary objectives is to keep you off balance, defensive, always on the run from them and never able to pause sufficiently to regain the offensive.... Paradoxically, by stopping you from using the courts against Shaw, they have FREED you to put the case into a book. Now it cannot be considered sub judice or prejudicial to a trial. So, I suggest urgently that we take the offensive. Let's get out a book, hard and fast, which nails the case against Shaw that we couldn't get into the courts.... let's put THEM on the defensive by blowing the Shaw case sky high with a muck-raking book that closes in on the company even closer.<sup>60</sup>*

Before Garrison could follow Schoenman's advice, however, the DA had to contend with a \$5 million dollar lawsuit lodged by Shaw, although his finances were so depleted that he could barely afford to file. The retired businessman had retained four lawyers and a small army of private investigators to keep pace with Garrison. Shortly after giving his first deposition, Shaw died in August 1974, his lifespan doubtlessly shortened by having his world shattered.

As the episode faded from view, the *Paese Sera* articles became akin to the Dead Sea scrolls of the investigation, an inner secret shared by Garrison's shrinking band of die-hard believers. Shaw was a "high-ranking CIA operative in Italy" and the *Paese Sera* articles proved it. Within this small circle of pro-Garrison conspiracy buffs, the DA was the person who had been martyred, victimized by the vast but hidden power of "the company" and its "disinformation machinery." The alleged link between Shaw and the CIA became a staple of conspiracy books published in the post-Vietnam, post-Watergate era.<sup>61</sup>

In December 1973, former CIA officer Victor Marchetti went public with information that fanned the embers. Marchetti, executive assistant to the Deputy Director of CIA before his 1969 resignation, had been present at several

<sup>57</sup> See, for example, Robert Sam Anson, *"They've Killed the President" The Search for the Murderers of John F. Kennedy* (New York: Bantam, 1975), p. 122; Robert D. Morrow, *Betrayal* (Chicago: Regnery, 1976), p. 92; and Bernard Fensterwald, *Coincidence or Conspiracy?* (New York: Zebra Books, 1977), pp. 452-453.

<sup>58</sup> "Steal This Myth: Why We Still Try to Re-Crete the Rush of the 60s," *The New York Times*, 8 August 2000.

<sup>60</sup> Letter, Schoenman to Garrison, 10 July 1971, New Orleans Public Library Microfilm, #92-83, JFK NARA.

high-level meetings in which DCI Helms expressed sympathy for Shaw's predicament. Marchetti overheard Helms instructing General Counsel Houston to help Shaw, consistent with the Agency's interests. Marchetti aired this information shortly before publishing his 1974 exposé, *The CIA and the Cult of Intelligence*. In keeping with his now-antagonistic relationship with the Agency, he couched the disclosure in such a way as to suggest that it was just as likely that the CIA had concealed a nefarious connection with Shaw as an innocuous one.<sup>62</sup>

Unfounded assertions of CIA complicity were bolstered inadvertently by a series of investigations of the Intelligence Community in the 1970s. The 1975 Rockefeller Commission report was followed by the 1976 report of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence and the 1979 report of the House Select Committee on Assassinations (HSCA). All examined the CIA's activities both before and after Kennedy's assassination, and, in the case of HSCA, specifically looked into Shaw's supposed role as a high-ranking operative. The bottom line in each instance gave no credence to any of Garrison's allegations about Shaw and the CIA. Inexorably, however, the mere fact that such questions were asked helped fashion Garrison into something of a prophet in the public mind.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>62</sup> Zodiac News Service Press Release, 21 December 1973, File G-1396, World Trade Center, Box 8, Jim Garrison Papers, JFK NARA.

<sup>63</sup> Joe Manguno, "Was Jim Garrison Right After All?" *New Orleans*, June 1976, and Richard Boyle, "The Strange Death of Clay Shaw," *True*, April 1975.

In 1979, Shaw's link to the CIA was dredged up again when former DCI Helms gave a deposition in a libel case. The lawsuit involved a 1975 book entitled *Coup d'état in America: The CIA and the Assassination of John F. Kennedy*, yet another book that had swallowed the *Paese Sera* deception.<sup>64</sup> Although not party to the suit, Helms was deposed by the defendants' attorney. Under oath, he divulged the kernel of truth that the Agency and Shaw had struggled to keep secret when Garrison's probe was at its height. Helms accurately described Shaw's contact with the CIA from 1948 to 1956: at "one time, as a businessman, (Shaw) was one of the part-time contacts of the Domestic Contact Division."<sup>65</sup> Garrison, by then a Louisiana state judge, pounced on Helms's disclosure and distorted it. Garrison wrote in his memoir that the disclosure represented "confirmation...that Clay Shaw had been an agent."<sup>66</sup>

### **Losing the Fight**

Bolstered by these developments, Garrison tried to implement the advice rendered by Schoenman in 1971: write a "muckraking book" that would bring the Shaw-CIA

<sup>64</sup> Michael Canfield and Alan J. Weberman, *Coup d'état in America: the CIA and the Assassination of John F. Kennedy* (New York: Third Press, 1975), pp. 39-40.

<sup>65</sup> Deposition of Richard McGarrath Helms, 1 June 1984, E. Howard Hunt, Jr., Plaintiff, v. Liberty Lobby, Inc., Defendant, No. 80-1121-Civ.-JWK, U.S. District Court, Southern District of Florida, Box 6, Jim Garrison Papers, JFK NARA.

<sup>66</sup> Jim Garrison, *On the Trail of the Assassins: My Investigation and Prosecution of the Murder of President Kennedy* (New York: Sheridan Square Press, 1988), p. 276.

connection front and center. It took Garrison more than four years to find a publisher for his memoir, although he hawked it with a promise to reveal, for the first time, the actual CIA hand in the assassination. Fifteen major publishers rejected the manuscript. Finally the memoir found a home at a small New York-based press, which printed *On the Trail of the Assassins* in 1988. For the first time, Garrison made explicit the connection between his grand conspiracy theory and Shaw's link to the CIA (*Paese Sera's* version). To explain why he had not made the affiliation known when it presumably might have counted—during the trial—Garrison claimed that he did not learn about Shaw's CIA activities in Italy until *after* 1969.<sup>67</sup>

None of this seemed to matter, least of all to the CIA, until the publisher of Garrison's memoir thrust a copy into the hands of filmmaker Oliver Stone during an international film festival in Cuba.<sup>68</sup> That chance encounter eventually led to the endorsement of *Paese Sera's* disinformation by a major Hollywood film, *JFK*. In the movie, Garrison (portrayed by Kevin Costner) confronts Shaw (played by Tommy Lee Jones) with an Italian newspaper article exposing Shaw's role as a CIA operative. The confrontation, of course, never occurred in real life; yet the scene captures a hidden historical truth. The epicenter of Garrison's prosecution, and the wellspring for his ultimate theory of the assassination, was the DA's belief in

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.

<sup>68</sup> Lambert, p. xiii.

a fantasy published by a Communist-owned Italian newspaper.<sup>69</sup>

According to one historian who admires Stone, the movie *JFK* probably “had a greater impact on public opinion than any other work of art in American history” save *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.<sup>70</sup> While that may be hyperbole, not many Hollywood films can claim to have generated new legislation. *JFK* ignited a public clamor for millions of pages of documents that had been “suppressed” as part of the government’s alleged massive cover-up.

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<sup>69</sup>To drive home the point, just before the credits roll a reference is made to Helms’s 1979 deposition. Rather than quoting Helms, or accurately characterizing Shaw as an unpaid and sporadic contact, the following words appear against a black screen. “In 1979, Richard Helms, director of covert operations in 1963, admitted under oath that Clay Shaw had worked for the CIA.”

<sup>70</sup>Robert Brent Toplin, editor, *Oliver Stone’s USA: Film, History, and Controversy* (Lawrence, KN: University Press of Kansas, 2000), p. 174.

In response, Congress passed a sweeping statute in 1992, the President John F. Kennedy Records Collection Act, which forced open all federal records relating to the assassination and an unexpected amount of state, local, and private records as well—including those of the former Orleans Parish district attorney. The law directed that these documents be catalogued and housed at the National Archives.

Oliver Stone likes to assign full credit for the legislation to his film, which is something of an exaggeration. The coincidental end of the Cold War also played a critical role in the enactment and implementation of the 1992 law. More disingenuously Stone claims that while the records declassified by the statute have not produced a “smoking gun,” they have opened “a clear historical record of a cover-up taking place.”<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>71</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 260.

In truth, one legacy of Stone’s *JFK* is an altogether ironic one. Far from validating the film’s hero, the new documents have finally lifted the lid on the disinformation that was at the core of Jim Garrison’s unrelenting probe. The declassified CIA records document that everything in the *Paese Sera* story was a lie, and, simultaneously, reveal the genuine nature and duration of Clay Shaw’s innocuous link to the CIA. These same records explain why the CIA never responded appropriately to the disinformation, as it had in Helms’s 1961 Senate testimony and would later do in swift response to such schemes in the 1980s. Finally, the personal files turned over by Garrison’s family underline the profound impact that one newspaper clipping had on a mendacious district attorney adept at manipulating the *Zeitgeist* of the late 1960s.