

PLAYBOY INTERVIEW: MARK LANE

a candid conversation with the fiery attorney and author of "rush to judgment," the documented, best-selling indictment of the warren report

News of the assassination of John Fitzgerald Kennedy had hardly reached a stunned world when the inevitable question was asked: Is this part of a conspiracy? When Lee Harvey Oswald, charged with the assassination, was in turn assassinated, the whispers of doubt swelled to a chorus. Scripps-Howard columnist Richard Starnes summed up the feelings of many Americans when he wrote: "Our credentials as a civilized people stand suspect before the world . . . but the real depth of the disaster that has befallen us cannot yet be imagined. In its 188th year, the Republic has fallen upon unspeakably evil days, and great mischief is afoot in the land. It remains to be seen whether more convulsions will rack us before it is over . . ."

Starnes' jeremiad was echoed abroad, where it was generally assumed that the murders of Kennedy, Oswald and Officer J. D. Tippit were all pieces in a monstrous, conspiratorial jigsaw puzzle. The Communist nations were quick to allege that the President had been murdered by a plot originating within his own Government, and that Oswald had been silenced before he could incriminate other members of the cabal. Tass cabled from Washington to Moscow on November 25, 1963, just three days after the assassination, that "All circumstances of President Kennedy's death allow one to assume that this murder was planned and carried out by the ultra-right-wing, fascist

and racist circles, by those who cannot stomach any step aimed at the easing of international tensions and the improvement of Soviet-American relations."

In other countries, too, rumors of conspiracy abounded. The London Daily Telegraph's Dallas correspondent reported on November 26 that "World opinion as much as American is not fully satisfied about this terrible affair. This has resulted in an elephantine attempt on the part of the local authorities concerned to cover up for one another." On November 27, the conservative London Daily Mail declared editorially that "facts can be produced that a right-wing plot against the President had caused his death." French press opinion was even less restrained. Paris Jour carried a front-page article entitled "Oswald Cannot Have Been Alone in the Shooting," while Liberation wrote that "There is no doubt that President Kennedy fell into a trap. He was the victim of a plot. And in this plot it is evident that the Dallas police, protectors of gangsters like Ruby, played a role one can only describe as questionable. They created a defendant, then allowed one of their stool pigeons to kill him."

In hasty pursuit of a scapegoat, conservatives and reactionaries—at home as well as abroad—were eager to blame liberals and leftists, who returned the charges. To dispel such divisive speculation, President Johnson appointed an ultra-

prestigious Presidential Commission, headed by Chief Justice Earl Warren, to investigate the assassination. Serving under Warren were former CIA Director Allen Dulles; John McCloy, former Assistant Secretary of War; Senators Richard Russell and John Sherman Cooper; and Representatives Gerald Ford and Hale Boggs. J. Lee Rankin, former Solicitor General of the United States, was appointed as the Commission's Chief Counsel, directing a staff of 14 lawyers.

The very appointment of such a blue-ribbon investigative body allayed many fears, at least in America. Ten months after the assassination, when the Warren Commission released its findings, Americans heaved a national sigh of relief. There had been no conspiracy, the Commission concluded. Lee Harvey Oswald, acting alone and irrationally, had murdered the President. Jack Ruby had killed Oswald on his own and without premeditation. The verdict was in, and it was almost unanimously accepted—in the United States. Two months later, when the Commission released its 20 volumes of supporting evidence—a massive 17,815 pages—the case appeared forever closed. A grateful public hailed the Commission for settling its gnawing doubts and clearing the air of poisonous rumors. Harrison Salisbury, assistant managing editor of The New York Times, echoed popular sentiment when he wrote in the Times: "No material



"History may come to know the Warren Report as the 'Warren Whitewash'; it may be ranked with Teapot Dome as a synonym for political cover-up and cynical manipulation of the truth."



"There were 90 witnesses to the assassination who were questioned and were able to give an assessment of the origin of the shots. Of those, 58 said they came from behind the fence on the grassy knoll."



"There were at least two assassins. The evidence is conclusive on that score. But the Commission wanted to disprove a conspiracy, and this desire defeated its investigative function."

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