

# MARK LANE

## *The Left's Leading Hearse-Chaser*

By Bob Katz

ON THE AFTERNOON of November 14, 1978, four days before the holocaust that occurred a continent away, an owl-eyed, bearded, burly and bespectacled man in a natty three-piece suit stomped into the climate-controlled hearing room on Capitol Hill, alone, briefcase in hand. All eyes and, most importantly, all TV cameras shifted toward him.

He did not gaze up to meet their stares, so certain was he of being the center of attention. This was the forum he had been waiting for. This was how he had always imagined it could be. They with their notepads and cameras demanded quotes, and, in due time, he would provide. They wanted to know, and, at his leisure, he would tell. They growled for headlines, and, at last, such bones were his to toss out.

This was not the New York State Assembly, where he might as well have been some little kid trying to sneak through the turnstile. Nor was it the pompous proceedings of the Warren Commission, where he was treated like a black in Birmingham, begrudgingly permitted the back seat on the bus. This was not a rickety sound truck chugging through the trash-strewn streets of Spanish Harlem, nor the

show-trial at Wounded Knee, nor some whistle-stop backwoods state college, where he had to switch his lightning-quick mind onto automatic pilot and recite, for the nine-hundredth time, the same stale joke about Jack Ruby's mother's dental chart. No, this was the House Select Committee on Assassinations (HSCA) and he, Mark Lane, was in the limelight, alone, briefcase in hand, the way he doubtless imagined it should be.

Lane was appearing in Washington as counsel and legal guardian to Grace E. Walden, an alleged witness to the King assassination, whom he had recently considered harboring, out of fear for her safety, at a remote jungle commune. After a decade of agitation on the John F. Kennedy case, Lane had come to the mysteries of the King slaying with the zest of an aging, free-agent fastball pitcher jumping to a pennant contender. He had cowritten with Dick Gregory a mass-market book on the case—*Code Name "Zorro"*—rallied the congressional black caucus to call for an official investigation, counseled James Earl Ray and done for the King issue all those uniquely ingenious and effective ploys of political promotion he had learned in 26

years of futile quests for noble causes.

Lane had developed a methodology over the years that was as distinctively his in style and content as a thumbprint on a police blotter: leap like a tiger at a hunch or a tip, call a press conference, make dramatic charges to illustrate that the issue—be it nuclear proliferation, assassination cover-up or dishonesty in the media—boils down to nothing less than the age-old tussle between good and evil. Then crank up an investigation, borrow and magnify other people's evidence and, finally, never let up so long as there is a virgin ear unassailed by the accusations.

It had been a long haul for Mark Lane. He had always been the underdog, the outsider. The strain showed in his tired eyes, and, to students of the assassinations, forced against their will to become students of Lane's, the strain also showed in his increasingly quixotic behavior. According to Lane, Walden was "the most important witness in the King case."

Since, according to testimony at the hearing, Walden was drunk at the time of the shooting and had a history of mental illness, Lane's claim was difficult to evaluate. Nonetheless, the HSCA accepted the task with fervor.

ground water.

Without regulation the water will not only become prohibitively expensive to pump and concentrated with salts and minerals, but, worse, the Upper Santa Cruz Basin could become a huge, dry sump. The threat of land subsidence is real: bench marks surveys show that the land has been sinking. Obviously, this fact has not been widely publicized.

The city of Tucson is not oblivious to all this; they have the Department of Water and Sewer working on it. The department is located in the City Hall annex—an annex because Tucson has grown faster than its government buildings. Southwest cities grow too new, too fast, and the city government must keep pace, filling the spacious ground floor of some former department store with rabbit warrens of social service offices, pasteboard walling just high enough for privacy.

Up on the third floor, water and sewer administrators are juggling solutions to the crisis that Tucson faces, combining expediency, social consciousness and hope. To gain more time and save water in the local basin, the city has been piping water from nearby Avra Valley, another critical ground-water basin.

Another tack the city has taken is voluntary water rationing, the summertime "Beat the Peak" plan. If you are a conscientious citizen, you water your lawn only every other day and avoid watering between four p.m. and eight p.m., the peak demand period.

A third water-saving measure is the use of recycled effluent. Stephen Davis, of the Department of Water and Sewer, points out that the effluent from the smallest of the city's three waste-treatment plants is used to water a municipal golf course. But with 16 golf courses around this water-poor area, that doesn't count for much. The rest of the effluent has its bidders. The city and the Papago lawyers are considering effluent as part of a negotiated settlement in

the Papago suit. The mining companies talk about getting some. The farmers already use some and could use more.

To the Papago Indians, whose land this was, the recycled effluent is as much a necessity as it is an insult. Until white men came with their wells, the Papago existed with what the desert provided, harvesting the fruit and flowers of saguaro, prickly pear and mesquite. It was hard, a subsistence living; yet the Papago lived in balance with the land and with what water they could find.

Eventually, the Papago adopted the ways of white people, first the Spanish, then the Anglos. The first thing you notice when you look across the desert to their San Xavier reservation, is a brilliant white, Spanish-style mission. Down the road from the mission is another Spanish adaptation: the Papago cemetery. The crosses on the graves are festooned with plastic flowers. Farther on are small fields of cotton plants. The Papago farm about 400 acres on this reservation, and they would like to farm more. In their suit against the mining companies, FICO, the city and the state, the Papago

claim aboriginal rights and are suing for enough water to irrigate all the practicable land on their reservation.

The outcome of the suit will probably influence the state, which has appointed a ground water study commission to draw up a management policy. The Papago claim, justifiably, that the federal government—the trustee of their rights—has ignored them in the past. The Papago insisted the federal government file suit on their behalf, and, to insure they would have some say in the decision making, the Papago filed a similar suit as a back-up.

Ground-water regulation will undoubtedly parcel out water use more fairly and would seem to benefit all but the farmers (whose share would presumably be cut back), but it won't necessarily make winners out of the Papagos, the mines or the city. The people of Tucson, the people of Arizona, in fact, all the people who live in the arid West, have to change the way they use water. This has long been the view of conservationists, but it is slowly filtering down to people who see their land sinking, their rivers drying up. It is also the view of some of Tucson's hydrologists, whose

measurements show that the city has used up half of the water that the aquifer can safely provide.

There are no easy solutions. Jim Posedly, a hydrologist at the University of Arizona says that "in the end it boils down to what Mother Nature has put here for us to use. So we take so much water out of the Colorado River. What if there isn't enough? Where do we go to get it? The answer is, 'Well, we'll go over the next hill, go up to the Pacific Northwest and get some water out of the Columbia River.' It's the type of solution Americans like. It relieves them of individual responsibility to live within the limitations of their resources. We think water will always be here, food will always be here. Food is something you get off a shelf; water is something you get out of a faucet."

But what will happen to people in Sun Belt cities, such as Tucson, when the tap runs dry? They may yet learn to live within the boundaries that water sets; if they do not, the land is impassive and time is long and dry in the desert.

*Michele Strutin, a former editor of Outside magazine, now lives in Telluride, Colorado.*





In fact, the Assassinations Committee had had a veritable feast on Lane's inaccuracies in the King case, from his published interview with Ray's alibi witness, who admitted to the committee that he told Lane a false story in hopes of gaining fame and fortune, to his allegations about the Memphis police removal of black police detective Ed Redditt, who turned out to be as much a police spy as a security guard, and whose removal from a watch post near the Lorraine Motel was apparently motivated by nothing more than fear of reprisal from King's people should they discover the spying.

But erudition and punctiliousness have never been Lane's strong suit. Leave the footnotes and appendices to those pinheads who read all 26 volumes of the Warren evidence. Lane, more than any of the Warren Commission critics, has seen that in the world of realpolitik a well-timed press conference may do more for an issue than tedious investigation, that passionate rhetoric carries more weight than a pile of corroborative documents. Lane's goal had always been to bring the assassination question before a congressional forum, so what could it finally matter how a professor might grade him on his research?

What did it matter what Grace Walden saw? One look at her—gray-haired, aged, bedraggled—and anyone but the Director of Covert Operations would admit she was, if not a victim of FBI/police harassment and illegal confinement in an insane asylum, as Lane claimed, then surely a victim of something else. Like Oswald. Like Ray. Like Dennis Banks. Perhaps like some small recessive part of Lane himself.

In the congressional hearing room, with the bright media lights glinting on his glasses, Lane took his seat and was sworn in by HSCA chairperson, Rep. Louis Stokes (D-Ohio). Earlier in the day, the committee had introduced testimony and medical records suggesting that Grace Walden had been psychotic for many years and had been justifiably hospitalized. She was a witness of significance, they said, only in her observation of the drunken condition at the time of the assassination of her husband, Charles Q. "Bay Rum Charlie" Stephens, who had once sworn that the man he saw fleeing the rooming house after the shooting was James Earl Ray. For Lane, the hearing was not shaping

up as a triumph.

He glared with disdain at the members of the committee, smugly seated on the carpeted proscenium, swiveling in their plush leather chairs. He had once been a politician. "Up and coming," he had been called some 20 years before. But the road to Congress was lined with compromises he was reluctant to make, among them his conviction that bureaucrats in starched shirts perpetrate more evil than good. That he was presently dressed better than any committee member save the unctuous Stokes was but one of many ironies and hypocrisies that his peripatetic career had rendered him blind to.

Lane glared again, leaned into the microphone and lit into the committee for their public debunking of Grace Walden, using the same stirring phraseage and dramatically modulated voice with which he assails the CIA out on the college circuit. "Until this moment," he said, his voice soft and restrained, "although I have closely observed this committee, until this moment I could not accurately gauge the extent and depth of your cruelty. . . . She [Walden] is living a normal life now that she is out of Gulag Bolivar [the asylum] in Tennessee. She is a decent human being, whom you have sought to destroy before the American people for your own purposes.

"She has suffered for ten years in that institution because she would not lie, because," his words louder now, more rhythmic, a demagogic crescendo to them, "she would not cover up the facts about the death of Dr. King. She had that kind of character, and America would be a better place today if one of you had that same kind of character. You do not," his voice trembling with anger, "and you all, all of you, make me ill."

That said, he stood up, grabbed his briefcase and stomped defiantly out to catch a plane, rumor had it, to some godforsaken country in South America.

## Unexpected Knockout

Mark Lane grew up in Brooklyn, joined the Army and went to Europe in 1945. In 1952, hardly the heyday of the socially conscious professional, Lane graduated from Brooklyn Law School and set up a storefront practice in East Harlem, a predominantly Puerto

Rican area that was a good place to start a career if one was looking for nothing more than needy cases. He handled tenant-eviction, police-brutality and welfare-aid cases in the neighborhood, often without fee; he also defended beatnik coffee houses in Greenwich Village from the harassments of officialdom. In 1960, frustrated by Tammany Hall obstinacy, Lane founded the East Harlem Reform Democratic Club, a base from which to establish tenant councils, stage sympathy pickets with the southern freedom-marchers and lobby to rescind the English-language literacy requirements for voter registration.

Promising to serve only until a successful Latin candidate could be found, Lane ran for state assembly on a reform platform and, riding on the coattails of Kennedy's immense popularity in the barrio, swept to victory in the November election. At age 33, he was an elected official with an unblemished record of good deeds, an excited constituency of the disenfranchised and a future of . . . In the September 29, 1961 issue of *Commonweal*, Jack Newfield wrote, "And what of Lane's future? He is, I think, at age 33, destined to help fill a great void in American political life. Someday, if the Senate of the United States is very lucky, Mark Lane may be its gadfly."

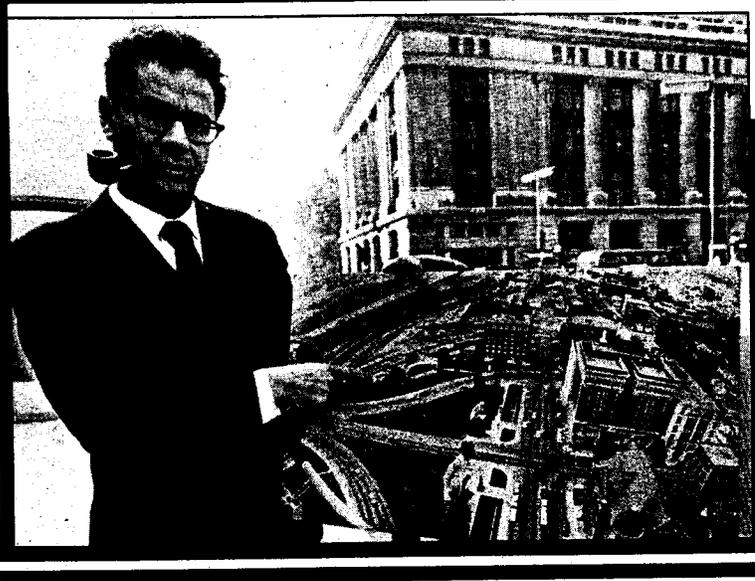
A Democrat in the Republican-controlled New York legislature, a loud-mouthed, querulous radical in the citadel of establishmentarianism, a crusader against the House Un-American Activities Committee at a time when J. Edgar Hoover's *Masters of Deceit* soared on the bestseller list, Lane came to feel that his first term in the state assembly was a propitious time to challenge the speaker, Joseph Carlino, right-hand man to Governor Nelson Rockefeller. They battled over that Eisenhower-era bugaboo: making bomb shelters mandatory in public schools.

The issue was perfect for Lane—progressive in its defiance of the '50s fanaticism about preparedness for the Big One, national and even international in scope, frightening in a way guaranteed to excite the deepest political passions and, most importantly, reminiscent of a previous bout between David and Goliath, recorded elsewhere.

He charged Speaker Carlino with conflict of interest and called for his resignation. Carlino was on the board



UPI Photo



London Daily Express/Pictorial Parade Photo

1964: Lane with Oswald's mother, Marguerite. Left: Lane points to the Dallas fence from which he claims the real assassin fired.

of directors of Lancer Industries, a swimming pool manufacturer that owned a subsidiary that made fallout shelters; at the same time, Carlino was writing and orchestrating the legislation that would make fallout shelters required in all New York public schools, an estimated \$100 million program. Lane produced corroborative affidavits and documentary memoranda. His charges received widespread attention in the media, an occurrence

noted by Governor Rockefeller, who termed Lane "ruthlessly misleading." The die was cast. This was not the way the state legislature conducted its affairs. By the time the Committee on Ethics and Guidance cleared Carlino of any guilt, due to the absence of any explicit conflict-of-interest statute, not even Lane was expecting otherwise. The Ethics Committee's findings were endorsed 143-1 by the full assembly.

State politics were never made to be

his forum, and Lane announced his plans to run for Congress. With the support and encouragement of people for whom he had become the very model of the self-sacrificing crusader—Percy Sutton, Shelley Winters, Erich Fromm, James Weschler—Lane entered the Democratic primary. And a very strange thing happened.

A photograph leaked out, arriving via surreptitious courier at the offices of relevant reporters and politicians. It was black-and-white and blatant, nothing artistic. One night—or maybe afternoon (the setting and lighting provide no clue)—Lane seemingly did something daring. Or maybe it was not so daring. Who knows what really goes on in America's bedrooms?

In the snapshot, a man appearing to be Mark Lane is naked, with an erection, lying on his side, someone's black-gloved fist reaching out to jab at his manhood. The expression on his face is of delight, not horror.

UPI Photo



1970: Lane and Jane Fonda en route to San Francisco to attend a Black Panther Party rally.

Despite Lane's denials about the authenticity of the photo, rumors abounded. The word was out. The primary was lost. His followers confused; his name besmirched. He had been set up with the oldest trick in the book. The door was slammed shut, and Lane was faced with this realization: the forces out there were as devious as the haunted stories he liked to tell about them.

The path of electoral politics was now closed forever. If his voice was to be heard, it would have to sing out on alternative channels—public lectures, radio talk shows, underground periodicals. If Lane wanted the limelight, he would have to hustle for it. If he was to continue in politics, he would have to find himself a sensational cause.

## Counsel for Ghosts

When John Kennedy was assassinated and, two days later, the alleged assas-

sin gunned down also, no one saw more of the big picture sooner, no one acted with more determination more quickly. Despite the scoffing of his radical comrades, Lane had been a big fan and supporter of Kennedy. If JFK was wishy-washy in foreign affairs and compromised on domestic issues, he nonetheless radiated a charm and charisma that Lane appreciated. When Camelot was fatally attacked in Dallas, no one was more ready to perceive clandestine treachery than Lane. Others had hunches; Mark Lane knew.

In Oswald, Lane saw a hapless victim caught up in a game that was out of his league. The alleged assassin's confused and frightened stare, his tense and bitter voice, the pleading before the media to an authority that did not exist, for a justice that never was, must have struck in Lane a nerve rubbed raw by the sex-photo setup. After Jack Ruby emerged on the television screen to do his thing, Lane blurted out, "If I were Oswald's attorney, he'd still be alive!" Lane became counsel for the defense of ghosts.

Late in 1963, in the *National Guard-*

*ian*, he published the first article challenging the lone assassin theory. He contacted Oswald's mother, Marguerite, and struck a deal to represent her son's rights during the Warren Commission proceedings, which intuition must have told him would be no more fair-minded than the New York State Assembly Committee on Ethics and Guidance. In New York, he launched public lectures, night after night, alleging conspiracy. Shots came from the front. Oswald was killed to prevent a trial. Injustice, he proclaimed, was loose in the land.

He went to Europe and received the support of the eminent Bertrand Russell. In 1965 he formed an organization in his image, the Citizens Committee of Inquiry (CCI), to press the issue. After numerous rejections, he finally published a book on the case, *Rush to Judgment*, which became a No. 1 best-seller the next year. His name was a household word, he was a hero on the college campuses, an anathema to *The New York Times* and a frequent radio talk show guest telling the scariest of ghost stories across the placid airwaves.



Wide World Photo

Although Lane pursued the issue with the proprietary tenaciousness of an ambulance-chasing attorney, he was not alone in his efforts. Harold Weisberg, Paul Hoch, Sylvia Meagher and Josiah Thompson, among others, made scholarly and valuable contributions to the critique of the Warren Report. But when the media wanted a spokesman for the issue—someone to refer to or to just pillory—it was invariably Lane. He was brash, assertive and, in his success, easy to portray as exploitative and greedy.

Lane was not one to be fastidious with data. The glaring errors and extravagances in some of his statements cast unfortunate doubt on the rest of them. He tantalized the Warren Commission with a story about a meeting a week before the assassination between Ruby, the slain police officer J. D. Tippit (killed shortly after Kennedy) and the man who printed up "Wanted for Treason" posters with JFK's picture on them. But the affidavits were never forthcoming. In a press conference to call for a new investigation, Lane disclosed that Robert Kennedy

had revealed his sympathy for such efforts in a letter to British historian Hugh Trevor-Roper, a supporter of Lane's. Kennedy, Lane said, urged the historian to "keep up the good work." Trevor-Roper vigorously denied the existence of the letter and ultimately denounced Lane. "Lane has never seen a lily without wanting to gild it," complains rival conspiracy researcher Harold Weisberg. "I only wish he were content to steal from others, but he has this urge to invent his own stuff."

The investigation of New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison, which exploded into the news in 1967, left little room, or need, for Lane's embellishments. The indictments and bill of particulars presented by Garrison surpassed even the wildest of late-night campfire speculations: a connection between Oswald and a CIA contract employee, a military manipulation of the autopsy, a veritable coup d'état in Dallas. Lane rushed to New Orleans and became a tireless pitchman for the investigation. "Besides Jim Garrison, I am perhaps the only person in the world who knows the identity of the

1974: Lane and attorney William Kunstler leaving the courthouse after completing their defense in the Wounded Knee trial.

assassins," he boldly announced. But America, in 1967, was marching to another cause.

## Lane to the Rescue

Lane's opposition to the war in Vietnam went back to the early '60s, when, as a member of the anti-bomb organization SANE, he protested the involvement of Kennedy Administration military advisers in Southeast Asia. In 1968, the young and radical—Lane's audience—were into utopian notions of countercultural revolutionary nirvana, in which any mention of the Kennedy assassination was a distinct bummer. So Lane began to work full time against the war.

He was a prime mover of and legal counsel to the Winter Soldiers Convention, an airing of war atrocities held in 1970 in Detroit, where he lived in a commune of anti-war vets along with

the newly radicalized Jane Fonda. He then traveled to Mountain Home, Idaho, and organized an anti-war coffee house near the Air Force base there.

"The project attracted a lot of people," Lane remembers. "Dick Gregory, a good friend, made two visits to talk to black GIs. Jane Fonda, Donald Sutherland, Ben Vereen stopped by. It became a very effective project. In fact, there are now memos, which we have found in Freedom of Information suits, showing that on more than one occasion the Joint Chiefs of Staff would begin their meetings by discussing the problem of Mountain Home Air Force Base." Lane lived in Idaho for two years, until the Indian insurrection at Wounded Knee, South Dakota, to which he swiftly split in order to handle the legal work.

The word "gadfly" began to hang in the breeze left by his departure. If there was a recurring pattern, it was of Lane charging into an issue, holding a press conference, filing an action, pledging solidarity and moving on. Not that he did bad work, not that he did not give his all while he was in town, just that he left town while there was still so much work to be done. "If he was F. Lee Bailey, there would be no confusion," complained a coworker on the Wounded Knee Legal Defense/Offense Committee, which Lane helped to start. "But Mark claims to be a comrade, to want to share the work with you."

In this regard, Lane represents but a more extreme version of a complaint made by many issue-oriented Left organizations against their prominent legal counsels. The names are familiar to anyone who follows the news pages: William Kunstler, Florence Kennedy, Leonard Boudin and Lane's colleague in Jonestown, Charles Garry. While some of these lawyers do possess legitimate courtroom capabilities and do give skilled help with taxes and incorporation, their true value is often as publicists. For impoverished activist groups locked into lengthy show-trials as a result of government persecution, these media-star counsels are both necessary to keep people out of jail and desirable for that last-ditch propaganda effort that such trials frequently signal.

Yet the comparison with Lane is patently unfair to the others. A prominent attorney cannot be blamed for being flamboyant in defense of principled causes or for the personality-oriented

media coverage that inevitably follows. But there is a special set of constraints that should apply when a person is reaping publicity rewards for representing political movements. Where other superstar movement lawyers have managed some respectful deference to the causes that have brought them into the limelight, Lane has been singular in his refusal to submit to any discipline beyond his own ego.

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Had Lane remained in electoral politics and gone on to fulfill his destiny as the first radical senator from New York, none of his ruthless ambition would have been noticed. On the lawns of Capitol Hill, Lane's excesses would have appeared as common as crabgrass. The true misfortune of the sex-photo setup was that Lane's thirst for publicity had to be quenched at the next well, the underdog issues of the day.

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## Eyes of the Beholder

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Somewhere along the way, Lane the gadfly began to buzz much more often than bite. His movements grew nomadic—Denmark to New Orleans to Paris to Idaho to St. Paul, Minnesota. He prowled around and wrote a book, *Arcadia*, about the grisly murders of a sharecropper's children in a sleepy Florida town. He wrote another book, *Conversations with Americans*, about grisly GI atrocities in Vietnam. The carnage at the 1968 Democratic Convention gave rise to another Lane book, *Chicago Eyewitness*. It would not take a literary critic to detect the threads that were starting to tie his life together.

His personal life was a chaos that he kept one step ahead of. His marriage in the mid-'60s ended in a separation from his Danish wife and two children. She lives in Paris. There were women wher-

ever he went. It was the height of the fuck-for-peace movement, that retrospectively ignominious effort to end the war by liberating the libido, whose repression, so the theory went, simply fueled the military-industrial complex.

Changes come over a person who stays on the move, in the news, constantly regaling audiences, with no constant environment save the constant listeners at his feet. He becomes a function of the reaction in the eye of the beholder, be it an expectant college crowd, the vast abstraction of radioland or an eager young female fan. A joke works, you tell it the next night. Your commitment is admired, you invite her up to see all of it. If it's an aura you're after, you tell ghost stories. Whisper. There are ghosts in Disneyland. I have seen them. Come.

Lane, needless to say, does not see it this way. He seems to view himself (in the mirror as well as the news pages) as a knight errant, compelled to journey hither and yon by the sheer pervasive-ness of imperialism and fascism.

He is about six feet tall, with a husky upper body and an aggressive stride. His hair is black and bushy even when coifed. Thick brows envelop his eyes like claws. But the beard is the key. Without it, years ago, Lane looked like the dean of a fly-by-night tax accounting college. With it—now black and streaked with wisps of white—he looks like a distinguished undersecretary of something or other.

In personal discussion, Lane speaks in soft, moist whispers, nary a hint of the booming impassioned oratory that can resonate to even the back rows of crowded, acoustically imperfect auditoriums. He folds his hands ostentatiously or touches the listener on the wrist to underscore a point. Even when subdued, his conversation is peppered with name dropping and anecdotes, refined over the course of a hundred retellings to italicize his wit, social concern and historical importance.

On his testimony at the Chicago Seven trial: "Tom Hayden called me and asked if I would testify about what I saw. Well, later there was a play in New York about the trial, and a critic said that the best line in the play was delivered by someone playing my role. In his questioning, Kunstler asked what I had been doing in Chicago. I said I had come because I was running for vice president with Dick Gregory. Vice



UPI Photos

president of what?" he asked. 'United States,' I said. There were laughs. Kunstler said, 'I take it you were not elected.' There were more laughs. Then I said, 'No, we peaked too soon.' "

### The Unwitting Agent

By 1975, pricked by the revelations of Watergate, there was a national resurgence of interest in the JFK assassination. The public wanted to know what else was rotten in the state. While Lane was off on his other forays, a new generation of researchers and activists emerged to travel the colleges, preach at teach-ins and display the bootlegged Zapruder film to incredulous viewers. Lane might have become something of a leader of this revival, but a certain stinginess had been creeping into his antics, like carbon in an engine, and when he came back to the issue, he saw this new legion of critics as nothing but unwanted trespassers.

The Assassination Information Bureau, a Washington-based research and education group, of which I am a direc-

tor, Lane termed "FBI dupes." Lane had come to make that most pitiful of connections: we opposed his causes; anyone who opposed him worked for the government. He held a press conference to trumpet the testimony of a witness, Julia Ann Murcer—testimony that Jim Garrison had revealed on *The Tonight Show* eight years previously. When asked about this, Lane scornfully replied, "Anything the press doesn't remember is news." The man who once claimed, "I know the identity of the assassins," now leveled broadsides at almost all other critics for "irresponsible speculation." "I have no idea who killed John Kennedy," he now said. "But I do know that Congress has an obligation to investigate."

By the time Congress did begin an investigation, in late 1976, Lane, through his undocumented claims, his haranguing of other activists and his insistence on being the sole spokesman for the issue, was himself casting a cloud over the inquiry.

Lane's conduct was growing frantic. He attempted to get an HSCA researcher fired because the researcher

1978: Lane, with his client James Earl Ray, testifying before the House Assassinations Committee. Inset: with Rev. Jesse Jackson.

had quit the Citizens Commission of Inquiry after a fight with Lane. The researcher, Kevin Walsh, was regarded by most critics as the ablest and most pro-conspiracy member of the HSCA staff. When *New Times* magazine ran a cover story alleging a conspiracy in the King case with Jerry Ray as a middleman, Lane, who had become counsel for Jerry as well as his brother James Earl, urged him to press a libel suit against the magazine. During a talk show, he threatened to punch then-*New Times* editor Robert Sam Anson. When James Earl Ray was interviewed before the HSCA, in August 1978, the first public forum appearance ever by an alleged assassin, Lane turned the hearing into a showplace for his own mania. He berated the committee, the media, the FBI and Ray's federal prison guards and generally obstructed Ray's precious testimony. It was a neat trick for a defense attorney, but an abomination for a concerned investigator. "We



P. Tainer/Liaison Photo

**I**f you kill us," Lane said, "there will be no one left to tell of the glories of Jonestown." The guard pointed to the jungle. Lane was free to tell another ghost story.

1978: After the mass suicide in Jonestown. Left: Lane being interviewed by George Walters. Right: Lane representing the HSCA, Jim Jones' treasurer.

Lane not so much a critic as an agent of the cover-up," common HSCA investigator.

### Light to Destiny

flight Lane caught to Georgetown, Guyana, the day after his Grace speech before the HSCA was set, but a continuation down he had been traveling for some

time. The Rev. Jim Jones was a social idealist with a totalitarian bent, an integrationist whose colony had become segregated.

Lane first visited Jonestown in September 1978, shortly after his obstreperous representation of James Earl Ray before the HSCA. The introduction to Jones had been made by Lane's long-time factotum, Donald Freed, whom Jones had selected to write the official biography of the Peoples Temple. Lane and Freed had coauthored the 1973 novelization about the Kennedy assassination, *Executive Action*.

Jim Jones was under the suspicion that the growing failures of his jungle

commune were attributable to the FBI and CIA. "I told him . . . you don't have to overreact," says Lane now. "You don't have to be paranoid. There's a lawful way to get this material [intelligence agency files] and if there's agents there, there's a lawful way to deal with them."

Lane was paid a \$10,000 retainer by Jones to file Freedom of Information Act suits against the intelligence agencies and to wage a counterattack against the negative publicity that was beginning to appear against the Peoples Temple. The suits were never filed, but Lane did vigorously lobby the *National Enquirer* against running a derogatory

account, and he met with parents of Temple members to dissuade them from taking legal action.

Although the media typically criticize Lane for being in it for the money, he has rarely played the hired-gun role to a high-paying client, a traditional role in the legal profession. The considerable money he has made over the years, while welcome, has mostly been a side-effect of his quest for fame. On behalf of Jim Jones, Lane was, for the first time in ages, a well-paid legal counsel. And, for the first time since he campaigned for JFK, Lane was cruising in someone else's wake.

Lane has said that he accompanied Congressman Leo Ryan's fact-finding mission to Jonestown in order to have a calming influence on Jones. This is hard to imagine, considering Lane's track record for escalating conflicts. Lane had denounced the FBI and CIA too vigorously for too long, receiving too much adulation in the process, for him ever to decline to see them where he could. Jim Jones had chosen his counsel well.

When the holocaust started, on November 18, Lane and attorney Charles Garry were shepherded to a shack on the periphery of the Peoples Temple compound. "We're all going to die," the armed guard gleefully announced.

Lane's back was up against the wall. In the distance, over the camp loud-speaker system, Jim Jones could be heard exhorting his minions to drink up. "If we die," Lane asked the guard, "who will tell the story?"

The guard's ears perked up.

"If you kill us," Lane continued, "there will be no one left to tell of the glories of Jonestown."

The guard lowered his weapon, opened the door and pointed to the jungle. Lane dashed out. He was free to tell another ghost story.

## Listener Beware

Since the holocaust last November, Lane has eagerly immersed himself in the subsequent controversies. He has been the counsel and media chaperone for Terri Buford, the young Berkeley journalism dropout who was Jim Jones' treasurer and trusted underling. His book on Jonestown, based on Buford's recollections, insights and purloined files, as well as his own, is scheduled

for fall publication. And his whirlwind, coast-to-coast lecture tour, entitled "The Jonestown Horror: An Eyewitness Account," visited almost as many college campuses this past semester as spring fever.

Lane's line on Jonestown is essentially this: the suicidal lunacy of Jim Jones was a fact concealed from Congressman Leo Ryan by the State Department and the CIA, who feared the mass defection of this socialist utopia to the Soviet Union. With skillful suggestiveness, Lane elaborates: "We will get the truth about Jonestown and when we do, I hope we do not discover that someone in the U.S. State Department said, 'We can't have 1,000 poor women and blacks defecting to the Soviet Union; we can't have such a propaganda nightmare.' I hope we do not find that someone in the State Department said, 'Better let them die in the jungles of Guyana.'"

Booked at \$2,750 per lecture, Lane delivered some 40 such programs.

Lane's financial boom with the Guyana issue has rankled the media like never before. There have been editorials calling him a ghoul, a scavenger and a graverobber; an investigative profile on the front page of the Sunday *New York Times*, a wholesale attack in *Esquire*, a spread in *Newsweek*.

Nasty as this new invective has been, Lane has not been significantly injured by it. During his years in the limelight, he has developed a sado-masochistic relationship with the media that is perversely perfect in its capacity to satisfy both partners. Lane loves to see his name in print, to watch his face on the screen, to hear his voice over the airwaves. Hating him as they do, the media can't help but vilify him in the only way they know how—in print, on the screen, across the airwaves.

And oh, how he makes the press rail and blather. Tom Snyder got so angry at Lane's Guyana routine during his *Tomorrow* show appearance, that when Lane switched the subject by insisting that the public has the right to know who killed President Kennedy, Snyder reflexively challenged, "Why Mark? Why do we have the right to know?"

Perhaps aware that names don't seem to hurt him, two agencies of the law may be attempting to take up sticks and stones. The New York Bar Association has received a formal complaint regarding Lane's Guyana-related activi-

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ties, centering on *The Washington Post's* claim that he kept secret his knowledge that Rep. Leo Ryan's party was being fed drug-laced sandwiches. The complaint could lead to disbarment proceedings against Lane. Also, the Los Angeles Office of District Attorney confirms that a criminal investigation is being conducted into the circumstances under which Lane was paid \$7,500 by the Peoples Temple to kill a derogatory *National Enquirer* story.

It is highly doubtful that these charges can be, or even should be, made to stick. Lane's ethics are no worse than those of hundreds of lawyers—he's just more effective.

Already, he is turning these attacks to his advantage. When quizzed by a student about the sums of money he has made in the service of good causes, Lane snapped, "You're asking that because Walter Cronkite and other reporters you probably respect have asked it, and it's all because the CIA told them: 'Find out how much money he makes.'" (The FBI did, in fact, attempt a flurry of COINTELPRO operations against Lane in the mid-'60s.) Similarly, when asked by a reporter about the sex-photo incident, Lane now retorts, "Those are the same sort of stories the FBI circulated about Dr. King."

Any move the government makes against Lane is almost guaranteed to validate and enhance the self-portrait he so loves to paint—a committed radical ceaselessly sniped at by nefarious agents opposed to his heroic quests. Because the establishment genuinely does oppose the causes Lane represents, it is ill-suited to silencing him.

Lane is finally a product of and a problem for the Left. So long as activists heed only the short-term goals of acquiring attention and creating debate, Mark Lane may unfortunately be the best man for the job. Once he has the job, there's no way to stop Lane from plundering the attendant P.R. treasures. And then, of course, there's no way to stop the media from using him as an easy foil. Probably the Left's only safeguard against the likes of Mark Lane is the old and difficult task of building a movement.

*Bob Katz is a founder of the Assassination Information Bureau and is completing a novel about boxing and vaudeville in the Prohibition era.*