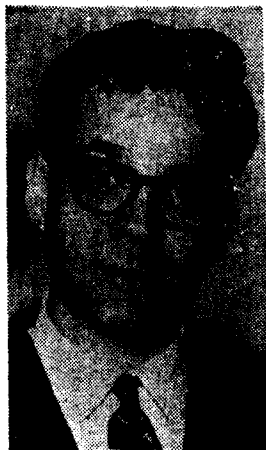


Mark Lane Crawls Into Crowded My Lai Ditch



MARK LANE
... here we go again

NEW YORK

AT THE 1968 Chicago convention, when the streets were filled with tear gas, young people came out of the thicker clouds, sneezing and gasping, with their faces mucus-smearred. First aid teams met them, where the air began to clear, with water to cleanse their eyes and bathe their faces.

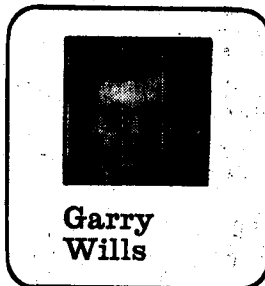
As the process went on, I heard a dry-eyed man say to the girl beside him, "Get my picture with them." He got in line, as if he were one of the victims just emerged from the worst ordeal.

It was Mark Lane, the affliction of the afflicted—the worst part of being one of the world's victims today is that you are liable to find Mr. Lane sidling up beside or behind you, while someone he brought with him takes his photograph.

Lane began it all by sidling up to Lee Harvey Oswald's mother, offering her his services as a lawyer. But that time, I'm afraid, he met his match. Mrs. Oswald's photographers would always be bumping into Lane's photographers if he stayed around her. So he defended the ghost of Oswald on his own.

THE result was his silly, hysterical book, "Rush to Judgment," which led to the formation of a comedy team—our Larry and Curly and Moe of the Sixties—Jim Garrison and Mort Sahl and Lane. Intent on tracing the crime of the century all the way up to their favorite criminal, LBJ, they ran a trial just as funny as Judge Hoffman's, and made New Orleans the Chicago of the Left.

Then Lane rode several oth-



Garry Wills

er fads. He published a scrapbook of his adventures in Chicago (Garrisonland meets Daleyland). He wrote a book on a prisoner. When photogenic Jane Fonda got in border trouble, there he was, sidling up to her (and the camera).

But people are bored, now, with single wrongs and assassinations. The big news is My Lai, the wiping out of whole villages. In his new book, "Conversations With Americans," Lane jumps, as it were, into the My Lai ditch to be photographed with the corpses.

THE book is just as thoroughly researched and reliable as "Rush to Judgment"—which means the New York Times reviewer could find a handful of errors with a couple of phone calls. Lane has taped the self-serving remarks of various deserters and defectors and exiles, taken it all at face value, and published the result as an accurate record.

According to his informants, our troops are trained and commanded to indulge in torture on all occasions and at any excuse. Such charges should be pursued, admittedly—but where is the best place to pursue them, among the disaffected and criminal and embittered, or among decent men in the Army who have not defected and can lead one to real evidence?

The worst part of this is that where Moe rushes in, can

Larry and Curly be far behind? Will New Orleans now put the Joint Chiefs of Staff on trial? The invariable result of Lane's advocacy is obfuscation—the last thing we need on the war crimes issue, which is just beginning to come to light.

Before we summon the nerve to learn the truth about this issue, Lane may have bored us all to death with his private fantasies, as he did with the Warren Report. Victims should not be so victimized.