

THE SOHO
WEEKLY
News
2/8/79

Mark Lane's Road to Jonestown

"Lane is the greatest living purveyor of isolated, inconsequential facts . . . They are non-truths and they can easily be untruth. The telling of this sort of non- and untruth is Mr. Lane's art form."

Paul Hoffman

There's an old adage that you shouldn't judge a lawyer by his clients. Perhaps so. But you can judge a client by his lawyer. And the moment I heard that Mark Lane was counsel for the Rev. Jim Jones and the People's Temple I knew there was something wacky about the whole operation.

For 15 years Mark Lane has been wading through the backwaters of the nation's politics — "the chief ghoul of American assassinations," Anthony Lewis recently called him.

Let's try to unravel the tangled skein.

The First Foray

Lane's early career was not much different from those of hundreds of other aspiring Jewish lawyers in New York. Born in 1927, he attended public schools and served in the army immediately after World War II. Then he attended Brooklyn Law School, hung out his shingle in Spanish Harlem and soon acquired a reputation as a storefront lawyer who was willing — indeed, eager — to take on the Establishment.

He got involved in politics, first as assistant to the regular organization Congressman, Alfred Santangelo, then as campaign manager for John Harrington, who became the first reform leader in Yorkville. In 1959 he formed his own club, the East Harlem Reform Democratic Club, and went after the entrenched Tammany organization.

In 1960 he ran for the state Assembly. He won a bitter primary and swept to victory on the JFK ticket. Meanwhile, he was active as an attorney in the civil rights movement, then at fever pitch. He joined the Freedom Rides through the South and in 1961 was arrested in Jackson, Miss., and sentenced to four months in jail.

Freed pending appeal, he returned to Albany for his first foray into the headlines. It was quintessential Mark Lane. He charged that Joseph F. Carlino, who was carrying the bull for Gov. Rockefeller's controversial \$100 million fallout shelter program, had a "conflict of interest" on the bill because he was a director of Lancer Industries, a Florida swimming pool manufacturer with a wholly-owned subsidiary that made fallout shelters.

The Assembly ethics committee concluded: "He [Lane] gave wide publicity to a most serious charge against a public official without a shred of credible evidence to sustain it," a judgment that would echo again and again throughout Lane's career.

The Assembly adopted the report by a vote of 143 to 1 — the one being Lane.

The Last Hurrah

Two months later Lane, who had unsuccessfully sought the Reform designation to run against Congressman Leonard Weinstein, announced that he would run for reelection to the

Assembly. He explained that he wanted to devote his energies to fighting "the steady drift toward nuclear annihilation."

But there's another aspect to the story. The reason Lane stepped down has been the subject of rumor and gossip for 16 years. But the details have never appeared in print . . . until now.

According to sources close to the investigation, a woman who had been arrested on some minor charge offered to make a deal with the office of Queens District Attorney Frank O'Connor. In exchange for her freedom, she'd deliver Mark Lane. She produced a Polaroid photograph of a man, naked except for his horn-rimmed glasses, sitting on a bed being ministered to by two (or possibly three) naked women. "He was unmistakable," said the source.

The woman told the authorities about a bizarre orgy with whippings and "all kinds of aberrations" — all of which, in the style of certain "swingers," had been duly photographed. Suddenly she said Lane, concerned that the photos could be used against him politically, had smashed the camera and torn up the pictures. The one that survived apparently had fallen behind a bureau.

O'Connor's office investigated. Reform leaders feared that O'Connor was waging a political vendetta against a leading light of the Movement and brought "all kinds of pressure to lay off," but were usually dissuaded when O'Connor showed them the photo, the sources said.

No charges were even filed. But by then the story had spread widely in political circles and threatened to surface publicly if Lane ran again. Whether there was an actual *quid pro quo* no one will say. O'Connor, now a Supreme Court Justice, declined to discuss the incident.

Lane's involvements with women have been the subject of much speculation over the years. Before he achieved notoriety, he was briefly married to Martha Schlamme, the folksinger. After that, "He served what Cail Sheehy calls the 'mentor function' to a lot of politically active young women — everyone from Susan Brownmiller to Jane Fonda," said one of the breed, who fell somewhere in between.

Rush to Riches

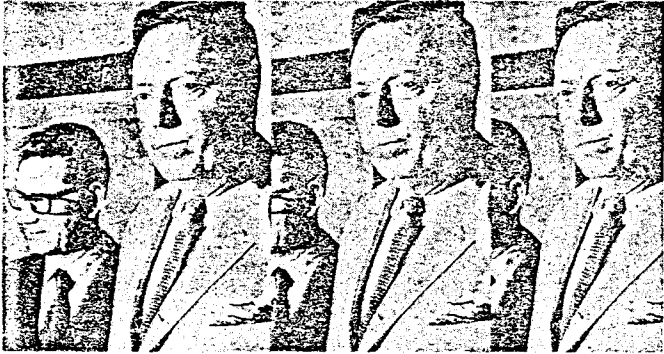
Throughout most of 1963 Lane was kept busy defending CORE members who had been arrested at various sit-ins and demonstrations around New York.

Then came Nov. 22 . . .

Lane, whose most recent courtroom appearances had been in cases of trespass and disorderly conduct, suddenly sprang to the posthumous defense of the most celebrated killer in American history. Within a month of John Kennedy's assassination he produced a 10,000-word defense brief which was published by the



A chronicle of Mark Lane's career: In 1964, with Marguerite Oswald, mother of Lee Harvey. . .



In 1967, with New Orleans DA Jim Garrison. . .



In 1970, on the protest circuit with Jane Fonda. . .



Last summer, before the House Assassinations Committee with James Earl Ray

urged the Warren Commission to appoint an attorney to represent Oswald at the hearings. He said he was "willing" to assume the task, but was "not offering" to do so. The commission turned down his request.

By the time the commission's hearings got underway, Lane had persuaded Mrs. Oswald to accept his offer to represent her son. He denounced the

commission — even before it came to any conclusions — from platforms in both the U.S. and Europe.

He found ready listeners, but he had little concrete evidence to offer the commission.

It was a typical Mark Lane performance — an accusation without evidence, a

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real question. What would have happened if Weissman, Ruby and Tippit had met? There's not one whit of evidence that such a "meeting" had anything to do with the Kennedy assassination. The three could have been discussing the fortunes of the SMU football team . . . or the sexual proclivities of the Carousel Club strippers.

In 1966 Lane published *Rush to Judgment*. Alexander Bickel, the late Yale law professor who was no defender of the Warren Commission — or the Warren Court — observed that "Lane is a master of the nitpick, the greatest living purveyor of isolated, inconsequential facts . . . In disarray, they amount to nothing. They are non-truths and they can easily be untruth. The telling of this sort of non- and untruth is Mr. Lane's art form."

Rush to Judgment hit No. 1 on the best-seller lists; like *Liberace*, Lane laughed all the way to the bank. He continued to lecture in both the U.S. and Europe and he adapted *Rush to Judgment* for film. His comments became wilder — as if only thus could he continue to command the headlines. "I know who fired the fatal shot at President Kennedy," he said in 1967 — but he didn't say who.

When New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison got into the assassination act with his prosecution of Clay Shaw, Lane flew to consult with him. He told a group of New Orleans businessmen that Garrison "presented his case to me detail by detail, incident by incident" and called it an "iron-clad case." He predicted that "the very foundations of this country will be shaken when the facts are disclosed in a New Orleans courtroom."

It took a New Orleans jury less than an hour to acquit Shaw.

Lane followed *Rush to Judgment* with *A Citizen's Dissent*, an account of how the media supposedly conspired to keep him from telling his version of the assassination to the American people. Victor Navasky, now editor of the *Nation*, observed that "his thesis about the Warren Commission would have been better served if his publisher had chosen to keep his latest book from the American people." Navasky sent letters to six persons Lane had mentioned in the book and received five replies. "In each case, [I] concluded that Lane is guilty of misrepresentation, which at best leaves him with a fielding average of .167," Navasky said.

In 1973 Lane co-authored a book and screenplay, *Executive Action*, his first acknowledged work of fiction. *Executive Action* — the CIA euphemism for murder — belongs to the "could-have-been" school of history — how the assassination could have been masterminded by a trio of rich, right-wing Texans who set up Oswald as a patsy, down to using a "dummy" to order the rifle and pose with it, a charge thoroughly discredited by expert witnesses who testified at the House Assassination Committee hearings.

Despite performances by Will Geer, Burt Lancaster and Robert Ryan, *Executive Action* was an insipid movie. *Time* called it "a low-grade, seedy shoot-'em-up." As for its thesis, the *New Republic's* Stanley Kaufmann noted: "Yes, and JFK could also have been shot by Martians in an invisible flying saucer. Just try to prove he wasn't."

Up Against the War

By the end of the 1960s Lane appeared to be casting about for a new cause. The 1969 revelations of My Lai provided the catalyst he needed and he plunged headlong into the antiwar movement. He encouraged American servicemen in Germany to desert to Denmark or Sweden and, teaming with his latest protegee, Jane Fonda, sponsored forums of ex-servicemen who said they'd witnessed or participated in atrocities against

considerably more outrageous than *My Lai*. From a tuneful, powerful, exciting rock 'n' roll band, the Sex Pistols turned into a more charismatic outfit, except the music suffered as a result of Sid's securities. And, of course, the break-up of the Pistols after their U.S. tour is attributed to Sid's increasingly unwieldy addiction and Rotten's jealousy at the attentions Vicious was attracting.

McLaren knew from the start Vicious had drug problems, but that did not stop him from using and exploiting him. From Malcolm McLaren's secret diary, Sophie, who kept a daily diary that reprinted in Fred and Judy Vernon's book, *The Sex Pistols*: "Emma found a flat in Maida Vale, unfurnished, 7-year lease (it ends up in 1984). When I phoned Malcolm to OK it, he said that's fine, he'd be dead by then. True enough." In the same book, Sid talks about his adolescent fantasies of being a rock star:

"... You know when I was like 15 years old and when I used to, I used to think Marc Bolan was great, and I used to think to myself what a wonderful life Marc Bolan must have, just think. And if only I could be like him, gosh, just think of all the things he must do. And like I do the things that he done before that stupid plane crashed his fucking mini for him, something, and like he probably did exactly the same thing as what I do now: I'd be in my mummy's front room cos I don't have anywhere to live, you know what I mean? It's fucking full of shit and I hate it all, there's nothing else to do. It's better doing nothing at all and it's certainly better than doing something I don't want to do."

So, Malcolm McLaren is left with the film, *The Great Rock 'n' Roll Swindle*, the accompanying soundtrack. The master puppeteer's only mistake was that, in his manipulations, he failed to realize he was playing with the lives of real human beings, people he maneuvered as if they were a deck of cards. But I don't blame Malcolm for Sid Vicious' death, nobody's fault but Sid's, really.

Like the boy who leaped from the window because he thought he could fly, his movie hero, Sid Vicious sought escape he knew he couldn't find in the very fantasies of popular culture he knew were unreal. He recognized the shades of himself attempting to please not only others but himself, and finally gave up trying to please either. It's a damn shame, and the worst realization is that there was not a thing anybody could have done to prevent it.

How He Died

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anybody. Just take a look at her when she was a kid. I don't know how she got involved with Sid, just started hanging around with him all of a sudden, went to Rikers all the time. Sid's mother had a sort of a liking to her, I guess, and so she picked her out for him. Sid's mum was a bit confused and lonely, you might say, didn't know where to turn. I think picking Michelle was a wrong move. Sid never loved her, she was just there."

I went back to Michelle's apartment the day after Sid died. Someone else answered the door. "She doesn't want to talk to anyone," said the blonde, punk-dressed woman.

Danielle Booth is a young aspiring actress who has been very close to both Vicious and Johnny Rotten. She was with them the night of the Todd Smith incident. She was reluctant to speak to me at first, but then opened up, saying, "There's something I really believe in. The tragedy," she told me, "is that Sid was not meant to live. He wrote me a letter from Rotten Island on Christmas day. Let me read some of it to you: 'This has been a very bad Christmas: no breakfast, no presents

their story-telling. We hear stories about women, about police troubles, about money woes. We hear of all the problems that must be confronted daily with varying degrees of bitterness, hostility, resignation and irreverence. Though some of the stories and performance rituals start to overlap, Hudlin succeeds in establishing the blues as an oral tradition inherent in

Mark Lane

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civilians and torture of prisoners in Vietnam.

In 1971 Lane journeyed to Mountain Home, Idaho, to defend an airman facing court martial for distributing antiwar leaflets. He lingered long enough to get arrested in nearby Boise at a demonstration against Gen. William Westmoreland, and to open the Covered Wagon, an antiwar coffee house.

Meanwhile he produced another book, *Conversations with Americans*, transcripts of his interviews with 32 American servicemen, veterans and deserters, all of whom told tales of atrocity and torture in Vietnam. Neil Sheehan, who was to file three consecutive Administrations with his coverage of the Indochina wars, reviewed the book for the *New York Times* and called it "irresponsible."

Sheehan did what Lane had failed to do — check the military records of the men Lane had interviewed. One claimed to have been on a Marine patrol in Vietnam; the records showed that at the time he was stationed as a stock clerk at an air base in South Carolina. Another said he was the son of the commander of the 11th Armored Cavalry; no such person had ever led the unit. By the time Lane's book was published, the "commander's son" had been arrested for murder — not in Vietnam, but in Oklahoma — and incarcerated in a mental hospital. Etc.

Sheehan asked Lane why he hadn't checked the men's military records. "Because I believe the most unreliable source regarding the verification of atrocities is the Defense Dept." Lane replied.

however, is that *PastFail* is not the ad-dicted infant documentary it so clearly ex-alts. It merely documents it as a plot device, while the film we see is, in essence, just as egocentric — though clever and well-planned — as the avant-garde films it at-tempts to cheapen. It is, nonetheless, a fast-paced piece of filmmaking and an in-teresting complement to Hudlin's work.

"This kind of reasoning amounts to a new McCarthyism of the left," Sheehan observed. A new McCarthyism perhaps — but the same old Mark Lane.

With the war winding down, Lane took up a new cause — the redman. He joined William Kunstler as co-counsel for Russell Means and Dennis Banks, leaders of the American Indian Movement charged with organizing the uprising at Wounded Knee, South Dakota. With typical restraint, Lane accused the government of "genocide" against Indians, particularly the Sioux.

The trial was long and hectic. In the end the charges against Means and Banks were dismissed because FBI agents had lied and suborned perjury.

It was Lane's greatest triumph as an attorney, but he soon left the Indians to their reservation and set off to search for happier hunting grounds.

From Memphis to Jonestown

In 1975 Lane resurrected the Citizens Committee of Inquiry to urge Congress to reopen the investigations into the deaths of both John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King. Through his old associate, black comedian Dick Gregory — the two had run as the presidential ticket of the Peace and Freedom Party in 1968 — he made contact with Coretta King and persuaded her of the need to reopen King's case. She led Lane to then-Representative Andrew Young and the Black Caucus. They, in turn, persuaded the House leadership to create a Select Committee on Assassinations.

Meanwhile, Lane and Gregory produced a book on the King case, *Code Name "Zorro"* — from the FBI designation for King. In it, Lane related the strange story of "Raoul," the

Dallas. Just after Kennedy was killed. The three looked like they were under arrest. One of them looked like, and might have been, Raoul."

On the basis of no evidence whatsoever Lane concluded "that persons employed by the Federal Bureau of Investigation in 1968 must be considered to be the prime suspects in the murder of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr."

Soon after the book appeared Ray — having lost his last appeal in the U.S. Supreme Court, having been foiled in his escape attempt — retained Lane as his counsel. Last Aug. 16 he finally got his day in court when he testified before the Select Committee.

But Lane could not come up with a single witness — other than Ray — who had ever met "Raoul," and the only witness who could corroborate Ray's alibi had a record of mental illness. Lane also antagonized committee members with his frequent objections and sarcastic asides.

In the end the committee concluded that "Ray's alibi . . . his story of 'Raoul,' and other allegedly exculpatory evidence are not worthy of belief." It judged that Ray killed King, but admitted the possibility that he had been part of a larger conspiracy — but it explicitly excluded the FBI.

Although the committee concluded that both of his "clients" were assassins, Lane said the finding that JFK "was probably assassinated as the result of a conspiracy" proved that he'd been right all along. It was a pro forma performance. Lane was not around for the committee's wrap-up. By then he'd returned to his new home in Memphis . . . and the bizarre business of Jonestown.

It is too near in time and too far in space to spell out the story of the Rev. Jim Jones and the People's Temple. Just a few notes on Mark Lane's role.

Jones hired Lane to investigate government "conspiracies" against the cult.

On Sept. 20 at a press conference in Georgetown, Guyana, Lane charged that there was "a massive conspiracy to destroy the People's Temple and a

A month later, when Congressman Leo Ryan sought to visit Jonestown, Lane accused him of engaging in a "witch hunt" and warned that if America's "religious persecution" continued, the Temple might have to move, presumably to the Soviet Union.

He accompanied Ryan's party to Jonestown and, by all accounts, wrested a knife from a crazed cultist who tried to kill the Congressman. He saved Ryan's life . . . for a few minutes.

Soon after, when preparations for the mass suicide started, Lane and Charles Carry, the San Francisco attorney who was general counsel for the Temple, were threatened by gun-toting members of the cult. The quick-witted Lane probably saved their lives by suggesting they be allowed to live and "write the history of what you guys believed in."

They escaped through the jungle, Carry, visibly shaken by what he had witnessed, withdrew as attorney for the Temple and retired from view. But Lane luxuriated in the limelight. He popped up all over the place — in Georgetown, Memphis, Paris, San Francisco and college campuses lecturing — at \$2750 a shot and calling press conferences, saying that he had known all along that Jones was "crazy" and calling him a "murderer"; saying that he had known that drugs, threats and force had been used to keep reluctant members at Jonestown; and that he had known of the suicide drills and of Jones' plans for the mass immolation.

Within a week after the mass suicide he was appearing as attorney for Terri Buford and talking about \$11 million that had been smuggled out of Jonestown to secret bank accounts abroad, money that surviving cultists intended to use to finance "death squads" to kill defectors and public officials.

Each press conference seemed to produce a new accusation against the dead, each more outrageous than the last. But nothing more was heard about government "conspiracies" or "religious persecution."

Whether there are or aren't death squads and multi-million-dollar slush funds to finance them, is not for me to say.