

Chance to Get Angry at Mark Lane Helped

Mark Lane may have, for the first time in a career that has earned him the epithet of "scavenger," saved some people's reason.

In the many-layered horrors of Jonestown, the egregious lawyer has behaved in a manner so reprehensible that many whose minds were reeling found themselves steadied by a rush of the first manageable emotion to visit during the episode. It was sustaining rage.

Lane's penchant is for making bad situations worse. He has been the most persistent peddler of the conspiracy theory in the cases of John Kennedy and Martin Luther King. He was last seen in Washington — just previous to his departure for hell in Guyana — as counsel for James Earl Ray.

One of his clients, his ward, in fact, was an alleged eyewitness for Ray, a woman too sick to appear before the House Assassinations Committee, but well enough to go on the "Today" show.

JONESTOWN SEEMED likely to defy his powers. The murder of an in-

quiring congressman and four others, followed by the spiraling body count — it was too much, even, you would have thought, for Mark Lane.

But Lane's dark, bearded, avid face appeared on the television screen informing us that it was no more a mass suicide than My Lai. What was it then? Lane did not explain.

Lane subsequently appeared regularly before us, telling us in detail the story of his deliverance from the holocaust.

No one knew what Jonestown meant. Was it California, where cultists put rattlesnakes in critics' mailboxes? Was it the ultimate expression of need of the lonely and self-despising to be bullied? Was it the thirst for "spirituality" that cannot be slaked by less demanding sects? Was it fear, which is an element in every religion, and which had been escalated to terror by Jones?

For most people, who tried not to think about it and kept coming back to watch and hear more — about babies being held in their mothers'

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arms for their dose of cyanide and Kool-Aid — it was like walking in a jungle. There were no paths, only strangling vines and muck underfoot.

LANE VOLUNTEERED to guide us. It was a "bleak comment" on the American way of life that 1,200 citizens had to flee to Guyana to escape drugs and street crime.

This was in keeping with his position of advocacy of the Peoples Temple. His enthusiasm had reached peak expression in a fund-raising letter from the temple, signed by its public relations director, Timothy Clancy, and dated Oct. 21.

Lane, as a director of the "Citizens Commission of Inquiry," had conducted an "independent investigation"

tion" of charges against Jones. Lane had been introduced to Jones by the cult's counsel, Charles Garry, and insisted on accompanying Ryan on the fatal fact-finding tour.

Predictably, Clancy reported that Lane had discovered "a deliberate effort in which American intelligence organizations have played a major part to destroy the Peoples Temple, to destroy Jim Jones and to destroy Jonestown."

Clancy quotes a statement that Lane had made at a press conference:

"I have been deeply impressed with what I have seen there (at Jonestown) . . . It makes me almost weep to see such an incredible experiment with such vast potential for

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the human spirit and the soul of this country, to be cruelly assaulted by the intelligence operations."

"AND," HE ADDED, in grotesque prophecy, "to those who have wondered why the Peoples Temple has been silent during the long time of these attacks, I can just say that the silence has ended and the offensive has begun. And before the dust settles, we are going to learn a great deal about the conduct of the conspirators against this organization and against this experiment in Jonestown."

The world learned about the "conspiracy" on Nov. 18.

Abruptly, last week, perhaps realizing that his image as a plot-spotter had been damaged, Lane changed his story. He knew, he told reporters on his way back to Memphis, that Jones was dangerous and that many in Jonestown were drugged to prevent escape. He had passed the information only to Ryan, he said. He suspected that the grilled cheese sandwiches offered the Ryan party on the day of the murders might have been

doped. He did not tell anyone why he didn't eat his.

He is going to write a book about Jonestown.

Families of the dead are asking why the government did nothing to save their relatives from their folly. Others are asking why Mark Lane is still a member of the bar.

The lawyer-client relationship that protects confidential exchanges does not extend to dangerous information. Lane was required by the ethics of his profession to divulge the knowledge he now says he had beforehand about the Gulag at Jonestown and of Jones' plans for mass suicide.

Charles Garry, who escaped with Lane, is now saying that if Lane had told him what he knew, the horror might have been averted. That is arguable, and since Garry was in a position to know as much, he is not the man to raise the question.

But the bar should certainly ask what Lane knew and when he knew it. Jonestown was a catastrophe. Lane's deportment was a scandal. It's the one thing that anything can be done about.