



vs media darling, has been in partnership with murder for 15 years

# Once again, murder and Mark Lane meet

By Jack Severson  
*Inquirer Staff Writer*

Somehow, it is fitting that Mark Lane was in Jonestown, Guyana, last weekend.

Murder and Mark Lane have been in a sort of partnership for the last decade and a half. Since his involvement with the events following the assassination of John Kennedy in 1963, Lane has hovered near the center of some of the most violent events in American history.

True, the last 15 years have provided him with ample opportunity to pursue his interests in the darker side of our culture — the assassinations of the Kennedy brothers and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.; the atrocities of the Vietnam war; the violence of the Democratic National Convention in Chicago in 1968; and, now, this week, the jarring, mind-numbing tragedy that was Jonestown.

Lane was there as counsel for the Rev. Jim Jones, founder of the People's Temple and the man who apparently led nearly 400 American members of the sect to suicide in their South American jungle encampment.

He was there to protect Jones and his followers from what Lane had charged, in a letter two weeks ago to the murdered Rep. Leo J. Ryan (D., Calif.), was a government "witch hunt."

But then Lane has been involved in what he terms witch hunts for a long time. In fact, he started his brief political career with one of his own.

Early in his first year as a member of the New York State Assembly in 1961, Lane went after then-Assembly Speaker Joseph F. Carlino, charging him with conflict of interest in a school fallout shelter program. The assembly cleared Carlino on a vote of 143 to 1. The single vote was Lane's, and, at the end of his first two-year term, he left politics.

The son of a New York accountant, Lane finished a 5½-year law school program at Long Island University and, Brooklyn Law School in only three years and eight months.

After a year with a Wall Street law firm, he hung out his shingle in Spanish Harlem in 1952 and threw himself into neighborhood affairs. He tackled housing problems, representing tenants against landlords without fee. He went after alleged police brutality and worked with drug addicts. Lane was a crusader.

As one close friend said at the time, Lane "sees himself as a belated knight on a white charger whenever he undertakes a cause."

He used his crusader's zeal to help elect a reform Democrat to Congress from his district in 1956.

## Man in the news

Then he formed his own reform political club that was the core of support that elected him to the assembly.

Besides the Carlino attack, Lane gained notoriety in the assembly by pulling a four-month jail term in Jackson, Miss., in 1961 — he had ridden his "white charger" into the heart of the freedom-riding desegregation movement in the South.

The young Lane, a rangy six-footer whose soft manner of speaking and horn-rimmed glasses belied the fiery idealism and courtroom oratory that earned him the labels "firebrand" and "Commie," was fast building a reputation beyond the New York Assembly.

But it was left to Marguerite Oswald, the mother of Lee Harvey Oswald, to launch Lane into the national arena. In January 1964, Mrs. Oswald engaged Lane (he refused a fee) to represent her son before the Warren Commission, the body investigating the Kennedy assassination.

Lane was fired by Mrs. Oswald three months later, but his appearances before the commission had generated enough headlines to make Lane a darling of the national news media. He decried the commission's investigation as a witch hunt, persisted in his view that Oswald couldn't possibly have killed Kennedy — or at least, not alone — and wrote his view of commission's findings in a 1966 best-seller titled "Rush to Judgment."

He followed that book with a novel, a fictionalized killing of a Kennedy-like president entitled "Executive Action," that later became a movie of the same name.

The two books, the movie and his performances before the Warren Commission made Lane a

much sought-after talk-show guest, and he toured this country and Europe with a 3½-hour presentation on the assassination.

The assassination had become a money-maker for Lane, and his own headlines didn't hurt the cause. He became more involved in controversial matters.

That same year, Lane served as attorney for James Earl Ray, the convicted killer of Dr. King. He also represented Ray before the House Select Committee on Assassinations last summer, contending that Ray did not get a fair trial in Memphis in 1969. And in 1977, Lane turned the Ray case — and his defense of Ray — into a book entitled "Code Mark Zorro." He is currently working on the screenplay based on this latest book.

Along the way, Lane became involved in other controversial, newsmaking events. He was arrested in 1974 during the Indian occupation of Wounded Knee, S.D., and was on the scene when rioting broke out in Chicago's Lincoln Park during the 1968 Democratic National Convention.

At least one witness in Chicago, opinion writer Garry Willis, says that Lane had his own camera crew with him at Lincoln Park and only "dashed briefly into a tear-gassed area" only to quickly retreat to be treated "for the cameras."

Indeed, there can be no question that Lane's involvement with the violent events of our times and those accused of perpetrating them has proved profitable.

What is perhaps less clear is whether it was another chance for headlines, the profit motive or his alleged self-image as "a belated knight on a white charger" that took him to Guyana to act as counsel to yet another controversial figure; to what was to become the scene of death and terror.

Whatever the motive, Mark Lane belonged in Jonestown last weekend.



with House Assassination Committee during James Earl Ray's testimony



Lane (right) with American Indian Movement leaders