

August 24, 1968

Mr. Stan Steiner  
c/o The National Guardian  
197 East 4th St.,  
New York, N.Y. 10009

Dear Mr. Steiner,

The egregious error in your review of Lane's book can come from ignorance of the field, which qualifies all other reviewers, so why not you?, or is a natural consequence of the Guardian policy, that because it was decent enough to print his first piece when no one else would, he is the only one.

When you lament, correctly, that he "begs the bloody question", then add, "the mournful (is this the right word) books attacking the Warren Commission have almost all shied away from the frightening why", you are really indicting the Guardian, which has steadfastly refused to acknowledge the existence of the only writing of which this is not true.

My fourth book, OSWALD IN NEW ORLEANS, has the subtitle, "Case for Conspiracy with the CIA", a title and subtitle that did not interest the Guardian.

Thanks to such generous assistance as the Guardian joined the commercial press in extending me, I have three unpublished books to add to the four printed. One of these is entitled COUP D'ETAT.

The press of the left has become its own kind of establishment organ. Particularly on this subject. I asked the Guardian for help when, long after I was forced to a private printing, I put my first (and the first) book on the subject in general distribution. It is still one of the two really definitive books on the broad subject (Rush to Judgement, in my opinion, is not). No answer from the Guardian, which would not even review it until Cedric Belfrage, from Mexico, insisted. Why not read that review now? The three subsequent ones, including the third, with 150 pages of photographic reproduction of suppressed documents that carry a heavy subplot on motive, what you seek, have never been acknowledged by the Guardian.

There is no point in continuing. When a paper like the Guardian undertakes to review a book like A Citizens Descent, it ought to know what it is doing. When you say such things as you did, you ought to know from something other than the not impartial author that they bear a resemblance to reality. Mark's second book is as corrupt and dishonest a piece of writing, blended with open thievery, as there ever was. For crap like this the Guardian has space, but for solid work that addresses itself to the core of the issue it has none. I look forward to your commentary on the second Epstein book, a Viking reprint of his New Yorker slander, due next month. By that time the Guardian should be ready to welcome him.

And all the writing in the field is not just criticism of the Warren Report. If you will not find it in Mark's, there is writing that does bring out suppressed evidence.

Sincerely,

Harold Weisberg

guardian 8/24/68

## BOOKS

## THE POLITICS

*A CITIZEN'S DISSENT*, by Mark Lane. Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1968, \$5.95.

I was cursed as an assassin . . .

There once was a black man in Mississippi. He had a name that everybody knew, then, though history has predictably forgotten him. In his day he was a *cause celebre*, and his innocence of whatever act of manhood he was accused of was celebrated by millions of people around the world. For that popularity, in punishment, the state of Mississippi killed Willie McGee.

On the day of his execution I was riding the Paris Metro—on the Left Bank, of course.

In that dank subway, swaying on my feet with my eyes in a book, avoiding the French newspapers with their headlines of American murders, this young man walked up to me, poised inches from my dodging glance.

"Assassin!", he spat. In French the word feels like spit.

I looked up and asked, "Who?"

"Assassin of McGee," he said, and walked away.

### Who is guilty?

He was right. The French are an innately political people. Everything in France is politics, even love and revolution, in the sense that so little in the United States ever is; and the young man sensed that if a black man was executed, then the white man was guilty. For the Frenchman knew, as we have yet to learn, that every political death is an act of assassination. Whether it is done legally by the state, or illegally by the single bullet of a madman, does not change the aim and effect of the politics of death. The dead surely could not care less. History cares not at all. An assassination may be the question of the moment, but the *why! why!* reverberates for generations, for it may alter fate. It will.

The politics of death are not plotted by a Whodunit misfit. Or even by a

## OF ASSASSINATION

conspiracy of fools. Such men merely pull ideological triggers. Wyatt Earp, in prototype or in flesh, has always been for hire, and historically plentiful, in our violent land.

No, the assassinations of Malcolm X, John F. Kennedy, Medgar Evers, Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy were all plotted by the temper of the times, the mood of the American people, the changing political atmosphere, the desperation of the defeated, the hatreds of our history. So far no one really dared to question who is guilty; and why.

Mark Lane's new book is furious, rhetorical, passionate and forthright. But it begs the bloody question.

### Lane's insights

Lane is the Perry Mason of the left, with the incisive insight of a criminal lawyer, which he is. He dogs every wayward bit of evidence, traps the official apologists in their own contradictions, nails the errors and omissions of the Warren Commission to his pages like trophies of the hunt. He proves, as anyone who has ever sat on a murder jury knows, that the evidence of death can always be cast in the shadow of doubt. And if the prosecution, for political reasons, is seeking to cover up the evidence, then a good lawyer can make a shambles of the case—if he dares.

Lane is a good lawyer. And he dares. Not much is left of the single-bullet theory when he gets through; nor of the single assassin, Oswald, shooting a single rifle, Mannlicher-Carcano-Mauser, or whatever, from a single window ledge, amid the textbooks in a Texas warehouse.

### Target: the media

Unlike "Rush to Judgement" this book is not, however, concerned merely with the evidence. Lane's target, this time, is mainly the lawyers of the Warren Commission who defended their work, and fees, and the lawyers of the mass media, especially the scholarly news announcers of CBS-TV, who attacked Lane's work. Most of "A Citizen's Dissent" is an angry writer's critique of his critics. The luxury of reviewing the reviewers is not afforded to a writer very often, and it is difficult to fault Lane for revelling in his good fortune, without envy.

Yet, in his recounting of how various

publications turned down his first articles on the assassination—from the liberal Nation and New York Post to the mindless mass media—Lane sheds light on the grey matter of the journals of opinion that is thought of as thought. The Guardian printed it. But in this uncomfortable account, he does not pause to ask why this was so; why did those publications that love a scandal refuse this most sensational one of our generation. Why were they so fearful?

### Frightening 'why'

The mournful books attacking and defending the Warren Commission have almost all shied away from the frightening why. By insisting on a single assassin—whether Oswald, Ray or Sirhan—the protectors of our psycho-political stability may hope to keep the ship of state on an even keel, as indeed they should. It's their duty. Those who feel the old ship is listing badly in the wrong direction, toward the reefs, have other duties than to petulantly weep, "Oh, Daddy! You lied to me about your compass readings!"

### Nearer the reefs

What reefs? What direction? What murderers? If this was no so-and-so, and this-or-that rifle, then—whom? Rather than trying to prove that Oswald or Ray or Sirhan did or did not do it, why not an analysis of who might have? And why?

Is it true, as New Orleans District Attorney Garrison has said, that any leader who tries to dismantle the war machine will be killed?

And to go on with the metaphor—am I only imagining that the helmsmen who have been assassinated, whether black or white, have in common the singular and unique characteristic that they were among the few, the very few, in this country, who knew where the reefs were and who was steering us toward that national death, and would have had the courage, so rare, to say so? There are undoubtedly many who know, but few who will say anything and be listened to.

Every death has brought us closer to the reefs. Our country is not merely sick, it is suicidal.

### Stan Steiner

STAN STEINER is the author of "The New Indians," published recently by Harper and Row.