

George--
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his wrinkled head, the lines of his forehead pad and peers at his notes. "The doctor wants to give you Motrin." Then he cradles the phone and confides that the caller was Yusef Salaam, the tall, good-looking kid who—with a gang of pals—raped a jogger in Central Park and beat her nearly to death.

Twwweeeeet!
A caller is interested in "peace with Cuba." Big rally coming up. It's hardly a rally in New York until Kunstler arrives.

Tweet, tweet, tweet. This shrill cacophony may be low drama, but low drama is better than no drama. Each call carries the hope of some new chance to stir up trouble. A summons to defend some loopy Maoist's right to burn the American flag, maybe. Or an invitation to wade into alleged supermobster John Gotti's judicial travails—followed inevitably by another Page 1 story in the Daily News. Or, if the heavens smile, perhaps another case to match the most spectacular tweet of recent years: the 3 a.m. call from Marlon Brando. The boyfriend of Brando's daughter had just been shot by Brando's son; the actor was giving mouth-to-mouth even as he dialed Kunstler.

There is a photo of Kunstler and Brando on the wall of his cluttered office in Greenwich Village. A photo of Kunstler and Costa-Gavras, the filmmaker. A photo of Kunstler at Attica. A photo of Kunstler taken by Richard Avedon ("they tell me that's worth \$10,000"). A photo of Kunstler, fist extended, on the steps of the Supreme Court after his victory in the flag-burning case. A photo of Kunstler with Desmond Tutu.

Visitors to the office have plenty of time to survey this gallery; meetings, regardless of the business at hand, are constantly interrupted by the phone. Between the interruptions, Kunstler rambles. Laughs uproariously. Free-associates. Feigns outrage. Blusters. Flibusters. The world slips away, the light drains from the afternoon sky, and still he talks. All his old comrades have faded away. Why is he still around?

The Ubiquitous Attorney

Question: When celebrities drop from the public eye, do they continue to exist? Your brain says, yes, of course, a former famous person continues to ambulate and occupy space. Ontology does not recapitulate photography. But your gut says no. A celebrity without fame—is nothingness. This is why we are endlessly fascinated by the mere discovery of forgotten celebrities; the American media are full of such finds, headlines along the lines of BARDOT: STILL SEXY AT 60 . . . GIDGET'S A GRANDMA . . . LIFE GOES ON FOR FORMER TV TYKE.

About 10 years back there was a flurry of these stories published about Bill Kunstler. They all shared one theme: Remember Kunstler, the outrageous hippie lawyer? Well, he still exists. And that would have been it,

a wounded punk; hanging ten for El Sayyid Nosair.

Suddenly, he's everywhere. In a single 24-hour stretch recently, Kunstler, now an improbable 73 years old:

- Whipped up a writ of mandamus on behalf of Gotti, America's most famous alleged Mafia don, arguing Gotti had been denied his Sixth Amendment right to counsel.

- Faxed a set of letters to reporters explaining why his latest contempt-of-court citation had been settled by paying the fine rather than going to jail.

- Clipped a story from the New York Times recording his court appearance in Connecticut on behalf of a convicted murderer.

- Tried, unsuccessfully, to visit the publishers of the book behind Oliver Stone's film "JFK." (Kunstler played himself in Stone's movie "The Doors" and plays a judge in Spike Lee's upcoming bio-flick "Malcolm X.")

- Engaged in a dab of legal research for his defense of an alleged drug dealer.

- Placed an encouraging call to the lawyers suing New York State over the deadly aftermath to the 1971 Attica prison riot.

You get the idea. When nine young people were crushed to death in December at a rap music celebrity basketball game, every reporter in town wanted a word with the promoters. At last they appeared for a press conference. The press waited impatiently.

Finally, Heavy D ambled in, wearing dark glasses and a pair of jeans drooping about his substantial hips, followed by the skeletal Puff Daddy. Laurel and Hardy find the power. And Kunstler. Him again! It's just like the old days; he has a finger in every pie.

Well, it's sort of like the old days. Sticklers could name a number of differences. Again, the props seem somehow inferior. There are, for example, certain undeniable contrasts between former and present clients, between, say, the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and Mr. Heavy D. Between the anti-war Chicago 7 and a rapist like Salaam. Between the Freedom Riders and the godfather.

Kunstler realizes this. You might say he rationalizes. But it sure beats vanishing.

"I worried I would become an anachronism," he says. It is a cold Saturday afternoon, and he is dressed haphazardly in lawyerly gray trousers, a poet's tweed jacket and an embroidered denim shirt of the sort a worker-priest might favor.

Kunstler lives with his second wife and two teenage daughters in Manhattan. Money has never meant much to him; he lives on about \$90,000 a year—which he earns from speaking fees, freelance writing and the occasional paying client.

"Sure, these cases aren't Martin Luther King, but they're still interest-

Lawyer William Kunstler w government is evil. That Lo theory of power is corrects, it moves to maximize role is always to fight it. the burr under the saddle. There is no real revolution.

Camera, Action, a Li

Let's roll some rough for the grand drama that is hi duced and directed by Kun Kunstler. In Kunstler's

Jumpy, grainy images '30s. Billy Kunstler is the with the devilish demeano is the distinguished gentle ing next to the mayor. J er's personal eye-ear-nose doctor. In Grandpa's offi half a human head in a jar hyde. When Billy is bad, "Straighten up, or you'l have to see the head!" A kind of likes the head.

Scenes of Yale. Enter '41. There's Kingman B ture president of dead old And over here, Paul El who will one day be bi Episcopal Church in New the glimmer of righteous clear eyes! That one is J ton, future CIA super-sp comes Bill Kunstler, his uppy sonnets under his ar 'can we transform/ Or we, so young, so old, course?" But some must s alarm." Oh, the English love him so.

Shift to newsreel. Dec narrator's voice: "Leyt pines. As Yankee bombs stubborn Nippon devils, can fighting men brace sion of Japan. Behind tl cated members of the corps prepare top-secre the leadership of M Kunstler, winner of the Kunstler's the one wh he's loving every minut

Okay. This next par bland. It has that bleac common to images sho ban Super 8. That's K bria Law grad; that's Lotte; that's their hous ter County. Okay. No the wife goodbye, hu girls and setting off on l the city. It's exactly t day. Here's his office o That's his brother, Mi half of Kunstler & Kun at law. The little ol through the door nee next guy wants to ck property. Okay. These vorce. This last shot writing a book at night tled "Corporate Tax S

We're looking at ol now, black-and-white short hair and a tie. V