The Case Against Mark Lane

The conclusion: He has only two motives—profit and headlines

by Steven Brill

Intelligence agencies and how the confrontation with Jones [and Congressman Leo Ryan] was arranged by them.

In the months following Guyana, we will be hearing from him again. Not in his early Toyota monologue. But with the practiced hysteria that I’ll see later in our ride—the kind that’s wowed them on campuses before, when the subject was death and the dead were John Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr. And always the adjective lawyer will come in front of his name. Lawyer Mark Lane today charged that . . . Lawyer Mark Lane revealed . . . Lawyer Mark Lane attacked . . .

Don’t believe him. On major issues, Mark Lane is as utterly truthless as any who has ever moved across our headlines. And his motives are always the same: profit and headlines.

In a tie-in clause that sets new frontiers for lawyer compensation, in a tie-in clause that sets new frontiers for lawyer compensation, Lane also suggested in a memo to Jones that the entirety of a three-story building Lane owns across from the Supreme Court, in Washington, should be rented by the temple. Lane says that in return for the $6,000 his sole legal service would be to file a Freedom of Information Act request “that would prove that the CIA had conspired to get Jones and the temple.” No Freedom of Information Act request was ever filed. All it takes is a simple form letter.

“Mark was also going to do public relations work for the temple,” says Lane assistant and girl friend April Ferguson, explaining the stiff fees. “He promised Jones,” adds one People’s Temple insider, “that the attempt [by San Francisco lawyer and Jonestown defector Timothy Stoen] to get custody of a child Jones had kept in Guyana was part of the CIA plot to harass him and that he [Lane] would expose it all. And Jones was so crazy that he bought it.”

Indeed, Lane’s memo to Jones outlining his proposed work did promise public relations work.

What kind of PR work was done? In October, Lane contacted Kathy Hunter, a former reporter for the Ukiah Daily Journal (circulation 9,000) in northern California who’d written one of

MONEY FROM PEOPLE’S TEMPLE

In fact, according to documents provided to me by a San Francisco survivor at the People’s Temple, Lane’s original September retainer arrangement with Jones called for an upfront $10,000 payment and a fee of $6,000 a month plus telephone and travel expenses. Among the documents I obtained is a photocopy of a $10,000 cashier’s check sent to Lane by the People’s Temple. In a tie-in clause that sets new frontiers for lawyer compensation, Lane also suggested in a memo to Jones that the entirety of a three-story building Lane owns across from the Supreme Court, in Washington, should be rented by the temple.

Lane says that in return for the $6,000 his sole legal service would be to file a Freedom of Information Act request “that would prove that the CIA had conspired to get Jones and the temple.” No Freedom of Information Act request was ever filed. All it takes is a simple form letter.

“Mark was also going to do public relations work for the temple,” says Lane assistant and girl friend April Ferguson, explaining the stiff fees. “He promised Jones,” adds one People’s Temple insider, “that the attempt [by San Francisco lawyer and Jonestown defector Timothy Stoen] to get custody of a child Jones had kept in Guyana was part of the CIA plot to harass him and that he [Lane] would expose it all. And Jones was so crazy that he bought it.”

Indeed, Lane’s memo to Jones outlining his proposed work did promise public relations work.

What kind of PR work was done? In October, Lane contacted Kathy Hunter, a former reporter for the Ukiah Daily Journal (circulation 9,000) in northern California who’d written one of

Mark Lane

The Case Against

The conclusion: He has only two motives—profit and headlines

by Steven Brill

Intelligence agencies and how the confrontation with Jones [and Congressman Leo Ryan] was arranged by them.

In the months following Guyana, we will be hearing from him again. Not in his early Toyota monologue. But with the practiced hysteria that I’ll see later in our ride—the kind that’s wowed them on campuses before, when the subject was death and the dead were John Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr. And always the adjective lawyer will come in front of his name. Lawyer Mark Lane today charged that . . . Lawyer Mark Lane revealed . . . Lawyer Mark Lane attacked . . .

Don’t believe him. On major issues, Mark Lane is as utterly truthless as any who has ever moved across our headlines. And his motives are always the same: profit and headlines.

In a tie-in clause that sets new frontiers for lawyer compensation, in a tie-in clause that sets new frontiers for lawyer compensation, Lane also suggested in a memo to Jones that the entirety of a three-story building Lane owns across from the Supreme Court, in Washington, should be rented by the temple. Lane says that in return for the $6,000 his sole legal service would be to file a Freedom of Information Act request “that would prove that the CIA had conspired to get Jones and the temple.” No Freedom of Information Act request was ever filed. All it takes is a simple form letter.

“Mark was also going to do public relations work for the temple,” says Lane assistant and girl friend April Ferguson, explaining the stiff fees. “He promised Jones,” adds one People’s Temple insider, “that the attempt [by San Francisco lawyer and Jonestown defector Timothy Stoen] to get custody of a child Jones had kept in Guyana was part of the CIA plot to harass him and that he [Lane] would expose it all. And Jones was so crazy that he bought it.”

Indeed, Lane’s memo to Jones outlining his proposed work did promise public relations work.

What kind of PR work was done? In October, Lane contacted Kathy Hunter, a former reporter for the Ukiah Daily Journal (circulation 9,000) in northern California who’d written one of

MONEY FROM PEOPLE’S TEMPLE

In fact, according to documents provided to me by a San Francisco survivor at the People’s Temple, Lane’s original September retainer arrangement with Jones called for an upfront $10,000 payment and a fee of $6,000 a month plus telephone and travel expenses. Among the documents I obtained is a photocopy of a $10,000 cashier’s check sent to Lane by the People’s Temple. In a tie-in clause that sets new frontiers for lawyer compensation, Lane also suggested in a memo to Jones that the entirety of a three-story building Lane owns across from the Supreme Court, in Washington, should be rented by the temple.

Lane says that in return for the $6,000 his sole legal service would be to file a Freedom of Information Act request “that would prove that the CIA had conspired to get Jones and the temple.” No Freedom of Information Act request was ever filed. All it takes is a simple form letter.

“Mark was also going to do public relations work for the temple,” says Lane assistant and girl friend April Ferguson, explaining the stiff fees. “He promised Jones,” adds one People’s Temple insider, “that the attempt [by San Francisco lawyer and Jonestown defector Timothy Stoen] to get custody of a child Jones had kept in Guyana was part of the CIA plot to harass him and that he [Lane] would expose it all. And Jones was so crazy that he bought it.”

Indeed, Lane’s memo to Jones outlining his proposed work did promise public relations work.

What kind of PR work was done? In October, Lane contacted Kathy Hunter, a former reporter for the Ukiah Daily Journal (circulation 9,000) in northern California who’d written one of
His antinuke gig didn’t make headlines. Kennedy’s death did. Within weeks, Lane had corralled Oswald’s mother as a client.

With Oswald’s mother: Less than a month after the assassination, Lane gave a 10,000-word brief to the new Warren Commission.

the earliest stories about the goings-on and the problems of defectors at Jones’s utopia in Guyana. Lane told her he’d like to meet with her and some of her sources. Except that he didn’t say he was lawyer Mark Lane representing Jim Jones. According to Hunter and two others who attended the subsequent meeting, Lane instead said he was Mark Lande, a reporter for Esquire magazine. Eight people on the West Coast involved with Jones say Lane passed himself off as Lande of Esquire during that time.

When “Lande” met with Hunter and her sources, he tape-recorded their accounts of rapes, guns, violence, and other horrors at Guyana (as well as threats against Hunter), egging them on all the while with a promise of a sympathetic piece in Esquire. The next day, lawyer Lane held a press conference in San Francisco and said he’d investigated Hunter’s allegations and that she and other Jonestown defectors were crazy.

This masquerade may be grounds for Lane’s disbarment that the Grievance Committee of the Second Judicial Department in New York City (Lane’s only bar affiliation) could pursue. Disciplinary Rule 7-102 A-5 of The Lawyers Code of Professional Responsibility says that “in his representation of a client, a lawyer shall not knowingly make a false statement of law or fact.” Lane’s “Mark Lande” act was just that.

My question to Lane about Hunter’s charge that he posed as a reporter comes just after we turn around in Santa Rosa, having found it. “The voice thunders, the foot pedal pushes the Toyota to 60. One hand jabs the air, the other swerves the wheel half a lane.”

“That’s crazy. She’s a ——- in liar. … Someone’s setting this up. Look at what the Justice Department is doing. They’re setting up my murder.”

“But two other people told me the same story, on the record.”

“Well, I did tell them I was a reporter. But not for Esquire. I’d never work for Esquire. It’s not a serious magazine.”

Esquire or no Esquire, Lane was admitting a violation of Rule 7-102 A-5. He also admitted that Kathy Hunter asked him directly, “Who are you conducting your investigation for?” and he said, “For a magazine . . . if I’d told her I was a lawyer for the temple she would never have talked.” Worse, one of the guests interviewed at Lane’s masquerade meeting with Hunter is Steven Katsaris. Katsaris was suing the People’s Temple because he claimed his daughter was being held hostage. Now, as we splash along at 65, Lane concedes, “Sure, I took the opportunity to ask him how he might settle the case.” In short, a lawyer on the opposing side in litigation posed as a reporter to learn his opponent’s settlement terms.

This apparently was not a spur-of-the-moment subterfuge. Notes of a meeting Lane had with Jones on September 17, 1978, made available to Esquire, report that Lane’s “cover,” as he described it, for interviewing a private investigator hired by a family who thought their daughter was being held hostage in Jonestown would “be production of a book, with need for facts in order to get errors & omissions insurance policy.”

There was one other “public relations” effort. Former People’s Temple San Francisco official Jean Brown says that Lane convinced her on November 8, 1978, at a meeting at the Los Angeles airport, to get $10,000 in cash from the People’s Temple treasury and deliver it to Lane at the airport the next day. Lane said that with the cash, he’d get a draft of a negative article the National Enquirer was preparing on Jonestown and that he then be able to postpone or “kill” the article. Brown told me she delivered the $10,000 the next day but that Lane took only $7,500 of it, saying that was all he’d needed to get the advance copy. According to Brown, Lane also said that while getting the article in advance might help the temple prepare for it or even postpone it, for $100,000 in cash he could get the article killed forever. Brown has signed a sworn affidavit recounting the airport cash-delivery story. Everyone at the Enquirer denies Lane used money to buy an advance copy. Lane now concedes that he took $7,500 from Brown but that it was for more unspecified legal work, not to kill the Enquirer piece.

The Enquirer article might have once been worth killing, just as Hunter and the defectors might have once been worth denouncing. But Lane and Buford are now conceding that they knew in advance that Jones was so crazy that a horror such as the mass suicide was virtually inevitable. This and the fact that Lane had heard the allegations from Hunter’s sources put him in jeopardy of a second possible ground for disbarment—that he didn’t tell authorities, American or Guyanese, what he knew of a client’s intention to violate the law. Lane, however, says that he did warn Congressman Ryan and that he went with Ryan to “smooth things over” and “prevent mass killing.”

If that’s true, I ask as we splash along 101, then why did he denounce Hunter and say Jonestown was an “incredible experience . . . for the human spirit”? The car jumps ahead from 50 to 60. His right hand leaves the wheel. “I went there and saved the lives of a lot of ——-ing people while you and your ——-ing editors were sitting on your butts attacking me. I risked my life for people. I made it possible for five people to get out.”

REAPING THE PROFITS

The last part of Lane’s new Jonestown scenario is that before he died, Jones dispatched a hit squad to kill off public officials. While the press is busy speculating about who is on the Jonestown hit list and when they’ll be hit, Lane may make even more money than he would have netted from his retainer/building-settlement terms. This apparently was not a spur-of-the-moment subterfuge.

Esquire or no Esquire, Lane was admitting a violation of Rule 7-102 A-5. He also admitted that Kathy Hunter asked him directly, “Who are you conducting your investigation for?” and he said, “For a magazine . . . if I’d told her I was a lawyer for the temple she would never have talked.” Worse, one of the guests interviewed at Lane’s masquerade meeting with Hunter is Steven Katsaris. Katsaris was suing the People’s Temple because he claimed his daughter was being held hostage. Now, as we splash along at 65, Lane concedes, “Sure, I took the opportunity to ask him how he might settle the case.” In short, a lawyer on the opposing side in litigation posed as a reporter to learn his opponent’s settlement terms.

This apparently was not a spur-of-the-moment subterfuge. Notes of a meeting Lane had with Jones on September 17, 1978, made available to Esquire, report that Lane’s “cover,” as he described it, for interviewing a private investigator hired by a family who thought their daughter was being held hostage in Jonestown would “be production of a book, with need for facts in order to get errors & omissions insurance policy.”

There was one other “public relations” effort. Former People’s Temple San Francisco official Jean Brown says that Lane convinced her on November 8, 1978, at a meeting at the Los Angeles airport, to get $10,000 in cash from the People’s Temple treasury and deliver it to Lane at the airport the next day. Lane said that with the cash, he’d get a draft of a negative article the National Enquirer was preparing on Jonestown and that he then be able to postpone or “kill” the article. Brown told me she delivered the $10,000 the next day but that Lane took only $7,500 of it, saying that was all he’d needed to get the advance copy. According to Brown, Lane also said that while getting the article in advance might help the temple prepare for it or even postpone it, for $100,000 in cash he could get the article killed forever. Brown has signed a sworn affidavit recounting the airport cash-delivery story. Everyone at the Enquirer denies Lane used money to buy an advance copy. Lane now concedes that he took $7,500 from Brown but that it was for more unspecified legal work, not to kill the Enquirer piece.

The Enquirer article might have once been worth killing, just as Hunter and the defectors might have once been worth denouncing. But Lane and Buford are now conceding that they knew in advance that Jones was so crazy that a horror such as the mass suicide was virtually inevitable. This and the fact that Lane had heard the allegations from Hunter’s sources put him in jeopardy of a second possible ground for disbarment—that he didn’t tell authorities, American or Guyanese, what he knew of a client’s intention to violate the law. Lane, however, says that he did warn Congressman Ryan and that he went with Ryan to “smooth things over” and “prevent mass killing.”

If that’s true, I ask as we splash along 101, then why did he denounce Hunter and say Jonestown was an “incredible experience . . . for the human spirit”? The car jumps ahead from 50 to 60. His right hand leaves the wheel. “I went there and saved the lives of a lot of ——-ing people while you and your ——-ing editors were sitting on your butts attacking me. I risked my life for people. I made it possible for five people to get out.”
Cross-examination that statements in the book were drawn from the Chicago Seven conspiracy trial, Lane conceded under sharp questioning to five to be “misrepresentations.” He adds, “You know he was right.”

In July 1968, Lane published a book, A Citizen’s Dissent, in which he accused the press of a conspiracy to suppress Rush to Judgment. Reviewing the book for The New York Times, Victor Navasky, author of Kennedy Justice and now editor of Citizen’s Dissent, said that Lane’s case against business magnate Clay Shaw for conspiracy in the Kennedy case had been presented “to me detail by detail, incident by incident,” and that it was an ironclad case that would shake “the very foundations of this country.”

When the case came to trial, Garrison presented no significant evidence, and the jury took less than an hour to acquit Shaw. “Garrison was right about the CIA, wasn’t he?” Lane hollered. He pounds the hard vinyl dashboard. “You know he was right.”

In October 1968, Lane published a quickie paperback on a new American tragedy—the Vietnam War and the protests against it at the 1968 Democratic Convention. In Chicago, the book was called Chicago Eyewitness, and Lane wrote that “I relate what I saw which is quite different from what newspaper readers have been told before.”

Fifteen months later, in testimony at the Chicago Seven conspiracy trial, Lane conceded under sharp cross-examination that statements in the book were drawn from newspaper accounts rather than personal observations.

In December 1970, Lane, still on his Vietnam kick, published Conversations with Americans on the heels of the My Lai massacre and other disclosures. It purported to be a series of no-holds-barred interviews with real American soldiers who committed real atrocities, such as killing Vietnamese women by putting hand flares in their vaginas. In a review, New York Times reporter Neil Sheehan, who spent three years in Vietnam, called the book “a lesson in what happens when a society shuns the examination of a pressing, emotional issue and leaves the answers to a Mark Lane.”

Reporters, who took the trouble to check, found that many of the soldiers Lane interviewed simply were not stationed where they said they were when the supposed atrocities took place and that other basic facts didn’t check out. Interviewee Chuck Onan, for example, was described as being part of an elite Marine long-range patrol unit that received special torture-technique training in addition to parachute, frogman, and jungle-survival courses.

Sheehan checked Marine records and found that Onan had only been to basic boot camp and an aviation school before working as a stock-room clerk at a Marine base in South Carolina—from which he deserted in 1968. Sheehan was “interested in covering up for the Army in Vietnam,” Lane hollered. Sheehan is the Times reporter who was responsible for publication of The Pentagon Papers.

The reviews of Conversations were so bad that the book sold only 10,000 paperbacks and less than 100,000 hardcovers, but Lane still netted “more than $50,000” in advances from the publisher, he says.

In July-August 1976, Lane had been largely unheard of for several years, except for some Kennedy-assassination press releases and a brief set of headlines garnered for getting arrested in 1974 as a lawyer at the Wounded Knee Indian rights trial. The books of a defense committee he formed to receive contributions for that cause are also not available.) Then he got himself into the Martin Luther King Jr. assassination case. Five months earlier, reporter Les Payne, of Newsday, had written two articles suggesting that the investigation leading to the arrest of James Earl Ray as King’s lone assassin was less than thorough and that the FBI and Memphis police might have been involved in the murder. So Lane went to Memphis and interviewed people Payne had interviewed. According to Payne, Lane “lied and told my sources he was working with me.” Lane then wrote a series of articles in a short-lived publication called Washington Newsworks and lobbied with the Congressional Black Caucus, calling for a reinvestigation of King’s murder because of the possibility of FBI and Memphis police involvement and an FBIcover-up. Nearly every fact he used (and distorted) was drawn from Payne’s work, yet he characterized it all as his own new revelation.

“His always ripping off other people’s work,” Payne told me recently, echoing the reaction I got most often from assassination buffs around the country. “The worst part,” Payne added, “is that he distorted my work so much that he thoroughly discredited it... He jumped from my information about the FBI...
Lane's masquerade as a reporter—to learn his opponent's settlement terms—may be grounds for his disbarment.

KOOL-AID CONSPIRACY

Jim Jones has so far saved Lane from having to produce on that one; the Guyana mass suicide/murder about a month after these promises on the King case gave Lane a new subject.

According to Jones's other lawyer, Charles Garry, "Lane stole my client. Without ever consulting me, the son of a bitch contacted Jones and told him he'd file a Freedom of Information Act suit that could expose a CIA conspiracy."

"He's just a sick old man," Lane says of Garry. "I could say he's CIA, but I think in his case, it's just old age and ego.

Spiced with tales about a hit squad surviving the Guyana disaster, the CIA plot is the new Lane line that we're now destined to sit through. The sole evidence that there is a hit squad, incidentally, other than Lane's and client Terri Buford's statements, are the packets of Kool-Aid Lane says he found on his doorstep in Memphis a few days after the Guyana deaths. (The doorstep dropping of the drink mix used for the Jonestown poison is his death warning from the hit men, Lane says.) At least among law-enforcement people, Lane's credibility is now so such that the Memphis detectives investigating the Kool-Aid caper suspect Lane planted it himself. That's the question I save for last, when he's to let me off. "Get me the name of that Memphis cop," he screams. "I'm telling you, it's just part of the plot to discredit me and get me murdered."

"Who's trying to murder you?"

"The CIA, through the media, principally the same media that covered up the Kennedy and King assassinations. The key media are CBS and The New York Times."

"Is Walter Cronkite a CIA agent?"

"I don't know what he is, but I know what he's doing... By reporting I was in Geneva (taking money out of a People's Temple bank), I could have been killed."

"Why would the government want you killed?"

"I don't know, Why was King killed?"

As with the Vietnam atrocities and the assassinations, Guyana needs to be investigated. And the investigators should be watched skeptically. But Lane has repeatedly damaged the credibility of sincere critics of these past investigations by his loud, venal, truthless presence at their side. He should not be listened to as he struggles his way through this new national nightmare, lecture and literary agents in tow.