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fileLane Peddles Conspiracy Nonsense

Assassinations Probe Should Be Junked

When James Earl Ray, who is serving 99 years in prison for killing Martin Luther King, appeared before the House Assassinations Committee in mid-August, television viewers may have noticed he was accompanied by a bearded attorney called Mark Lane.

The teaming up of Ray and Lane is hardly a major surprise, since Ray has been singing Lane's tune that U.S. intelligence agencies may have been involved in the King slaying. Lane has always been attracted to the bizarre, including the *idée fixe* of many U.S. radicals that the FBI and the CIA are repeatedly bumping off prominent Americans such as President Kennedy and King. Indeed, Lane's vigorous propagation of this view was instrumental in bringing into existence the assassinations panel, which this week resumes its investigation of the deaths of these two men.

Lane has been riding high as an assassinations buff and revisionist "historian." Until recently, he has been operating from what the *Washington Post* has described as "the toniest area of Capitol Hill...."

His *Rush to Judgment*—Lane's version of the Kennedy slaying—made the best-seller list, and *Code Name "Zorro"*—a fanciful tract on King's murder—has reportedly done well. Lane and writer Donald Freed also wrote a fictionalized novel on JFK's murder titled *Executive Action*, which was turned into a film grossing \$15 million. Lane gets \$1,000 to \$1,750 for his anti-Establishment lecture performances, and his Citizens Commission of Inquiry takes in money by selling his book on the Kennedy murder and bumper stickers asking "Who Killed Kennedy?" Lane insists he hasn't seen much of the money, and that his lecture fees are poured back into his Citizens Commission, which, in fact, triggered the congressional assassinations probe.

Lane's cast of mind has delighted the left. Within one month of the Kennedy assassination, for instance, Lane had turned out a 10,000-word brief in

which he argued that Lee Harvey Oswald was the victim of a massive frameup. The piece was published in the *National Guardian*, a New York weekly described by the House Committee on Un-American Activities as a "virtual official propaganda arm of the Soviet Union." In 1964, the *National Guardian* sponsored a Lane speaking tour, in which he called for a re-opening of the Kennedy slaying.

Lane's leftism is long standing. From 1948 to 1952, he was a member of the American Labor party, cited by the Senate Internal Security subcommittee as a Communist party front. In the early 1950s, Lane served on the board of directors of the New York chapter of the National Lawyers Guild, cited in 1950 by the HCUA as the "foremost legal bulwark of the Communist party." In the 1960s Lane spoke in defense of the Castro government before the Emergency Civil Liberties Committee (also labeled a CP front by the HCUA), addressed several meetings of the W.E.B. DuBois Clubs (a youth organization conceived by the Communist party), and made anti-war speeches before rallies sponsored by the Trotskyite Socialist Workers party.

A Reuter's press dispatch of April 6, 1964, reported that Lane appeared before the Congress of the International Association of Democratic Lawyers in Budapest—also a Communist front—urging the creation of an international commission to probe Kennedy's death. Lane has continued his links with the left up until the present time.

The reason for Lane's popularity on the left is simple: he has been a major propagandist against the U.S. intelligence community.

While reputable writers and journalists believe that Oswald, for instance, may not have been working alone as the Warren Commission concluded, few would deny that Oswald was the murderer or that he was a committed Marxist. Lane, however, said in a February 1967 *Playboy* interview that "...there is no convincing evidence that Oswald fired a gun...on the day of the assassination." Moreover, he has tried to pin the blame for JFK's death directly on the CIA. In an interview with the *East Village Other* in New York on July 9, 1969, Lane was quoted as saying: "I do know that the

CIA killed John Kennedy." In an article he wrote for the Los Angeles *Free Press* on Aug. 7, 1970, he bluntly asserted the "CIA killed JFK" to keep the war going. He reiterates the theme in the October 1978 issue of *Hustler* in an article titled: "The Assassination of President John F. Kennedy. How the CIA Set Up Oswald."

A master of innuendo, he has suggested that the FBI, the Dallas police department and even President Johnson were involved in the Kennedy assassination. He accused LBJ of being "responsible for the fact that the crucial material evidence... have [sic] either disappeared or been left to the tender mercies of the FBI," as if the FBI had no business investigating what the law required them to. While saying he personally believed Johnson had nothing to do with the killing, Lane, nevertheless, certainly suggests that those who think LBJ was involved have made a very persuasive case.

While the major culprit in JFK's death is the CIA, King, in Lane's fevered imagination, was almost certainly felled by the FBI. There is no evidence of this either, of course. But Lane and "comedian" Dick Gregory co-authored a book in 1977 called *Code Name "Zorro"*, which tries to build a case against the FBI. Indeed, the cover of the pocketbook features these words from a New York *Post* review: "Makes a Powerful Case for Assassination by the FBI." Lane also labeled the bureau as "prime suspects" in the killing when he was hawking his book in the Nation's Capital last year.

Unfortunately for Lane, however, the assassinations panel, now looking into his charges, held hearings that boomeranged badly on the panel's creator. In the *Zorro* book, for instance, Lane (pages 356 and 357 of the pocketbook edition) reports on his interview with Dean Cowden, "a long-time resident of Memphis and a professional investment counselor dealing in commodities."

While the prosecution says that Ray shot King from the bathroom of the rooming house he had rented in Memphis, Cowden informed Lane that he had spotted Ray in a Texaco service station at the very time Ray was supposed to have been in the bathroom. He said he recognized Ray from the pictures in the newspapers. Before the assassinations panel two weeks ago, however, Cowden admitted he had conned Lane as a favor to Renfro Hays, a private investigator who, Cowden claimed, was trying to sell rights to information about the King murder. When the story was told to Lane, said Cowden, he "went for it hook, line and sinker." Cowden, who says he wasn't even in Memphis the day of King's murder, added that

Lane never even queried him to make sure the story was correct.

So far as the FBI having anything to do with King's death, the Carter Administration's Justice Department—hardly a bastion of right-wing conservatism—issued a report last year clearing that agency of any wrongdoing in the King case.

After an eight-month probe that took investigators to more than a dozen cities, involved interviews with 40 persons and included the review of more than 200,000 documents, the report concluded that the FBI probe was "thorough and honest." And whereas Lane argues that Ray is innocent and others were involved, the department concludes that "... the sum of all the evidence of Ray's guilt points to him so exclusively that it most effectively makes the point that no one else was involved."

Perhaps someone else was involved, but there can be no legitimate question that Ray is guilty. He admitted buying the murder weapon, his fingerprints were on the weapon, he rented the rooming house and, when faced with a possible death sentence, pleaded guilty (only to change his story after he was certain he would escape execution).

In an interview with *Playboy* in September 1977, Ray again protested his innocence, even agreeing to permit *Playboy*—which seemed potentially sympathetic to his "I didn't shoot King" routine—to strap him to a lie detector. *Playboy* hired Douglas Wicklander, a polygraph expert with John E. Reid & Associates, a highly respected firm in Chicago which has instructed federal and state agencies in the use of lie detectors. John Reid co-authored with Fred Inbau, the former director of the Chicago Crime Laboratory, a classic book on the use of polygraphs, *Truth and Deception, the Polygraph Lie Detector Technique*. But the polygraph backfired on Ray. Ray, for instance, was asked the following questions:

Q: Did you kill Martin Luther King Jr.?

Ray: No.

Q: Did you fire the shot that killed Martin Luther King Jr.?

Ray: No.

Q: Do you know for sure who killed Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.?

Ray: No.

After reading the polygraph, Wicklander, Reid and Joseph Buckley gave *Playboy* the following conclusion: "It is the opinion of the examiner, based on this subject's polygraph records, that he is not telling the truth on the previously listed questions."

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But when Ray said "No" when asked if he arranged King's death with someone else, the polygraph experts said he was telling the truth.

In other words, the evidence is overwhelming that Lane, whose initial charges on the Kennedy and King assassinations spurred the congressional probe into being, has based his "case" or "cases" on nothing but left-wing fantasies. So why doesn't the committee close up shop rather than waste more of the taxpayers' money? The panel has already gone through \$4 million and wants \$750,000 more from the House Administration Committee. To our way of thinking, Rep. Bob Bauman (R.-Md.) was right when he called for the shutting down of the assassinations panel close to a year and a half ago.