

An interview with Mark Lane, author, lawyer and activist in the American anti-war movement of the 1960s

In the spring of 1968, Mark Lane was in New Orleans helping district attorney Jim Garrison with his case against Clay Shaw—a case which was, more significantly, the only attempt ever to put someone on trial as a conspirator in the murder of John F. Kennedy on November 22, 1963. While in New Orleans, Lane met with the editors of an alternative newspaper called *NOLA Express*. He granted them an interview which later became part of his FBI file. The FBI had surveillance on Lane almost everywhere he went at this time. He was not only aiding Garrison, but he also was helping young men resist the draft. The scanned FBI file has been typed and made legible in the text that follows.

About Jim Garrison and his trial of a conspirator in the murder of JFK, New Orleans, 1969—adapted from the jacket of his book *On the Trail of the Assassins* (Skyhorse Publishing, 1988, 2008):

On the Trail of the Assassins—the primary source material for Oliver Stone’s film *JFK*—is Garrison’s own account of his investigations into the background of Lee Harvey Oswald and the assassination of President Kennedy, and his prosecution of Clay Shaw in the trial that followed.

The assassination of President John F. Kennedy continues to haunt the American psyche and stands as a turning point in the nation’s history. The Warren Commission rushed out its report in 1964, but questions continued to linger: Was there a conspiracy? Was there a coup at the highest levels of government?

On March 1, 1967, New Orleans district attorney Jim Garrison shocked the world by arresting local businessman Clay Shaw for conspiracy to murder the president. His alleged co-conspirator, David Ferrie, had been found dead a few days before. Garrison charged that elements of the United States government, in particular the CIA, were behind the crime. From the beginning, his probe was virulently attacked in the media and denounced from Washington. His office was infiltrated and sabotaged, and witnesses disappeared and died strangely. Eventually, Shaw was acquitted after the briefest of jury deliberation and the only prosecution ever brought for the murder of President Kennedy was over. In 1979, after Shaw’s death, Richard Helms, Director of Covert Operations in 1963 (Director of Central Intelligence 1966 to 1973), admitted under oath to the US Senate’s Church Committee that Clay Shaw had worked for the CIA. This statement vindicated Garrison and showed that Shaw had committed perjury when he said during his trial that he had never had any association with the CIA.

From the FBI file on Mark Lane, Document ID 2212202, file no. 100-17689:

In March and April, 1968, Mark Lane was in New Orleans, Louisiana, to assist New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison in Garrison’s prosecution of New Orleans businessman Clay Shaw for conspiracy in the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in November, 1963. While in New Orleans, Lane met on several occasions with Bob Head and Darlene Fife who originated and published the *NOLA Express*, a militant underground New Orleans newspaper. Lane reportedly told Fife that he is a very close friend of District Attorney Garrison, and was

also to assist Darlene Fife in covering the trial in New Orleans for the *National Guardian* newspaper of New York City.

Lane reportedly told Fife that the right-wing element in New Orleans is against District Attorney Garrison's action against Clay Shaw, and that he would be willing to accept support from the New Left movement in the New Orleans area.

In Volume 1, Number 1, of the *NOLA Express*, dated April, 1968, the following interview with Mark Lane took place and is set forth below in its entirety:

Interview held on March 12, 1968:

Darlene Fife: What are your objectives?

Mark Lane: Garrison has limited objectives. He wants the American people to know who killed the president. He wants to arrest everyone in his jurisdiction [involved in the conspiracy], although he believes no one will go to jail. And he wants the ramifications of be sufficiently great so that the United States government will have to dissolve the Central Intelligence Agency and find three new letters for the organization that will be formed. He has no illusions about permanent change.

DF: Say Garrison gets all his convictions and it turns out that high men in the CIA are involved and Johnson flees the country to join the American deserters in Sweden. What do you think is going to happen? Certainly there's some kind of "power vacuum" left.

ML: Well, we are presently residing in a totalitarian state and the fact that there might be a power vacuum doesn't frighten me. That would be a massive improvement over what we have at the present time. I don't see President Johnson fleeing to Sweden. I don't think that will be the result and I don't think that what takes place in New Orleans in terms of the trial will have that kind of shocking effect upon the American people, firstly because they probably won't even know about it because they have to rely on the media for the facts. And the media has not proved to be too reliable in this area for the last four and a half years. They might hear about a conviction or two, and Walter Cronkite in stentorian tones will make some reference to Southern justice. So I think that what is taking place here will never be accurately reported, just as what has been taking place here for the last year has been distorted by *NBC*, *CBS*, the *New York Times*, *Time Magazine* and most of all *Newsweek*, the liberal publication. And I think that one cannot expect that the facts which are presented at the Shaw trial will be genuinely broadcast around the country.

DF: Explain to me what Garrison is talking about when he talks about an operational level, an intermediate level, and then the sponsor level.

ML: I've recently interviewed a person closely associated with the CIA for a number of years. I've talked with him about the assassination of the president and he said it fits into the classic pattern of a program for "executive action" and which any intelligence agency in the United States or abroad would have used to bring about the operation. He says the footprints of an intelligence operation are all over Dealey Plaza. He describes it as at one end of the chart there is a sponsor; that is, the man or organization who wants the job done. At the other end of the chart is the target. The target is the objective the sponsor wants to achieve. It may be the blowing up of a bridge, the sabotaging of a ship, or assassination of a head of state. It may be going into an embassy and removing documents, photographing them and returning

them. In the latter case the objective is never to let anyone know the job has been planned or has been done. However, when it comes to blowing up a bridge or killing a president, it is of course impossible to prevent knowledge that the job has been done, and then it is most important to prevent anyone from knowing who the real sponsor is. In order to see to it that the information is not divulged, first of all in the chain of command each person just knows the person above him and below him. The chain can be broken at any time by the removal—they call it the “permanent termination”—of anyone in the chain. I asked him what was meant by that and he said, “You kill him.” There is a series of false sponsors that is also established so that in case anyone is curious, which the Warren Commission was not, they will find false leads.

So if the Commission had examined the evidence closely and found there was a conspiracy, and were they curious enough to have found out who might have been behind the conspiracy, they would have uncovered many false leads which were scattered around Dealey Plaza like leaves on an autumn day. For example, they would have found out that Jack Ruby was associated with organized crime. There would have been indications that Castro was involved in the assassination. There are a whole host of clues that point in various directions such as the extreme right, extreme left, or organized crime. These are just three examples of the clues that were developed, but it never got that far because the Commission, being a liberal body, decided that it had no concern with the truth and that it would compromise. True liberalism. The Commission decided it would compromise because those who planned the assassination envisioned planes taking off the next morning to bomb China or Cuba or Russia, or hopefully all three. The president didn't want that to happen and the Commission was designed to conceal the facts, and in concealing the facts, they also concealed any evidence of a conspiracy, including the conspiracy the CIA wanted them to fall upon—the evidence of a conspiracy of the left involving foreign governments.

DF: The CIA was the sponsor and Kennedy was the target, and all the people Garrison is investigating like Shaw and Ferrie were in the intermediate level?

ML: Yes.

DF: Does Garrison have an inside view yet? Has anyone confessed?

ML: No one has confessed, and I don't think you can expect many confessions in this case because if you're convicted without confessing, all you can get in a conspiracy to kill the president is twenty years, and you don't serve twenty years. You may just serve one third of the term. And if you confessed, you'd probably be permanently terminated by the sponsor.

DF: What kind of support has Garrison received from the press or say a “movement”?

ML: Well, almost none from the press, as you know. The press is almost unanimous. *NBC* had a historically unprecedented program which was the trial of Clay Shaw. It took place on television before it took place in real life. *CBS* did four one-hour reports on the Warren Report, defending the report from its critics. At one point Walter Cronkite said, “Garrison has made many charges, but he hasn't proven any of them in court.” In fact, Garrison has made two charges, one of them against Dean Andrews for perjury in a case closely related to the assassination investigation, and the other against Clay Shaw. It's true he hasn't proven the guilt of Shaw because for over a year now Shaw has been doing everything to prevent that case from coming to trial. About Dean Andrews: Three days after Cronkite said Garrison had

not proven anything in court, Dean Andrews was convicted of perjury. I watched television the next night to see how Cronkite was going to explain this, but he never did.

The only movement which has supported Garrison is the Citizens' Committee of Inquiry on various college campuses and cities which was established early after the assassination for the purpose of making the facts known. Of course, *Ramparts Magazine* has been very helpful in terms of publishing new material, but one of the things that dismays me is that while one would expect attacks from the right, one would expect the left to have a more sophisticated view, a knowledgeable view of what takes place in this society. One would expect the left to support Garrison, but the left seems to be sitting back watching, waiting very cautiously. That's not the position the left should be taking at the present time, it seems to me. One of the problems is the atmosphere around to convince us that Garrison is some kind of nut. One listens long enough and tends to believe it and gives that as an excuse for not participating. I think that's unforgivable.

DF: I think one of the problems is that, even assuming everything Garrison says is true, you say you have to get three new letters for the agency and everything is the same again. There have been heads of state assassinated in other countries and nothing changes.

ML: Well, that's a very cynical view by those who are sitting back and taking no position right now, and saying that the truth is not sufficient, the truth must do that which we want it to do; the abstract truth is not sufficient. But I think things will change. [If change] comes from the conclusion that the CIA, an agency of the federal government, killed President Kennedy, things can never be exactly the same in America. I don't think revolution will take place the next day. I don't think there will be rioting in the streets, either, but I think there will be a change, and a healthy change.

DF: I know your position on the war in Vietnam. What is Garrison's view on the war?

ML: I spoke at the Louisiana Polytechnic Institute about four months ago. Garrison had been there just a year ago. That was before his investigation began, and they asked if he would go back to discuss the assassination, and I said I would raise the issue with him. I saw him the next day and told him I was there. He said, "I was there a year ago. Did they tell you?" I said, "Yes, they told me." He said, "Did they tell you what I talked about there?" I said no. He said, "I was lieutenant colonel in the active reserve. I spoke in favor of the war in Vietnam." He blushed. He said that in his forties when he came across the Warren Report and the contradictions, and he began his investigation, he realized for the first time that honorable men had issued this false report. It brought a great change in his thinking. He is now wholeheartedly against the war in Vietnam and has resigned as lieutenant colonel in the active reserve. And he believes in the very near future there will be an American Dien Bien Phu*. He says the American people probably don't realize that those in this country and outside this country who oppose our policy in Vietnam are the only ones today defending American freedom.

* Dien Bien Phu refers to the decisive battle of 1954 which led to French withdrawal from Vietnam and the UN agreement to partition the country into North and South Vietnam. At the time this interview occurred, the Tet Offensive had already occurred a few months earlier. American military operations ended in 1973 and Saigon fell to North Vietnamese troops on April 30, 1975. This note does not appear in the original article or the FBI file.