

Mark Lane: The Original Shyster

By Mel Ayton

Last Word: My Indictment of the CIA in the Murder of JFK

Mark Lane

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The idea that Lee Harvey Oswald was somehow connected to the CIA is a legitimate line of inquiry considering how many allegations have been made that posit the Agency has not released all its files pertaining to the assassination.

The non-release of some CIA files, including those of Agency officers William Harvey (sealed until 2063) and George Joannides, only helps fuel suspicion that a cabal of operatives, known to be involved in an enterprise designed to either kill or topple Fidel Castro, enlisted Lee Harvey Oswald or used Oswald as a “patsy” in a conspiracy to kill President Kennedy.[\[1\]](#)

Conspiracy writers have named singularly, or as a group, such CIA officers as William Harvey, George Joannides, James Angleton, David Atlee Phillips, E. Howard Hunt, and David Morales, amongst others. It is the considered opinion of this reviewer that any additional CIA files will not support the allegations of CIA involvement in the assassination and will likely develop into a farce along the lines of the false Morales/Joannides/Campbell connection to the RFK assassination. However, the central ethical tenet for journalists and historians is to illuminate the unknown therefore it is in the interests of everyone that these files be released.[\[2\]](#)

Outside of the wild and speculative books that attempt to tie in the CIA to the JFK assassination, there have been a number of respected authors (including Bayard Stockton, Vincent Bugliosi, Gus Russo, Evan Thomas, Tim Weiner, Jefferson Morley, and Peter

Grose) who have researched the allegation. Most discovered curious, but essentially ephemeral, Oswald connections to anti-Castro Cubans and their CIA handlers. Additionally, alleged CIA/Oswald connections were investigated by the [Warren Commission](#), [Rockefeller Commission](#), [Senate Select Committee on Intelligence Activities](#) (Church Committee), as well as the [House Select Committee on Assassinations](#) (HSCA). All these investigatory bodies found no credible evidence to support CIA involvement or culpability in the assassination.

Vincent Bugliosi, in his 1,600 page opus about the JFK assassination, *Reclaiming History*, concluded that conspiracy theorists have been unable to come up with “any evidence connecting the CIA to Oswald.” Bugliosi meticulously researched the JFK/CIA allegations that had been circulating since the sixties and observed that “. . . the only books written that suggest the CIA was behind the assassination are those by conspiracy theorists on the other hand, a considerable number of books have been written about the CIA and its history, warts and all, and not one of their authors, even though they had every ethical, professional (Pulitzer Prize, esteem of peers. etc.) and commercial reason to expose the CIA as being behind the assassination, found the need to devote no more than a paragraph or two in their long books to Lee Harvey Oswald and the assassination.”^[3]

Bayard Stockton, an ex-CIA agent who later worked as a journalist for *Newsweek*, may be the exception as he devotes a chapter of his 2006 book to the allegations. He researched the possibility of CIA involvement in the JFK assassination for his biography of CIA officer William Harvey. Stockton interviewed many former officials and Harvey’s wife, all of whom reacted with “horror and disbelief” about the allegations. Stockton wrote that although a conclusive decision could not be made until the CIA releases all its documents, there was no credible evidence to blame the CIA. “I find it very hard to believe,” Stockton wrote, “that sworn officers of the CIA plotted the death of the president of the United States. I think the Agency’s top echelon knew more than it has admitted and was embarrassed that it had not yielded its knowledge instantly.”^[4]

Those who have an interest in learning more about the purported role the CIA played in the JFK assassination will be disappointed in what Mark Lane has to offer in his new book *Last Word*. He offers absolutely nothing new to the “CIA-did-it” literature. He will also likely upset many serious researchers who have been receptive to claims of CIA malfeasance because he has partly built his arguments around preposterous propositions, including the notion that the witness testimony and physical evidence “proves” a second shooter was involved in the assassination. Those old canards were debunked years ago.^[5]

Judging from website reports, Lane’s supporters are unaware of his previous shenanigans which stretch back to December 1963; yes, Lane was present at the creation. In 1966, Lane’s first book, *Rush to Judgment*, was persuasive with the mainstream media who were taken in by Lane’s lawyerly tricks and silver tongue as he debated supporters of the Warren Commission around the world. As Commission lawyer Wesley Liebeler observed, Lane’s antics during these debates reminded him of “an old legend about frogs jumping from the mouth of a perfidious man every time he speaks If (Lane) talks for

five minutes, it takes an hour to straighten out the record.” Even the counter-culture *Rolling Stone* magazine characterized Lane as a “huckster” and “hearse chaser.” Bugliosi describes Lane as having “infidelity to the truth” . . . a person who commits “outright fabrications” . . . “a fraud in his preachments about the known assassin” . . . and that he had “deliberately distorted the evidence” and repeatedly omitted “evidence damaging to his side.”[\[6\]](#)

In *Rush to Judgment*, Lane abused the Warren Commission testimony of Jack Ruby, Oswald’s killer, and others like Charles Brehm, an alleged “grassy knoll” witness, who said Lane took his statements out of context and added a different meaning to them. Lane also omitted the statements of key witnesses like Johnny C Brewer, who observed a nervous Oswald avoid police patrols after the shooting of Officer Tippit.[\[7\]](#)

But Lane has a long history of playing fast and loose with the facts. In the early 1970s he used unreliable testimony to accuse American soldiers of multiple atrocities during the Vietnam War, according to *New York Times* correspondent Neil Sheehan, a prominent critic of US involvement in the Vietnam War. Sheehan investigated the accounts in Lane’s book, *Conversations with Americans Testimony from 32 Vietnam Veterans*, and found most of them to be bogus.[\[8\]](#)

In the late 1970s, as a lawyer for Martin Luther King, Jr.’s assassin, James Earl Ray, Lane appeared before the House Select Committee on Assassinations (HSCA), a congressional probe into the circumstances surrounding the separate assassinations of the civil rights leader and President Kennedy. HSCA said of Lane in its report, “Many of the allegations of conspiracy that the committee investigated were first raised by Mark Lane As has been noted, the facts were often at variance with Lane’s assertions Lane was willing to advocate conspiracy theories publicly without having checked the factual basis for them Lane’s conduct resulted in public misperception about the assassination of Dr. King and must be condemned.”[\[9\]](#)

With the publication of his latest book Lane’s *modus operandi* has clearly not changed. In fact, his new tome depends on readers’ ignorance, and no independent knowledge of the *dramatis personae* of the assassination literature or how the CIA behaved at the time of the assassination. For example, the author of the book’s introduction resurrects the myth that FBI agents listened to a tape recording of a “Lee Oswald” at the Soviet embassy during the assassin’s trip to Mexico City weeks before the assassination. The allegation that such a tape existed was debunked many years ago by HSCA. The story of the existence of tapes had originated with only one FBI agent out of many who handled the transcripts of the tapes because the tapes had been copied over as per the CIA’s usual procedures. [\[10\]](#)

There are literally tens of thousands of documents and items of evidence in the JFK case. There are therefore endless opportunities for conspiracy writers to add a word here or a word there to give a different contextual meaning to either a witness statement or a government document. The vast majority of readers simply do not have the time to wade through the relevant documents. As Victor Navasky observed in a 2010 article, “[The](#)

[Rosenberg Variations](#)” in *The Nation*, “we live in a state of opinion trusteeship. None of us have the time and few of us the ability to do our own research on all the complex, problematic issues of our day.” Consequently, many conspiracy supporters mistake crude manipulation for scholarship.

Lane demonstrates how he can contort language to give a different meaning when he writes, “. . . [former CIA Director Allen] Dulles told the [Warren Commission] members that they need not worry about anyone doubting their false conclusions. Maybe, he suggested, at worst many years will have passed before some professor might study the evidence and by then it would not matter.” Was the word “false” Lane’s, or did Dulles actually characterize the Warren Commission conclusions as “false?” Lane does not tell us so it is left to the reader to figure it out.[\[11\]](#)

Lane also demonstrates his technique of sowing doubt where none exists when he carefully places suspicion in the mind of the reader by making reference to the alleged sinister circumstances of the Robert Kennedy assassination. Lane describes how Bobby Kennedy was led out of the Ambassador Hotel pantry by his bodyguard “FBI agent . . . William Barry.” Barry, according to Lane, “changed the route at the last minute.” Lane goes on to state that Barry told an onlooker, “No, it’s been changed. We’re going this way.” At the time of the RFK assassination Bill Barry was a *former* FBI agent and the decision to change the route out of the Embassy Room was made by Bill Barry and RFK aide Fred Dutton to accommodate the realities of running for president—RFK had promised to meet with the print press who were in the Colonial Room and the simplest route was through the pantry, the scene of the assassination. Additionally, RFK had asked to go the “back way” to the Colonial Room instead of through the crowds in the Embassy Ballroom. Yet via Lane’s transparent innuendo readers will inevitably be left to wonder if a federal agency was responsible for the assassination of JFK’s brother Bobby. It is therefore ironic that Lane has the gall to criticize Vincent Bugliosi for getting an address wrong in his book *Reclaiming History*. Lane sarcastically wrote, “Did the publisher never hear of the term shared by the entire [publishing] industry: fact checker?”[\[12\]](#)

Lane also uses wild accusations to silence his critics by denouncing them as “old CIA hand(s),” “CIA assets,” “CIA media assets,” a “voice for the CIA,” “close to the CIA,” or they work “on behalf of the CIA.” He also uses innuendo to accuse anti-conspiracy writers of working for the Agency in some undefined but nonetheless sinister fashion. These phrases will no doubt incite some of his less-than-rational readers. It is essentially McCarthyite in nature. To paraphrase Attorney Joseph Welch at the 1954 Army v McCarthy hearings, “Mr. Lane, you’ve done enough. Have you no sense of decency, sir? At long last, have you left no sense of decency?”[\[13\]](#)

Lane’s omission of important facts about the two government investigations into the assassination also leaves his readers with an unenlightened understanding of the inquiries. He tells his readers that the HSCA “concluded that probably a conspiracy was responsible for the murder [of JFK].” What he does *not* inform his readers about is how the committee toiled for three years to uncover a conspiracy and failed. At the eleventh hour, however, HSCA members were presented with a report from an acoustics firm

which examined a Dallas police recording, purportedly of the shots fired in Dealey Plaza. The acoustics experts concluded more than three shots had been fired at the motorcade therefore there must have been a second shooter. A narrow majority of the HSCA members concurred. In 1982, however, three years after the Committee dissolved, the National Academy of Sciences found their acoustics findings to be seriously flawed.^[14]

Central to Lane's the-CIA-did-it thesis is his chapter entitled "The Indictment—The People of the United States v. the Central Intelligence Agency." It is a regurgitation of his endlessly voiced but unproven vociferations that the CIA was not only at the center of a conspiracy to murder President Kennedy but that Watergate burglar and former CIA agent E. Howard Hunt, along with others, had been part of the plot.

His publishers promote the book by proclaiming Lane had successfully persuaded a jury that the CIA killed Kennedy. On the inside book flap they loudly state, "Mark Lane has tried the only case in the history of America . . . in which jurors concluded that the CIA killed President Kennedy." In fact, the jury concluded nothing of the sort.

Lane's story about CIA involvement in the assassination begins with a 1976 article published in an anti-Semitic magazine, *Spotlight*, which alleged that CIA agent E. Howard Hunt, one of the Watergate burglars, was in Dallas on 22 November 1963. The article, written by Victor Marchetti, a former CIA official, alleged Hunt had a role in the Kennedy assassination. The allegation had its origins in a photograph taken at the time of the assassination which purported to show three mysterious tramps in the railroad yards behind the infamous Book Depository being taken into custody by the Dallas police. One of the tramps bore a resemblance to Hunt. It was not until the 1980s and the release of Dallas Police files that the tramps were identified and they had nothing to do with the assassination.^[15]

Hunt won a libel judgment against the magazine in 1981, but it was thrown out on appeal, and the case was re-tried in 1985 in Miami in a civil, not criminal, trial. Hunt lost his case but the jury decision, with the exception of one juror, was based not on their belief that Hunt was a participant in a CIA plot to kill the president but on the fact there was not "actual malice" (a principle of law established by a 1964 Supreme Court ruling) in the magazine's publication of the article, not that the article was necessarily true. When a "public figure" like E. Howard Hunt is attacked in the media, he cannot win a libel judgment merely by showing that the attack is "untrue and unfair."

Lane claims the jurors accepted his premise that the CIA was responsible for murdering the president. Lane wrote, "The evidence was clear, she [jury forewoman Leslie Armstrong] said. The CIA had killed President Kennedy. Hunt had been part of it, and that evidence, so painstakingly presented should now be examined by the relevant institutions of the United States trial government so that those responsible for the assassination might be brought to justice."^[16]

However, two of the jurors told the *Miami Herald* they did not believe Lane had proven that Hunt was a co-conspirator. Suzanne Reach said that the jury's verdict was

“absolutely not” the reason for the verdict. “We were very disgusted and felt (the article) was trash”, she said, “. . . . The paper published material that was sloppy – but it wasn’t malicious.” While Lane avoids literally telling lies in his book, he uses the same convoluted expositions he used before the Miami jury to persuade his readers that Hunt was indeed guilty of conspiring to kill the president.[\[17\]](#)

Lane trades on the sound presumption that the vast majority of his readers have no way of knowing what he’s doing. In the Lane tradition of carefully concealing from his readers any information that might undermine his thesis, he portrays Hunt as having only two alibi witnesses at the trial, and denigrates these because they were CIA employees. But in fact there were three CIA employees who testified at the trial, and three witnesses (two of Hunt's children and a domestic) who swore to the 1974 Rockefeller Commission that Hunt was in the Washington area, and not in Dallas, on the day of the assassination.[\[18\]](#)

In support of his allegations against Hunt, Lane makes reference to an alleged confession.” The circumstances of St John Hunt’s interview with his father are fraught with problems, not least the fact E. Howard Hunt was heavily medicated at the time he “confessed,” but Lane does not disclose this to his readers. Hunt’s memoirs were published posthumously and he vehemently denies any involvement in the JFK assassination. Hunt did “. . . not believe the CIA had anything to do with JFK’s death.” He even discloses that Lane’s irresponsible accusations caused his family great suffering. Additionally, Hunt’s “confession” is nothing more than his own guesswork and ruminations as to who killed JFK. He may even have used this opportunity to vent his spleen over those in government who did not give him any support after he was indicted in the Watergate affair.[\[19\]](#)

Another central weakness in *Last Word*, as with all Lane’s books, is to accept without context or criticism, the false and misleading statements of so-called “JFK assassination witnesses,” including Jean Hill, deputy sheriff Roger Craig, and disgraced Secret Service agent Abraham Bolden.[\[20\]](#)

Abraham Bolden is important to Lane because the former Secret Service agent bolsters his view that the Secret Service assisted the CIA in carrying out the assassination. Bolden, a disgraced Secret Service agent, claimed there had been a plot to kill Kennedy during a planned presidential trip to Chicago. When Kennedy’s Chicago trip was cancelled, Bolden alleges, the assassination plans were then adapted to Dallas and Oswald became the designated patsy. The HSCA, however, said it “was unable to document the existence of the alleged assassination team. Specifically, no agent who had been assigned to Chicago confirmed any aspect of Bolden’s version.” The HSCA also said that “. . . one agent did state there had been a threat in Chicago during that period but he was unable to recall details.” (The existence of a “serious threat” was hardly surprising as Kennedy received numerous death threats during his presidency.) The HSCA concluded that Bolden’s story was of “questionable authenticity.”[\[21\]](#)

Lane also accepts the veracity of Marita Lorenz even though numerous researchers have proven her stories were not credible or they were constructed on outright lies. Marita Lorenz was the one single witness at the Miami trial who placed Hunt in Dallas on the day of the assassination. She said he was a co-conspirator in the JFK assassination who went by the name of “Eduardo.” Lorenz, a supposed CIA operative and mistress of Fidel Castro, was characterized by Lane as “credible.” However, he fails to inform his reader of Lorenz’s other claims about the assassination, and Hunt in particular, over the years. In conversations with other writers and investigators for the HSCA, she made a number of allegations which were proven to be false. Lorenz said Oswald was among the conspirators in a “caravan” that drove from Miami to Dallas arriving on 21 November 1963. Numerous witnesses, however, placed Oswald elsewhere. Lorenz also claimed to have seen Oswald participating in training for the Bay of Pigs invasion at a time when Oswald was in the Soviet Union.^[22]

During 1977 and 1978, Lorenz’s allegations were extensively investigated by the House Select Committee on Assassinations . One of HSCA’s investigators, Ed Lopez, a conspiracy advocate, told author Gerald Posner, “Oh God, we spent a lot of time with Marita It was hard to ignore her because she gave us so much crap, and we tried to verify it, but let me tell you—she is full of shit. Between her and Frank Sturgis, we must have spent over one hundred hours. They were dead ends Marita is not credible.”^[23]

In the end the sumptuous appeal of Lane’s book, the deliberate demonization of a federal agency without any real proof, doesn’t need to make sense. His work nourishes the appetite of a ready-made audience eager for stories that will prop up a belief system they are not willing to abandon. So the question remains—will Lane’s recitation of decades-old lies and myths about the assassination and alleged CIA responsibility provide ready-made paranoiacs with a larger arsenal of imagery and rumor? The answer to that is assuredly yes.

But those readers who are new to the subject and are skeptical of JFK conspiracy theories should read John McAdams’s *JFK Assassination Logic* and/or Vincent Bugliosi’s *Reclaiming History*. McAdams’s intent is not to persuade the reader that there is no credible evidence to prove that JFK was assassinated as the result of a conspiracy. Instead, he concentrates on advising the reader how to think about conspiracy theories, especially the JFK assassination. By addressing the logical weaknesses in conspiracy books, he has been able to demonstrate how not to be duped by unscrupulous authors. And Bugliosi’s volume is notable for its erudition and common sense.

After reading McAdams and Bugliosi, any reader should be in an excellent position to choose which title for Lane’s book is more apt—*Last Word* or *Latest Lies*.

Mel Ayton’s most recent book is [*Dark Soul of the South*](#) (Potomac Books, 2011).

Washington Decoded

[1] Norman Mailer, Jefferson Morley, G. Robert Blakey, Gerald Posner, and Anthony Summers, et al., "[JFK's Assassination](#)," *New York Review of Books*, 18 December 2003.

[2] Mel Ayton, "[Still Guilty After All These Years: Sirhan B. Sirhan](#)," *Washington Decoded*, 11 May 2008; Mel Ayton, "[Did the CIA Kill Bobby Kennedy? The BBC's Blunder](#)," HNN, 7 December 2006; Mel Ayton, "[Shane O'Sullivan's Who Killed Bobby?](#)" HNN, 9 July 2008; Dan Moldea, "[SOS's Comments About My Work](#)," moldea.com, 3 July 2008.

[3] Vincent Bugliosi, [*Reclaiming History: The Assassination of President John F. Kennedy*](#) (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007), 1189, 1214.

[4] Bayard Stockton, [*Flawed Patriot: The Rise and Fall of CIA Legend Bill Harvey*](#) (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2006), 228.

[5] John McAdams, "[The Single Bullet Theory](#)"; John McAdams, "[The Medical Evidence](#)." Lane also makes much of the testimony of Dallas Police Officer Joe M. Smith, who "believed" he confronted a Secret Service agent behind the "picket fence" on the infamous "grassy knoll." Smith's allegations were researched extensively by Vincent Bugliosi. He concluded the "probability was substantial" that the "Secret Service agent" was James W. Powell, who was part of the 112th Military Intelligence Group that frequently assisted the Secret Service in its protective duties. Powell identified himself to police officers in the parking lot area behind the picket fence as a "special agent." And, as John McAdams has pointed out, "There is one final fact that conspiracy books always omit. The alleged Secret Service agent remained in the parking lot and helped Smith and Deputy Sheriff Seymour Weitzman check out cars." Bugliosi, *Reclaiming History*, 868-869; John McAdams, [*JFK Assassination Logic: How to Think about Claims of Conspiracy*](#) (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2011), 16.

[6] Bugliosi, *Reclaiming History*, 1001, 1002 – 1011.

[7] Jean Davison, [*Oswald's Game*](#) (New York: W. W. Norton, 1983), 17-19; David Von Pein, [Charles Brehm](#). Lane also omitted the statements of key eyewitnesses. Bugliosi, *Reclaiming History*, 1003.

[8] Neil Sheehan, a prominent journalist and critic of US involvement in Vietnam, [examined](#) Mark Lane's *Conversations with Americans: Testimony from 32 Vietnam Veterans* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1970), and found most of his claims to be bogus; Sheehan, "[Mark Lane: Smearing America's Soldiers in Vietnam](#)," *New York Times Book Review*, 27 December 1970.

[9] House Select Committee On Assassinations, *Final Report* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1979), [424fn16](#).

[10] McAdams, *JFK Assassination Logic*, 198.

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[11] Lane does not source the “top secret” minutes. However, he probably is referring to a document entitled [Warren Commission Executive Session. 30 April 1964.](#)

[12] Lane, *Last Word*, 43, 113, 143; Mel Ayton, [The Forgotten Terrorist: Sirhan Sirhan and the Assassination of Robert F. Kennedy](#) (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2007), 80.

[13] Lane, *Last Word*, 103, 111, 126-127, 129, 134-135, 137, 139, 195, 230.

[14] Ibid., 113; Michael, O’Dell, “[The Acoustic Evidence in the Kennedy Assassination.](#)”

[15] John McAdams, “[JFK Assassination a Hobo Hit? The Three Tramps.](#)”

[16] Mark Lane, *Plausible Denial: Was the CIA Involved in the Assassination of JFK?* (New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press, 1991), 322.

[17] Stephen K. Doig, “[Hunt-JFK Article ‘Trash’ But Not Libelous, Jury Finds,](#)” *Miami Herald*, 7 February 1985.

[18] Lane repeats the story of how Hunt confessed on his deathbed to his alleged knowledge of the conspiracy. He [allegedly confessed](#) to his son, St John Hunt, and this bogus revelation was published in *Rolling Stone* magazine.

[19] E. Howard Hunt with Greg Aunapu, [American Spy: My Secret History in the CIA, Watergate, and Beyond](#) (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, 2007), 126–147.

[20] John McAdams, “[Jean Hill: The Lady In Red](#)”; David Perry, “[Roger Craig: The Rambler Man.](#)”

[21] In 1964, Bolden was [prosecuted and convicted](#) of conspiring to sell official information in a counterfeiting case and was sentenced to six years in prison.

[22] John McAdams, Ed Dolan, and Jean Davison, “[Marita Lorenz: Tying Hunt To A Conspiracy.](#)”

[23] Gerald Posner, [Case Closed: Lee Harvey Oswald and the Assassination of JFK](#) (New York: Random House, 1993), 407.