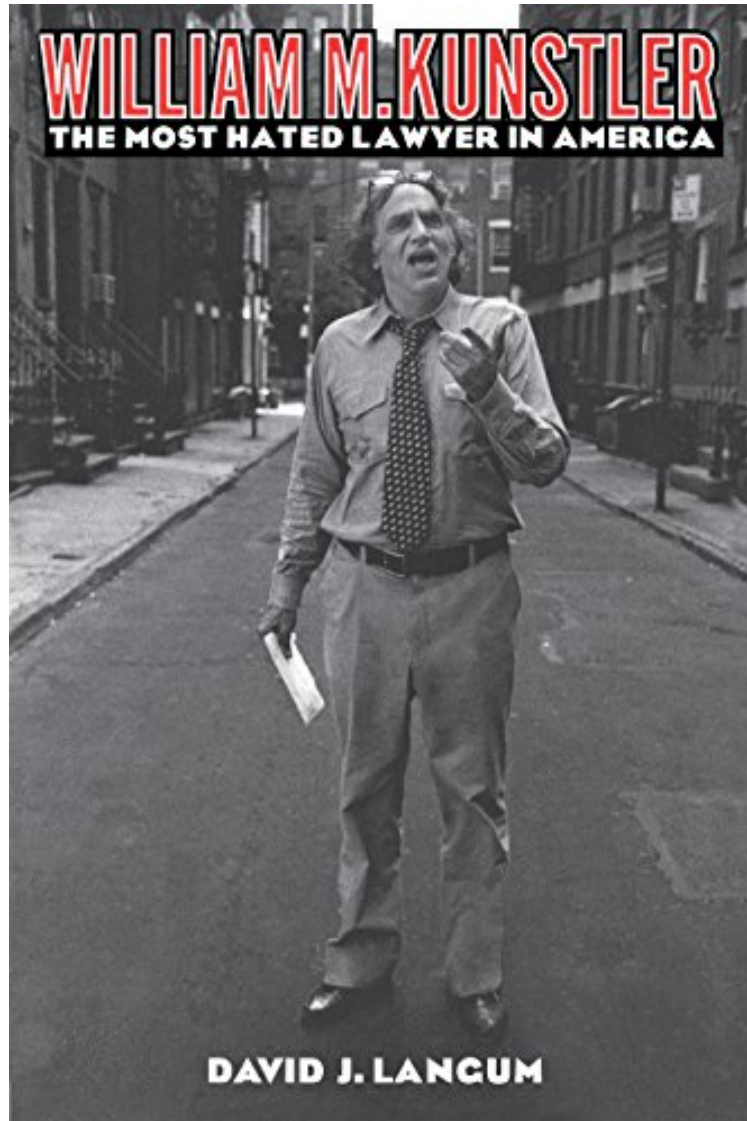


William M. Kunstler: The Most Hated Lawyer in America

David J. Langum

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David J. Langum : William M. Kunstler: The Most Hated Lawyer in America before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised William M. Kunstler: The Most Hated Lawyer in America:

3 of 6 people found the following review helpful. the book reads like an Oliver Stone film -- including the title By Suzannah B. Troy I don't support many of Kunstler's views, outrageous statements and his representation of many of his criminal clients. The courage of civil rights movement lawyers was beyond powerful and Kunstler got involved with the Freedom Rider's case which ignited his fiery passion to be a radical lawyer . Author David J. Langum is a

smart story teller because I was entertained when I wasn't being shocked. I had to laugh when he writes about the amount of mail the Chicago 7 received including a letter with some pot which Kunstler and his clients smoked together. Kunstler had unconventional boundaries with clients and Langum has some interesting theories on why. This book did not turn me into a Kunstler admirer but Langum made me think hard about "conveying a message/education to the public" using "movement law". I live in the East Village and we have been mega dormed to death by NYU and even NY Law with a zone busting mega dorm "with balconies" for law students on 3rd St. and my point is these law students seem to care more about their balcony views than what is going down in the communities that are being gobbled up by their Universities. I would like the zone busting part of NY Law dorm removed and everyone of those students to do volunteer work for the evictions and struggles caused by their Universities and other greedy landlords exploiting our neighborhoods. I doubt the NY Law students would do so and those balconies are more enticing but it would be interesting to hear what Kunstler might have said about all this since Langum mentions that he taught at NY Law and William M. Kunstler, I am guessing, also loved our neighborhood with all the texture and characters (although we are losing both every day). I would like to think he would have tried to help. P342 Langum does write, "Kunstler worried especially about the young people, their materialism and lack of social activism." I would add "institutions of higher learning" like NYU and NY Law with their community crushing mega dorms are encouraging anything but students with passion for social activism. I am surprised Oliver Stone hasn't made one of his three hours long films from this book but I wouldn't go see the film; the book was enough and "fair" with lots of grey tones that would not make it into the movie version. There are many ironic notes in this book and for me the most ironic is the back cover which says New York University Press. 2 of 7 people found the following review helpful. Smart Enough to be Funny By Bruce P. Barten Stand-up comedy is not in the index of this book, but it gets mentioned. Along with a list of Kunstler's film credits is a note that when he tried a comedy routine, he got his biggest laugh for a lawyer joke. I was interested, a long time ago, in what Chapter 6 of this book calls Circus in Chicago. Back when I was contemplating what I might like to do in a career in law, I would have enjoyed the opportunity to generate the number of laughs that are contained in this book. Then I actually found a case that said "Resort to the courts is futile." That was such a change from my expectations that an element of humor creeps into my appreciation of the outrageous nature of that truth. As evidence that the author of this book is aware of the potent nature of that form of humor, picture this: "Kunstler objected. The United States attorney jumped up and argued, "This is outrageous. This man [Kunstler] is the mouthpiece for these defendants. The Government protests this man's attitude.'" (p. 124) I thought that the best legal point in the book was that Bobby Seale could not be retried on the conspiracy charge after the jury found that the other seven defendants were not guilty of conspiracy. Seale hadn't been charged with anything else, so further proceedings in his case would have been pointless. If there is a fine line between legal logic and the quirks of the system, check this book for the side of the line where the quirks are, and maybe you have already seen bits and pieces of this story on TV. It sure made the newspapers when it was going on.

Alternately vilified as a publicity-seeking egoist and lauded as a rambunctious, fearless advocate, William Kunstler consistently embodied both of these qualities. Kunstler's unrelenting, radical critique of American racism and the legal system took shape as a result of his efforts to enlist the federal judicial system to support the civil rights movement. In the late 60s and the 70s, Kunstler, refocusing his attention on the Black Power and anti-war movement, garnered considerable public attention as defender of the Chicago Seven, and went on to represent such controversial figures as Leonard Peltier, the American Indian Movement leader charged with killing an FBI agent, and Jack Ruby, the killer of Lee Harvey Oswald. Later, Kunstler briefly represented Colin Ferguson, the Long Island Railroad mass murderer, outraging fans and detractors alike with his invocation of the infamous "black rage" defense. Defending those most loathed by mainstream, conventional America, William Kunstler delighted in taking on fiercely political cases, usually representing society's outcasts and pariahs free of charge and often achieving remarkable courtroom results in seemingly hopeless cases. Though Kunstler never gave up his revolutionary underpinnings, he gradually turned from defending clients whose political beliefs he personally supported to taking on apolitical clients, falling back on the broad rationale that his was a general struggle against an oppressive government. What ideological and tactical motives explain Kunstler's obsessive craving for media attention, his rhetorical flourishes in the courtroom and his instinctive and relentless drive for action? How did Kunstler migrate from a comfortable middle-class background to a life as a staunchly rebellious figure in social and legal history? David Langum's portrait gives depth to the already notorious breadth of William Kunstler's life.

From Library Journal Cumberland Law School professor Langum's spectacular and thoughtful biography of radical lawyer William Kunstler is distinguished by an even-handed presentation and deep research, which includes interviews with the late attorney's family, his ex-wife, judges, and attorneys. Langum traces Kunstler's affinity for society's outcasts and malcontents to his civil rights work in 1960s Mississippi. While praising Kunstler for his dedication to the cause of individual rights, the author debunks his claims that he never received fees for civil rights cases and points to his habit of stretching the truth in recounting his exploits. Organized chronologically, the book

takes the reader inside Kunstler's famous cases, such as the Chicago Seven trial in 1968, the Attica prison riot in 1971, the Wounded Knee trial in 1975, and the World Trade Center bombing case. In sum, Langum opens a fascinating window on four decades of legal firestorms and the lawyer who stood close to the flames. A Harry Charles, Attorney at Law, St. Louis Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Kirkus s In a vivid, thoughtfully enthusiastic critique, Langum (Law/Samford Univ.; Crossing the Line: Legislating Morality and the Mann Act, 1994) outlines the life, loves, and legal struggles of the radical lawyer who defended such diverse clients as the Chicago Seven, the Attica prison insurgents, Jack Ruby, and John Gotti. Langum, a libertarian though not a radical, admires Kunstler for "his willingness to do battle against the government" at a time when the author perceives an increasing threat to individual liberty from the growing power of the federal government. However, Kunstler emerges here as a protean figure whose personality and legal philosophy defy easy classification. As Langum shows, commencing with his representation of members of the civil rights movement in the early 1960s, Kunstler identified with the New Left and indeed often represented political radicals. Also, Kunstler would frequently politicize the causes of his indigent and minority clients, articulating ideological legal defenses intended more to expose the hollowness of the judicial system and to point up societal issues like racism than to obtain acquittal for his clients. Still, as Langum shows, Kunstler carried on a conventional law practice for many years and represented many nonideological clients, including mob figures, and despite his radical contempt for judges, colleagues, and the conventions of the bar and bench, usually conducted himself in the courtroom with exemplary professionalism and decorum. Langum sketches Kunstler's complex, appealing personality and details his love of writing, his two marriages, and his womanizing habits. Langum also analyzes several of Kunstler's important trials and describes his sometimes off-the-cuff trial preparation and technique, his prodigious work ethic, and the effect of his affable personality and outsized ego on clients, judges, and adversaries. While conceding that Kunstler was no saint, Langum concludes that, to combat the growing despotism of the federal government, "thousands of Kunstlers are needed." An absorbing, reflective narrative of the life and crusades of America's quintessential "people's lawyer." (16 photos) -- Copyright 1999, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved. "Langum opens a fascinating window on four decades of legal firestorms and the lawyer who stood close to the flames."-Library Journal "Langum paints a large, sympathetic portrait of a keen and angry man."-New York Times "A vivid biography."-Publishers Weekly "Probative and insightful . . . Langum goes beyond the conventional reading of Kunstler to uncover a man who often embellished his experiences to get at deeper truths about American society."-Booklist "A thoughtfully enthusiastic critique, Langum outlines the life, loves, and legal struggles of the radical lawyer who defended such diverse clients as the Chicago Seven, the Attica prison insurgents, Jack Ruby, and John Gotti."-Kirkus s