

***Did Jimmy Hoffa, Carlos Marcello, and Santo Trafficante
Kill President John Kennedy?****

A presentation to The Mob Museum by Dan E. Moldea
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ANNOTATED

On July 17, 1979, upon the release of the final report of U.S. House Select Committee on Assassinations about the murder of President John Kennedy, its chief counsel, G. Robert Blakey—one of the world’s experts on organized crime in America and the author of the 1970 RICO Act—declared: “The mob did it. It’s a historical fact.”

Again, that took place in July 1979.

Now, let me tell you what happened two years earlier, leading up to that moment.

But first, I want to state that any reasonable definition of “organized crime” is that it is *enterprise crime*. It is *conspiracy crime*. And it is *crime by association*. . . . So please keep that in mind during these next few minutes.

In 1977, forty years ago, I was finishing up the research for my first book, *The Hoffa Wars*, about the rise and fall of Jimmy Hoffa. In late-September, I called one of my best sources, Ed Partin, whom I had earlier met through my friend and mentor, Walter Sheridan, who was a top lieutenant for Robert Kennedy during their work together on the Senate Rackets Committee when Kennedy was its chief counsel and later when Kennedy served as Attorney General.

Walter Sheridan headed Kennedy’s “Get Hoffa Squad,” and it was Sheridan, who flipped Partin in September 1962. At that time, Partin was Hoffa’s trusted doorkeeper at his hotel during the Teamster boss’s extortion trial in Nashville. And it was Partin who would later reveal that Hoffa had arranged for the fixing of one of the jurors in the extortion case.

To be clear, if Kennedy and Sheridan were eating labor racketeers and Mafia guys for breakfast during their work at the Senate committee, then they started eating them for lunch and dinner, too, after Kennedy became the Attorney General.

In my opinion, when it came to fighting the Mafia, Bobby Kennedy was the greatest crimefighter in American history. He was breaking the back of the American Mafia, a war that was highlighted with the October 1963 public televised testimony of Joseph Valachi, a soldier in the Vito Genovese crime family, one month before the President’s murder.

* Praise for the 1978 book, *The Hoffa Wars* by Dan E. Moldea, as the first investigation—even before the US-HSCA—to put together the Hoffa-Marcello-Trafficante combination in the murder case of President Kennedy: <http://www.moldea.com/THW-JFK.pdf>.

Department of Justice wiretaps on Mafia guys during Robert Kennedy's tenure indicated that the frustration level was so high that many were actually fantasizing about murdering both of the Kennedys.

The reason why Ed Partin turned state's evidence in September 1962 was because Hoffa had approached him to kill Robert Kennedy and his entire family by blowing up their northern Virginia home with plastic explosives. Partin, who had a houseful of children himself, objected to Hoffa wanting Kennedy's wife and children murdered.

After Sheridan arranged for Partin to take a polygraph test, which he passed, the Kennedy Justice Department used him as their key government witness at Hoffa's 1964 jury-tampering trial in Chattanooga.

It was Ed Partin's testimony that sent Jimmy Hoffa to jail.

When I called Partin in September 1977, he gave me additional details about Hoffa's plot to kill Robert Kennedy. In addition, he told me about Hoffa's alleged role in the pre-CIA-Mafia plots to kill Fidel Castro.¹

Just to be clear, these were the plots before the involvement of Robert Maheu, whom I would later interview at length. Maheu told me that events against Castro were already unfolding before he joined the plots in August 1960.²

Instead of Chicago mobsters Sam Giancana and Johnny Rosselli—who were brought into the plots by Maheu—the mobsters involved with Hoffa, were John LaRocco and Gabriel Mannarino of the Pittsburgh Mafia, as well as Jimmy Plumeri and Salvatore Granello, two capos in the Tommy Lucchese crime family.

In addition and most importantly, the fifth mobster was Russell Bufalino, the boss of the northeastern Pennsylvania Mafia—who would later authorize the murder of Jimmy Hoffa in July 1975.³

Hoffa had felt betrayed by Castro after Hoffa had personally arranged for a \$300,000 Teamsters pension-fund loan to a company which used the money to ship a fleet of C-74 Globemaster aircraft to the new Cuban government. This package was allegedly a gift to Castro, whom Hoffa and the mob believed would allow them to keep their gambling and narcotics businesses operating in Cuba. Of course, Castro double crossed Hoffa and the mob, shutting down the gambling casinos and the narcotics routes out of the country.

Partin also told me about a \$500,000 contribution that Hoffa and Carlos Marcello, the boss of the New Orleans Mafia, had made in 1960 to then Vice President Richard Nixon who was running for President against John Kennedy, a member of the Senate Rackets Committee.

The transaction was witnessed by I. Irving Davidson, a Hoffa and Marcello associate in Washington, D.C., who had been a major gun-runner for Fulgencio Batista during the Cuban Revolution.⁴

Partin told me that Irv Davidson—on behalf of Marcello—later made a ham-fisted attempt to get him to recant his testimony against Hoffa. Partin explained that—during Hoffa's appeal process in the aftermath of his conviction in Chattanooga—the mobbed up New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison, as a favor to either Hoffa or Marcello or both, had actually tried to implicate Partin as a suspect in his already off-the-wall investigation of the murder of President Kennedy.

Notably, Garrison had declared, “There is no organized crime in New Orleans.” And he insisted that Marcello was simply a “respectable businessman.”⁵

Frank Ragano, an attorney for Hoffa, had approached Partin and told him that he could make Garrison go away—if Partin agreed to sign an affidavit recanting his earlier testimony in Chattanooga against Hoffa. Partin, who was offered as much as a million dollars from the mob, refused, and Hoffa went to Lewisburg Penitentiary in March 1967.

After my 1977 conversations with Partin, Walter Sheridan gave me a March 15, 1967, FBI 302-interview report with Irv Davidson, captioned, "Assassination of President John F. Kennedy," in which the FBI stated:

Edward G. Partin . . . will be subpoenaed by [Garrison’s] grand jury in New Orleans, Louisiana, in the near future in connection with his possible involvement in captioned matter. Davidson stated that he has heard there is a photograph available of Partin in the presence of Jack Ruby (deceased), convicted of killing Lee Harvey Oswald.

When I interviewed Davidson in 1977, he grudgingly admitted to, among many other things, his role in this drama to frame Ed Partin via Jim Garrison.

And it was Davidson, who, in 1980, unwittingly introduced Joseph Hauser, an undercover FBI informant, to Carlos Marcello as part of a sting operation called BRILAB for which Marcello was convicted and sent to a federal prison.

I was approached to write Hauser’s book in which Hauser would allege that Marcello had given him “thinly veiled admissions” that he was involved in the President’s murder.⁶ And Hauser claimed that these admissions had been recorded by the FBI.⁷

During Marcello’s subsequent time in prison, another FBI-trained informant revealed that Marcello, speaking of President Kennedy, had told him on tape: “Yeah, I had the son of bitch killed. I’m glad I did. I’m sorry I couldn’t have done it myself.”

During my 1992 interviews with Frank Ragano, I asked him about Ed Partin’s earlier statement to me that Ragano had offered to make Jim Garrison back off from his bogus investigation of Partin’s alleged involvement with Jack Ruby.

Ragano confirmed Partin's story, admitting that he did make that offer to Partin. Ragano added that he had the clout with Garrison to guarantee it.⁸

In an article I later did for the *Washington Post*, I wrote:

Ragano has told me that Garrison did nothing more during his 1967-1969 investigation than divert public attention away from Marcello. "Garrison was shielding Marcello from being implicated in the Kennedy murder case," Ragano says.⁹

Notably—although not without controversy, after his conviction on criminal-tax charges—Frank Ragano, who was Tampa Mafia boss Santo Trafficante's long-time attorney, went public.

Most importantly, while promoting his memoir in 1994, Ragano, who had also done legal work for Hoffa and Marcello, alleged that Hoffa had asked him to carry a personal request to Marcello and Trafficante to help arrange the murder of President Kennedy.¹⁰

In September 1962—while speaking with an FBI informant named Jose Aleman about a Teamsters pension-fund loan they hoped to receive from Jimmy Hoffa, along with a discussion about the upcoming 1964 Presidential election which Kennedy was expected to win—Santo Trafficante said, speaking of Kennedy: "No Jose, he's going to be hit." And then, according to Aleman, Trafficante "made it clear" that it was Jimmy Hoffa who was making the arrangements for the President's murder.

Of course, Trafficante had earlier been solicited to participate in the failed CIA-Mafia plots to kill Castro, who had thrown the Tampa mob boss in prison shortly after the revolution.

The question for me in 1977 was whether one assassination plot—the plot against Castro—had evolved into another—a plot against President Kennedy.

By mid-1977, no one had even suggested, at least in writing and in any detail, that the President's murder was a straight mob hit with Hoffa's participation.

For my investigation of the CIA-Mafia plots and President Kennedy's murder, I retained an outstanding investigator named Michael Ewing, a respected former U.S. Senate aide. Mike had gained possession of some previously undisclosed phone records of Jack Ruby, showing that during the days and weeks prior to Kennedy's murder, Ruby had called and received calls from several people close to Hoffa, Marcello, and Trafficante.

Mike and I interviewed several of those callers, including but not limited to Irwin Weiner, the Teamsters' top bail bondsman; Hoffa leg-breaker Barney Baker; and Earl Ruby, Jack's brother who owned a laundry business in Detroit, along with friends and associates close to Chicago mobsters Leonard Patrick and David Yaras, among others.

And it was widely known that Ruby had once worked for Paul Dorfman, then head of the Chicago Waste Handlers Union, whose son, Allen Dorfman, was selected by Hoffa as the fiduciary manager of the Teamsters biggest pension and health and welfare funds.

Jimmy Hoffa also personally knew Jack Ruby, as Hoffa's son, James P. Hoffa, Jr., told me during one of my many interviews with him.¹¹

Upon completion of our work, Ewing and I concluded that Jimmy Hoffa, Carlos Marcello, and Santo Trafficante might have arranged and executed the murder of President Kennedy.¹² I personally believed that this killing was a straight mob hit. I did not believe then, nor do I believe now, that either the CIA or the FBI, as institutions, were involved in the conspiracy.

While investigating the JFK murder and working with the Warren Commission, the FBI was compromised by J. Edgar Hoover's stubborn refusal to admit the existence of a national crime syndicate. And the CIA was similarly compromised by its secret Castro plots with the Mafia. In my opinion, these were institutional coverups.

In 1977, Mike and I shared our information with Mafia expert, Ralph Salerno, the former supervisor of detectives for the New York City Police Department, and, soon after, with Dick Billings, a former investigative reporter for *Life* magazine.

Shortly thereafter, Ewing, Salerno, and Billings were hired by the U.S. House Select Committee's new chief counsel, G. Robert Blakey—who believed, when he accepted the job, that the Warren Commission's final report was honest and accurate.

But Ewing, Salerno, and Billings, now in key roles on the committee's staff and armed with subpoena power and the ability to compel testimony, turned Blakey around. Blakey admitted that he had been wrong about the *Warren Report* and then re-focused his investigation on the Mafia.

In my opinion, Bob Blakey and his team who worked for the select committee did an honest job and sincerely pursued the truth before running out of time and money, coming up with a tremendous amount of information and new witnesses, living and dead, linking Hoffa and the Mafia to the players and circumstances of the President's murder.

Most impressively, the committee documented the relationship between Oswald and Charles "Dutz" Murret, a bookmaker who was a father figure to Oswald and was reportedly very close to Marcello. Oswald had lived with the Murret family for several years in his youth.

The committee even discovered that Robert Kennedy suspected that Hoffa had somehow been involved in his brother's murder. But the younger Kennedy knew that it would take the power of the Presidency to uncover the circumstances behind that crime.

Then, on July 17, 1979—a year after the release of my book, *The Hoffa Wars*, which was excepted by *Playboy* and nationally syndicated by the *New York Times*—the select committee released its final report—principally written by my friends and colleagues, Mike Ewing, Ralph Salerno, and Dick Billings.¹³

The committee report concluded, in part—just as I had in my book—that Jimmy Hoffa, Carlos Marcello, and Santo Trafficante had “the motive, means, and opportunity” to have President Kennedy killed . . . although there was some equivocation about Hoffa.¹⁴

And, once again, Bob Blakey, who later co-authored a book about the committee’s work with Billings, declared, “The mob did it. It’s a historical fact.”

Now, you can dismiss everything I’ve said in my 40-year argument that Hoffa and the Mafia killed President Kennedy. I do not claim to own Absolute Truth.

But it is much more difficult to dismiss the simple fact that if former CIA Director Allen Dulles—who was at the epicenter of the CIA-Mafia plots to kill Fidel Castro and was also a member of the Warren Commission—had simply told the other members of the commission about the CIA-Mafia plots, I find it very difficult to believe that this stunning revelation would not have created an entirely new avenue of investigation, focusing on the Mafia’s possible role in the murder of President Kennedy, which certainly should have been investigated when the trail was still hot and the principal suspects were still alive.

Thank you.

ENDNOTES

¹ Mafia figure-turned-protected witness Charles Crimaldi specifically told me that Hoffa was the “original liaison” between the CIA and the Mafia.

² While discussing the Castro plots, Maheu appeared to slip and identified the then-unknown Cuban exile leader who was passed the poison pills by the CIA, via Rosseli, for the purpose of killing Castro: Antonio de Varona, the former president of the Cuban Senate. Maheu and I both knew that was big news.

In the September 11, 1978, issue of *Newsweek*, the magazine’s Periscope section threw a bouquet to *The Hoffa Wars*, saying: “A mystery man who reportedly took part in a CIA plot to assassinate Cuban Prime Minister Fidel Castro in 1961 is identified in a forthcoming *Playboy* excerpt from *The Hoffa Wars*. According to author Dan E. Moldea, the mystery figure was a Cuban counterrevolutionary named Antonio de Varona, a pre-Castro president of the Cuban Senate. Moldea’s book says that ‘the CIA passed a set of poison pills earmarked for Castro’ to mobster John [Rosseli], and that the pills were then delivered to de Varona, but ‘de Varona’s attempts to murder Castro failed.’ De Varona is said to be alive and in hiding; [Rosseli’s] body turned up in an oil drum found floating off the Florida coast in 1976, a year after he told a U.S. Senate committee that he had participated in plots to kill Castro.”

³ Russell Bufalino, who was involved in the earliest stages of the CIA-Mafia plots against Castro, authorized Hoffa’s murder which was handled by Salvatore Briguglio, upon the orders of Anthony Provenzano. Others allegedly complicit in the Hoffa murder included Gabriel Briguglio, Thomas and Stephen Andretta, and Frank Sheeran.

The Hoffa murder had more to do with silencing him in the midst of the investigations of his participation in the Castro plots and John Kennedy’s murder than with his attempts to return to power in the union—and that Marcello and Trafficante had both checked off on the Hoffa hit. Chicago mobster Charles Crimaldi specifically told me that Hoffa had been killed on orders from the same mobsters who had been involved in the CIA-Mafia plots.

⁴ For details about the relationship between the mobbed-up Irv Davidson and Jack Anderson, a great man with a bad

conflict of interest, see Mark Feldstein's excellent book, *Poisoning the Press: Richard Nixon, Jack Anderson, and the Rise of Washington's Scandal Culture* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2010).

⁵ In Oliver Stone's film, *JFK*, the main character, Jim Garrison, is not a mobbed-up Marcello stooge, but rather a misunderstood visionary.

⁶ Marcello had reportedly been furious after Attorney General Robert Kennedy arranged for federal agents to snatch Marcello off the street and then to deport him to Guatemala.

⁷ Following up on what I had learned from literary agent Sterling Lord and Oscar-winning screenwriter Abby Mann in June 1983, I contacted federally protected witness Joseph Hauser, indirectly, via a respected federal investigator. According to my trusted source, Hauser corroborated what Lord and Mann had told me.

In my 1986 book, *Dark Victory: Ronald Reagan, MCA and the Mob*, I wrote about Hauser on pages 338-339, saying: "Hauser had allowed himself to be used as the hub of several FBI sting operations during the Carter administration that yielded a pending indictment against [Santo] Trafficante of Florida and the bribery conviction of Carlos Marcello of Louisiana. Hauser had also received thinly veiled admissions on tape from Marcello during the FBI's BRILAB sting operation that he had been directly involved in the assassination of John Kennedy twenty years earlier."

⁸ On September 18, 1978, my attorney in Washington, D.C., Steve Martindale, called and told me that Frank Ragano (allegedly on behalf of television talk-show host David Susskind) had offered to buy all of the rights to *The Hoffa Wars* for \$250,000, which we viewed as an attempted bribe. When Martindale called Ragano to turn down the offer, Martindale asked Ragano how close I was to the truth with my Hoffa-Marcello-Trafficante allegation about the murder of President Kennedy. Ragano replied that I was "essentially correct" but that I had "oversimplified" the scenario.

⁹ Dan E. Moldea. *Washington Post*, "Tales of Hoffa: Why Does Hollywood Make Thugs Into Heroes?" December 27, 1992.

Significantly, Aaron Kohn, the legendary head of the New Orleans crime commission, corroborated Ragano's allegation, telling me that Garrison was really nothing more than a stooge for Carlos Marcello.

¹⁰ Ragano published his autobiography, *Mob Lawyer* (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1994), which he wrote with Selwyn Raab, a respected crime reporter with the *New York Times*. A controversy erupted over the date of an alleged final confession that Trafficante had given to Ragano on March 13, 1987—four days before Trafficante's death. Supposedly, Trafficante had said during a car ride in Tampa, "Carlos screwed up. We shouldn't have killed John. We should have killed Bobby." Hospital records showed that Trafficante had spent that particular day receiving dialysis in North Miami Beach. Ragano told me that he was simply mistaken on the exact date.

Notably, Ragano was present and photographed at the La Stella Conference in New York with Marcello and Trafficante.

Throwing me a bouquet, Ragano gave my publisher a quote for the 1993 re-release of *The Hoffa Wars*, in which he said:

In 1978, a Washington journalist released a controversial book that began to unlock the secrets of the brutal murder of President Kennedy. He did it by piecing together the Hoffa-Marcello-Trafficante puzzle for the first time. That journalist was Dan E. Moldea, and his book was *The Hoffa Wars*.

Ragano died on May 13, 1998, at his home in Tampa after serving ten months in prison in 1993 for income-tax evasion.

¹¹ Also, during my interview in December 1977 with attorney Jimmy Hoffa Jr., now the president of the Teamsters Union, he admitted to me that his father knew Jack Ruby. When the U.S. House Select Committee on Assassination questioned Hoffa about this admission, which I reported in my book, he denied ever saying it. When the committee

investigators confronted me, I gave them a copy of a tape-recorded interview in which young Hoffa repeated what he had told me in person . . . that his father knew Jack Ruby.

¹² Three fascinating books that advanced the state of evidence were Pulitzer Prize-winner Ed Reid's 1969 book, *The Grim Reapers: The Anatomy of Organized Crime in America*; Los Angeles television producer Peter Noyes's 1973 book, *Legacy of Doubt*; and Berkeley professor Peter Dale Scott's 1977 book, *Crime and Cover-Up: The CIA, the Mafia, and the Dallas-Watergate Connection*. The books by Noyes and Scott were released only in paperback editions; thus, they did not receive as much attention as they should have.

In Reid's book, the author stated that, in 1962, New Orleans Mafia boss Carlos Marcello had blurted out that he was planning to kill President Kennedy in front of three associates.

The principal target of Noyes's book was Jim Braden, a mystery man who was picked up by local law-enforcement officials in Dealey Plaza immediately after the shooting. Braden, whom I later interviewed for my book, *The Hoffa Wars*, had alleged ties to Hoffa, as well as to Marcello and other mobsters.

The subtitle of Scott's book pretty much described what he believed, but he did a good job of including some of mob material amidst his army of alleged conspirators.

Also, in the *Washington Post's* Outlook section on May 16, 1976, journalist George Crile III had written an article, "The Mafia, The CIA, and Castro." For this story, Crile had interviewed a successful Cuban-exile businessman, Jose Aleman, who revealed that Tampa Mafia boss Santo Trafficante had told him that President Kennedy was going to be murdered—over a year before the murder. Crile also referred to a recently released CIA document, stating that an American "gangster-gambler named Santos [who was in a Cuban prison in 1959] . . . was visited by an American gangster type named Ruby."

¹³ In a quote I used in *The Hoffa Wars*, which was released in August 1978, Ralph Salerno told me: "There is no solid evidence yet that Carlos Marcello, Santo Trafficante, Jimmy Hoffa, or any other criminal or criminal associate had been involved in a conspiracy to kill President Kennedy. Regardless of whether they knew or not, they should have built the largest statue in the world to Lee Harvey Oswald. No one man has ever done as much damage to this country's war on the underworld as he did."

¹⁴ Hoffa disappeared on July 30, 1975; Trafficante died on March 17, 1987; and Carlos Marcello died on March 2, 1993.
