

Jack Anderson

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Mafia Had Motive to Assassinate JFK

In a recent column, we reported that the most intriguing of the conspiracy theories, in connection with the murder of John F. Kennedy, involved Mafia bosses Carlos Marcello and Santos Trafficante.

The House Assassinations Committee will conclude that organized crime had the "motive, means and opportunity" to kill the president. Although there is no direct evidence that the mob hierarchy met and planned the assassination, the committee's final report will give indirect evidence linking Marcello and Trafficante to Lee Harvey Oswald and Jack Ruby.

The most compelling evidence of a Mafia motive for killing Kennedy is provided by underworld figures themselves, in more than 300 volumes of transcripts made from FBI taps of the nation's top crime figures. Ralph J. Salerno, a recognized authority on organized crime, supervised the committee staff's painstaking examination of the transcripts.

The wiretap evidence reveals the mob's deep-seated hatred of the Kennedy brothers, and Salerno pinpoints the reason: Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy's relentless pursuit of the syndicate.

"By 1963," Salerno told the committee, "the FBI had a very complete and accurate picture of who was doing what and where they were doing it [inside the Mafia] . . . You had total penetration of the organization." The Mafia, for the first time in its infamous history, was scared.

A transcript of an intercepted telephone conversation of May 22, 1963,

six months to the day before the assassination in Dallas, shows that Buffalo crime boss Stefano Magaddino lamented: "We are in a bad situation . . . They [the FBI] know everything under the sun. They know who's back of it . . . They know there's a Commission (of mob leaders). We got to watch out right now . . . and stay as quiet as possible."

In October, a month before the assassination, Magaddino was almost hysterical, saying: "They should kill the whole [Kennedy] family. The mother, the father, too."

In another transcript of a tapped conversation of May 1963, two Cosa Nostra figures in New York talked about the attorney general's campaign against the mob. "Bob Kennedy won't stop until he puts us all in jail all over the country," said one mobster. "Until the Commission meets and puts its foot down, things will be at a standstill."

About the same time, Angelo Bruno, the organized crime leader in Philadelphia, listened while an associate told him what they should do to President Kennedy. "With Kennedy, a guy should take a knife. Somebody should kill the [expletive deleted]. I mean it. Honest to God . . . Right in the White House. Somebody's got to get rid of this [expletive deleted]."

The transcripts helped convince the committee that the mob had a motive for killing President Kennedy.

House investigators asked Salerno whether the Kennedy shooting in Dealey Plaza had the earmarks of a mob "hit." In its final report, the committee will conclude that on its face the assassination did not look like mob

handiwork. It will note the traditional Mafia reluctance to use "nondependable, nondescript people" instead of professional killers for gangland murders.

The report, however, will acknowledge three exceptions to the rule. Two of these were famous: the 1956 acid-blinding of labor columnist Victor Riesel and the 1971 shooting of Joe Colombo. In both cases, the mob used outsiders — and in both cases, the hit men died shortly after the job was done.

The third exception was the 1970 murder of a Kansas City, Mo., businessman by four street thugs who were hired by a lower-echelon mobster. The businessman was a witness in a federal gambling prosecution. The four thugs and the Mafioso who hired them were caught and convicted.

Clarification: On Dec. 20 we reported that Nicaraguan dictator Anastasio Somoza had expanded his power over the press by purchasing an influential fortnightly news magazine called Vision. "A separate Portuguese edition, Visao, sells some 125,000 copies in Brazil," we wrote.

We thus left the impression that Visao is part of Somoza's publishing empire. This is not true. Visao was owned by Vision until 1967, when it was purchased by Brazilian interests. It was bought in 1974 by Henry Maksud, a Brazilian businessman, who is now the sole owner of the magazine.

Vision's sales representatives still act as agents for Visao's foreign advertisers. However, the Brazilian magazine is definitely not owned or controlled by Anastasio Somoza.