

THE NATION

Mob lawyer's claim fuels JFK controversy

By Bruce Frankel
USA TODAY

NEW YORK — Conspiracy buffs and those skeptical about the official explanations of President Kennedy's assassination received a boost Tuesday from two sources.

► Mob lawyer Frank Ragano became the first person to claim a role in the killing. He told the *New York Post* he carried a message from Teamsters boss Jimmy Hoffa to Mafia godfathers demanding a "hit" on the president. ► Rep. Henry Gonzalez, D-Texas, said he will introduce legislation to open sealed Kennedy assassination



UPJ (1966 photo)
HOFFA

questioned in a new *Time/CNN* poll of 1,500 adults believe the truth hasn't been told about the assassination. The poll had a margin of error of 2.6 percentage points.
The idea of a mob role isn't new. But, "he's what we've been waiting

records when the House reconvenes later this month.

Already, the movie *JFK* is re-igniting the public's longstanding obsession with the assassination and is likely to further undermine acceptance of Warren Commission findings that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone in killing Kennedy. Nearly 75% of those

for for the last 20 years — the older guy who's gotten an attack of conscience and who knows secrets" says Jack Newfield, who interviewed Ragano for the *Post*.

But Steven Brill, author of *Teamsters*, says Ragano "was a peripheral figure. . . . Hoffa didn't order those guys to do anything. They ordered Hoffa. . . . When he forgot he was their tool is when he got killed."

Ragano says he now believes he conveyed a fatal message from Hoffa in early 1963 to Florida mob boss Santos Trafficante and New Orleans mob boss Carlos Marcello.

The story supports the conclusion in 1979 of the House Select Committee on Assassinations that Marcello, Trafficante and Hoffa had the "motive, means and opportunity" to kill the

president. The panel never questioned Ragano.

A panoply of conspiracy theories have flourished from almost the first reports of Kennedy's shooting: Right-wingers in Dallas, the Mafia, Castro, the Soviet Union, the CIA and the FBI have all been "linked" to the crime.

Hoffa's daughter, Barbara Ann Crancer, 53, a Missouri administrative law judge, says that Ragano has other motives.

Now appealing a second tax-avoidance conviction, he "is a desperate and very sick man" trying to sell "his books by attacking a dead person."

"Nowhere in my heart do I believe my father is capable of doing such a thing," says Crancer, who is battling the Justice Department to open FBI files on Hoffa's 1976 disappearance.

Lawyer Says Hoffa Told 2 Mob Bosses to

By George Lardner Jr.
Washington Post Staff Writer

A lawyer who once represented Teamsters president Jimmy Hoffa said yesterday that Hoffa had him tell two Mafia bosses in early 1963 to have President John F. Kennedy killed.

Tampa lawyer Frank Ragano said on ABC's "Good Morning, America" that he "thought it was a joke" but later became convinced that it was serious. He told the New York Post, which first reported on Ragano's allegations Tuesday, that he was willing to repeat his story under oath to a congressional committee.

Ragano, who was close to the two Mafia bosses, Santos Trafficante of Tampa and Carlos Marcello of New Orleans, once ridiculed the idea that the two might have been involved in the assassination.

According to an April 11, 1967, FBI report, Ragano told agents in an interview that he had been driving through New Orleans with Marcello and Trafficante when the car radio blared out the latest item about District Attorney Jim Garrison's investigation of the Kennedy murder.

Ragano, who was in the back seat, said Trafficante listened for a moment, then turned to Marcello and stated: "Carlos, the next thing you know, they'll be blaming the president's assassination on us."

The House Assassinations Committee, after an inquiry in the late 1970s, concluded that Kennedy "was probably assassinated as the result of a conspiracy." The committee said that Marcello and Trafficante had "the motive, means and opportunity" to take part in the murder, but the panel said it had no direct evidence against them.

Ragano, 68, now writing his autobiography

and appealing a three-year-sentence for income tax evasion, did not testify before the committee. He was Trafficante's lawyer as well as Hoffa's for many years, and was present with 13 top Mafia bosses from around the country, including Marcello and Trafficante, when they were arrested at a Queens, N.Y., restaurant in 1966 to discuss what police described as "matters of national importance" to organized crime.

Ragano could not be reached for direct comment yesterday, but he told the New York Post that he delivered Hoffa's message to Trafficante and Marcello at a meeting in the Royal Orleans Hotel in New Orleans a few days after meeting with Hoffa at Teamsters headquarters here. Trafficante has since died. Marcello is 81 and reportedly suffering from Alzheimer's disease.

According to the New York Post account, Ragano told them, "You won't believe what

Have President Kennedy Killed

Hoffa wants me to tell you. Jimmy wants you to kill the president." Instead of laughing, Ragano said, Marcello and Trafficante "looked at each other in a way that made me uncomfortable. . . . It made me think they already had such a thought in their mind."

A few minutes after the Nov. 22, 1963, assassination, Ragano said Hoffa called him and asked: "Have you heard the good news? They killed the SOB." Ragano said he had dinner with Trafficante that same night and Trafficante offered a toast to Kennedy's death.

On ABC yesterday, Ragano said Hoffa, who was under indictment for jury tampering, wanted President Kennedy killed because of the "Get Hoffa" efforts of Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy. "If Bobby was killed," he said the president might simply have appointed someone who was "more vicious."

This is not the first time Ragano has sought to capitalize on his relationship with Hoffa. In 1982, he made efforts to produce a movie about "the life and death of Jimmy Hoffa," who was presumably murdered in 1975. Ragano sold percentages of the prospective profits to local investors. He was convicted for failing to report \$107,000 of the money he took in on his 1982 and 1983 tax returns and sentenced last year to three years in prison. The movie was never made.

In a related development, former House Assassinations Committee chairman Louis Stokes (D-Ohio) said he is actively exploring the possibility of releasing all that is "releasable" from committee records put under a 50-year seal. He said he is disturbed by Oliver Stone's movie, "JFK," and its charges of government involvement in a conspiracy to kill Kennedy and to cover it up.