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The Mobster, Bigger Than Life

DOUBLE CROSS The Explosive, Inside Story of the Mobster Who Controlled America

By Sam and Chuck Giancana
Warner Books. 357 pp. \$22.95

By Michael Covino

With its melange of Mafia history and conspiratorial politics, "Double Cross" has raced up the national bestseller lists, propelled in good

part by the movie "JFK," which has helped catapult some half-dozen books purporting to solve the Kennedy assassination onto the lists in recent months. "Double Cross" is merely the latest, but also the most insidious. This book solves almost everything.

"Double Cross" tells the tale of onetime Chicago Mafia boss Sam
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Giancana, and is written by—or allegedly written by—his younger brother Chuck (actually his stepbrother, though the book de-emphasizes this) and Chuck's son, also named Sam, who hardly figures in the book. I say "allegedly" because the book is such an inventive stew of nonsense that I sense the gleeful hand of a ghostwriter. The code of *omertà* doesn't run deeply in this family. In 1984, Sam Giancana's daughter, Antoinette, with Thomas Renner, published "Mafia Princess," also a bestseller, about her dad's life. All this should serve as a cautionary tale to current and retired Mafia bosses: Spread the wealth among your family unless you want them to take out contracts on you—book contracts.

"Double Cross" essentially interweaves two narratives. One is of Chuck's relation—or non-relation—to Sam. Chuck evidently envied, admired, feared and resented him. Dependent on him for approval and livelihood, Chuck lived much of his life in Sam's shadow, until Chuck finally changed his name to escape the notoriety it brought upon his family and struck out on his own. Chuck's story is rather depressing, and not especially interesting.

But sad sack Chuck also claims that "the mobster who controlled America" used him as his confidant, and so now all the dirty secrets can be told (though not verified). This is the tale of Sam Giancana's criminal empire, built up from his Chicago street gang, the 42s, and integrated into the Al Capone mob. It's difficult enough for biographers to agree on their facts regarding past presidents. But when it comes to professional psychopaths like mobsters the task is hopeless. "Double Cross" resonates with incidents and aphorisms from "The Godfather" and takes facts such as the CIA's involvement with Giancana to assassinate Fidel Castro, and Giancana and Jack Kennedy's simulta-

neous affairs with Judy Campbell, then piles on half-truths, lies, warmed-over gossip and garbled fairy tales.

Well, then, according to the book, Chuck learned from his brother that Sam was one of the gunmen in the Valentine's Day Massacre of 1929 that established Capone as Chicago's undisputed crime boss; that Giancana knew that Huey Long was assassinated on orders from New York bosses whom he was cheating; that Giancana got the contract to kill Las Vegas casino operator Bugsy Siegel; that the Chicago mob "owned" Presidents Franklin Roosevelt and then Harry Truman, whose career they promoted; that the mob pulled strings to keep crime-buster Sen. Es-

tes Kefauver off the Democratic presidential ticket; that athletes in Giancana's pocket included Joe DiMaggio, Mickey Mantle and Willie Mays, all of whom used to party in New York mob boss Frank Costello's Washington Hotel suite; that Joe Kennedy was in Giancana's debt from bootlegging days; that Giancana got Costello to cancel a hit on Joe Kennedy and in return Joe swore that when his son Jack became president he would owe Sam a big one; that Costello fed J. Edgar Hoover tips on fixed horse races in return for laying off the mob; that Giancana engineered Vito Genovese's heroin bust, which effectively ended his criminal career; that Giancana partied at the Cal-Neva Lodge in Lake Tahoe with Jack Kennedy and assorted prostitutes; that Giancana had sexually compromising pictures, tape recordings and films of Kennedy, but Giancana's CIA friends persuaded him not to use them; that Frank Sinatra, who set up Judy Campbell with both Sam and Kennedy, was Giancana's conduit to the Kennedys; that Giancana got Jimmy Hoffa to skim millions from the Teamsters for Kenne-

dy's campaign; that Chicago Mafia money bought West Virginia and Illinois for Kennedy, crucial for his election to the presidency; that Richard Nixon got Giancana's people highway contracts and helped his man in Texas, Jack Ruby (hullo Jack!), avoid testifying before Congress in 1947; that Sam worked with the CIA to try to assassinate Castro in Cuba, Trujillo in the Dominican Republic and Lumumba in the Congo; that Giancana secured for the CIA the financial services of Michele Sindona, consultant for both the Sicilian Mafia and the Vatican; that the CIA bugged comedian Dan Rowan's home for Giancana, who suspected him of an affair with Giancana's girlfriend, singer Phyllis McGuire; that after his election, Kennedy used Angie Dickinson and Marilyn Monroe to deliver messages to Giancana; but that when the Kennedy brothers double-crossed the Mafia and went after mob figures and Hoffa, then Giancana, who had promoted Monroe's career, had her murdered with a Nembutal suppository to create a scandal that would implicate Bobby Kennedy, then ending an affair with her; and that Giancana eventually conspired with other top Mafia bosses, as well as Hoffa, Vice President Lyndon Johnson, Nixon, top CIA officials, top military officials, top Dallas police officials, top Texas oilmen etc. etc. to assassinate Kennedy, with Ruby serving as Giancana's point man in Dallas; that Giancana later arranged to have Bobby Kennedy assassinated too; that Giancana placed a contract on Hoffa before he himself was murdered in 1975, prior to his scheduled appearance before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence; and so on into the long black night.

The only crime this book doesn't solve is the Lindbergh kidnapping. But then maybe Sam Giancana's great-great-grand-nephew and second cousin's niece will collaborate to solve that one.

The reviewer, who has written about the Mafia before, is the author of a short-story collection, "The Off-Season."