

TV REVIEWS

'JFK, Hoffa and Mob' Hints at Mafia Ties

Did the mob kill J.F.K.? Could Jim Garrison have been touting his J.F.K. assassination conspiracy ideas—that the killing was effectively a *coup d'état*—as a cover story to protect alleged New Orleans mob friends? And—if this isn't enough—did fellow Teamsters kill Jimmy Hoffa?

It's interesting to consider that, were "Inside Edition" pumping these questions-as-headlines into the airwaves, they'd be dismissed, but since respected investigative reporter Jack Newfield is raising the queries in his "Frontline" investigation, "JFK, Hoffa and the Mob" (at 9 tonight, KCET Channel 28 and KPBS Channel 15; 8 p.m. KVCR Channel 24), they command attention.

That is because Newfield seems to have done his homework. The nexus of his amazing story is Frank Ragano, former attorney for Mafia godfather Santo Trafficante, and a man releasing a lifetime of guilt and regret. Linked by a remarkable childhood incident in which the mob "disciplined" the abusing husband of Ragano's big sister, Ragano with Trafficante rose to great heights. Trafficante reportedly ran mob operations in pre-Castro Cuba, and after being hoodwinked by the new Communist leader, was privy to the much-talked-about U.S.-Mafia plot to kill Castro. Ragano insists that Trafficante had no intention of following through with the plot.

Instead, according to Newfield, Trafficante's real enemy was Robert Kennedy, J.F.K.'s attorney general brother whose key target

was organized crime. Under Kennedy, prosecution rates increased seven-fold over past federal mob-busting efforts, and Mafia "golden years" appeared to be at an end. Teamster boss and mob ally Hoffa was a key Kennedy prize, and according to Ragano (and other corroborators), it was Hoffa's pressure, plus the building impatience of Trafficante and New Orleans Mafia head Carlos Marcello, which led to talk of killing J.F.K. as a way of getting rid of Bobby.

Ragano is so full of allegations—not least that then-Teamster chief Frank Fitzsimmons and mob figures "disappeared" Hoffa in 1975 when it seemed that Hoffa, just out of jail, would topple Fitzsimmons—that Newfield can't fully expand on the implications of the Trafficante-Marcello plot against J.F.K. But he also takes great pains to confirm Ragano's claims—claims that one critic suggests can help him sell a movie or book idea.

Certainly, the Oliver Stone school supporting the coup notion will go ballistic over Newfield's report. Basing much of his story on Trafficante's death-bed confessions to him, Ragano insists that Garrison was a patsy for the New Orleans mob, and that Garrison's elaborate theories served as effective distraction from his friends. While Stone has argued that the Mafia didn't have the means to pull off the killing of the President, Newfield's report gives one pause. It surely demands paying attention when previously suppressed documents on the assassination are due to be reopened in the future.

—ROBERT KOEHLER