

FATAL AFFAIR

BY DAVID TALBOT

LIVER STONE, whose film *JFK* goes for Oscar gold tomorrow night, and the conspiracy theorists whose books ride the bestseller lists argue that John F. Kennedy was cut down in Dallas because he was too good to live. Intent upon leading the country down the path of peace and social justice, Kennedy was killed by sinister forces at work within our government that were equally bent on war and profiteering.

So goes the story, as told by Stone and company. But while the combative moviemaker and authors like Mark Lane and Jim Garrison noisily demand the public's attention, a very different view of the assassination has been quietly gaining credibility. According to this school of thought, Jack Kennedy met a violent end because he was as much a prince of darkness as he was of light.

John Kennedy's links with the underworld are well-established. We

Cross purposes: While *JFK* took favors from organized crime, his brother, Attorney General Robert Kennedy, set out to crush it.

Sunday, March 29, 1992 • 1 M A G A Z I N E • 17

A growing body of evidence suggests that John F. Kennedy met his doom because he was as much a prince of darkness as he was of light.



now know that he was not above using the mob's services when he wanted votes delivered, campaign money contributed, women provided or even a despised foreign leader targeted for "executive action." But taking these favors did not prevent him from unleashing his brother, Attorney General Robert Kennedy, to hunt the god-fathers of organized crime with a ferocity they had never before experienced. "The supremely confident Jack Kennedy thought he could have it both ways. He couldn't, and he paid the ultimate price for his hubris."

This is not a view of Camello that finds favor in the liberal press, where Kennedy loyalists still abound, or in Washington circles, that JFK's dark secrets and unvarnished self-interest many still prefer over since the House Select Committee on Assassinations found that the shooting was probably the result of a conspiracy — and that the primary suspects were some of the Mafia's most powerful overlords. In the words of the congressional report, these gangsters had "the means, the motive and the opportunity" to kill the president. "The mob typically doesn't hit presidents or politicians," says G. Robert Blakely, the expert on organized crime who served as chief counsel for the committee. "You are all right... just as long as you do not sleep with them, that is, you do not take favors, either money or sex." Blakely wrote in his book, *The Plot to Kill the President*. "Once the public official crosses the line, he invites violent retribution." In Blakely's mind, the Mafia had good reason to believe that Jack Kennedy had crossed the line.

Blakely, who joined organized crime as a young prosecutor in Bobby Kennedy's Justice Department and now teaches law at the University of Notre Dame, is still clearly sympathetic to the

Kennedy legend. But his work on the House Assassinations Committee, which was chaired by Rep. Louis Stokes, D-Ohio, and his subsequent book (which will be reissued in perpetuity this summer under the title *Fatal Hour*) present a compelling case for a darker interpretation of Camello. Since the committee released its report in 1979, other assassination researchers have fleshed out this part of a president who thought he could consort with the devil and get away with it. The most interesting research has been produced by former BBC reporter Anthony Summers, author of *Conspiracy*, a book about the assassination, and *Godfathers*, a history of relationships with the Kennedy family and the mob.

When he wrote *Conspiracy*, which was published in 1980, Summers still thought of President Kennedy as the noble victim of evildeeds — "this in any incarnation of a dozen years ago, Summers says today. But his later research on the Monroe book, which came out in 1986, and on his work-in-progress about, *Edgar Hoover*, led him to think that was not the entire story. "The dividing line between the Kennedy clan and the mob, particularly in Mafia playboys like (Joseph) Samal (Hofel) and Cal-Neva Lodge, was virtually invisible," he says. "If, as the two most powerful political leia, you're going to get in trouble, the Kennedys were just consistently pushing their luck, and it finally ran out."

Summers rushes to say that neither he nor any other assassination researcher has solved the crime. "Some of us should pretend that we definitely know what happened, because we don't," he says. "I personally tend toward the conspiracy explanation, but anybody who's serious about this case has to remain open to everything, including the possibility that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone, as the Warren Commission concluded." (See page 25 for a defense of the

Warren Report.) Though Jonathan Kwitny, a respected investigative journalist, has flatly declared that "Bob Blakely's staff cracked the case," Blakely is also more modest in his claims. Summers and Blakely, it should also be noted, do not always see eye-to-eye. While Blakely sees the assassination as exclusively a mob hit, Summers sees "the fingerprints of U.S. intelligence all over Oswald," and suspects that rogue agents and anti-Castro Cubans also participated in the plot. "There's nothing far-fetched about that at all, since these three elements were already in bed together, fighting the secret war against Havana."

While Summers and Blakely differ on this crucial point, both see a fatal significance in the Kennedy family's contradictory relationships with the mob. Their careful and thorough work is of a higher grade than that of the wild-eyed theorists who are grabbing the spotlight. But it is no less disturbing. For Summers and Blakely's writing — along with that of John H. Dwyer, author of *Mafia Kingpin* — suggests that Camello's corruption may have led to his doom.

Those in government, academia and the press who are in charge of certifying which interpretations of American history are correct have yet to embrace this haunting version of events. But as new evidence comes to light — the most intriguing of which is the recent claim by former mob lawyer Frank Rogano that he carried the message from Teamsters boss Jimmy Hoffa to Mafia Kingpin Santos Triunfante and Carlos Marcello that led to the assassination — this version of Camello may ultimately prevail. As Ron Rosenbaum wrote last January in *Time*: "In retrospect, JFK resembles Galahad less than a gang leader like *The Godfather's* Michael Corleone — the well-meaning son of a bloody godfather (Joe Kennedy with his hoodlugging connections to the mob), who can't escape his father's legacy or his family's cutthroat character."

Joe Kennedy's history as a hoodligger is widely known ("I hated Kennedy because wealthy," New York Mafia chieftain Frank Costello told author Peter Maasi). But it seems that the family patriarch's ties to the underworld were even more extensive than is generally appreciated. The elder Kennedy married on a number with the widow of a murdered mobster in the 1930s. He played golf with Johnny Roselli, the Chicago mob's man in Hollywood, and the scandalized with mobsters at the Cal-Neva Lodge at Lake Tahoe (which was partly owned by Chicago godfather Sam Giancana) during his son's presidential campaign. But apparently the founding father of the underworld dynasty was not viewed as trustworthy by the underworld. Joe Kennedy was "one of the biggest crooks who ever lived," Giancana bitterly told Judith Campbell Exner, the girlfriend he shared with JFK.

In 1980, Joe Kennedy, whose ambitions for his sons went to ruthless extremes, reportedly asked the mob for the ultimate favor: to help put Jack in the White House. The Giancana outfit obliged, as FBI wiretaps later revealed, buying off key election officials in the important West Virginia primary, and in November, helping Mayor Daley of Chicago deliver Illinois' critical Cook County vote by hook or crook. (Nixon's campaign is also thought to have taken votes in downstate Illinois, but its strategy could not keep pace with the Chicago operation.) "Your hoodligger would be the president if I wasn't for me," Giancana howled to Campbell. In return, according to Giancana's daughter, Antonette, Joe Kennedy returned the underworld favor by persuading her father to support the presidential bid of his son's friend, Lyndon B. Johnson.

The underworld had reason to believe that President Kennedy would be their kind of man. Like father, the son parted with their



Image of JFK Examiner
5/20/92



Accorded to former mob lawyer Frank Rogano, Mafia godfathers Carlos Marcello, opposite, and Santos Triunfante, above, were the principal underworld hitlers against JFK. They were allegedly joined in their conspiracy by Teamsters boss Jimmy Hoffa, left, shown speaking with Bobby Kennedy during the 1957 McClellan hearings.



Judith Campbell, left, says JFK invited her to communicate with gangster Sam Giancana. Giovanni and other underworld bosses saw the blackmail potential in the president's affair with Marilyn Monroe, opposite, shown parrying 'Happy Birthdays' to Kennedy at a 1962 fete.

By 1962, many of the men who had been involved in the Kennedy assassination were still in the country. Some were still in the White House. Some were still in the CIA. Some were still in the FBI. Some were still in the military. Some were still in the government. Some were still in the business. Some were still in the law. Some were still in the media. Some were still in the entertainment industry. Some were still in the education system. Some were still in the religious community. Some were still in the political arena. Some were still in the social scene. Some were still in the family. Some were still in the neighborhood. Some were still in the country. Some were still in the world.

crowd JFK ran with Frank Sinatra's Rat Pack (which the singer remained "the Jack Pack" in his honor); he enjoyed the extravagant bohemian company, not to mention the steady stream of young women they provided: the prizefighter, "Frank got (JFK) all the honorees he could ever have used. And these girls were not unknown. They were all stars. ... It was Sinatra who introduced him to Judith Campbell, the beautiful 28-year-old starlet and pianist who would play a pivotal role in the president's life.

President Kennedy also utilized the Mafia's services as hired killers in an ongoing effort to eliminate Fidel Castro. The CIA-mob conspiracy to assassinate the Cuban leader originated during the Eisenhower administration. (Historian Michael Beschloss, in his recent book *The Cuban Years*, suggests it was Vice President Nixon who gave the green light to the scheme.) But despite the details of Kennedy's involvement, the historical consensus today is that Kennedy both knew of and approved this plot. Campbell, who was a fairly frequent visitor to the White House during the first lady's absence, now says that Kennedy also used her to carry intelligence data about Castro to Giancana and to set up meetings between Kennedy and the Chicago gangster. Campbell says that in April 1961 she sat in the bathroom during one of these meetings as Ambassador East Earl Campbell, who first came to light in 1975 as a reluctant witness before a Senate committee probing the CIA. Anthony Summers published that fall in the *New York Daily News*. According to Summers, he was able to corroborate major elements of Campbell's story with newly released Secret Service logs and other government documents.

But if the mob was perfectly content with John Kennedy's selection, it was unimpressed by his selection of his brother Bobby as the country's chief law enforcement official. "I know that certain people in the Chicago organization knew that they had to get John Kennedy in," recalled Mickey Cohen. "But nobody in my line of work had an idea that he was going to name Bobby Kennedy attorney general. That was the last thing anyone thought of."

Robert F. Kennedy had hurt into the mobsters' lives in 1966 as the chief counsel for the McClellan committee, the Senate panel formed to investigate organized crime and labor racketeering. With J. Edgar Hoover's FBI adopting a live-and-let-live attitude toward the Mafia, and focusing its attention on the hunt for Reds, the country's crime bosses had been enjoying a relatively tranquil relationship with Washington. But spearheaded by Bobby Kennedy, the McClellan committee began to change that. The investigation brought about the downfall of corrupt Teamsters boss Dave Beck and made He miserable for his successor, Jimmy Hoffa, as well as Mafia kingpin like Carlos Marcello, the godfather of New Orleans. Sen. John Kennedy was a member of the McClellan panel, but it was his 31-year-old brother, with his "archly, youthful, Cape Cod-Harvard accent," in John H. Davis words, who set the committee's aggressive tone.

It is fascinating to speculate about the psychological reasons that drove Bobby Kennedy to crusade against organized crime. Was it simply political ambition, an ambition suggested, or something deeper? When he looked off the McClellan committee's crime hunt, the mob, indeed, the Kennedy committee, which had blazed the trail for the McClellan probe with its 1961 organized crime hearings, had heard testimony that linked Bobby's father to the underworld. And as the campaign manager for his brother's 1960 presidential race, he was surely aware of the debts to the mob that the campaign incurred. But none of this prevented Kennedy from becoming, as a Senate investigator and later as attorney general, the fiercest scourge the Mafia in this country had ever known.

Perhaps Bobby Kennedy, as the younger brother and another deeply removed from the founding father — and as the son closest to the late Jack, Bobby was devoted to the father and craved the father's approval. But he was even more devoted to the idea of the family as a force for good and justice. Bobby's drive to redefine the Kennedy's Christmas holiday at Hyannis Port in 1966, Joe Kennedy's death in 1967, and his own death in 1968, were all part of a larger effort to redefine the family. Bobby's drive to redefine the Kennedy's Christmas holiday at Hyannis Port in 1966, Joe Kennedy's death in 1967, and his own death in 1968, were all part of a larger effort to redefine the family.

It was a bold act of defiance, considering the emotional control that Joe Kennedy still wielded over his sons. This act of rebellion gave the younger son, for the first time, an identity separate from that of the family — he would become nationally known as a crime fighter. In psychological terms, it may also have been an acknowledgment of the hoodligger-father. As Collier and Horowitz write, Hoffa and Joe Kennedy, a man "who had always known what he wanted and had taken the necessary steps to get it." But in symbolically killing the father, Bobby Kennedy may have been seeking his brother's — as well as his own — fate.

"If we do not, on a national scale, attack organized criminals... they will destroy us," wrote Robert Kennedy in his book about the McClellan investigation, *The Enemy Within*. As his brother's attorney general, he was given the opportunity to do just that. No sooner could he take office in the Justice Department than Kennedy set out to confront the Mafia. In 1960, before JFK took office, there were only 35 convictions for offenses connected with organized crime. In 1963 there were 281. If you figure that doubled within a year as a result of the momentum built up in the last months of the Kennedy reign, Bobby

UP/BETTMANN

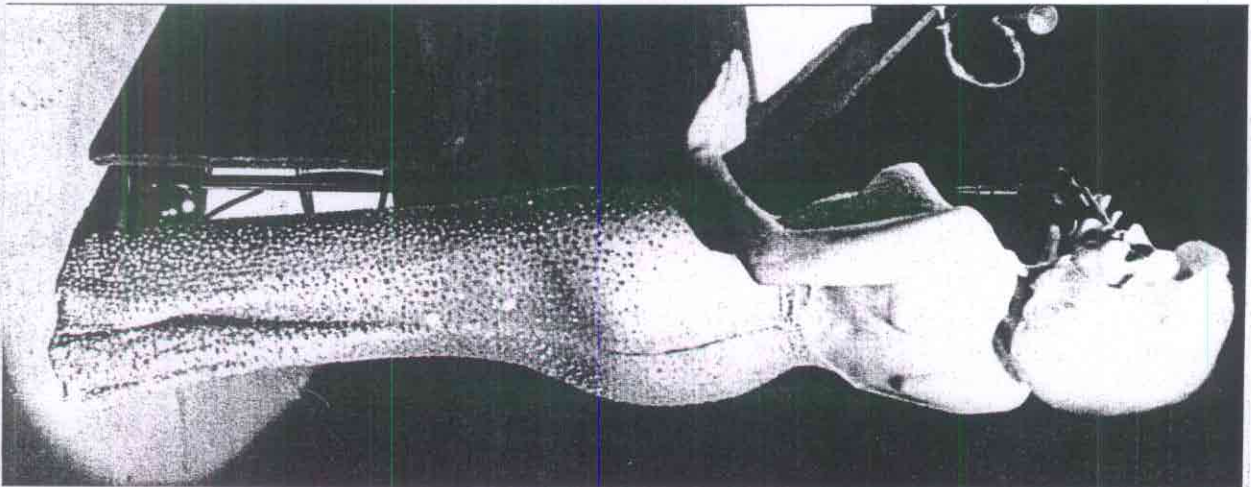
Kennedy finally forced Hoover's FBI into battle, to the undying gratitude of dedicated agents like Bill Rosen, who was assigned to put Sam Giancana under "general surveillance." "Bobby Kennedy was the best attorney general this country ever had," says the respected mob-fighter today.

Bobby Kennedy's primary target was Jimmy Hoffa, his nemesis from the McClellan hearings, the man who had bludgeoned his way to the top of the Teamsters union with the help of the mob. ("We were like fish and steel," Hoffa would say of Kennedy. "Every time we came to grips, the spears flew.") But the attorney general also mercilessly harassed such crime lords as New Orleans godfather Carlos Marcello. In April 1961, Marcello was seized at a routine appearance at the New Orleans Immigration Department, on Bobby Kennedy's personal orders, handcuffed and read to the airport, where he was summarily flown to Guantanamo (a little joke of Bobby's, who knew that Marcello had bought himself a forged Guantanamo birth certificate), without even being allowed to alert his wife and family. After his lightning deportation, Marcello spent two nightmare months of exile in Central America before slipping secretly back into the country. (At one point, the squat, middle-aged mobster and loyal traitor were forced to trek for eight hours through the Honduran high country, according to *Mafia Kingpin*, John H. Davis biography of Marcello. Suspecting their Indian guides were planning to murder them, the gangsters escaped by plunging down a steep slope, with Marcello suffering three broken ribs.)

After this ordeal, in John H. Davis' words, Marcello's "hundred of Kennedy would know no bounds." We now know that the evil genius of organized crime in Louisiana, "in Sen. Edwin Edwards described Marcello — a powerful and extremely violent man, known for disposing of his enemies in the summer behind his hangout — made an ominous threat in the fall of 1962: "Don't worry about it. I'll be an ominous threat in the fall of 1962." "Don't worry about it," Hoffa Bobby would hiss. "The old Edward Becker, a man involved in the casino business. According to Becker's statement to the House Assassinations Committee, Marcello referred to President Kennedy as a dog. With Bobby as the tail. 'The dog will keep biting you if you only cut off the tail,' the mobster told Becker. But if the dog's head were cut off, the entire dog would die. There was no mistaking the meaning of this, said the committee's informant. Marcello also spoke of taking out 'insurance' for the president's assassination, by 'setting up a nut to take the blame.' 'That, lost-fid Becker, is the way they do it all the time in Sicily.'"

According to government witnesses, Jimmy Hoffa and Florida godfather Santos Trinfante also made death threats against the Kennedy brothers in 1962. FBI wiretaps from this period show how menacing the bonds of organized crime felt by Bobby Kennedy's crackdown — some mobsters even talked of backing it in and going back to Italy. They also show how violently the crime bosses felt about the attorney general and his brother: "With an associate of Angelo Bruno was tape-recorded telling the Philadelphia Mafia boss, 'Somebody should kill the f---er. I mean it. This is true. Honest to God. It's about time to go. But I tell you something. I hope I get a week's notice. I'll kill. Right in the f---ing White House. Somebody's got to get rid of that f---er.'"

The beleaguered crime bosses, they were heightened by their feeling that they had been double-crossed by the Kennedys. The ambitious family had taken their political favors, had taken the women they offered, and now was paying them back by arresting them and deporting them and digging their every step. Sam Giancana, quite understandably, felt especially betrayed. The bar to the Capone empire had contributed money, he had delivered votes and was even engaged in top-secret espionage work on behalf of the president. Didn't the White House owe him some protection? The short, dapper gangster, who wore a star-sapphire pinky





The new president dines with Sinatra at the inaugural Ball.

ring given to him by Frank Sinatra, couldn't go anywhere without big Bill Hoover and other FBI agents on his tail. "They were supplanting Hoover with the agent I began publicly insulting him at Chicago's O'Hare Airport, in an effort to make him lose his cool. The G-men even followed him onto the golf course, playing behind him and making fun of his swing. So budgeted did Giovanni feel that he took the unprecedented step (for a gangster) of going to court to get a restraining order against his tormentors.

Giamanna and his men felt that the Kennedy had made fools of them, and they filed the FBI report with their venom. In their anger, they even considered knocking off Sinatra and his Pat Patrick, blaming the singer for not delivering on his promises to smooth things over with the Kennedys. "Let's show 'em. Let's show those f---ing Hollywood fratboles they can't get away with it as if nothing had happened," Johnny Fontana, Giamanna's Las Vegas front man, urged his boss. "I could whisk out a couple of those guys. (Peter) Lawford, that (Oswald) Martin P... and I could take the singer (Sammy Davis, Jr.) and put his other eye out."

When Giamanna's complaints about being double-crossed by JFK got back to J. Edgar Hoover, the FBI chief took pleasure in passing this information to his boss, Bobby Kennedy. Hoover despised the brutal young attorney general, clashing with him over the FBI's work effort against organized crime and the administration's civil rights policy, and his disdainful paragonism of one Giamanna reeling was, in Hoover biographer Curt Gentry's words, "madly racist." "The mobster felt he was not getting his money's worth," said the president. Hoover returned the attorney general.

As Gentry observes, this would have infuriated Bobby, for now Hoover had "yet another arrow in his quiver" that he could use against the Kennedys. Here was the reigning younger brother going all out to remove the stain from the family name, and yet the Kennedy's just kept coming back to haunt them. Gentry (as well as Kennedy biographer John H. Davis) surmises that Bobby would have confronted his father with the Giamanna story, "certainly to ask about the tale and probably to rant and rave. He'd had occasion to snap facetiously at his father more than once during the campaign, when Jimmy mistookly threatened to undercut the campaign, Kennedy's image of uncorrupted, idealistic youthfulness."

Shortly after Bobby is thought to have complained to his father about the compromising Giamanna tape, the father Kennedy suffered a massive stroke while indulging golf in Palm Beach. Davis, a cousin of Jacqueline Kennedy, writes in his book about the family feud that the old man's stroke was related to Bobby's phone call. "That must have been such a shock to Joe Kennedy, to learn that Hoover

know that the mob was displeased, because the Kennedys had accepted favors, and now were threatening to go after them," says Davis. The patriarch would stay alive for almost eight years, but he was incapacitated, all that rky of the power of speech. Now, for better or worse, his sons would finally be on their own.

By 1962, Bobby Kennedy was aware that his brother's reckless voraciousness and his fraternizing with Sinatra was a serious threat to the administration. We are out front fighting organized crime on every level," complained one young Justice Department lawyer in a meeting with Bobby, "and here the president is associating with Sinatra, who is in bed with all those guys." When he and his lover, singer Phyllis McGuire, were hauled at O'Hare Airport by the FBI, Giamanna exploded. "I know all about the Kennedys, and Phyllis knows a lot more about the Kennedys, and one of these days we are going to tell all... You fit a fire thought that will never go out. You'll rue the day." Apparently one thing that will never go out: JFK's affair with a badly kept secret (Mauro's brotherly rendition of "Happy Birthday, Mr. President" conspire at Madison Square Garden, wearing a sequined gown she had literally been sewn into, the kind of fascist display JFK revealed in), the mob's swelled the blackmail potential.

Bobby Kennedy was no "puritan," despite what JFK said of him, though it must have seemed that way to a man as sexually frank as the president. (According to the FBI's court, the chief executive had liaisons with 52 women during his brief time in the White House — and Hoover's men might have missed a few.) Anthony Summers makes a compelling case in *Goddess* that Bobby's own affair with Mauro nearly became "the Chappaquiddick." "Bobby was human. He liked a drink and he liked young women, Kennedy loyalist Arthur Schlesinger acknowledged to Summers in 1983, an observation left out of the historian's airbrushed biography of Bobby. "He indulged that thing when he traveled — and he had to travel a great deal."

Still, Bobby's love of power was greater than his indulgent drive, and he knew that steps had to be taken if the Kennedy brothers were to hold onto the White House. After Bobby consulted with his brother, JFK broke off his affair with Judith Campbell and, to the anger's mortification, stopped making Sinatra's Palm Springs estate his desert retreat. When Bobby learned from a CIA spy that the spy agency had learned up with Sam Giancana to kill Castro, he



The mobster considered the prospect of having Kennedy's brother-in-law, Senator Ted Kennedy, as a rival.

found no smoking gun, says former chief counsel Bialystok, was that FBI surveillance of the mob in Florida, Texas and Louisiana was inadequate. "Bugs Kennedy, the agent who ran the FBI's New Orleans office, was, if not corrupt, grossly inefficient," says Bialystok. "He looked me straight in the eye in my office in 1978 and told me that Carlos Marcello was not involved in the racket, he was a romantic salesman."

In January of this year, Frank Ragano, the 68-year-old former attorney for Hoffa and Trafficante, publicly confirmed the House Assassinations Committee's suspicions. Ragano told columnist Jack Newfield of the *New York Post* that in early 1963, he carried a faked message from Hoffa to the two godfathers, who were meeting in New Orleans. "Jimmy told me to tell Marcello and Trafficante that they had to kill the president," Hoffa said to me. "This has to be done." On the evening of Nov. 22, 1963, the day Kennedy was murdered, Ragano dined with Trafficante at the Intercontinental in Tampa, where the telephone room boss teased the president's death. "Two weeks later," according to Ragano, he met with Marcello in New Orleans. Looking like "Jimmy once me and he owes me big."

Marcello told Ragano that "Jimmy owes me and he owes me big." Stunning "reveals" regarding the mystery of Dealey Plaza have occurred with equally stunning frequency over the past 29 years. But organized crime experts say they find Ragano's story, which has already disappeared into the black hole of assassination trivia, persuasive. Bialystok, who has had long conversations with Ragano since the *New York Post* story ran, says flatly, "I believe Frank Ragano. He was in a position to know." Investigative journalist Tom Malloy, whose 1978 book on Jimmy Hoffa was the first to draw a link between organized crime and the assassination, says, "The Ragano story is the most important breakthrough on the case since the House report."

Malloy says he has been "battering around" on Capitol Hill to have Ragano granted immunity and brought before a congressional committee to answer questions. "I know for a fact that Ragano knows more than he has said so far," says Malloy. "The hours we devote about the actual murder... But, according to Malloy, there is a relative in Washington to "open up this case of worms." (It is too late to interrogate Trafficante the principal suspect in Ragano's story, Hoffa disappeared in 1976 and is presumed to have been killed by mob-kill. The 82-year-old Marcello has apparently lost the mind to Alzheimer's disease. And Trafficante died in 1987. But something

new might be learned from questioning other close associates of these men, such as Carlos Marcello's brother, Joseph (and Anthony.) One of the more intriguing elements of Ragano's story, says Bialystok, is the former mob lawyer's account of Trafficante's rambling, disjointed reminiscence. According to Ragano, who served as the Florida godfather's house counsel for 27 years, Trafficante told him, "We should have killed Bobby" instead of JFK. "He was an old man, he was reversing his life," says Bialystok, "and he was a man not without feelings. And looking back at what the assassination had done to the country, and to Jackie and the family, this is what he had decided."

According to Ragano, the principal planner of the assassination was Carlos Marcello, the son of New Orleans, the man who had been hounded nearly to death by Bobby Kennedy. This corresponds with the massive bulk of assassination research that nips New Orleans as the focal point of the conspiracy. The strange and hapless Joe Harvey Oswald, who told the world he was a patsy before he was forever silenced, spent the spring and summer of 1963 in New Orleans and was certainly known to the Marcello crowd. His uncle worked as a bookmaker in Marcello's organization, and Oswald, with his seamy, left-wing convictions, might have seemed the ideal "nut to take the bait."

Jack Ruby, too, had links to the Marcello family, which also controlled the Dallas underworld. Ruby, whose Caravel Club was a gangster watering hole, was closely associated with Marcello's underbosses in Dallas, Joseph Crivello and Joe Campisi. (Campisi paid tribute to the Marcello family every Christmas, sending them 289 pounds of homemade sausage.) In fact, Campisi was Ruby's first jailhouse visitor after he killed Oswald. In the weeks before the assassination, phone taps show that Ruby made and received a flurry of calls from mobsters around the country, including lieutenant of Jimmy Hoffa and Carlos Marcello.

Ruby's murder of Oswald should have been "the heaviest" that it, lunched the entire Dallas mystery, says John H. Davis. But the FBI downplayed Ruby's involvement with organized crime to the Warren Commission, withholding documents that would have worked his ties, and the truth failed to shine. But Oswald, the staff counsel assigned by the commission to investigate Ruby, would later say that he felt "unhappily misled" by the FBI and CIA, both of which had information on Ruby's mob connections in their files.

Years after the Warren Commission concluded that Jack Ruby, a flash-peddler and drug-pusher who had not even worked for Kennedy, gunned down Lee Oswald in a fit of patriotism and compassion for the Kennedy family, gangster Johnny Roselli gave a very different version of the shooting. Roselli, the key contact man in the CIA-Mafia plots against Castro, spoke to columnist Jack Anderson in 1976. "When Oswald was picked up," Anderson reported Roselli telling him, "the underworld conspirators feared the word crack and disclose information that might lead to them. This almost certainly would have brought a massive U.S. crackdown on the Mafia. So Jack Ruby was ordered to eliminate Oswald."

Roselli would meet his own prison end that same year. In July 1976 he was found hanged to himself and squashed into an all-drum floor in the warden's office. "The gangster" had testified earlier to the Senate committee chaired by Frank Church that was investigating the CIA, and was due to testify again. Roselli had reportedly told congressional investigators that he believed that President Kennedy's assassin, Oswald, had turned their guns on President Kennedy. Sources told the *New York Times* that Roselli was hired to do the deed by an associate of Senator Trafficante.

Roselli was the second gangster to be strangled from the Church committee's witness list. In 1975, Roselli's boss, Sam Giancana, was found shot to death in his home before he could testify. He had been shot once in the back of the head, and six times around the mouth. (Douglas Crown, a new book by Giancana's half-brother

CONSPIRACY OF DUNCES: A REBUTTAL

BY A.S. ROSS

and godson, charges that the gangster organized JFK's assassination at the behest of the CIA handlers. But the question of Olanow's involvement by organized crime experts. The question of Olanow's involvement by organized crime experts. The question of Olanow's involvement by organized crime experts.

While the consensus among credible assassination researchers is that the Mafia probably played a key role in the murder of JFK, there is still lively debate over whether the mobsters were joined in their role by CIA agents and paramilitary Cuban exiles specifically, some of the same men with whom they had

against Castro. Anthony Summers sees the hand of U.S. intelligence at work, particularly in Oswald's trips to the Cuban and Soviet embassies in Mexico City, which Summers suggests may have been faked to further implicate him. Summers finds a statement made by David Phillips, who was the CIA's chief of Cuban operations in Mexico City at the time of the Kennedy assassination, particularly eye-opening. Making before the death of Oswald in 1988, Phillips told private detective Kevin Walsh, who had worked as an investigator for the House Assassinations Committee, "My private opinion is that JFK was done in by a conspiracy, likely including major American intelligence people." In Summers' view, "this is a remarkable finding. — I mean, this was not some conspiracy nut, or someone trying to sell a book. This was a man who, before he retired, was the chief of the CIA's Western Hemisphere division."

Summers is no Oliver Stone — he keeps his imagination firmly in check. He does not think the conspiracy reached to the top levels of the CIA, much less to the Pentagon and the military-industrial complex. "There is as much evidence that JFK was shot because of his Vietnam policy as that he was done in by a jealous mistress with a bow and arrow," says Summers. "In fact, I would be rather more inclined to the jealous mistress theory." But his suspicion do fall heavily on a few individual agents, in particular, William King Harvey, the man in charge of the CIA-Mafia operation.

Harvey was not the Ivy League type that filled the top ranks of the CIA, but rather a besely, hard-drinking man known to pick a proper impression on a visitor. His derring-do was legendary in the agency, and when he was placed in charge of the anti-Castro operation, he predictably took it over the edge. In the midst of the Cuba missile crisis in 1962, while the world held its breath as Kennedy and Khrushchev fingered their nuclear triggers, Harvey took it upon himself to dispatch several secret raids on Cuba — an intensely provocative act under the circumstances. Here was a man who seemed to be capable of anything. Robert Kennedy, whom he despised ("with a purple passion," according to CIA colleague) along with the president for not going all the way against Castro, had asked Harvey to the CIA's Rome station after this mad stunt. But he was spotted in the summer of 1963, back in the Florida Everglades, with his Cuban comrades-in-arms and his Mafia co-conspirators, Harvey, who filed a heart attack in 1976. It beyond the reach of investigators, but Summers feels that the actions of this man, who epitomizes the term "rogue agent," bear historical scrutiny.

Robert Kennedy, however, dismissed talk of possible CIA involvement as groundless speculation. "There's no proof," he says. "William Harvey? Where's the times, dates and places where he did anything wrong? As far as the Oswald sightings in Mexico City, 'Yes, there were more than one person down there, but Oswald was one of them. He filed out the visa application in the Cuban embassy. I

think the purpose of the trip was to incriminate the Castro government, but that's consistent with the mob's goals."

As Blakey suggests, the Mafia longed to reclaim the extremely lucrative gambling and narcotics interests that it lost after the Cuban revolution. In fact, so great was its desire to reconquer Havana that when JFK began to de-solidate his war against Castro after the harrowing missile crisis, the mob had one more compelling reason to murder the president. "The SOB is dead," a informant said to have repeated while dining with his brother, Raymond, on the evening of Nov. 22, 1963. "We'll get back into Cuba now."

Blakey contends that the CIA, as an institution, was friendly to most of the CIA way was Irish Catholics. The same was true of the ranks of the FBI. They may have been conservative, but they loved Jack Kennedy. Now, you can theorize about a few rogue elephants like William Harvey, but if they were up to something, it would have been some known to the people above them, and then you're talking about the institution as a whole being involved, and that's preposterous."

Journalist Dan Mohlen, who has investigated organized crime for nearly 20 years, agrees with Blakey. He rejects Oliver Stone's contention that the Mafia could not have pulled off a hit this ambitious of this sort of crime than U.S. intelligence. "It came off too well to be an intelligence operation," he says. "No one talked. If it had been a government plot, it would have leaked."

Perhaps there was no CIA participation in the plot to kill Kennedy, even on the wild fringe of the agency. There is certainly less evidence of that than there is of Mafia culpability. But at the very least, the spy agency's Murmur five-type partnership with the mob to kill Castro might have emboldened the underworld to carry out its domestic assassination plan. Furthermore, this criminal and intelligence partnership could have back to haunt the agency when it was later called upon to help solve the president's murder.

John Kennedy endorsed this deal with the devil. "Thought by his father to win at all costs, he crawled into the underworld to accomplish a messy piece of business, to eliminate the besetted irritant to the south. But in doing so, Kennedy again became one of them. And, as Blakey has noted, the Mafia traditionally kills only its own."

It is easy to understand why the CIA and FBI failed to cooperate with the Warren Commission, and indeed did everything in their power to narrow the commission's focus to Oswald. The CIA was undoubtedly paid attention at the prospect of allowing its underworld dealings exposed, particularly since that seeming might have backfired at the president. Years later, J. Lee Rankin, the Warren Commission's chief counsel, would acknowledge between the CIA and the Mafia, "I am sure there would have been quite a serious upheaval." In all likelihood, the uproar would have echoed throughout the growing nation. As historian Michael Beschloss has observed, if the American people had learned of this secret operation in the final weeks of 1963, when their emotions were still raw, "there would have been serious demands, as Kennedy had threatened after the Bay of Pigs, to sack the agency from its dominant position and transfer it to the winds. "Then, too, the fact that Oswald apparently had a background in U.S. intelligence would not have helped the agency's reputation. "Imagine the publicity reaction if they had learned that American intelligence had very likely recruited this guy into their top-secret program to infiltrate the Soviet Union — a guy who later turned out to be honey enough to about the president," says Jonathan Kwitny, a former investigative journalist for the *Wall Street Journal* whose 1989 PBS documentary on the assassination remains the best TV report on the subject.

It's not easy to understand why the CIA and FBI failed to cooperate with the Warren Commission, and indeed did everything in their power to narrow the commission's focus to Oswald. The CIA was undoubtedly paid attention at the prospect of allowing its underworld dealings exposed, particularly since that seeming might have backfired at the president. Years later, J. Lee Rankin, the Warren Commission's chief counsel, would acknowledge between the CIA and the Mafia, "I am sure there would have been quite a serious upheaval." In all likelihood, the uproar would have echoed throughout the growing nation. As historian Michael Beschloss has observed, if the American people had learned of this secret operation in the final weeks of 1963, when their emotions were still raw, "there would have been serious demands, as Kennedy had threatened after the Bay of Pigs, to sack the agency from its dominant position and transfer it to the winds. "Then, too, the fact that Oswald apparently had a background in U.S. intelligence would not have helped the agency's reputation. "Imagine the publicity reaction if they had learned that American intelligence had very likely recruited this guy into their top-secret program to infiltrate the Soviet Union — a guy who later turned out to be honey enough to about the president," says Jonathan Kwitny, a former investigative journalist for the *Wall Street Journal* whose 1989 PBS documentary on the assassination remains the best TV report on the subject.

It's not easy to understand why the CIA and FBI failed to cooperate with the Warren Commission, and indeed did everything in their power to narrow the commission's focus to Oswald. The CIA was undoubtedly paid attention at the prospect of allowing its underworld dealings exposed, particularly since that seeming might have backfired at the president. Years later, J. Lee Rankin, the Warren Commission's chief counsel, would acknowledge between the CIA and the Mafia, "I am sure there would have been quite a serious upheaval." In all likelihood, the uproar would have echoed throughout the growing nation. As historian Michael Beschloss has observed, if the American people had learned of this secret operation in the final weeks of 1963, when their emotions were still raw, "there would have been serious demands, as Kennedy had threatened after the Bay of Pigs, to sack the agency from its dominant position and transfer it to the winds. "Then, too, the fact that Oswald apparently had a background in U.S. intelligence would not have helped the agency's reputation. "Imagine the publicity reaction if they had learned that American intelligence had very likely recruited this guy into their top-secret program to infiltrate the Soviet Union — a guy who later turned out to be honey enough to about the president," says Jonathan Kwitny, a former investigative journalist for the *Wall Street Journal* whose 1989 PBS documentary on the assassination remains the best TV report on the subject.

IT'S NOT EASY BEING A JFK ASSASSINATION JUNKIE. If you want to read about 600 books to read, 700 cubic feet of documents in the National Archives to pore over, not to mention countless deobits, tips and theories to assess, and Kevin Costner's *Four Seasons* account to listen to, it's particularly hard when there's not one single shred of hard evidence that indicates a conspiracy, no second gun, smoking or otherwise, no left-label ball cartridge, no wine guy lunging his heart out in a witness-protection program. Nothing.

What do we have after 28 years of searching? At least 60 different versions of the shooting, at least seven, with about 13 different assassins in or around Dallas? Yes. We've got "several Oswalds," like Oswald, the fake photos of Oswald, fake Secret Service agents, Kennedy's "missing brand," fake photos of Oswald's storm, fake photos of the autopsy, faked wounds, switched bodies, mysterious erasings, the "umbrella man," and who did it? Lyndon Johnson, J. Edgar Hoover, H.I. Hunt, E. Howard Hunt, the official CIA, the renegade CIA, the Chicago mob, the New Orleans mob, the Florida mob, the "Cristian connection" (the French did it). Or maybe it was that bushless Secret Service agent, in a sick imitation of Chevy Chase, who bump up in the car behind JFK and misled that the president's head.

Call me a party, a book of mainstream media, a part of the conspiracy. I was working the night shift in a bakery in Brighton, England, on Nov. 22, 1963. But here goes *before the Warren Commission*.

Chalmers. Let us try to explain.

The anniversary and 26 volumes of the Warren Commission report led down to three key evidentiary findings which, unfortunately for the conspiracy theorists, look better than more clearly they are examined and analyzed. The "bullet hole," "Yes, we've all had a jolly good laugh at this one. This was the bullet that the now-dead Alan Spector borrowed entering Kennedy's back, entering the neck, proceeding on to hit Texas Gov. John Connally in the back, wane and drop, before dropping out onto his stretcher in near-panic condition.

What's most remarkable turns out to be "highly likely," according to a philosophical technical analysis of the bullet remains not available to the Warren Commission. Fragments found in Connally's vest indeed came from Oswald's rifle; they matched the bullet on the stretcher. Experts who analyzed all pictures and the Alabamian Zapruder film for the House Assassinations Committee in the 1970s testified that the one bullet could have hit both Kennedy and Connally just as the Warren Commission described — and that the fall metal jacket bullet, designed to pass through soft tissue without detonating, could easily have emerged relatively undamaged.

• **The head wound.** "Think and to the left." That's how Kennedy's head moved in the Zapruder film — which we watched, again and again — as half of the president's brain blew out. Proof, surely, that the shot was fired from the front, maybe the grassy knoll.

None. Neither neutron analysis of fragments taken from Kennedy's head (that he built to Oswald's rifle — the one found on the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository with Oswald's palm print on it. Publications consulted by the House Assassinations Committee said this final shot hit the right side of the president's head — from the rear. Enhanced contrast of the Zapruder film, again not available to the Warren Commission, showed Kennedy's brain matter spraying forward. That why did the head jerk backward? This was a tremendous revelation to the damage being caused from the front of the head as the bullet exited.

• **Three shots.** This it. If the Warren Commission was wrong that only three shots were fired, then the lone assassin explanation falls apart. Could Oswald have squeezed off the second shot from a bolt-action rifle with faulty sights in the 8.2 second allotted by the Zapruder film? No problem, other riflemen consulted by CBS News and by the Assassinations Committee have found Oswald was at least an average shot, and he had a slow-moving target.

Skeptics did have their third floor in the sun. Just as it was about to wrap up after two years and \$8.8 million worth of taxpayer money (and coming up with absolutely nothing), the House Assassinations Committee found a police report of records in Dallas. It was around the time of the assassination. Assassins experts consulted by the committee said they detected four "Amunettes," one of which probably came from the grassy knoll area. Proof? The committee used this as its basis for saying there was a 50 percent chance that Kennedy was killed as the result of a conspiracy.

At conspiracy theory, Anthony Summers has acknowledged something of an unexamined, the "bullet hole" that had a "rough ride" since then. (Nimble, a panel of scientists summoned by the National Academy of Sciences found that the most serious expert was quite simply wrong. For one thing, they found the type in question was picking up sounds one minute after the assassination took place. Taken back while still ringing in them, G. Robert Blakey, the House Assassinations Committee's chief counsel, has since acknowledged that the anecdotal evidence of a conspiracy is not conclusive.)

OK, say the "respective" conspiracy theorists, so maybe Oswald did some of the shooting, but he didn't operate alone; he was a "party" for Bill (the band). There is absolutely no evidence to support any of this, either. It will not be found in the secret House Assassinations Committee files that Oliver Stone is so hot for. Apart from informant files, uncorroborated tips, and probably more evidence — as if any more were needed — of the other impregnation of agencies like the CIA and the FBI, they will find no evidence of government agency involvement — "nothing, zilch, nada."

What about the mob? David Talbot, in his absorbing (if a bit editor) but somewhat exaggerated view of JFK as some sort of Mike Guy, Emerson, rears out some heavy old document concerning George Plummer, leader of Jimmy Hoffa and mob boss Sam Giancana, and Charles Maloney, Mike Angelo, David Demers, and Judith Hunsick — scuffed at these changes in the 1980s, with relevant FBI wiretaps (some of which Talbot and I heard that Kennedy would be "the" or "taken care of" of such an extent that the FBI, Thurgood Marshall and Kennedy to Oswald amount to little more than glorified referees. Absent from them — as is absent from the FBI wiretaps and the non-involvement dossier of Blakey, John H. Davis and Talbot — are any explanation of just who set Oswald up, when and, most importantly, how.

I realize that any public confession of espionage will do little good. The asserted cracks, from believers and Hollywood know-nothings, with their best-selling books and Academy Award-nominated movies, have far too much at stake over to acknowledge that they may be wrong. Maybe we've all been reading too many Robert Ludlum novels, with their twenty-eight volumes who look just like former CIA directors. After all, no one ever went broke underestimating the intelligence of the American public.

Or to be more charitable, maybe, the lone assassin has never been mind-bled guy, a hero, with did it by himself, transforming history. "We can't handle this," says James Tompsett, a psychology professor at Southern Methodist University. "We need a cause commensurate in size with the effect. Conspiracies are much more comforting."

Of course, they always have been. Victims, Jews, Muslims, communists — all have been used to explain our discomforts. These days we have a conspiracy of Salazar rings abusing our children. "Too" people have stolen the history of the "our" people and given them AIDS.

Historically, and today, such irrational absurdities have only worked to the advantage of cynics and demagogues. The result of us, they threaten to ally and despise. "If secret governments are killing all 'our' leaders," it "they" would all the secrets and control all the levers, if we are all, like Lee Harvey Oswald, mere "pawns," then what's the point? Why bother to follow when we can create through life with a permanent movie of disbelief on our faces? ■

S.F. BY ANWALA

S.F. BY ANWALA