

Mr. Leonard Downie, Jr., executive editor  
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Harold Weisberg  
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6/21/94

Dear Mr. Downie,

It took very little time after you got my letter of the 12th before the Post once again demonstrated that on assassination stories, little truth as there is, the supply still exceeds the demand.

Today it is with more than a full page that, despite Jeffrey Frank's care to present two sides, will still sell a book that is an obvious fraud.

While the Post, despite what you told Byrd about reporting books as news when they hold news, continues <sup>not</sup> to report on a book that proves beyond question that the most successful and most media-adored assassination books with the possible exception of Manchester's is of deliberate, commercialized dishonesty. Or to mention this exposure in a review.

While Ragano was counsel to the mob people he was also an informer for the FBI.

"Ragano remembers a conversation that took place in a car with Marcello and Trafficante," today's story quotes him as saying, and that Trafficante told Marcello that they would be blamed for killing the President. Ragano then said that "both of them looked like the cats that ate canaries."

That is the opposite of what Ragano told the FBI, that page enclosed.

Which, no doubt, establishes his credibility and the worth of his book for a full page and more in the Post.

The Post also quotes Washington lawyer Ronald Goldfarb, who has a coming book to promote, as saying that what Ragano says does "line up with other things you know are so." For this to have any meaning those "things" have to be fact relating to the assassination. I am confident Goldfarb has no basis at all for saying any such thing.

Robert Blakey, who led the House assassins committee on a futile search for proof of his preconception, that the mob did it, is quoted as endorsing Ragano from his "study." Despite the rights of the House that private citizens do not have Blakey got many thousands of pages of assassination records fewer than I did by a series of FOIA lawsuits. He could have gotten more. He did not want them. He did get a great volume of mob records. And with them was able to prove nothing. This is the basis of his endorsement of Ragano's fiction for ripping off the public mind, <sup>along</sup> with the public pocket.

Another commercialization and exploitation of the great tragedy the Post now helps succeed. Or, fraud is news, truth is not?

Regretfully,

Harold Weisberg

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6/12/94

Dear Mr. Downie,

"We often write news stories about books when they are newsworthy," Joann Byrd today quotes you as saying. I hope you will consider doing that with my current Case Open (Carroll & Graf/Richard Gallen) not as a JFK assassination book but as an expose of the crudest and most brazen of the exploitations and commercializations of that great tragedy, ~~the~~ the knowingly mistitled Case Closed, by Gerald Posner (Random House) and of the major media abdication of all responsibility in extolling it.

With the Post, thanks to Jeffrey Frank, a notable exception. (Although in printing Posner's dishonest comment it failed to note for its readers that he lied - but then he has trouble telling the truth even by accident.)

(Please excuse my typing. I'm 81 now and in impaired health. My typing cannot be any better.)

What was published is but a fraction of what I wrote and the haste in publication is, I regret, only too obvious. But what I wrote and what is published stacks. I refer to Posner as a plagiarist, using his own publisher's definition ~~it~~ of it, as a shyster, same definition, and as a deliberate liar, among other things. I have yet to hear a word from Posner, from Random House or from any ~~lawyer~~ <sup>lawyer</sup> speaking for either.

With the exception of George Gardner, who informed Frank and who makes the Post an exception in its reporting of assassination information news, almost nobody at all did any checking on that most dishonest of books while all the media vied in making a supersensation of all its lies, thus misleading and misinforming the people.

It was even considered for the Pulitzer in history and the panel was loud in its protests when it was ignored!

The rights were sold so widely I have an issue of an outback Australian standard-size paper that gave Posner and his fraud three full pages. You may recall the attention U.S. News gave it, without any checking - and that for a book without any peer reviews.

Can you recall any grosser or more successful disinformations? and the one book that documents its exposure of it has been entirely ignored.

Sincerely,

*Harold Weisberg*

Harold Weisberg

Suit

RAGANO stated that some of the allegations involving TRAFFICANTE have been ridiculous, and he related the following to illustrate TRAFFICANTE's attitude:

While driving through Now Orleans in MARCELLO's car, MARCELLO was driving and TRAFFICANTE was seated in the front seat and he (RAGANO) was in the back, when a radio broadcast related events concerning District Attorney GARRISON's escapades revolving around the assassination of President KENNEDY. SANTO turned and remarked to MARCELLO, "Carlos, the next thing you know they will be blaming the President's assassination on us." RAGANO added that after his return to Tampa his office had received numerous calls from a newspaper reporter by the name of GREEN, associated with a Long Island, New York, daily. RAGANO called the reporter, who related that he had understood that when TRAFFICANTE was jailed by CASTRO in Cuba, some arrangements were made for JACK RUBY to be flown from Dallas to Cuba to expedite his release, since RUBY was friendly with CASTRO. The reporter exclaimed to RAGANO, "Don't you see the significance of this contact in connection with the Communists and 'La Cosa Nostra' being involved in the presidential assassination?" RAGANO stated he told the reporter he was completely off base because he (RAGANO) had been involved in attempting to get TRAFFICANTE back to Florida from the Cuban prison, and that this was done through an individual in Miami who was close to CASTRO before the revolution. RAGANO said he later told this story to TRAFFICANTE, pointing out that he was not very far from wrong since he had told MARCELLO he would some day be blamed for the assassination.

c. Weapons

RAGANO indicated that TRAFFICANTE at no time carries a gun with him and that he does not even carry a pen knife.

d. TRAFFICANTE's feelings

Mr. RAGANO said that TRAFFICANTE has expressed the belief that eventually he will be the victim of a "frameup" on the part of law enforcement agencies anxious to put him in jail. He said that TRAFFICANTE leaves his car unlocked and very frequently his home unlocked and he has told him on numerous occasions that he should not do this, but TRAFFICANTE has said that if they want to get into the house or the car, whether locked or not, they can get in without any trouble.

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ENCLOSURE

This is a copy of the original file



Carlos Marcello, who Ragano claims engineered the Kennedy assassination.

UNITED PRESS INTERNATIONAL



ASSOCIATED PRESS

Teamsters boss Jimmy Hoffa hated JFK, Ragano claims, so Kennedy's murder was a way for Trafficante and Marcello to gain access to the union's huge pension fund.

# CONFESSION OF A DEAD MAFIA BOSS

## Mob Lawyer Frank Ragano Says He Knows Who Killed JFK

By Jeffrey A. Frank  
Washington Post Staff Writer

**T**his is the age of confession, an era of dragging oneself through the mud, abusers and abusees compete in the marketplace of self-abnegation. Which is why it seems inevitable that a place be set for Frank Ragano, a man whose chief claim to fame is a long career as "house counsel" to the mob.

But in this time of revealed secrets, Frank Ragano claims to possess one of the best. He says he knows who killed President Kennedy. He says he knows why. And he says he knows all this because one of the plotters told him.

Sure, sure, you've heard this one before. And Ragano's alleged source doesn't make his claim easier to believe. It is, after all, Santo Trafficante Jr., the powerful Florida Mafia boss, whose death seven years ago prevents him from denying his role.

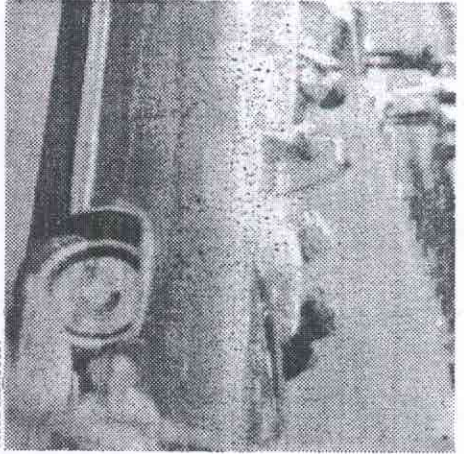
Ragano is a short 71-year-old with wispy, reddish hair, and he is talking in a restaurant at the Mayflower be-

cause he has written a sort of Godfather Dearest, "Mob Lawyer," in which he recounts years of serving organized crime. His clientele included the very vanished Teamster boss Jimmy Hoffa (killed by the mob in 1975), but *numero uno* was Trafficante, whose line of work included *botita*, a numbers game, drug trafficking and a big interest in Havana's pre-Castro gambling casinos. The mob made Ragano very rich—and very circumspect. Of Trafficante, he says, "I think if I'd been inquisitive, curious—I think as soon I was no longer any use to him—he'd have me killed."

But that was then. Ragano says that when Trafficante vouchsafed the historic news about JFK's murder seven years ago, it came as a sort of deathbed admission. The mobster confessed. Ragano says, as they drove through the streets of Tampa on March 13, 1987—four days before Trafficante died. The exact date is important because there is an argument as to whether Trafficante actually made the trip from Miami.

If Trafficante did not, Ragano's story falls apart, which is why his every word is being challenged by the

See RAGANO, E2, Col. 1



President Kennedy slumps over after being hit by an assassin's bullet in Dallas.

ASSOCIATED PRESS



Trafficante before a hearing of the House Select Committee on Assassinations in 1977

THE WASHINGTON POST



Frank Ragano says a dying Santo Trafficante confessed to the assassination of President Kennedy: "He was a slick man. And I think maybe he owed me something. It could very well be that he didn't think I'd say anything about it."

BY CARVA SMITH—THE WASHINGTON POST

# Mob Lawyer

RAGANO, From E1

dead mobster's family, who insist that Trafficante was too ill to travel. To which Ragano says, "If they are sincere in their contentions that he was not here in Tampa on that Friday the 13th, I would suggest that they file a lawsuit so this issue can be settled by a court of law."

Not bloody likely.

## 'Carlos Messed Up'

The theory that the mob killed JFK has had many devotees. The House Assassination Committee came to that tentative conclusion in 1979, 15 years after the Warren Commission said that one lone nut killed the president. The House committee singled out Trafficante and New Orleans Mafia chieftain Carlos Marcello, who died in 1992.

Ragano, to be sure, has no proof. But his testimony is rich in detail, right down to the words allegedly spoken, in Sicilian, by the dying Trafficante as they drove around Tampa: "*Carlos e futtutu. Non duvevamu ammazzar a Giovanni. Duvevamu ammazzari a Bobby.*" ("Carlos [Marcello] messed up. We shouldn't have killed Giovanni [John]. We should have killed Bobby.")

How does a person react to discovering who was behind the crime of the century?

"I didn't know how to deal with it," Ragano says earnestly, his Florida drawl sounds incongruous in a world of Sicilian confidences. "As a lawyer. As a human being. As an old friend. I just didn't know how to deal with it." He turns to Nancy Ragano, who has been girlfriend and wife for 30 years. "I didn't tell her for a while," he says, "and she kept asking me, 'What's wrong, what's bothering you?'"

"Frank was very disturbed for about two weeks there," says Nancy Ragano, who sounds like the Florida coed she was when she met the mob lawyer. "I thought maybe it was Santo's death."

"When you find that a man you know is responsible for the president's death, my God . . . ." says Frank Ragano.

". . . —the godfather to my son," says Nancy Ragano, "and those are not nice things to hear."

As the Raganos talk on, it is suddenly a most peculiar Washington moment. This conversation has been taking place in a quiet corner of a restaurant in the hotel where, years before, Ragano had lunch with Hoffa—and where J. Edgar Hoover regularly lunched with his deputy, Clyde Tolson, and where, Ragano says, he once saw Hoffa and Hoover greet each other. On this bright spring day, two tables away, sits former CIA chief Richard Helms, who served as deputy director of plans after the Bay of Pigs fiasco—a time when the CIA tried to hire Trafficante and the mob to kill Fidel Castro. Ragano does not recognize Helms, who occasionally looks his way.

Ragano is trying to figure out why Trafficante told him:

"If somebody was to tell me why did Santo tell you about it, I don't know anybody else he could have told. I was close to him for 27 years. He was a sick man. And I think maybe he owed me something." Ragano pauses. "It could very well be that he didn't think I'd say anything about it."

## A Meeting in Tampa?

Then there is the view that Ragano is making all this up, which is what Trafficante's widow and daughters say, while lamenting that their children and grandchildren must bear the stigma.

Mary Jo Trafficante Paniella says by telephone that her



BY DAYNA SMITH—THE WASHINGTON POST

**Frank Ragano with wife Nancy. He claims Mafia boss Santo Trafficante told him the mob killed President Kennedy.**

father was at Miami's Mercy Hospital on March 12 and March 14, and family lawyer Henry Gonzalez, by fax, produces hospital records to show that Trafficante received dialysis treatments on those days. "One thing we do remember is the week my father died," says the 54-year-old Paniella, who teaches elementary school. "When [Ragano] named a date and said he was with my father, we said, 'How can he say this?'"

It's easy, Ragano says, because Santo Trafficante was not in the hospital on March 13, 1987. Ragano carries with him a March 19, 1987 Tampa Tribune story in which Ragano says he talked with Trafficante on March 13 about his medical options.

At the suggestion that Ragano might have made his historic confession by phone, Ragano says Trafficante was so fearful of being bugged that he'd carry a pocketful of quarters for pay phones. "To suggest for a moment he would be talking to me about the murder of a president over a telephone, that's beyond comprehension."

If he has witnesses that the two met in Tampa, who are they? asks Paniella.

Ragano says he has three—but won't produce them. "One guy is afraid of retaliation. The other guys are two doctors, who say they'll testify if they're summoned to court."

Then Ragano says, "I did not see the two daughters in [Trafficante's Tampa] house that Friday. The one person I saw was his widow, and she's not making any claims or denials at all."

Ragano is wrong about that. "That's a big, big lie," says the 74-year-old Josie Trafficante by telephone. "My husband was too sick to fly anywhere. If he had to travel, I had to take him in a car, because he had that colostomy bag."

"In view of the terrible things that I've said about her late husband in our book, and knowing her as I do," Ragano responds later, "I'm not at all surprised that she would parrot the claims of her two daughters."

Of herself and her 50-year-old sister, Sarah Ann Trafficante Valdez, Mary Jo Paniella says, "Our children have this burden to bear. They'll have this all their lives because he decided to write a novel."

"This book was not written to make me look good," says Ragano. "It makes me look terrible."

That is one Ragano statement that no one will dispute.

### 'Rank Self-Deception'

Ragano's coauthor is Selwyn Raab, a New York Times reporter who has covered the Mafia for two decades. Raab's brief narrative is set apart from Ragano's, and occasionally he takes his writing partner to task. "Frank's refusal to consider the evidence of Trafficante's ties to the Mafia was rank self-deception for a lawyer trained to be logical," he writes at one point.

Not only does Raab scold Ragano, but Ragano scolds himself. His memoir is filled with quotidian humiliation, such as the night that Trafficante ordered Ragano to solicit the favors of a cigarette girl at a Miami bar.

The worst happened on the night of Nov. 22, 1963, when the future Nancy Ragano, then 19, walked into a Tampa hotel bar to find Trafficante exulting, "The son-of-a-bitch is dead." Ragano's glass, she says, was raised in a toast.

"I have to tell you," she says, almost angrily, "I'm not so sure I've ever forgiven Frank for that night."

Wait a minute, says Mary Jo Paniella. An FBI surveillance report proves that her father was in Miami that night. Ragano says that Trafficante routinely misled the FBI.

"I think that was the night I made my pact with the devil," says Ragano, "sitting there like an idiot, toasting the death of the president."

More humiliations were to come: conviction for tax fraud in the early 1980s, his law practice suspended and finally, last year, a prison sentence, of which he served 10 months. At age 70, Ragano was broke and without a livelihood. Through the worst of it, in the mid-'80s, his old friends shunned him—even Trafficante, although the mobster eventually reconciled with his former "house counsel."

"Here's a guy, I thought we were closer than brothers," Ragano says, "and when I was in trouble, Santo turned his back on me. How coldblooded can you get?"

### A Favor for Marteduzzo

Some students of the Kennedy murder, such as the indefatigable Harold Weisberg, are skeptical of Ragano's claim. Among those who believe it are G. Robert Blakey, Justice Department veteran and chief counsel to the House Assassination

Committee, who says, "I have carefully studied his story and I think he is telling it as he remembers it." But that is no surprise. Blakey 15 years ago said it was a "historical truth" that the mob—Trafficante and Marcello, in particular—killed Kennedy to get the administration off its back.

Washington lawyer Ron Goldfarb, who is completing a book on Robert Kennedy and organized crime, also takes Ragano seriously. "He's broke, he's looking to cash in on a book," says Goldfarb. "On the other hand, does what he says line up with other things you know are so? The answer to that is yes."

Ragano says he hasn't a clue about what happened in Dealey Plaza on the day Kennedy was shot.

"I think Santo was the brains, and I think Carlos carried it out. . . . Whenever we would talk about Carlos, Santo would always remind me that he had powerful friends in Texas, and he did have a man in Dallas, a Mafia figure who represented his interests there."

Ragano remembers a conversation that took place in a car with Marcello and Trafficante. The radio was on, he says, and they heard the news about New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison's loopy investigation of the assassination.

"Santo said, 'Carlos, mark my words, before this thing's over they're going to blame you and I for killing the president.' And I looked back there, and both of them looked like the cats that ate canaries. And I wondered at the time—I wondered why they'd make a statement like that."

Ragano says Marcello and Trafficante both knew Chicago Mafia boss Sam Giancana, who'd once had the same girlfriend as John F. Kennedy.

"Giancana felt, rightly or wrongly, that he was instrumental in bringing about the [1960] election," Ragano says. "Because there was only 118,000 votes, the smallest margin ever, and they felt they had a friend over there and they felt betrayed."

"And they were close, Santo and Giancana. . . . I would say all those guys had to know. I know they all felt they were double-crossed. But I don't think they could pull off something like this without some of those guys getting together and deciding on it."

Ragano says the plot might have begun in July 1963, when Hoffa, who hated the Kennedy brothers, told him: "Something has to be done. The time has come for your friend and Carlos to get rid of him, to kill that son of a bitch John Kennedy."

Ragano—only half-seriously, he says—carried the message—for the man they nicknamed *Marteduzzo*, which means little hammer. "Marteduzzo," he told them, "wants you to do a little favor for him." But, he writes, the reaction was odd: "Santo and Carlos exchanged glances. . . . Their facial expressions were icy. Their reticence was a signal that this was an uncomfortable subject."

"I don't think he could order those two guys to do anything," Ragano says, "but if they could lead Jimmy to think they did it because he ordered it, it would make the [Teamsters] pension fund more accessible. These are devious people, these are cunning people, they don't think the way we do, everything has double meanings."

"The whole motive revolves around one thing—forget everything else. The Teamsters pension fund. It all goes back to that—a billion dollars."

"So by killing Kennedy, Jimmy would be *beholden* to Carlos and Santo and they would have [guaranteed] access to that pension fund. They had the motive and obviously had the capability. When [the CIA] wanted to get rid of Castro, who did they turn to? Santo—not one of their own agents."

"I don't pretend to know how it happened," Ragano says, "but after I talked to Santo, four days before he died, all these pieces fell together. I could see the jigsaw puzzle."