Judith Exner was President Kennedy's lover from 1960 to 1962. She knows things about him that nobody could have believed while he lived, and nobody wants to believe now he's dead. For her new testimony confirms Kennedy's Mafia links, and may even hold the key to the mystery of his death, which she still mourns. Ignored and belittled by the press and the president's old retainers, she wants to set the record straight. Report by Anthony Summers. Portrait by Harry Benson

THE UNMAKING
OF A MYTH

Early evening, April 28, 1961, in a room at Chicago's Ambassador East Hotel. For 15 minutes, two men sat quietly talking. One, a handsome 46-year-old, was familiar to millions. The face of his companion, a decade older, was thinner and more lined, virtually unknown to the general public. Both wielded immense power and, together, they were planning a murder.

According to the history books, this meeting never took place. For the younger man in this scenario was allegedly President John F. Kennedy, who dazzled the world as champion of all that was best in America. The older man, the co-conspirator, was Salvatore "Sam" Giancana, one of the three most powerful Mafia chieftains in the United States; a man whose criminal enterprises ranged from Las Vegas to Mexico to pre-revolutionary Cuba, believed responsible for hundreds of murders.

On this occasion the man be and Kennedy were allegedly planning to murder was Cuba's Communist leader, Fidel Castro.

That there were American plans to assassinate Castro — and other foreign leaders — has been known since US Senate revelations in 1975. The Senate's Intelligence Committee discovered that CIA officials had plotted the murder with Giancana and other mobsters — and condemned the operation as "incompatible with American principles, international order, and morality". The senators suspected President Kennedy had knowledge of the plot, but had no proof, found no witnesses who would testify to the president's involvement.

Now, in a year that has seen several scholarly books raising fresh controversy about Kennedy's womanising and his moral fitness for high office, a key witness offers devastating revelations.

She is Judith Exner, one of the president's few surviving lovers, herself no stranger to controversy. She says she was present when John Kennedy met the mobster at the Chicago hotel — she sat on the edge of the tub in the bathroom while they talked business in the bedroom. She claims she helped arrange other secret meetings, and acted as courier between the two men "on at least 20 occasions".

Initially, she says, she carried huge sums of cash, designed to subvert the elections that put Kennedy into the White House. Later, after he had become president, Kennedy used her as a go-between to deliver intelligence data about Fidel Castro to Giancana.

In 1960 Judith Exner was 26 years old, a blazing beauty and a familiar face on the California social scene. She did not, however, fit the profile of either bimbo-on-the-make or gangster's moll — the roles in which the press enjoy having her. Raised as a God-fearing Catholic girl, the daughter of a German architect and an Irish mother, Judith enjoyed an affluent childhood in the Hollywood area. After a brief marriage, at 15, to a small-time actor, she had continued to circulate in a milieu peopled by some of Hollywood's most famous names.

It was at Pavilions' restaurant, in 1959, that Exner was approached by Frank Sinatra. It was a fateful meeting, one that led first to a brief affair with the singer and then — through him — to her role in a high-stakes game involving John Kennedy, Sam Giancana, FBI director J. Edgar Hoover and the CIA.

Exner never sought publicity. She kept silent for 15 years, and her name only surfaced in 1975 — because Senate investigators broke their promise of confidentiality and leaked her name to the press. White House telephone logs showed at least 70 contacts between Exner and the president's office. These, combined with interviews and FBI records, led the senators to report that she had been a "close friend" to both Kennedy and Giancana.

By her own admission, Exner has Be-
Ask the Agency
Sam Giancana, mob boss, was already working for the CIA when Kennedy made the fatal contact.

Ask the secretary
"Nearly released faxes below, show two women making at least three visits to the White House under her married name, Campbell. All were recorded as being to Kennedy's secretary, Evelyn Lincoln, right."
Kennedy's centre, director of the
warned the president about his underworld
Edgar Hoover, apparently was
He said the envelopes contained "intelligence material," and that it involved the elimination of Field Centre. I think it came out because I was cautious about Jack - being who he was - was working for the CIA.

"I think Jack told me because he was concerned that I would be comfortable with it. I was right in the middle of my relationship with him, and I loved him. He was also the president, and I don't think I felt qualified to question it. I was a young woman in my twenties, and I was not deeply into politics. But I knew what was going on, and Jack knew Jack fully participated in the CIA involvement with the underworld." There is more, says Emmer. In 1950, when he was campaigning for the president, Kennedy asked her to carry money to Giancana. The first request came soon after her introduction to the mobster by Frank Sinatra - who had earlier introduced her to Kennedy during a trip to Las Vegas. Kennedy sent her red roses, and soon the mobster was showering her with yellow ones - though her interest then, and for more than five years, was only asking me, 'What have you been doing? Who did you meet?' I told him I had met Sara, and he laughed and said, 'I was in contact with Jack on the phone all the time,' Emmer says. 'He was always asking me, 'What have you been doing? Who did you meet?' I told him I had met Sam, and he laughed and said, 'You have to watch out for these guys, or something like that. I only knew Sam as 'Sam Flood,' the name he had been using when I met him, but Jack appeared to know who I was talking about.'

The next time Emmer saw Kennedy was an April 6 when - with characteristic informality - he invited her to his townhouse in Georgetown, Washington, while his wife Jacqueline, then pregnant with John F. Kennedy, was away. That evening, the emphasis was on romance.

"There was another man there," Emmer says, "a railroad lobbyist called Bill - I don't remember his second name. He was a very big man, and you could tell they were close. Very good friends, I didn't listen to much of the discussion. I was in another room having dinner with her husband. And I was concerned about how it looked.

Jack's request to me overshadowed everything else. He asked me, in front of Bill, if I would set up a meeting with Sam.

"I said, 'Why do you want me to fix the meeting, or should I ask?' And he said something like, 'I think he can help me with the campaign.' I knew Frank Sinatra was helping him with the campaign. Sam was a friend of Frank's. It was all made sense to me. I was very flustered.

"And then Jack asked if I would mind taking something to Sam for him. I said, 'What is it?' And he said, 'It'll be cash, money. A lot of money.' I was stunned, and I asked, 'Will I be safe? I'm a woman alone.' He said he wouldn't be since, that someone would be with me, and that I'd be better off not knowing who, that they could watch over me easier that way.

"I agreed, to what he asked. I was afraid that he had that trust in me. I felt that he was entrusting me with something that was very important to him, that had to do with the campaign. I didn't know where the money was going to go when it left Sam, but I knew it had to do with the campaign. But I wasn't stupid, and I read the papers. And I probably deduced someone was being paid off, something was being bought with this money.

"It gave me a sort of bribe, made of very soft leather. It felt very firm, very packed, and it was on the heavy side. Sometimes after midnight, between 11 and two, Jack called a cab and went back to my hotel, the Sherman, with the bag.

"Emmer sees the travel involved, and Giancana met her there at Union Station at 8:30am on April 8. She did not try to look into the suitcase, not until noon, when she was close. She looked into the suitcase, and it was on the heavy side. She played with the Castro murder tape. 'The bag never left my hands,' she said, 'I gave it to Sam right there at the station. I just handed it to him without any comment, and he took it without comment. To anyone who it would have looked like a man helping a woman with her luggage.'

"I think Sam was expecting the money. It was kind of obvious from the fact that Jack asked me to take it to him. I didn't just show up with a basketful of money and Sam not know what this was all about. There were forces at work that I didn't know anything about.'

After Kennedy won the Democratic nomination in July 1960, says Emmer, Giancana received more Kennedy money. In the late summer and early autumn she moved into an apartment in New York City's Navarro Hotel, which was Kennedy's second home. In August, it served another purpose: Giancana came to the apartment for another brief meeting with Kennedy, and on another occasion stopped by to pick up a second packed leather briefcase, which Kennedy had delivered to Emmer.

"After Jack was elected," Emmer said, "Sam used to tease me all the time. 'Hey, you're boyfriends wouldn't be president if it wasn't for me.' Her's say this in a serious way, too. My impression was that Sam bought the influence, that he had a direct effect on the result of the election.

With her new statements, Emmer becomes the first primary source to offer apparent confirmation that Emmer was one of Kennedy's key contacts with organized crime during the 1950s. The account presented by Emmer, however, raises more questions than it answers. The extent of her involvement in the campaign for the presidency, and the role of Frank Sinatra in that process, remain unclear. The accounts of Emmer and others involved in the investigation of the Kennedy assassination provide a glimpse into the complex web of relationships that existed during this period, and the extent to which organized crime influenced the outcome of the election.
Kennedy cleared his way towards election, and placed the murder of a foreign leader in perspective. If Eisen's account is accepted, the president's reputation will be damaged.

Eisen knows he will face disbelief and criticism. If this new story is the full truth, why did she wait so long to tell it? When she first spoke out in 1972? Why did she do so again, when interviewed by Kirby Kelber in 1987?" "I was afraid — afraid I would be killed," Eisen says. "I was also protecting Jack as I was protecting my husband. And we were - we were afraid I should tell just enough to get the press off my back, harmless things about my affair with Jack that had nothing to do with what really played me in danger, the business about the sugar plane." Eisen says the same "tripped-out fear" made her pull her hair back even in 1987 — that and the fact that she did not trust her interviewer, Kirby Kelber. The fear was justified. Sam Giancana was shot dead in his basement before the Senate Intelligence Committee could question him. Some of the bodies that killed him had been wired around his mouth — a warning to others to talk. Giancana was close to Kennedy, and Eisen also knew, did testify to Senate committee — three times. He vanished soon after, and his body was later recovered in a basement in Chicago. Depression. No, another murder has yet been solved.

Why then, is Eisen telling her story now? Is it because, as she is moved by anger, anger that she has been branded separately as a weak woman, as a "tripe" — or worse; "I think any woman caught up in such a situation should fight back. The men are never put in the same position as the woman. When a politician like Jack Kennedy's philandering counts out his last breath, the woman comes over as a trump, a slut. I was never anything unless Jack, Jack alone gave me $200. But that was because he wanted to pay for a minor coat that I had already bought. I had my own funds — my grandfather had made money in real estate. My main interest was in painting, but I did not need to wear such money. Money had nothing to do with what I did.

I've always been used to manipulating Jack. He entranced me as a go-between. But I think he put me too much in my place. So I don't think I should have asked me that way. He was clever. I was the instrument that he used to keep everyone one step away from proving Jack's connection to the assassination plot. If I'd said anything about the drive or the car, even then, who would have believed me? They would have burned it.

Eisen is 75 now, and suffers from cancer that has been diagnosed as terminal. She has already survived longer than her doctors expected. "When you find you're in the position you're in, healthwise," says Eisen, "you think about it differently. Now, a more important part of my telling the truth is for the sake of my son. This story will never go away, and it's going to have to live with it. And I really believe that the cover-up should be exposed. Even if it costs my life, I should be exposed for the sake of honor, for history to be able to know the truth about Jack's affair with my husband, and Jack's presidency." Eisen believes there was a cover-up. Few Eisen's facts are accepted, and the president's reputation will be damaged.

The source of the documents obtained this week is unknown. It is possible that these are secret Service records relating to the assassination of President Kennedy. In fact, they show that "Jackie Kennedy" was registered in the logs, and was admitted to the White House on May 26, 1961, and again on April 15, 1961. Evelyn Lincoln personally escorted one of the visits.

There were other occasions, Eisen says, when she was brought to see the president in the White House cafeteria. When she arrived that way, through the East Garden, there was no written check-in procedure. Researchers who have studied many of the Oval Office files have indeed discovered secrets.

Not all, however. The May 25 story shows Eisen arrived at the Secret Service post in the last afternoon. Eisen being a key figure in the case is still on file with the secret service — in fact, it's still on file with the secret service. Researchers have identified the "railroad lobbyist called Bill" who Eisen claims, was present at dinner that night. Kennedy set up his first secret service detail in Giancana. One of Kennedy's key aides, the former senator George Smathers, recalls seeing Kennedy and Eisen in the company of railroad lobbyist Bill Thompson. Thompson, who died in 1973, is still alive by his absence from the invited Kennedy biography. He was a friend who did service by remaining invisible.

Thompson's family reveals that he had been friends with Kennedy since the mid-1960s, noting that Kennedy was present at his wedding, that he was active with the Democratic Advisory Committee as a "believer in the New Left". That and that he had CIA links. When Kennedy was president, Thompson had access to the White House around the clock. They had a very special relationship" says Thompson's daughter Cassy Laid. "I think it was somewhat on the steering side. My father was a railroad lobbyist."

They were "fortune cookies" was said about the Maffia acts this story. Not, Eisen's family claim that, during the election campaign, Kennedy met the mobster Giancana, and sent him bags full of cash disguised to be $50 bills? It is conceivable that John Kennedy would have liaise with the Maffia after the苏州. The answer must be yes.

The mob connection runs in the family. The former senator has said publicly that he began to see the mobsters when, in his mid-20s, his political adviser, Joe Kennedy, was a "friend to many mobsters" while staying at the Calabria Lodge in California. Eisen represents a fertile battlefield for historians and researchers.

From being away from paper work, Eisen has let her memory run free.
Las Vegas, the presidential campaign was going beyond the usual. Senator Edward M. Kennedy, who was in his hotel room at the Sands Hotel, later recalled an odd incident. The candidate's aids knew that he was staying in the room, but none of them noticed that he was bleeding. The candidate was said to have been found at the Sands Hotel and was taken to the hospital. The incident was later reported in the media, but the details remain unclear.

The night before Kennedy was to campaign in West Virginia, he was visited by the president of the Mafia. The candidate, however, was not impressed with the visit and told the president to stay away. The incident was later reported in the media, but the details remain unclear.

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KENNEDY AND THE MOB continued

young Judith Ewer — there was nothing to forbid the suspicions in the cover relationship she had witnessed between

Kennedy and Giancana.

Congress's Assassinations Committee concluded in 1975 that President Kennedy "probably" assassinated as the result of a conspiracy. "Many of the facts at the scene are not consistent with the version of events that has been presented," the committee

statement said. "The committee's conclusions are based on the evidence presented to it by a number of witnesses and on the testimony of government agents and others who were present on the scene at the time of the assassination." The committee also recommended that the White House security procedures be reviewed and that a "reorganization of the intelligence community" be undertaken.

The committee's report was widely criticized, and many of its conclusions were later discredited. The FBI, for example, had concluded that Oswald was the sole assassin, but the committee found that there was "sufficient doubt" about his involvement. The committee's report was also criticized for its failure to address the role of the CIA and other intelligence agencies in the assassination.

In the aftermath of the committee's report, the CIA and other government agencies were subjected to intense scrutiny. The agency was investigated by Congress, and its Director, William Colby, was forced to resign. The CIA also faced criticism for its role in the Vietnam War, and its activities were extensively investigated by government committees and the media.

The committee's report was a significant event in the history of the investigation into the assassination of President Kennedy. It was widely seen as a failure, and its conclusions have been largely discredited. However, it also marked a turning point in the way that government agencies were scrutinized, and it helped to establish new standards for the investigation of major political events.

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by dying lover Judith

JFK and the Mafia,

Marriage makes our men lazy.