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# Links Between Trafficante,

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(Second in a Series)

Four of the five Mafia figures most closely identified with CIA plots to assassinate Fidel Castro are dead, victims of gangland style slayings. Only Tampa's Santo Trafficante Jr., remains alive today, and federal investigators are wondering why.

When they find the answers, they believe they may also have answers to several questions involving the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

**THE TWO** Mafia dons most closely associated with the CIA plots during the early 1960s were Sam Giancana and John Roselli.

Giancana was scheduled to testify before a 1975 Senate Intelligence Committee that was investigating the CIA plots, but he never got there. He was shot to death

in his mansion June 19, 1975, just four days before the committee convened.

Roselli, however, did testify. He said he and Giancana had been offered \$100,000 by the CIA to kill Castro. Roselli's body was found last Aug. 7, stuffed into a 55-gallon drum bobbing in an arm of Biscayne Bay.

Trafficante had been scheduled to testify at the same hearings, but the FBI could not locate him in time to serve his subpoena.

Two lesser figures involved in the plots, Salvatore Grannello and James Pumeri, also were murdered, Grannello in 1970 and Pumeri in 1971. Both were shot to death in what investigators said were typical gangland style slayings.

**THAT LEAVES** Trafficante. Why him? And what connection is there between the CIA plots to kill Castro and the recently unveiled possibility that Cuba may have ordered the assassination of a resident Kennedy?

## CIA, JFK Death Eyed

George Crile III, Washington editor of Harper's magazine and an expert on the CIA's Cuban operations, believes he may have part of the answer.

In a recent copyrighted article in the Washington Post, Crile wrote that Trafficante was the most important Mafia figure involved in the plotting.

"**IT WAS HIS** men, both in Miami and Havana, who were supposed to carry out the murder," Crile wrote.

"Trafficante is generally identified as the don of southern Florida, but he is also one of the chiefs in the Mafia's loose national confederation. Once the (Central Intelligence) Agency decided to turn to the mob, it was inevitable that Trafficante's assistance would be sought. Alone among the principal dons, he had lived in Cuba. He had built a large organization there and still had a number of associates in Castro's Havana. Moreover, his professional experience made him ideally suited for assassination work . . .

"At that time, in 1960, Castro's grip on Cuba was by no means secure. Once Trafficante accepted his CIA commission, Castro's days should have been numbered."

**BUT CASTRO'S** days were not numbered, and neither were Trafficante's. The reasons why may be in federal government files that show Trafficante:

—May have been a secret agent of Fidel Castro from the late 1950s through the early 1960s.

—May have met and talked with Jack Ruby while Trafficante was in a Cuban prison in 1959.

—May have had advance knowledge that President Kennedy was marked for assassination.

**THE POSSIBILITY** that Trafficante was a secret agent for Castro is detailed in a July 21, 1961, report

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prepared by the Federal Bureau of Narcotics. That report reads in part:

"There are unconfirmed rumors in the Cuban refugee population in Miami that, when Fidel Castro ran the American racketeers out of Cuba and seized the casinos, he kept Santo Trafficante Jr. in jail to make it appear that he had a personal dislike for Trafficante, when in fact Trafficante is allegedly Castro's outlet for illegal contraband in the country."

Another Bureau of Narcotics report established a more definite link between Castro and Trafficante. It said Castro "has operatives in Tampa and Miami making heavy bets with Santo Trafficante Jr.'s organization."

The report goes on to say the winning bolita numbers were being taken from the last three digits of the lottery drawing in Cuba every night. Prior to these drawings, the report said, Cuban operatives in Tampa and Miami communicated with Cuba and advised which numbers were getting the heaviest play. Cuban lottery officials then rigged the drawings.

**IF THAT WERE** true, Castro was stealing from Trafficante, not working with him. But Crile disagrees.

"Trafficante was in an even better position than the feds to know about raids on his profits," Crile said. "Had he chosen to, he could have solved the problem overnight by shifting the payoff numbers from the Havana lottery to the weekly dog races in Miami, as he finally did in the late 1960s."

"If, then, these reports are to be believed, Trafficante's bolita may have served as one of the paymasters to the Cuban intelligence network in the United States."

**THE SECOND** report held by federal agents — that Trafficante met and talked with Jack Ruby in Cuba — is in recently declassified Warren Commission files.

The report discusses a conversation between a CIA agent and a British journalist, John Wilson-Hudson, that took place four days after Kennedy's assassination.

It quotes Wilson as saying that, while he was in a Cuban prison in 1959, he met "an American gangster-gambler named Santos who could not return to the U.S.A. because there were several indictments outstanding against him."

"Santos opted, therefore, to remain in prison for a period of time, paying Castro in dollars for his rather luxurious and definitely non-prisonlike accommodations."

"While Santos was in prison, Santos was visited by an American gangster type named Ruby."

The CIA was never able to confirm or disprove the story.

**THE THIRD** report — that Trafficante may have known in advance of Kennedy's assassination — comes from Jose Aleman of Miami, a Cuban exile who became involved with Trafficante in 1962. He had been a rich young revolutionist in Cuba and was one of the leaders of the almost successful 1957 attack on Batista's presidential palace.

FBI agents in Miami recall Aleman as "a real nice fellow . . . a reliable individual," and they confirm talking with him at length on several occasions.

For the most part, Aleman kept the agents posted on Cuban exiles in Miami whom he suspected of being Castro agents. But he also told them of a series of meetings with Trafficante. One of those meetings, in September 1962, concerned President Kennedy.

FBI agents refused to talk about that conversation, but Crile interviewed Aleman at length for an upcoming book. He reports on that interview:

**"ALEMAN SAYS** that Trafficante spent most of the

evening philosophizing. 'He spoke almost poetically about democracy and civil liberties.'

"But then he turned to the Kennedys: They were not honest, they took graft and they did not keep a bargain. He complained about their attacks on his friends, saying 'Have you seen how his brother is hitting Hoffa, a man who is a worker, who is not a millionaire, a friend of the blue collars? He doesn't know that this kind of encounter is very delicate. Mark my words, this man Kennedy is in trouble, and he will get what is coming to him.'

"Aleman says that he argued that Kennedy would get reelected, and Trafficante replied, 'No, Jose, he is going to be hit.'"

A little more than a year later, Kennedy was hit, gunned down as he rode in a caravan through the streets of Dallas, Tex.

**TRAFFICANTE'S** statements may have been merely gangland bragging, or they may have been based on information coming to him from Cuba. At this point, no one knows.

However, one investigator for a federal government organization — he asked that neither his name nor the name of his organization be revealed — plans to find out.

He said he's involved in investigating another aspect of the Kennedy assassination now, but the Trafficante-Castro connection is next on his list.

"I don't know for sure what I'm going to find," he said, "but I feel certain something's there. There's just too damned much smoke for there not to be fire somewhere."

He expects to begin his investigation by October.