

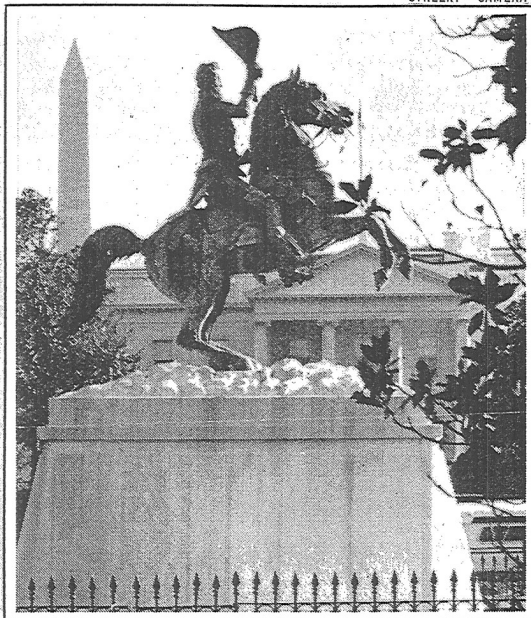
The Presidency/Hugh Sidey

Savoring a Mellow Moment

Notes on a September morning:

Up in the dark out in the Maryland suburbs. Air crisp, sliver of a moon still high. Roar of the Potomac River's great falls from over the hill. George Washington used to tarry there. Headed down the valley to breakfast with Jimmy Carter, 189 years after George, but land still beautiful in first light. Mist rising over water. Sun burnishing the East. Past Teddy Roosevelt's hiking island, Lyndon Johnson's memorial pine thicket, John Kennedy's flame. Glorious city ahead in sparkling dawn. Everything looks, feels better with President acting like one.

Across Lafayette Park on foot. Joggers, pigeons, fresh chrysanthemums (Lady Bird's tender touch). Good morning to Andrew Jackson on bronze horse. Looks more chipper. White House whiter than white in first rays. Godfrey Sperling, *Christian Science Monitor's* journalistic breakfast impresario, leading 38 col-



Statue of Andrew Jackson in Lafayette Park

leagues up to front door just like wanted guests. No Marine Band in the foyer, but can almost hear a Sousa march as we proceed into State Dining Room. Elegant E-shaped table with cut fall flowers. Feel like Congressmen with votes in pockets. Orange juice at door for quick fix. Eggs (poached and scrambled), sausage, bacon, buns. Better cuisine than reported.

Dick Strout, 80, at President's left. Covered Calvin Coolidge. Still reporting. Charley Bartlett across table. Introduced Jack Kennedy to Jackie Bouvier. J.F. terHorst off to left. Once Jerry Ford's press secretary. Ike's favorite, Roscoe Drummond, on duty. Des Moines, Los Angeles, Baltimore ready to ask questions. President does not eat. Already been up several hours. He sips water. Puffy eyes. Still tired from Camp David. Delicious fatigue. New spirit in room. Respect from press. Carter easier. Abe Lincoln looking benignly down from the wall, chin in hand, elbow on knee. Carter with chin on thumbs, then arms around knees.

Walters hovering. Sun through tall windows. Ficus trees in corners of room. Jody Powell in vest. Reporters off the street could get used to this, jokes Sperling. Questions come. Carter answers all. Does not reveal much new. What's new is the feeling, the hope. So much nicer to meet in respect. Reporters reflect concerns, prejudices of publications. Oklahoma asks about Sunbelt. Washington *Post* asks about secret documents. Detroit asks about Humphrey-Hawkins full employment bill. New York asks if Carter might help out in newspaper strike.

Carter's hands are long, expressive, almost like those of a musician. Over and over he spreads fingers and forms imaginary globe, trying to put things together. Sweeps long forefinger through air. Chops with flat hand.

Cigars passed. Help for those friendly tobacco growers? Few take them. Nobody lights one up. Everybody polite, muted by setting. Columnist Rowland Evans looking serious. Came to town under F.D.R. *New Republic's* John Osborne looming like Buddha at far end of five bouquets. Carter Aide Jerry Rafshoon looking pale. Been watching TV too much. *Meet the Press's* originator Lawrence Spivak smiling. Lone Woman Mary McGrory wants to know if she and the rest have been too tough on President. President believes so now and then, but is not going to press point in new aura. Jimmy has to leave. Everybody lingers second or two savoring mellow mood, Americans all. Know it will not last. Should not. Outside sun warming branches of old elms. Andy Jackson still astride. On and up, old U.S.A.

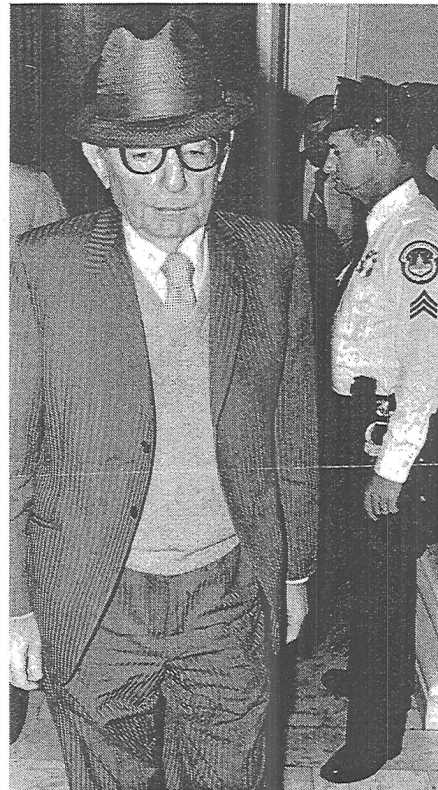
The President And the *Capo*

A Mafioso denies all

Q. Will you please tell the committee where and when you were born?

A. I exercise my constitutional right to take the Fifth Amendment.

So began in traditional fashion last week the strangest session of the House committee's hearings on the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.



Trafficante arriving at committee hearing

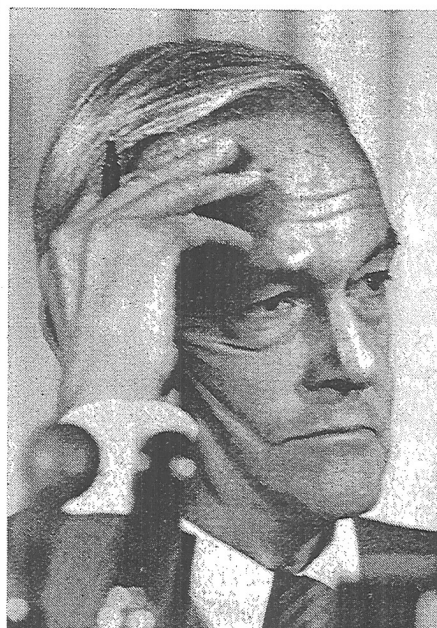
At heart, he said, he was a patriot.

The balding, hunched-over man in the witness chair was Santo Trafficante, 63, the reputed Mafia boss in the Tampa area and former overlord of mob-owned gambling casinos in Havana.

The committee particularly wanted to know whether he had in fact told Cuban Exile Leader José Aleman during a 1963 conversation about Kennedy that "he's going to be hit." This was Aleman's story when questioned by committee investigators in March 1977, and it seemed to lend credence to a theory that mobsters had plotted to kill J.F.K. because of his Administration's crackdown on organized crime. But Aleman, admitting that he was afraid of Trafficante's wrath, remembered differently last week. The mobster, he testified, probably meant only that Kennedy would be hit by Republican votes in 1964, not bullets.

But the committee still wanted to hear

ATTENTION—THE WASHINGTON POST



Subcommittee Chairman Richardson Preyer
"Some questions never will be answered."

from Trafficante. Next day, he showed up, nattily attired in a gray pinstripe suit, but refused at first to testify. Finally, handed a court order granting him immunity from prosecution for anything he might say, and faced with contempt if he did not talk, Trafficante became one of the few top-level mobsters ever to answer a congressional committee's questions.

He recalled his conversation with Aleman, but insisted he had not used the word hit. Said Trafficante: "I was speaking in Spanish, and in Spanish there is no way to say that." Had he known in advance about Kennedy's assassination? "Absolutely not. No way."

He acknowledged, however, that he had been recruited by Gangster John Roselli in the early '60s for the CIA-backed plot to murder Cuban President Fidel Castro. He joined, he said, chiefly out of patriotism: "It was like in World War II. They tell you to go to the draft board and sign up. Well, I signed up." Besides, he had a grudge to settle against Castro for closing down the casinos after seizing power in 1959. According to Trafficante, the mobsters considered "poison, planes, tanks. I'm telling you, they talked about everything." Eventually they chose poison pills, but for reasons that have not been fully explained, the would-be assassins, two Cubans, failed to carry out the plot. Trafficante told the committee that he knew nothing of any attempts by Castro to retaliate against Kennedy.

The mobster's testimony provided a melodramatic ending to the committee's four weeks of hearings. In more than 100 hours of testimony from 59 witnesses, the committee re-examined the known facts about the assassination, convincingly shot holes in the major conspiracy theories and turned up no solid evidence to challenge the Warren Commission's conclusion that

Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone in killing Kennedy.

In the end, the committee's performance turned out to be far more solid and thorough than anyone had expected at the outset, two years ago, when members and staffers feuded in public and repeatedly leaked unsubstantiated reports that there was "new evidence" of a conspiracy. Part of the committee's increased professionalism followed the appointment of G. Robert Blakey, a Cornell law professor, as counsel and Ohio Democrat Louis Stokes as chairman. But much of the credit must go to North Carolina Democrat Richardson Preyer, who headed the subcommittee that probed J.F.K.'s assassination. In two years as a federal judge and ten years in Congress, Preyer, 59, a Bible-quoting Presbyterian elder, has won wide respect for fairness and patience. He soothed the personality conflicts, helped stop the leaks, and set the committee to work.

Were the findings worth the \$5 million spent during the investigation? Said Preyer: "It was important that something be done for the peace of mind of the country. We have succeeded in putting to rest some of the doubts. Some questions, however, never will be answered." ■

Alabama Upsets

The voters are inscrutable

"People in the South love their politics better than their food on the table," says Alabama Senator Maryon Allen. With contests last week for the governorship, both U.S. Senate seats and many lesser offices, Alabama's Democratic primary runoff—tantamount to election in a state where Republicans are still considered carpetbaggers—was a veritable feast. And the voters tried a little of everything. Experience counted, but then it didn't. A new face was helpful, but then it wasn't. The voters were inscrutable.

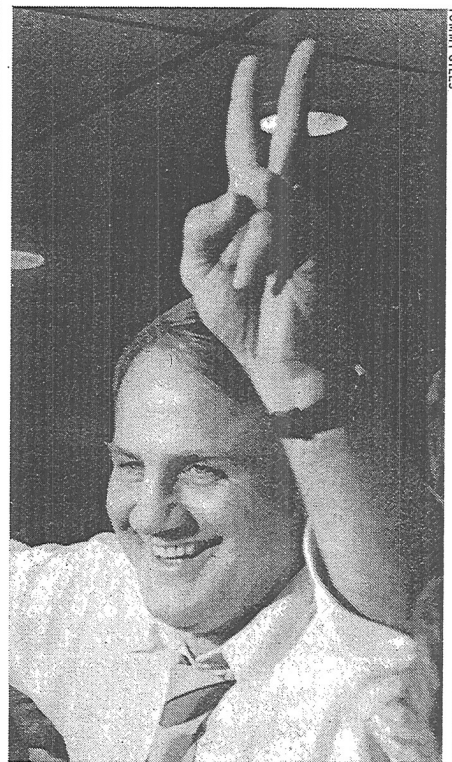
What mattered most was the departure of George Wallace, who could not legally succeed himself as Governor and decided not to run for the Senate. With his control removed from state politics after the mesmerizing years, the rules had suddenly changed.

At the beginning of the campaign, his most likely successor seemed to be Alabama Attorney General Bill Baxley, 37, a populist in polo shirt and plaid pants. But he lost last week to Forrest ("Fob") James Jr., 44, a former star halfback at Auburn University '55 and a millionaire manufacturer of sporting gear. James' victory showed that Jimmy Carter's tactics can still pay off, at least in the South. His lavishly financed \$2.5 million campaign played up his role as an outsider with no ties to the political system. That image was reinforced by Walker & Associates Inc., a Memphis-based political consulting firm that specializes in winning elec-

tions for Southern unknowns. "You deserve better than a bunch of politicians swapping jobs," James told delighted audiences. He acknowledged that he had once served as a Republican state committeeman but assured the voters that he was a "born-again Democrat." James won handily with 55% of the vote.

In one of the Senate contests, Marvon Allen, 52, was trying to win election in her own right to the seat formerly held by her husband James. After he died in June, she was appointed his successor by Wallace. She had a sympathy vote, but she also had a salty tongue that she stilled for the campaign. "The hardest thing to do is to keep your mouth shut," she admitted. She refused to debate her opponent, State Senator Donald Stewart, 38, a scrappy anti-Wallaceite who called her a "nice lady without any political experience." He scored an upset victory with 57% of the vote.

In the other Senate race, former Alabama Chief Justice Howell Heflin, 57, who remodeled the state court system, took 65% of the vote, swamping Congressman Walter Flowers, 45, whose courtly eloquence was a highlight of the Nixon impeachment proceedings in the House. While Flowers campaigned as an insider who knew his way around the nation's capital, Heflin berated him for being "part of the Washington crowd that has brought more inflation and higher taxes." Heflin, on the other hand, owed a debt to another Washingtonian. His campaign slogan was the same as Nixon's in 1972: "Now More Than Ever." In Alabama politics, anything goes. ■



James acknowledging his primary victory
Without Wallace, the rules changed.