

## DEUS EX MAFIA: THE SOLUTION TO AMERICA'S GREATEST MURDER MYSTERY?

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*Ultimate Sacrifice: John and Robert Kennedy, the Plan for a Coup in Cuba,  
and the Murder of JFK*

Lamar Waldron with Thom Hartmann

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897 pp., hardcover, \$33

The assassination of President John F. Kennedy is, in the words of journalist David Talbot, “the greatest unresolved mystery of the 20th century.” Each year dozens of books are published on the assassination. The most important JFK assassination book to appear in 2005 was *Ultimate Sacrifice*. The book is the result of 17 years of research and investigation; the two authors have consulted hundreds of books, pored over hundreds of thousands of the millions of government documents relating to the assassination declassified since 1992, and interviewed scores of persons, including former high-ranking officials of the Kennedy administration.

The principal thesis of the book is that the assassination was a mob hit arranged by three organized crime leaders, Carlos Marcello, Santos Trafficante, and Johnny Roselli. These three powerful Mafia dons “did not carry out the act themselves, but used trusted associates and unwitting proxies,” and the gunmen who shot JFK were professional hit men hired to commit a gangland slaying. In short, the Kennedy assassination was, according to *Ultimate Sacrifice*, the result of a Mafia conspiracy.

It should be pointed out here that Trafficante and Roselli, along with another Mafia kingpin, Sam Giancana, had been involved between 1960 and 1963 in the infamous CIA-Mafia plots to murder Cuban dictator Fidel Castro. For the specifics of this unbelievable episode, in which the CIA actually recruited and assisted mobster bosses in various attempts to kill Castro, see “Alleged Assassination Plots Involving Foreign Leaders,” *An Interim Report of the U.S. Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations With Respect to Intelligence Activities*, pp. 71-135 (Nov. 20, 1975); *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations, U.S. House of Representatives*, pp. 107-117; 172-175 (1979); “The Evolution and Implications of the CIA-Sponsored Assassination Conspiracies Against Fidel Castro,” in *Appendix to Hearings Before the Select Committee on Assassinations, U.S. House of Representatives*, vol. 10, pp. 147-195 (Mar. 1979); see also Charles Ashman, *The CIA-Mafia Link* (1975); Warren Hinckle and William W. Turner, *Deadly Secrets: The CIA-Mafia War Against Castro and the Assassination of JFK* (1992); Antoinette Giancana, John R. Hughes, and Thomas H. Jobe, *JFK and Sam: The Connection Between the Giancana and Kennedy Assassinations* (2005). Although it has not yet been proven that Marcello (a friend of Trafficante, Roselli, and Giancana) participated in the CIA-Mafia plots against Castro, he certainly knew of them and probably lent them assistance.

The view that JFK's slaying was an organized crime murder is not new. It has for years been the contention of many responsible conspiracy theorists that the plot to kill Kennedy was a Mafia

conspiracy. The principal reason La Cosa Nostra wanted Kennedy dead, these theorists agree, was the war on organized crime figures then being relentlessly waged by the Department of Justice under the leadership of Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy. Among the books setting forth important evidence and cogent arguments supporting the mob plot theory are G. Robert Blakey and Richard N. Billings, *The Plot to Kill the President* (1981); David E. Scheim, *Contract on America: The Mafia Murder of President John F. Kennedy* (1988); and John H. Davis, *Mafia Kingfish: Carlos Marcello and the Assassination of John F. Kennedy* (1989).

Furthermore, Congressional investigations have refused to rule out the possibility of Mafia involvement in the JFK assassination. The U.S. House of Representatives Select Committee on Assassinations, which investigated the Kennedy assassination in 1977-1978, concluded, on the basis of the evidence available to it, "that the national syndicate of organized crime, as a group, was not involved in the assassination of President Kennedy, but that the available evidence does not preclude the possibility that individual members [of the Mafia] may have been involved." The Assassinations Committee also found that "organized crime directly benefited substantially from the changes in Government policy that occurred after the assassination;" that "organized crime had the motive, opportunity, and means to kill" JFK; and that Mafia crime bosses Carlos Marcello and Santos Trafficante both "had the motive, means, and opportunity to have President John F. Kennedy assassinated."

In their endeavor to show that JFK was slain by La Cosa Nostra, the authors of *Ultimate Sacrifice* rely on previously known information and also on new information gleaned from recently declassified documents. Unfortunately, however, most of this evidence of organized crime involvement in the assassination, whether previously available or newly discovered, is anecdotal, uncorroborated, conjectural, or suspicious. This does not mean that the Mafia conspiracy theory is false. It simply means that the theory, so admirably articulated in *Ultimate Sacrifice*, has not been proven to be true. Unquestionably, there is ample evidence of mob involvement in the JFK assassination; but it is also unquestionable that there is ample evidence that the assassination was attributable to (among others) the CIA, anti-Castro Cubans, or white-supremacists and right-wing extremists. *Ultimate Sacrifice* therefore fails insofar as it attempts to demonstrate that the Mafia conspiracy theory is the correct theory of the assassination.

*Ultimate Sacrifice* contains one bombshell revelation: in May 1963 President Kennedy and Robert Kennedy devised a secret program for a coup d'etat in Cuba. The coup leader, a trusted associate of Fidel Castro, would stage a "palace coup" within Cuba, Castro would be "neutralized" (killed), a provisional government would be formed and martial law declared, and American armed forces would then respond to a call by the provisional government for American intervention. (After the JFK assassination, the new president, Lyndon B. Johnson, learned of and then promptly cancelled plans for the proposed coup.) The Document Appendix to *Ultimate Sacrifice* contains a copy of a letter to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff by the Secretary of the Army, dated Sept. 30, 1963, and entitled "Plan for a Coup in Cuba," which discusses possible American military intervention in support of the proposed uprising in Cuba. The Document Appendix also includes a copy of a CIA dispatch, dated June 28, 1963, which announces the secret plan to overthrow Castro and gives it the code-name AMWORLD. From a CIA cable reproduced in the Document Appendix dated Nov. 22, 1963—the very day JFK was

assassinated in Dallas, Texas—it appears that the proposed coup d’etat in Cuba was scheduled to take place on Dec. 1, 1963.

*Ultimate Sacrifice* asserts that the three gangster bigshots behind the JFK assassination knew of the existence of the secret plan to topple Castro and that they “arranged the assassination so that any thorough investigation [of the assassination] would expose the ... coup plan.” Because, the book claims, U.S. government officials knew that the conspirators behind the assassination would, if fingered for killing JFK, publicly reveal the existence of AMWORLD, and because these government officials feared that such a disclosure might trigger a nuclear war with the Soviet Union, these officials engineered a limited, inadequate investigation of the assassination, an investigation that found no conspiracy and wrongly pinned the assassination on a supposedly lone assassin, Lee Harvey Oswald (who in fact had been set up as the patsy by the Mafia). Thus, the mob was able to “assassinate JFK with relative impunity.”

This explanation for the ineptness of the Warren Commission’s investigation of the assassination may be questioned. Why kill JFK only a week before the planned invasion of Cuba? Since only a handful of government officials knew of AMWORLD, would they have been in a position to arrange a mammoth coverup of the true circumstances of the assassination? Furthermore, after the assassination the three Mafia chieftains allegedly responsible for JFK’s murder were subjected to various federal criminal and tax investigations, and Carlos Marcello himself was tried, convicted, and sent to federal prison. How could this be if the U.S. government was so afraid that these men would publicly spill the beans about AMWORLD? Wouldn’t they have been untouchable?

According to *Ultimate Sacrifice*, Lee Harvey Oswald, accused by the Warren Commission of being the sole assassin of JFK, had nothing to do with the assassination. Oswald, the book says, was a low level U.S. intelligence agent with organized crime affiliations who was set up as the assassin by CIA operatives who were actually working for the Mafia.

Because the authors of *Ultimate Sacrifice* have combed through hundreds of thousands of previously classified documents, they are able to bring to light numerous interesting facts about JFK’s assassination. Examples:

- The reason why a planned visit by JFK to Chicago, Illinois on Nov. 2, 1963 (three weeks before the assassination) was cancelled at the last moment is that the Secret Service became aware of an assassination plot under which a four-man team of killers planned to assassinate JFK while he was motorcading through the city.

- The “Secret Service was extremely concerned that an attempt would be made to assassinate JFK during his motorcade in Tampa, Florida [on Nov. 18, 1963, the Monday before the Friday assassination in Dallas].” The Secret Service’s concerns arose because from unknown sources it became aware of a threat that an “unidentified rifleman shooting from a window in a tall building with a high power rifle fitted with a scope” might assassinate JFK while the president was being driven through Tampa in a motorcade. The Tampa assassination attempt was thwarted by beefing up escort security for the presidential motorcade; over 600 law enforcement officers protected JFK, and the Tampa visit was completed without incident. (Prior to

publication of *Ultimate Sacrifice*, the only mention in print of the Tampa attempt was a short news article, "Threats on Kennedy Made Here," which appeared in the Tampa Tribune newspaper on Nov. 23, 1963. The article is reproduced in the Document Appendix to *Ultimate Sacrifice*.)

- Strangely, in 1995 the Secret Service secretly and unlawfully destroyed its files on the Chicago and Tampa assassination attempts.

- Lee Harvey Oswald made a mysterious visit to Atlanta, Georgia in August 1963. Official FBI documents from the Atlanta Field Office dated Dec. 1, 1963 reveal that the FBI "received reports of Oswald's brief stay in Atlanta from several individuals, including Hal Suit, the highly respected news director of Atlanta's largest TV station and later a candidate for governor. Some of the reports mention Oswald's leaving behind a pistol at a Holiday Inn motel after he checked out."

- According to other official FBI documents, later in August 1963 Oswald mysteriously visited the University of Illinois in Urbana. "An FBI memo says Oswald reportedly inquired at the office of the assistant dean of students about Cuban student organizations and asked the secretary 'if she had ever seen him on TV in New Orleans.' The FBI memo says Oswald 'expressed interest in any campus organization advocating humanist views' to the secretary."

*Ultimate Sacrifice* is an excellent, painstakingly researched, well documented book. It is the best of all the JFK assassination books advocating the Mafia plot theory. But in the last analysis it is unconvincing. For, in the words of reviewer Jefferson Morley, "To attribute the gunfire in Dallas and the alleged subsequent cover-ups to the ingenuity of thuggish crime bosses like Johnny Roselli and Santos Trafficante has the feel of a *deus ex mafia*, wrapping up a complicated story too neatly." *Ultimate Sacrifice* does not, therefore, provide a decisive answer to what Morley calls "the great unsolved mystery of American politics."

Indeed, more than 42 years after the assassination that shocked the whole world it appears increasingly likely that, because President Kennedy's murderers were so fiendishly clever and diabolically skillful, a satisfactory answer to this country's greatest murder mystery may never be found.