

Blakey, Cornwell & Ewing Report on Carlos Marcello  
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Summary by Laura Denk, ARRB  
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### Summary of Report

Carlos Marcello was one of several leaders of La Cosa Nostra that the HSCA believed had the motive, means and opportunity to assassinate President Kennedy. In this report, Blakey, Cornwell, and Ewing review Marcello's background and the background of organized crime in New Orleans. As Attorney General, RFK promised to fight organized crime and he targeted Marcello in particular. RFK's pressure on Marcello included a 1961 deportation of Marcello, who was not a U.S. citizen, to Guatemala and the FBI's first attempts to install ELSUR on Marcello. According to Edward Becker, a potential business associate of Marcello's in 1962, Marcello thereafter hated the Kennedys. The report outlines the HSCA's investigation into Edward Becker's assertion that Marcello made a detailed threat about assassinating JFK in September of 1962. Finally, the report discusses how the FBI at headquarters and in the New Orleans and Los Angeles field offices, failed to investigate Becker's account of Marcello's threat against Kennedy.

### Report Highlights

LCN = La Cosa Nostra

ELSUR = electronic surveillance

SA = Special Agent

61-69 Marcello's Background: Carlos Marcello was the leader of La Cosa Nostra in New Orleans for over 35 years. He was first arrested at age 19. In his early years, he was arrested for a wide range of criminal activity. Most records from these early arrests and convictions have disappeared. Marcello's first serious involvement with LCN probably occurred in the late 1940s when he began working with Frank Costello, a LCN leader in NYC. By 1948, Marcello was well-established as leader of LCN in New Orleans. By this time, he was known for "owning" public officials at every level. In the 1950s, he testified before Congress (Kefauver and McClellan Committees) and chose to take the 5th Am. on every question. By the early 1960s, Marcello was recognized both inside and outside LCN as one of the 10 most powerful LCN leaders in the U.S. Estimates indicate that he made billions of dollars each year, although he told Congress in the early 1970s that he earned \$1600 a month as a tomato salesman and through various land investments.

65-69 New Orleans "Family": LCN started in the U.S. in the 1880s in New Orleans. As the "first family," the New Orleans family received the highest respect and esteem from other LCN members in the country. Generally, the "first family" did not have to consult the "Commission" (national oversight board of LCN; explained in Salerno testimony) in order to operate or to admit new members. The remote geographic location of New Orleans also

contributed to the “first family’s” independence. The report indicates that, within LCN, Marcello was probably the single most respected boss.

- 69-75 Marcello’s Immigration Battles & Deportation: Born in Tunisia in 1910, Marcello never became a U.S. citizen. In 1953, the U.S. began trying to deport him. Marcello obtained a fake Guatemalan passport and continued to live in the U.S. as a resident alien until RFK had him deported to Guatemala in 1961. The deportation occurred on 4/4/61. Marcello reported to the INS office for a regular appointment when INS officials arrested and handcuffed him, rushed him to the airport and flew him to Guatemala. They left Marcello in Guatemala with no luggage and very little money. Two months later, Marcello had made his way back into the U.S. Some theorists believe that Marcello’s deportation led to the Kennedy assassination. Marcello aggressively fought his immigration status and spent more money contesting his deportation than anyone else in U.S. history.
- 69-73 RFK targets Marcello: Even before JFK’s inauguration, RFK promised to fight organized crime. RFK was particularly interested in Marcello, Hoffa and Giancana. Until the early 1960s, Marcello operated in New Orleans in relative peace, as evidenced by the reports of Special Agent Regis Kennedy of the New Orleans FBI field office. The FBI assigned SA Kennedy to investigate Marcello and his organization. SA Kennedy apparently never believed that Marcello was a significant organized crime figure. Although SA Kennedy would prepare reports on Marcello per instructions from FBI HQ, he testified that the New Orleans field office did not have any independent reason to investigate Marcello. In 1978, SA Kennedy told the HSCA that he did not believe that Marcello engaged in any illegal activity, at least from 1959-1963. Moreover, Marcello was one of the few LCN bosses that were not subject to FBI ELSUR. Before 1963, no law enforcement agency even tried to install ELSUR on Marcello’s offices and residences. Under RFK, the FBI began trying to install ELSUR on Marcello in 1963, but failed.
- 75-76 Alleged Assassination Threat by Marcello: In September of 1962, Marcello allegedly told his cousin and a potential business associate about his plan to kill JFK. In September of 1962, Marcello allegedly drove his cousin, Carl Roppolo and a potential business associate, Edward Becker, to Churchill Farms, which was Marcello’s house outside New Orleans. There, the men engaged in business and casual conversation. Becker asserted that Marcello became very angry and agitated when the men began to discuss the Kennedys. Marcello told Roppolo and Becker that he was going to take care of RFK. Marcello described JFK as a dog and RFK as the dog’s tail. Cutting off the tail would not stop the dog from barking, but if he killed the dog, the tail would stop wagging. Marcello allegedly told the men that he would not allow his lieutenants to be involved. Rather, he would hire a “nut” to do the job. In 1967, Becker shared his story with author Ed Reid, who was writing a book about organized crime.
- 77-81 FBI Investigation of the Allegation: The report reflects that the HSCA was disturbed by the

FBI's failure to fully investigate Becker's story about Marcello's threat. The FBI first learned of the threat in early May of 1967, when author Reid told agents in the LA field office of the FBI about it. The top officials in the FBI received memoranda regarding Becker's story. However, rather than investigate the substance of his allegations, the LA field office worked to discredit Becker. The HSCA found that the FBI's own files corroborated Becker's version of events. FBI files showed that the FBI interviewed Becker on 11/20/62 in the Billie Sol Estes case. Becker reported that he knew Carl Roppolo, who was Marcello's first cousin; that he had been in New Orleans with Roppolo and that he and Roppolo had met with Marcello to try to get Marcello to fund a business deal. The HSCA found it particularly disturbing that the LA field office sent an agent to author Reid's home to try to convince Reid that Becker was not reliable and that Reid should not include the information about Marcello in his forthcoming book.

- 81-83 Becker's Statement to the HSCA: Becker testified before the HSCA and told them that his account was true. He described his background. He then described the 9/62 meeting with Roppolo and Marcello. Becker testified that Marcello appeared to be serious about having JFK killed in some way and that Marcello seemed to have thought through the plan of using a "nut." However, as of 9/62, Becker said that he did not believe that Marcello had the means or opportunity to carry out the threat. Becker affirmed what FBI files showed: he did not tell FBI agents about the threat in November of 1962. Becker testified that the only person he might have told about the threat would have been Julian Blodgett, a former FBI Agent and chief investigator at the LA DA's office, with whom he was working as an investigator. Becker testified that, after the assassination, he believed Marcello was responsible.
- 84 Marcello's Testimony Before the HSCA: Marcello testified under immunity before the HSCA. He said that he did not have a personal vendetta against RFK. Rather, he figured RFK had a job to do and that RFK did what he thought was right when he deported Marcello. Marcello further testified that Becker's statement to the HSCA was false and that he would not have held a business meeting at Churchill Farms, as he used it merely for hunting.
- 85-86 Conclusions: The report concludes that the FBI failed to adequately investigate Marcello's threat against JFK. The FBI should have tried to corroborate or deny the substance of Becker's story rather than discredit Becker personally. Moreover, FBI HQ did not give the New Orleans field office, responsible for investigating Marcello, information about the threat. Therefore, the field office could not fully investigate. SA Patrick Collins, who was responsible for investigating Marcello after SA Kennedy, first learned of the alleged threat in the press. In addition, the LA field office of the FBI should not have talked to author Reid in an attempt to have Reid omit the threat from his book. Finally, the report notes that the FBI's failure to investigate Becker's allegations in 1967 demonstrates that Hoover did not keep his promise to

follow up on every lead about the JFK assassination.