HOFFA STORY

By JACK NEWFIELD and MEL JUFFE

The former counsel of a House investigation into the murder of President John F. Kennedy yesterday called a mob lawyer's disclosures in The Post implicating Jimmy Hoffa and two Mafia chieftains in the assassination "the most plausible" explanation.

Lawyer Frank Ragano revealed exclusively in The Post yesterday that he carried an order to assassinate JFK from Teamsters boss Hoffa to New Orleans mob boss Carlo Marcello and Florida mob boss Santos Trafficante. Ragano served as a lawyer for both Hoffa and Trafficante.

"This is the most plausible, most coherent [assassination] theory," said G. Robert Blakey, who shaped the 1973 final report of the Select House Committees on Assassinations.

That report concluded that Trafficante, Marcello and Hoffa all had the "motive, means and opportunity" to kill Kennedy.

Ragano's testimony would have strengthened the conclusions we reached," said Blakey.

Ragano's revelations — while filling in the jigsaw puzzle of circumstantial evidence — still fall short of direct evidence, Blakey said.

Blakey, a former FBI agent, said that Ragano's account "is the most plausible [assassination] theory. It sounds reasonable to me.

Meanwhile, Frank Mankiewicz, who was Sen. Robert Kennedy's press secretary, also declared yesterday that Ragano's account "is the most plausible [assassination] theory. It sounds reasonable to me.

Mankiewicz said he became "an assassination buff" after he "looked into it on assignment from Robert Kennedy in 1967 and 1968."

Another of Robert Kennedy's top aides, Adam Walinsky, called for a new and improved version of the Warren Commission to investigate the murder.

Commenting on Ragano's revelations, Walinsky said, "I always thought that Marcello was the most likely suspect."

Mob expert Nick Plieger said Ragano's description of a Hoffa-ordered hit "smells more right to me than all those other theories."

G. ROBERT BLAKEY
Believes Ragano story.

FRANK MANKIEWICZ
'Most plausible theory.'

ADAM WALINSKY
Long suspected Marcello

LAST MOMENTS: The president and Mrs. Kennedy begin tragic ride through Dallas.

"You have men in organized crime who are more than capable of murder and who had the motive — tapping into the Teamsters' half-billion-dollar pension fund," said Plieger, co-author of the mob movie "Goodfellas."

"The Kennedys were driving the mob guys — as well as Hoffa — crazy. The mob figured if the Kennedys got rid of Hoffa, it would lose access to the pension fund."