

Sam Giancana was the boss of bosses in Chicago's mafia. Now his brother and nephew have written a book, 'Double Cross', detailing his violent life and death. **Stephen Leigh** spoke to his nephew and namesake, Sam Giancana.

Cross to bear

Left: Sam 'Mooney' Giancana



Sam Giancana, the author and wholly legitimate businessman, is talking about his Godfather, The godfather. One of the most powerful mafia dons ever. "He's tied to the history of the United States, he's affected world politics," he says matter-of-factly. Sam 'Mooney' Giancana was more than just a gangster and dapper thug. He was a billionaire visionary, secret statesman and CIA partner. In *Double Cross*, Sam 'Mooney' Giancana's life and legacy is placed at the very centre of every major event in American history since the '50s, except the conquest of space.

In its 350 pages unravels one grand conspiracy theory to end all conspiracy theories. Just for example, the Bay of Pigs was organised and financed by the mob. It was just one example of the CIA and Mafia's cosy partnership. The mobsters organised American covert operations abroad and in return were given a free hand to smuggle in hundreds of millions of dollars of drugs, the CIA received a ten per cent cut which went into a slush fund that the Mafia laundered for them in the Vatican bank. They were "both sides of the same coin", Sam Giancana liked to say.

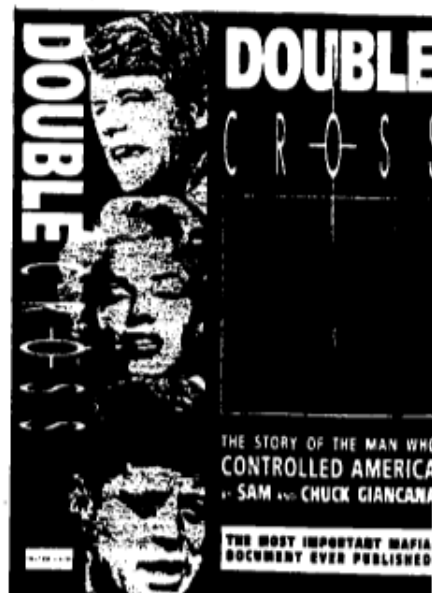
Every president since Franklin Delano Roosevelt was beholden to the Mafia, for votes bought and influence swung. "The Mafia (or Outfit) was "the dog" and the president "the tail", Mooney once said. Castro was opposed, the Shah of Iran supported. Las Vegas was created and owned by the Mafia, Hollywood had a little more freedom, but not much. Marilyn Monroe was murdered by mobsters, to frame her lover Bob Kennedy. And, his brother, Jack, was assassinated because he tried to double cross the Mafia. It is this double cross from which the book takes its name.

Joe Kennedy, the family patriarch, had, like Mooney Giancana, been born into poverty in Chicago, they joined rival street gangs that terrorised, robbed, and hijacked their way to notoriety. When prohibition was introduced, they were perfectly placed to start running illegal liquor, break legs and earn a tax-free fortune. By the time Joe Kennedy sold up his illegal stock to move amongst the circle of politicians and judges that he had, previously, met only to hand over envelopes stuffed full of cash, Mooney Giancana had already had the first of two contracts against the Irishman cancelled.

To call off the second, the price was a place by Jack and Bobby's side in the White House. Joe agreed and Jack, a young outsider, was promptly elected on Mafia money, votes, and influence. The second generation immigrant, who had lived on the streets from the age of 13 and served two stretches in prison, now believed he had the President's full compliance. Meddlesome FBI investigations would cease and business – already a billion, tax free, dollars a year concern – would boom. Instead, the Kennedy's used the power of the presidency to try to smash the Chicago Mafia and, therefore, wipe out their markers to the mob and unsavoury links to the underworld. There was the double cross. And, according to the authors, from that moment they were naked men. The murder of the President and his brother was an audacious, world shaking (CIA-supported) assassination, but, it was also just another gang-related slaying. In *Double Cross* for the first time, the Mafia's motive for the killings seems clear and simple. The author talks about it being "the missing link in history".

Unlike many of the plethora of Mafia books published every year, *Double Cross* eschews

the drudgery that comes with the burden of proof. The book is based on the life of its co-author Chuck Giancana, Mooney's younger brother and confidant. A man who desperately longed to be a member of the criminal inner circle but was always, deliberately, kept away from it by Mooney. The book is told through his eyes and ears, with many of the brothers' conversations recreated. It reads like a novel not a documentary. And only gets bogged down in the countless tellings of the continual murders. "We tried to fashion a story that would make people feel what it was like to be in that world, understand how someone like Mooney thinks," explains Sam Jnr.





"He certainly rolled the dice to get close to the Kennedys to be able to manipulate them"

Sam Giancana, co-author of 'Double Cross'

"Hollywood has done us a service and a disservice, Hollywood has helped bring certain images of the Mafia that are very accurate, that show the horror and violence. But, at the same time, they have created people who are larger than life, who have power and money. You get a distorted view. The fact is that that life was a horrible life. You had someone who owned you lock stock and barrel, women lost husbands, and lost sons."

The picture that *Double Cross* paints of Sam Giancana is of a ruthlessness, power junkie, a beaten child who deliberately hardened his heart as an adult, a rogue genius with a vacillating temper who could as easily put a bullet in a man's

head as the keys to a new car in his hand. A man with only one weakness, the Presidency of the United States. The seat of ultimate power.

"He certainly rolled the dice to get close to the Kennedys to be able to manipulate them," admits Sam Giancana, of his Godfather's achilles heel. "He felt because a politician would take a favour for someone, he owned them. Sam's perspective was that once he got that crack he could work them. Though all their life the *Outfit* had operated based on influence. That's what he saw in the Kennedys, it was an aphrodisiac, it had to be, that kind of power."

Mafia mania is back in a big way. The trial of John Gotti, alleged head of the largest of New York's five mob families, the Gambinos, for murder and all the attendant Mafia crimes has had New Yorkers glued to their TV sets. In an ironic twist to the life imitating Hollywood scenario, leading celebrities including Mickey Rourke and Anthony Quinn, dropped by at the court house to watch the proceedings. But John Gotti's trial has been written up as a decisive nail in the Cosa Nostra's coffin: a major figure on trial and one of his leading lieutenants whistling like a bird.

It would never have happened in Sam Giancana's day. Under his rule, through the '50s and '60s, when the Mafia power was still at its heady heights, the code of *Omerta* (silence) ruled, and a man would die before he turned against the mob. If only because a

stoolpigeon was always caught and killed. "Watching it [the Gotti trial] play out, I think the Mafia is in a state of decay. People are not willing to remain silent, people are willing to turn on their fellow mobster. And that frays everything." That Chuck, Mooney's own brother, should write this kill-and-tell account is proof enough. Even if the authors expressed "a little concern" about the consequences.

"A lot of the Mafia major ties have gone, Hollywood, the unions, Las Vegas. It's [the trial] another crack in the armour, they're now getting to the very highest." Agrees Sam Jnr, but he doubts that even such high level strikes will close down the mafia for good. "It's a business, when the CEO leaves the President takes over, it has a chain of command."

It is not surprising that the authors of this book, Sam Jnr, and his father Chuck Giancana, Mooney's surviving brother and constant confidant, are cynical men. It's not surprising that they think both Ronald Reagan and George Bush knew all about Irangate. "The United States Government continues to use methods that are unethical and immoral in order to promote their agenda. The Government may, or may not, be involved with the Mob, the Government may now use a third nation, may now use a bank, another leader, but they are not acting properly and we are all victims."

Double Cross by Sam and Chuck Giancana is published by Macdonald.