

# Omerta dead as Mafia goes from...

## Feds: We'll quit grabbing press' notes

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON – The Justice Department said Saturday that it no longer will secretly obtain reporters' records during leak investigations, a policy shift that abandons a practice decried by news organizations and press freedom groups.

The reversal follows a pledge last month by President Biden, who had said it was "simply, simply wrong" to seize journalists' records and that he would not permit the Justice Department to continue the practice. Though Biden's comments in an interview were not immediately accompanied by any change in policy, a pair of statements from the White House and Justice Department on Saturday signaled an official turn-about from an investigative tactic that has persisted for years.

Democratic and Republican administrations alike have used subpoenas and court orders to obtain journalists' records in an effort to identify sources who have revealed classified information. But the practice had received renewed scrutiny over the past month as Justice Department officials had alerted reporters at three news organizations – The Washington Post, CNN and The New York Times – that their phone records had been obtained in the final year of the Trump administration.

The latest revelation came Friday night when the Times reported the existence of a gag order that had barred the newspaper from revealing a secret court fight over efforts to obtain the email records of four reporters. That tussle had begun during the Trump administration but had persisted under the Biden Justice Department, which ultimately moved to withdraw the gag order.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki said Saturday that no one at the White House was aware of the gag order until Friday night, but that more broadly, "the issuing of subpoenas for the records of reporters in leak investigations is not consistent with the president's policy direction to the department."

In a separate statement, Justice Department spokesman Anthony Coley said that "in a change to its longstanding practice," the department "will not seek compulsory legal process in leak investigations to obtain source information from members of the news media doing their jobs."

In ruling out "compulsory legal process" for reporters in leak investigations, the department also appeared to say that it would not force journalists to reveal in court the identity of their sources.

The statement did not say whether the Justice Department would still conduct aggressive leak investigations without obtaining reporters' records.

# Godfather to Podfather

Former mobsters spill secrets and tell stories in podcasts and YouTube videos, including ex-Gambino boss Sammy "The Bull" Gravano – seen at home (l.) and testifying before Senate committee in 1993 (r.) – and John Alite (below).



BY LARRY MCSHANE  
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

Legendary FBI mob infiltrator Joe Pistone remembers when the Mafia's oath of omerta actually meant something to its members.

Those days of mob fealty are gone, with the Mafia's once inviolable vow of silence washed away by the lure of social media. Check Twitter, and YouTube, and assorted podcasts for the latest thoughts from major league ex-gangsters like the Colombo family's one-time "Yuppie Don," Michael Franzese, and murderous former Gambino family underboss Sammy "The Bull" Gravano.

They're hardly alone.

John Alite, the former best friend-turned-government witness against Gambino family scion John A. "Junior" Gotti, co-hosts another successful podcast, and ex-Luchese soldier John Pennisi is among the newest arrivals in the expanding market.

"There is no secret society anymore," said Pistone, whose undercover work spawned the hit movie "Donnie Brasco" – with Johnny Depp portraying the ex-agent. "The old-timers are probably rolling over in the graves."

Not that the mob-loving masses

care. Aficionados of "Goodfellas" and "The Godfather" are eating up the tales of the Mafia's glory days, the unheard escapades – and the occasional tale of a mob hit.

Franzese boasts a staggering 554,000 subscribers to his YouTube channel, which features a weekly "Mob Movie Monday" to review Mafia flicks of the past.

And Gravano, who now operates a podcast, attracted more than 10 million views when he broke a long silence with a two-hour YouTube video in October 2019.

Pennisi, inducted into the Luchese family in 2013, is among the spate of ex-gangsters in their new enterprises. He started with a blog after departing organized crime for the embrace of federal prosecutors, disgusted by the muddled state of La Cosa Nostra in the 21st century.

"People use that word, 'omerta,'" says Pennisi, who testified at three mob trials and teams with partner Tom LeVecchia on their show "The MBA and the Button Man."

"How about the other rules?" Pennisi continued. "There's no loyalty, no honor, no respect. It was replaced by greed and selfishness. Once the rules are taken away, what is there? One thing describes Cosa Nostra: Do as I say, not as I



do."

Gravano recently provided a detailed account of a planned hit on Joey Gallo back when the Bull was still with the Colombo family. The situation made the shooting impossible, but the details decades later are as riveting as anything Mario Puzo ever imagined – right down to Sammy's description of the mole on Crazy Joey's face.

"I knew it was him," declares Gravano, his thick Brooklyn accent intact after years of living in Arizona. "He got out of the car, and I saw him ... and this woman came out, with a white mink coat.

She was drop-dead gorgeous ... And I thought about it. I was gonna kill this guy right in front of this woman."

The 14-minute YouTube clip drew nearly 200,000 views. Another YouTube story, with Gravano explaining the rationale behind the infamous December 1985 execution of family boss Paul Castellano outside a Midtown steakhouse, clocked in with hundreds of thousands of mob fans tuning in.

The loose lips can carry repercussions, just as they once did in the mob's heyday. Mafia turncoat John Rubeo overspread on Alite's show about his illegal behavior while a government witness, with a Manhattan federal judge excoriating the one-time Genovese associate before sparing him additional jail time.

Pistone admits missing the old days of a more taciturn New York mafiosi: "I respect John Gotti, Sonny Franzese, the guys who were gangsters, who joined the life and believed in it. They went to jail and never said a word."

But count Pistone among those in the podcasting business. His show "Deep Cover: The Real Donnie Brasco" is now in Season 2, and one of his recent guests was Michael Franzese.