



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on April 10, 2014

Al Sharpton Adroitly Sidesteps Charges He Was an FBI Informant

“Reverend” Al Sharpton’s (shown) denials have just enough ring of truth about them that the media are accepting them at face value. On Monday *The Smoking Gun*’s three investigative reporters published their nearly [30-page exposé](#), “Al Sharpton’s Secret Work as FBI Informant,” based on documents they obtained from the FBI under the Freedom of Information Act. On Tuesday the media began publishing Sharpton’s denials.



USA Today’s lead read: “The Rev. Al Sharpton is denying claims made by *The Smoking Gun* website that he worked as an FBI mob informant in the 1980s,” while the *New York Daily News* reported a modified version of Sharpton’s denial, reporting that Sharpton only went to the FBI after his life had been threatened by mobsters.

So he either was a snitch, or he wasn’t.

Sharpton’s supposedly non-existent relationship with the FBI and mobsters began in the 1980s when he worked with the FBI in their investigation into boxing promoter Don King. The Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations played a series of audio and videotapes showing Sharpton meeting with an FBI undercover agent and a mobster in which various ways were discussed on how to access King’s connections with the boxing underworld.

In 1983, during the FBI’s attempts to stem illegal drugs pouring into black communities and the rap music business, the agency secretly recorded Sharpton’s conversations with a Latin American drug lord offering to sell him massive quantities of cocaine. It turned out that the “drug lord” was also an FBI undercover agent. When Bryant Gumbel ran a three-minute segment of that tape on HBO’s *Real Sports with Bryant Gumbel* in 2002, Sharpton pulled a Sharpton, calling it part of a smear campaign using “dirty tricks” intended to derail his 2004 presidential campaign.

Sharpton practiced his misdirection skills at the time, noting not only that the segment failed to tell the whole story but that there was another tape — undisclosed by Bryant — that showed him denying complicity. He then compounded the misdirection by launching a lawsuit against Gumbel, HBO, and its parent company AOL Time Warner, for \$1 billion.

So close were Sharpton’s ties with the FBI that the agency dubbed him CI-7 — Confidential Informant number 7 — which Sharpton also adroitly sidestepped, widely reported by the compliant media: “I don’t know if I’m C-7 or B-19. I don’t know none of that. I know I was threatened. I did what anybody would do ... other than a thug ... I cooperated.”

Sharpton’s skill at deflection was applauded and confirmed by New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio, who came to Sharpton’s defense: “[The report from *The Smoking Gun*] doesn’t change the relationship one bit. I’m very proud to be his friend. What’s obvious from what he said this morning is that he was asked



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by the FBI to support their efforts, and he agreed to help. And that's what a citizen should do."

Sharpton's adroit sidestepping and misdirection infuriated William Bastone, one the *Gun's* reporters, who wrote on Wednesday,

In a desperate effort to explain away his work as a paid government informant, the Rev. Al Sharpton yesterday claimed that he first ran into the FBI's arms after his life was threatened by gangsters, an incident that prompted him to then record 10 face-to-face encounters with one of those dangerous hoodlums. That story is a lie....

Sharpton's story, built on a narrative conflation, is preposterous. He wants viewers and journalists to believe that the FBI, upon being told about [a death threat on Sharpton's life] sent the reverend out wired to record a [gang member].

Ten times.

Each time that Sharpton has run into trouble he has been able to escape unscathed, with the help of the media. When Bernhard Goetz shot four blacks who were trying to rob him on a subway in 1984, Sharpton was there in full force, leading marches protesting that Goetz was a racist and demanding a federal civil rights investigation. When that investigation confirmed that the shooting was an attempted robbery and had nothing to do with race, the media fell silent.

When Sharpton accused District Attorney Steven Pagonis (among others) of rape and racism in the 1987 Tawana Brawley case, Sharpton and two other accusers were ordered to pay Pagonis \$345,000 in damages after a jury found Sharpton liable for making seven defamatory statements about him. Even then, Sharpton avoided paying restitution, refusing to pay and allowing instead a number of black business leaders to pay it for him.

Sharpton has had less success in deflecting the IRS, although he has certainly tried. In 2008 the *Associated Press* reported that Sharpton and some of his businesses owed nearly \$1.5 million in unpaid taxes: \$931,000 to the IRS and \$366,000 to New York City. His company, Rev. Al Communications, owed \$176,000 to the state as well.

That same year, the IRS began investigating another of Sharpton's groups, his National Action Network, for failing to file required reports on its finances.

In 2010, the IRS filed a federal tax lien against Sharpton for another \$538,000 owed from the prior year.

In summarizing its own 14-page report on Sharpton's history, DiscoverTheNetworks.org revealed how Sharpton's sidestepping and misdirection and deflection and "conflation of the narrative" have not deterred him from becoming a virtual media icon. Sharpton:

- Founded of the National Action Network;
- Helped incite anti-Jewish riots in Crown Heights, New York, in 1991;
- Was convicted of libel for his role in the racially charged Tawana Brawley hoax;
- Incited black anti-Semites against a Jewish business establishment in Harlem in 1995;
- Ran as a Democratic Party presidential candidate in 2004.

Today he hosts MSNBC's nightly talk show *PoliticsNation* and makes regular appearances on *The O'Reilly Factor* and CNN.



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In one revealing moment of clarity, following a puff piece on Sharpton by *60 Minutes*, Lesley Stahl interviewed investigative journalist Wayne Barrett (who has been investigating Sharpton for more than 30 years):

Barrett: Sharpton is in the civil rights business. I don't think he's a civil rights leader. Would anybody else be able to transcend [his tawdry history] and be this larger than life figure?

Stahl: *He* has!

Barrett: Only because we let him.

Photo of Al Sharpton: AP Images

A graduate of Cornell University and a former investment advisor, Bob is a regular contributor to The New American magazine and blogs frequently at www.LightFromTheRight.com, primarily on economics and politics.



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