

Hoffa murder theory an author’s prime plot

By Harriet Howard Heithaus
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People never tire of reading about icons, an agent once told author Lew Paper. Paper’s latest book took that adage one better: People never tire of reading about colorful icons.

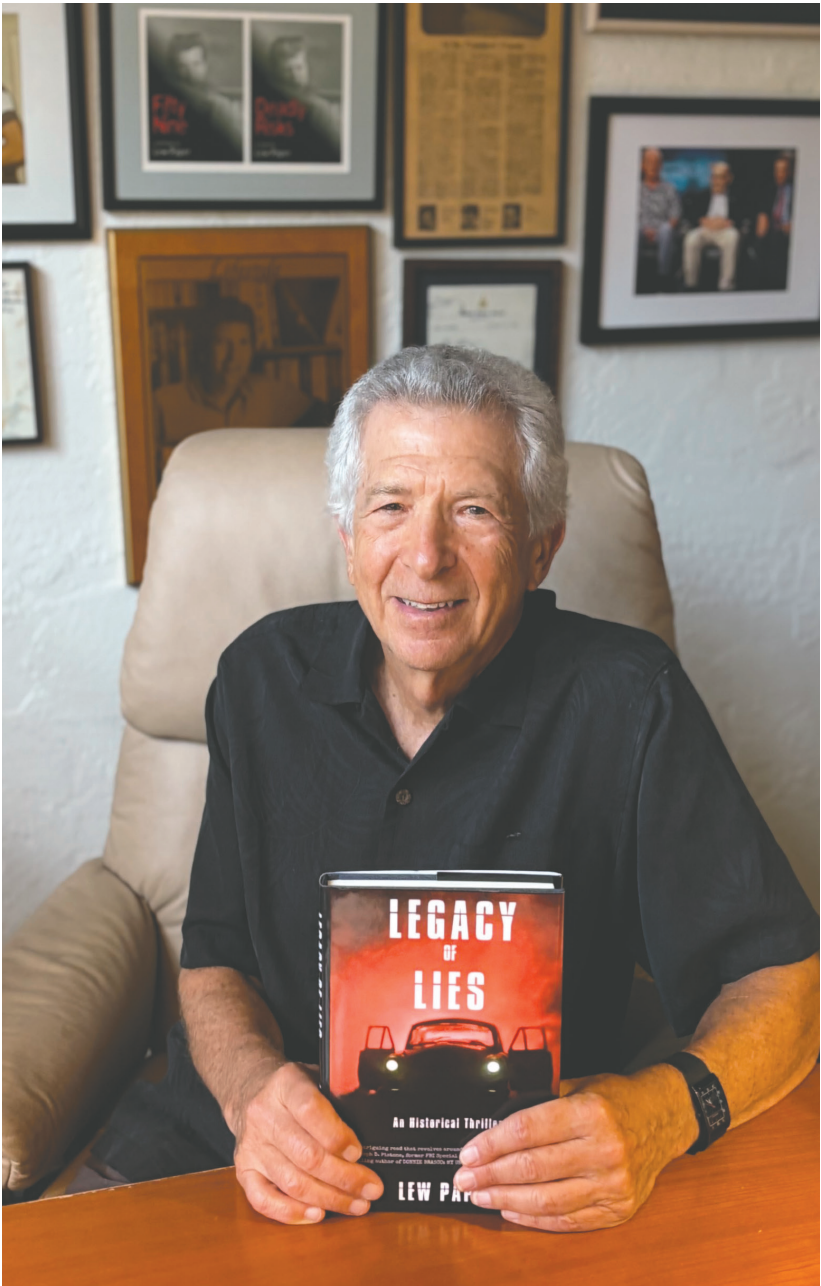
Legacy of Lies: An Historical Thriller (2025; Level Best Press) is the page-turning result of that wisdom, a fictional theory of who actually may have killed Teamsters kingpin Jimmy Hoffa.

The Naples resident, a former adjunct professor at Georgetown University Law School and teaching fellow in government at Harvard College, has written five historical books since his 1975 master’s thesis on President Kennedy that inspired his first, *The Promise and the Performance: The Leadership of John F. Kennedy*. The Hoffa story, however, wanted color and life to equal its outspoken, unvarnished subject, who walked out of a suburban Detroit restaurant 50 years ago and vanished.

Legacy of Lies delivered it through the premise of a retired FBI agent tailing him for a shadowy client and possibly seeing too much. The story picks up with that agent’s adult son, unable to shake the suspicion his father had not simply died in a sailing accident shortly after Hoffa’s disappearance. He follows a trail to find the truth that puts both himself and his loved ones in the crosshairs of the murderers.

Tailing a magnetic character

It’s a nimble narrative, punctuated with italicized accounts of the roiling political climate of the time. Paper will talk about his book, his research and the writing life for the Friends of the Library lecture Nov. 6 at the Norris Center, and his most recent subject is one that still intrigues him.



Lew Paper with his latest book, *Legacy of Lies: An Historical Thriller*. Photo courtesy **Lew Paper**

“I’ve always been fascinated by Jimmy Hoffa’s disappearance. And I mean always, for a very long time. So it wasn’t like I just came upon it,” he said in a recent interview.

“Part of the reason is Hoffa himself is such a colorful figure,” he continued. “He was built like a boxer. He was like five feet, five inches tall, 175 pounds. And he was combative, feisty. He was not a shy guy. And so he had, like I said, a very colorful personality. But more than that, the

forces surrounding Hoffa’s disappearance make it really fascinating.

“Bobby Kennedy ... hated Hoffa because of Hoffa’s relationship with the Mafia. And so when Kennedy was chief counsel, as I explained in the book, when he was chief counsel of the Senate committee that investigated criminal activity in labor unions, no union received more attention than the Teamsters.”

He added, “And these two guys just quarreled about everything.

They even argued about who could do more pushups.”

Kennedy took his vendetta to a book, *The Enemy Within*, detailing corruption in the Teamsters Union and its Mafia ties. And when he became Attorney General, he found charges on which to jail the Teamsters icon. Nixon’s later commuting of Hoffa’s sentence would unleash the power struggle that Paper believes led to Hoffa’s death.

“I couldn’t write a non-fiction book about Hoffa’s disappearance because, to be honest, I don’t know precisely what happened to him,” he said, adding wryly, “There are only so many quotes you can get from people who aren’t alive anymore.”

Doing TV with Don Larsen

So he turned to historical fiction. It is not Paper’s first in the genre. History has been more of a magnet to Paper; he has written historical biographies of major figures such as the former Supreme Court justice Louis Brandeis (*Brandeis: An Intimate Biography*) and CBS chairman William Paley (*Empire: William S. Paley and the Making of CBS*). The industry mogul was a name he knew well: Paper was the assistant general counsel for agenda review and policy at the Federal Communications Commission from 1978 to 1981.

He’s even written about New York Yankees pitcher Don Larsen (*Perfect: Don Larsen’s Miraculous World Series Game and the Men Who Made It Happen*). That book won him praise from one of the nation’s foremost history writers, Doris Kearns Goodwin, and *The Washington Post*, which called it “one of the best books of 2009.” Perhaps best of all, it won him a TV appearance with Larsen and fellow Yankee Yogi Berra.

However, in 2008, he released his first historical fiction work, *Deadly Risks*, bringing the FBI into the

assassination of President Kennedy.

Legacy of Lies, his sophomore effort in that genre, has been elected a finalist for Best Thriller by the National Indie Excellence Awards, with some high praise: “Your work exemplifies the passion, creativity and excellence this award was established to recognize. In a highly competitive field, your book truly stood out, earning the admiration of our expert panel of judges.”

Doing research for *Legacy of Lies* was so much easier than for his early books, Paper said, thanks to the copious data available on the internet. When he wrote *The Promise and the Performance: The Leadership of John F. Kennedy*, Paper said he had to personally visit the Kennedy library, the Library of Congress and other relevant data centers to add detail to his book. Now, he said, everything is online.

However, that also means every fact must be checked.

“To show you how detailed the research was, in the beginning of the book, in the very first chapter, the very first page, it talks about the weather, about it’s a hot, humid day ... you’d be soaking through your clothes,” he said. Paper had consulted the historical data page of NOAA to ask what the weather was like in Detroit on July 30, 1975.

“I didn’t make that up.” **📖**

Meeting the author

What: Friends of the Library Author Spotlight Series featuring Lew Paper, author of *Legacy of Lies: An Historical Thriller*

When: 2 p.m. Nov. 6; book signing follows

Where: Norris Community Center, 755 Eighth Ave. S., Naples

Tickets: \$65 nonmember, \$55 member; buy online at collier-friends.org under Events/Author Spotlight Series

More: lewpaper.com

BEHIND THE ARTIST

Where art and craft worlds meet

By J.C. Amodea

Swirls of color meld together to form a new creation using a unique art form and technique.

“Fluid art” is thought to have been originated by Mexican muralist David Alfaro Siqueiros in the 1930s. He called it “accidental painting,” and it has intentionally attracted aficionados ever since.

Jump years ahead, and we find artist Maya Ratcliff, who, at the start of her art career, “worked with individuals with brain injuries, using art as a therapeutic tool to unlock their creative potential.” In 2021, using acrylic paints and a special pouring medium that helps the paint flow smoothly and create the characteristic fluid patterns, she developed a proprietary method of fluid art.

She found the art form easy — anyone, even an untrained artist from age 3 to 100, can create it — and it became so popular that she opened her first studio in Waikoloa, Hawaii. Eventually, interest exploded, and she went on to open 43 franchise locations throughout the United States, including three in Florida. On Nov. 8, 2024, Melissa Kennedy opened the Naples studio.

According to Kennedy, “Hawaii Fluid Art integrates the Hawaiian concept of the ‘Aloha Spirit,’ which embodies love, respect and connection into its fluid art studios, creating a joyful and welcoming environment where everyone, regardless of artistic skill, can participate in art-making.”

Vicky Lewis is the Naples studio manager and sole teacher. Originally from Athens, Greece, she relocated to Naples from Indianapolis, Indiana, in 1996. A life-long artist, she holds a bachelor’s degree in fine arts and has painted for several private art shows over the years.

“I have used my artistic creativity throughout my career in staging real estate and in re-



Vicky Lewis of Hawaii Fluid Art in Naples working on a fluid art canvas piece.
Photos courtesy **Liani Belcher, The Coastal Hive**

modeling homes,” she said. “I love all types of art, design and creativity.”

Since joining Hawaii Fluid Art, Lewis has infused her artistic repertoire with the joy and freedom of fluid art.

“Our goal is to let go, be free and have fun,” she added, hoping to inspire others to embrace the distinctive art form.

She joined us for a chat.

The Naples Press: Describe fluid art and the technique used.

Vicky Lewis: Fluid art uses acrylic paints mixed with a “secret sauce.” A base of either white or black is used on the canvas, depending on the desired look, then several pre-chosen colors are layered into a cup and poured onto the base. The canvas is then moved around with the paint to create a design. It is more re-



Vicky Lewis teaches fluid art at classes at Hawaii Fluid Art in Naples and is pictured in front of a custom mural painted by Dillon Gunn, a local artist.

warding to let your intuition rule, surrender to the process and be surprised by the results versus trying to over-manipulate the process.

TNP: Are the materials safe?

VL: We primarily use acrylic paints and a fluid mixture, along with gloves. My students have never experienced any issues. I caution students that if they are sensitive or have allergies to check with me about the ingredients before starting their project.

TNP: What types of pieces can participants make?

VL: We offer quite a selection of fluid-pouring paint on various-sized canvases, charcuterie boards, plastic bears and bunnies. We also offer resin tumblers, resin beach scenes, hat patches and glass painting.

TNP: How many people are there per class, and do you cater to larger groups?

VL: I teach anywhere from one person to 20 for one activity at a time; ideally, I prefer from one to 10 people. We host birthday parties and have organized several corporate events, as well as private gatherings for social groups.

TNP: Do you have any advice for aspiring artists?

VL: Everyone is creative and artistic; tap into your personal expression and follow your intuition, do not overthink — and above all, have fun. **🎨**

Hawaii Fluid Art

Class hours: 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday; 11 a.m.-6 p.m. Friday; 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Saturday; classes offered throughout the day, call, email or book on website (classes one to two hours depending on the activity and number of participants)

Where: 2343 Vanderbilt Beach Road, Suite 622, Naples (at Shoppes at Vanderbilt)

Costs: Costs vary by size. \$35, \$65, \$85, \$115 for canvases; \$200-\$650 for very large canvases; \$90 or \$115 charcuterie boards; \$55 animal pours; \$90 or \$115 beach scenes; \$25 hat patches (two); \$65 glass painting

To purchase: Pieces on display in the gallery are available for purchase

Contact: hawaiifluidart.com, 239.776.0037 or naples@hawaiifluidart.com