

Circulation 929,222
Customer Service 406-1818
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High tide - 6:34 a.m., 6:48 p.m.
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Vol. 234; No. 81

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 20, 1988

*35 cents at newsstands beyond 30 miles from Boston 100 Pages • 25 cents

THE BULGER MYSTIQUE

Five years ago, on a cloudy April morning, federal agents barreled into a cinderblock warehouse in South Boston the minute the huge garage doors blinked open like two heavy eyelids.
Daylight revealed the booty hauled from the piers a mile away: 10 tons of marijuana. Valued at \$6 million, bale upon bale was jammed into trucks gassed up and ready to go.
Not a bad haul, along with the six men nabbed inside.
But agents savoring the bust were brought up short when they learned a potential bonus prize had apparently gotten away. By 10 minutes, informants later disclosed, the agents had missed James

A GLOBE
SPOTLIGHT
REPORT

Third in a
four-part series

(Whitey) Bulger. The agents went back to look for fingerprints, but no such luck.
So where was Whitey?
The question has become the lament of law enforcement. The man designated a killer and crime boss by the 1986 President's Commission on Organized Crime has risen steadily in the past decade to the top of the underworld with nary a scratch.
Since 1980, local police, state troopers and federal drug agents have hunkered down behind windows, squeezed into entryways, and wormed around car interiors - all in an effort to tail Bulger or conceal a tiny microphone in Bulger's car, his home or in the public telephones he frequently uses.
They have assembled the evidence to win court permission to monitor Bulger, but then have been repeatedly outmaneuvered before they could make the pinch. The bug goes in and suddenly Bulger stops talking.
The near-misses of Whitey Bulger have been law enforcement's most conspicuous failure in a decade of unprecedented accomplishment that saw the downfall of Howie Winter, overlord of the Winter Hill Gang, and, bigger still, of Gennaro Angilulo, the longtime Mafia underboss of Boston.
It is an elusiveness that Bulger, who served his only stretch of hard time three decades ago, has sustained throughout his life. "People all knew him, but nobody knows him," observed one longtime acquaintance. At 59, he is one of Boston's all-time mystery men and the aura of mystery fosters contradictory tales - about his ruthlessness but also about his soft spot for the South Boston that has always been his base. The result is a paradoxical portrait of a reputed killer: the legend of Whitey as a not-so-bad bad guy.
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