

## THE HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN MAFIA

OMERTA?

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Throughout history, crime has existed in many different forms and has been committed by not only individuals, but by groups as well. Crime is something that knows no boundaries; it exists in all cultures, is committed by all races, and has existed in all time periods. Crime exists as a part of the economic institution and is a lifestyle for many people. Crime also exists in both organized and unorganized forms. Since the early 1900's, "organized" crime has existed in the United States. The following will show where, when, and why the Mafia came to the United States, who organized it in the United States, and how it differed from its origins in the European mafia. By showing this you will see how this specific type of organized crime has

In the ninth century, Arab forces occupied Sicily. The native Sicilians were oppressed and took refuge in the surrounding hills. The Sicilians formed a secret society to unite the natives against the Arab and Norman invaders. This secret society was called Mafia after the Arabic word for refuge. The society's intentions were to create a sense of family based on ancestry and Sicilian heritage. In the 1700's, pictures of a black hand were distributed to the wealthy. This was an unspoken request for an amount of money in return for protection. If the money was not paid, the recipients could expect violence such as kidnappings, bombings, and murder. By the nineteenth century, this society grew larger and more criminally oriented. In 1876, Mafia Don Rafael Palizzolo, ran for political office in Sicily. He forced the voters to vote for him under gunpoint. After being elected into office, he promoted Mafia Don Crispi as Prime Minister. Together the two put Sicily under government control and funneled government funds to the society known as the Mafia.

In the 1800's, New Orleans was the largest Mafia site in the United States. It was while investigating the murder of an Italian immigrant that the current Police Chief, David Hennessey discovered the existence of this secret society. Police Chief Hennessey was assassinated before this murder case could go to trial. Twelve men were charged with this assassination but were lynched by a newly formed vigilante group. The Italian Ambassador demanded that the vigilantes be tried. President Harrison who disproved of the vigilantes and gave a large cash settlement to the families of the lynched men. This was a widely publicized case because of its' foreign ramifications and the involvement of the President of the United States. Don Vito, Vito Cascio Ferro, was the first Sicilian Capo de Tutti Capi. He fled to the United States in 1901 to escape arrest and formed a group of the Black Hand. Its' members were hardened criminals currently fugitives from Sicily. He is known as the Father of the American Mafia. In 1924, Mussolini was determined to rid Italy of the Mafia so many members fled to the United States to avoid persecution . This increased the numbers of members in the organization.

These fleeing Italians were well aware there was money to be made in the United States through extortion, prostitution, gambling and bootlegging. Every large city soon had its own Mafia chapter. Prohibition which was a legal ban on the manufacturer and sale of intoxicating drinks generated a wave of illegal activity since there was big money to be made. During this time, gangsters openly flaunted their wealth and power. This period established many young men as leaders in the New Age American Mafia.

Charles Luciano, born in 1897 in Sicily, came to New York in 1906. He trained in the Five Points Gang, a Mafia crew, under John Torrio. In this gang, he became friends with Al Capone and other prominent gangsters. Luciano started his own prostitution racket in the early 1920's and was in total control of prostitution in Manhattan by 1925. In 1929 he was kidnapped, beaten and stabbed severally with an

icepick. He miraculously survived but maintained "omerta", which is a vow never to reveal any Mafia secrets or members under penalty of death or torture. By 1935, Luciano was known as The Boss of Bosses. He had previously established Murder Inc. with Bugsy Siegel and Myer Lansky, two other well known gangsters. Luciano's wide spread criminal activities led to his being investigated by District Attorney Thomas E. Dewey. He was eventually sentenced to thirty to fifty years for extortion and prostitution. Luciano was considered to be a powerful Mafia member with strong ties to Sicily. After his conviction, the United States government approached him with a deal. In exchange for his assistance in the Allied invasion of Sicily, he was offered deportation to Rome. Luciano contacted his Mafia associates in Italy and the deal was made. Luciano died of a heart attack in 1962 while meeting an American movie producer to do his life story.

Myer Lansky was never an initiated member of the Mafia since he was not Italian. Lansky became a close associate of Luciano after his rise to power and influence among the Jewish gangsters, known as Myer's mob. His speciality was gambling. He formed Murder Inc. which was a group of specialized contract killers which was hired out to other mobs. Lansky was instrumental in working out the deal with the government for Luciano in the Allied invasion. While Luciano was in jail and later deported to Italy, he entrusted the running of the crime syndicate to Lansky. By the 1960's, Lansky's gambling operations extended half way around the globe with departments all over South America and as far as Hong Kong. In 1970, the federal government was planning to charge Lansky with tax evasion, so he fled to Israel. In Tel Aviv, the Israeli government under pressure by the U.S. revoked his visa and Lansky was forced to stand trial. He avoided conviction because of his high level government contacts and retired to Miami, Florida and died in 1983. At the time of his death, his estate was valued at 4 million dollars.

The third member of Murder Inc. was Benjamin (Bugsy) Siegel. He was born in Brooklyn, NY in 1906. While still a teenager, he met Myer Lansky and went on to form the Bug and Myer Mob which specialized in gambling and car theft. In the 1930's, this mob joined with Luciano and formed Murder Inc. Siegel eventually killed Joe. "The Boss", Masseria which ended the present mob wars at that time. Siegel continued to carry out murders for Luciano and by 1937 there was a large number of contracts out of Siegel's life since he had angered so many of the bosses. To protect him, Lansky and Luciano persuaded him to move out to California. In California, Siegel he was the main man in the Luciano and Lansky gang and extorted money from movie studio owners. He continued to do murders for Luciano. Siegel "borrowed" five million dollars of syndicate money to build the first super casino/hotel in Las Vegas. The Flamingo hotel turned out to be a fiasco and lost money. Luciano demanded repayment of the funds and Siegel refused, thinking he was as powerful as Luciano. Luciano ordered his death. Although Siegel was warned by Lansky of this plan, he continued to refuse to repay the money. On June 20, 1947 he was killed.

Dutch Schultz, was another major player in organized crime He opened a saloon in the Bronx, New York during prohibition and organized a group of thugs to expand his bootlegging operations. His empire soon grew to large proportions with many illegal establishments in the Bronx and Manhattan. During his trial for tax evasion, many of his rackets were taken over by Luciano, who expected Schultz to be convicted. Although this prompted him to move his operation to New Jersey, Schultz was still considered so influential Luciano asked him to be a member of the Board of Directors of the crime syndicate. The District Attorney of New York, Thomas E. Dewey was not finished with Schultz though and continued investigating his activities. Schultz decided it was in his best interest to eliminate Dewey but the crime syndicate disagreed. They feared the killing of a District Attorney would only add to their problems but Schultz would not drop his plan. On the evening of October 23, 1935, while Schultz was informing his New Jersey associates of his plan, a Murder Inc. hit man assassinated all of them, Schultz included. He died later that evening in a Newark City hospital.

Alphonse "Scarface" Capone was another organizer of the early American Mafia. He was born in Brooklyn, New York in 1899. His involvement with organized crime began

when he was eleven years old. As he got older, he graduated to the more powerful "Five Pointers Gang" where he became acquainted with Luciano. When Johnny Torrio, the original leader of the "Five Pointers Gang" moved to Chicago, he invited Capone to be his sidekick. Torrio's uncle, "Big Jim" Colisimo was the crime boss in Chicago. Trouble between uncle and nephew started and Capone was hired to kill the uncle leaving Torrio in charge of all Chicago. In 1925 when Torrio was severally wounded in a shoot out, he gave Capone his vast business empire, valued at fifty million dollars a year. During this time, Capone fell out of favor with other Mafia gangsters and several attempts were made on his life. Capone took revenge by staging the infamous St. Valentine's Day massacre in which he killed several of his enemies ending resistance to his continuing business dealings. He was finally sentenced for tax evasion and spent most of his eleven-year sentence in Alcatraz. In 1939 he was released from prison because he was in the advanced stages of syphilis. He died of this disease in 1947.

At the turn of the century, the American Mafia was different from the Sicilian Mafia in a number of ways. The European Mafia was founded on a sense of loyalty and respect for culture, family and the Sicilian heritage. The Mafia was to protect its' members interests and grant them freedom in business in exchange for absolute loyalty and submission to the "family". The Sicilian Mafia was based on the belief that justice, honor and vengeance are for a man to take care of, not for a government to take care of. The Sicilian Mafia valued the code of "omerta" , the code of honor and silence and strictly adhered to the ruling that this was a secret society, open only to those who shared Sicilian blood. In contrast to the noble Sicilian Mafia, the American Mafia has proved to be a conniving, cold hearted organization. The American Mafia consists of a large group of glorified thieves, pickpockets and murderers. Although it began with the adoption of much of the Sicilian heritage it has evolved into an organization that's sole purpose is to make money using any illegal means possible. The members of the American Mafia use extortion, bootlegging, prostitution, gambling, kidnapping, and murder to achieve their ends.

The above research has shown that the Mafia has become a wide spread problem. The Mafia has continued to grow and infest our society from the early 1900's. It continues to exploit and destroy the honest citizens of our country. Now, these criminal organizations not only control the adults of our communities but also have begun, through the sale and distribution of narcotics, to control our children. Crime organizations must be stopped however this is a difficult task. They have infiltrated members of our government and law enforcement agencies with the lure of money. Unfortunately, crime does pay in many instances. It is up to each of us to not look the other way, but be aware that there are really no victimless crimes. One way or another, we all pay either by higher taxes or by a more violent society.