

# American mafia



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

According to Wikipedia the free encyclopedia, The American Mafia especially Five Families has its origins in Italian Cosa Nostra. The American Cosa Nostra underwent many changes at the hands of Black Hand gangs around 1900s, Five Points Gang during 1910s and 1920s in New York City and Al Capone's Syndicate in 1920s in Chicago. Two factions of organized crime emerged by the end of 1920s leading to Castellamarese war for gaining control over organized crime in New York City. Murder of Joseph Masseria, leader of one of the factions ended the war uniting the two factions.

First leader of the American Mafia Salvatore Maranzano established a code of conduct, "family" divisions and structure. He also established certain procedures to resolve disputes but was murdered within six months. Charles "Lucky" Luciano took over the reins and set up a "Commission" consisting of bosses from six or seven families for managing their activities. According to Binder, Jim Colosimo or "Big Jim" was considered the most powerful gangster and led a multi-ethnic group, with Italian, Jewish, Irish, Greek and other members. In May 1920 he was probably shot dead by "Frankie Yale under contract John Torrio.

"John Torrio took over and united major local gangs dividing the liquor business in Chicago city to a stable state and profitability. The other major gangs during this period in Chicago were North Siders led by Dion O'Banion, the Guilfoyle gang, the Gennas in Little Italy, the West Side O'Donnells, the Druggan-Lake gang, the Saltis-McErlane gang and the Sheldon gang. Torrio under the guidance of Capone took over brothels in Cicero and managed the largest area covering the South Side and major suburbs occupying the south and west of the city.

Problems started when a gang tried to increase its profits by not following the agreement strictly and entered neighboring gang's territory. Friction between Gennas and the O'Banion gang led to the murder of O'Banion in November 1924 starting off prohibition gang wars. The Sheldon gang, the Gennas, the Druggan and Lake, the Guilfoyle and later the Circus Gang were all allies of Torrio-Capone. Chicago Heights joined Capone in 1926 and controlled Joliet and major areas east of Indiana and south of Chicago. Torrio was succeeded by Al Capone in 1925.

Gennas under Hymie Weiss surrendered after their leadership was attacked by North Siders and the Gennas rackets such as Unione Siciliana were taken over by Al Capone appointing Tony Lombardo as Unione president. The West Side O'Donnells joined ranks with Capone in 1926 after a short lived gang war. Similarly Sheldon gang too joined Capone after Danny Stanton left the town. Gang wars continued for several years and North Siders lost Hymie Weiss in October 1926, nothing remarkable was noticed until the St. Valentine's Day Massacre in 1929.

Now let us consider organized black gangs during this period run by Italian, Jewish and Irish gangsters operating from Harlem, New York and a few loosely run black gangs concentrated primarily on policy and lottery gambling, prostitution and drugs. Bell stated that over 200, 000 blacks returned after World War I to Harlem expecting better pay, better housing and equality. But they realized very soon that whites had not changed and found some of the worst low paying menial jobs such as that of janitors, bootblacks, cooks, houseboys and baggage handlers.

They were paid very less compared to a white person doing the same work. The housing situation too was worst; Harlem an overcrowded and segregated community accommodated more than 250, 000 citizens in 50 blocks long and 8 blocks wide area with more than 5, 000 people staying in one block. The people were compelled to sleep in shifts. Blacks suffered the most with Racism, race riots and labor riots being the order of the day. Things moved from bad to worse with the passage of 18th Amendment to the constitution banning sale of alcoholic beverages by the Congress on January 20, 1920.

Establishments primarily depending on the sale of these products (alcoholic beverages) were compelled to down the shutters across the nation. These developments marked the beginning of the infamous Roaring Twenties - one of the country's darkest periods when the mob, the crooked politicians and the gangsters ruled. Taking advantage of the fact that consumption of alcohol was a part of American culture and people could not stop drinking due to prohibition, the mob and the crooked entrepreneurs illegally transported the alcoholic beverages from the Canadian border and at times even manufactured beer and liquor.

“ The overt exclusion of blacks from the nation's economic, social and political processes only served to foment alternative means toward becoming a part of established idealized factions. ” Blacks were suppressed to the maximum possible extent by denying good jobs, influential political positions, advanced education, nice homes, equal social treatment and benefits. Thus most of the black Americans took to illegal means to compensate for the economic denials.

Black crime was independent initially with traditional thievery, gambling, prostitution and robbery, but later two key factors Bolito (the numbers game) and drugs led to involvement of organized crime. Bets could be placed from any where such as parlors, bars, restaurants, pool halls, barber shops, drugstores and even from their homes, more than 800 runners or bet collectors hurried places to collect and place bets on behalf of customers in 30 policy banks. The policy bankers became the richest and started extending loans and financeto Harlem residents, which the blacks could not expect from whites operated financial institutions.

The big time number operators included James Warner, Stephanie St. Clair, Casper Holstein, Wilfred Brandon, Jose Miro, Joseph Ison, Masjoe Ison and Simeon Francis. By 1928 the numbers game became most profitable and the arrests on this count also increased. Profits were reported to the elected representatives through police officials and these corrupt elected politicians had strong links with mob's syndicate led by white gangsters. " Corruption ran throughout New York's law enforcement, legal and political systems, including bondsmen, high-ranking police officials, judges, lawyers and politicians.

" To protect themselves the night clubs, businesses, bars, pimps, whores, gamblers, bankers and number runners started paying huge kickbacks. Democratic Party boss in Manhattan, James J. Hines had links with mobster and beer baron " Dutch" Schultz. Schultz and fellow Murder Inc. gangsters " Lucky" Luciano, Frank Costello, Owney Madden, Bugsy Siegel, Joe Adonis and Meyer Lansky started taking over Harlem's numbers racket. Short gang wars that erupted due to taking over and syndication led to an estimated 40

murders and 6 kidnappings. By late 1928 a total of 20 policy banks remained out of 40 and most of the bankers retired mysteriously.

Dutch Schultz was in total control and called “ King of Harlem Bankers” From the discussion above it is clear that organized crime had flourished in American society basically due to prohibition which was in vogue from 1920 to 1933 and every affluent individual was either directly or indirectly involved in illegal activities such as illicit liquor trafficking, prostitution, maintenance of brothel houses and having ties with mafia bosses. It is now clear that removal of prohibition led to a reduction in one of the evils i. e. , illegal liquor trafficking, but other illegal activities do continue carried out even to this day.

References Cosa Nostra. Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia (2006). Retrieved on September 21, 2006 from: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cosa\\_Nostra](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cosa_Nostra) John Binder. The Chicago Outfit (2003). Arcadia Publishing. Page nos. 27 to 42. Walter A. Bell. Brief History. Court TV. Crime Library. Criminal Minds and Methods. Black gangs of Harlem (2005). Retrieved on September 21, 2006 from: [http://www.crimelibrary.com/gangsters\\_outlaws/gang/harlem\\_gangs/index.html](http://www.crimelibrary.com/gangsters_outlaws/gang/harlem_gangs/index.html) Walter A. Bell. The Roaring Twenties. Court TV. Crime Library. Criminal Minds and Methods. Black gangs of Harlem (2005).

Retrieved on September 21, 2006 from: [http://www.crimelibrary.com/gangsters\\_outlaws/gang/harlem\\_gangs/2.html](http://www.crimelibrary.com/gangsters_outlaws/gang/harlem_gangs/2.html) Walter A. Bell. The Numbers Game. Court TV. Crime Library. Criminal Minds and Methods. Black gangs of Harlem (2005). Retrieved on September 21, 2006 from: [http://www.crimelibrary.com/gangsters\\_outlaws/gang/harlem\\_gangs/3.html](http://www.crimelibrary.com/gangsters_outlaws/gang/harlem_gangs/3.html) Walter A. <https://assignbuster.com/american-mafia/>

Bell. The Takeovers and Syndication. Court TV. Crime Library. Criminal Minds and Methods. Black gangs of Harlem (2005). Retrieved on September 21, 2006 from: [http://www.crimelibrary.com/gangsters\\_outlaws/gang/harlem\\_gangs/6.html](http://www.crimelibrary.com/gangsters_outlaws/gang/harlem_gangs/6.html)