

A brief history of organized crime

[Law](#), [Crime](#)



Protection. That was the first purpose of the Mafia when they first organized themselves, to ensure the estates of the landlords that were not always present on their estates in Italy. From a loose network of criminal groups, they formed themselves into a dominant and feared component of society that held sway over the Sicilian countryside (Encarta, 2008). Through their strong arm tactics they influenced the electorate in their territories to vote them into official government positions (Encarta, 2008). This development gained for them influence with the law authorities and weapons handed to them on a silver platter (Encarta, 2008).

The regime of Fascist leader Benito Mussolini had at one point been able to reign in the activities of the Mafia, resulting in some of their members immigrating to the United States (Encarta, 2008). These groups soon became involved in bootlegging activities during the Prohibition era in the United States (Encarta, 2008). When the era of Prohibition ended in 1933, most of these groups turned to other illegal activities, such as loan sharking, racketeering and in recent times, illegal drugs, among others (Encarta, 2008). The New York Crime Families

The crime “families” can be more considered as organizations, rather than the usual connotations of family. These groups are basically, more of an aggregation of people with one goal-the domination of their area of influence. Though these families all have bases of operations in the City of New York, these geographic lines do not necessary apply to the number of boroughs in the city (The American Mafia, 2008). These families all ran their areas with respect to the other “families” with due respect to the relationships, personal allegiances and rackets (The American Mafia, 2008).

Why the separation into the five families? The reason why the five families were created came straight out of Hollywood. The Castellammarese War , where the faction of Salvatore Maranzano crushed another rival group in New York in the 1930's, resulted in the division of the families being divided into the five “ families” Murphy, 2008). Two factions, one composed of native born Sicilians headed by Don Vito Cascio Ferro, and one of U. S. born Italians, led by Giuseppe” Joe the Boss” Masseria (Murphy, 2008).

This war was featured in the movies “ The Godfather” and “ Good fellas” (Murphy, 2008). Masseria eventually was betrayed by two loyal followers, Charlie Luciano and Vito Genovese (Murphy, 2008). Agreeing with rival faction crime boss Salvatore Maranzano to do away with Masseria, Luciano got the services of Ciro Terranova (The American Mafia, 2008), Luciano had Masseria murdered at Nouvo Villa Tamaro restaurant April 15, 1939 (The American Mafia, 2008). After consummating the “ hit” on Masseria, Luciano took over Masseria's operations (The American Mafia, 2008).

Maranzano then gave the structure of the Mafia families currently in place. New York was under the control of five families, an exception to other cities controlled by one family (Murphy, 2008). Each of the groups was under the leadership of one boss, with each boss having under bosses and “ capos” that had soldiers under them (Murphy, 2008). After assuming the title “ boss of bosses” for the New York crime outfit, Maranzano himself was taken down by Luciano and Genovese (Murphy, 2008). Luciano then made the other players equal in the city of New York (Murphy, 2008).

Luciano thus proved that the Italian born in the United States was just as cold blooded as their Sicilian born counterparts (Murphy, 2008). The

Genovese Family Don Vito Genovese, or “ Don Vitone”, was the head of the Genovese crime family, their base of operations in East Harlem (Gangsters, 2008). Started as an extortion ring in East Harlem by Giuseppe Morello and Ignazio Lupo in 1895, they are considered as the most powerful of the crime families in the United States (Gangsters, 2008). Among the more notable personalities in their “ stable” is one Charles “ Lucky” Luciano (1897-1962) (The American Mafia, 2008).

As earlier mentioned in the paper, Luciano gained the leadership of the Genovese family when he had Salvatore Maranzano assassinated after helping him dispose of his former boss, Giuseppe “ Joe the Boss” Masseria (Murphy, 2008). Once gaining the position of boss, he, together with his friend Meyer Lansky, started the drive to bring the family to new heights (Gangsters, 2008). Lansky and Luciano started to put up rackets everywhere, coming to Cuba to set up hotels, casinos and brothels (Gangsters, 2008).

In time, concerned about Mafia men who got into the doghouse with their bosses and might “ rat” out their operations, they began a murder-for-hire operation, the infamous Murder Inc. (Gangsters, 2008). The Gambino Family Considered today as one of the more powerful families in the United States today, the Gambino family has also been the subject of Hollywood, in the films “ Gotti” and “ Witness for the Mob” (Gambino, 2008). Their primary source of income is through their activities in loan sharking, union corruption, car theft, extortion and construction, among others (Gangsters, 2008).

One of their more infamous members is the man known as the “ Dapper Don” and the “ Teflon Don”, John Gotti Sr. (Gambino, 2008). As United States

law enforcement units began to take organized crime operations apart, John Gotti captured the imagination of people wondering about the Mafia (May, 2008). At the end of his reign as the boss of the Gambino crime operation, Gotti was sentenced to life without the possibility of parole or pardon on racketeering charges by a Brooklyn court in 1992 (May, 2008). Gotti died after serving only ten years of his sentence of head and neck cancer (May, 2008).

The Bonnano Family Joseph “Joey Bananas” Bonnano (1905-2002) was one of the moving forces behind the founding of the Mafia families in the United States (Gangsters, 2008). After he had Maranzano killed, Luciano supported Bonnano to head the former Maggadino crime outfit (The American Mafia, 2008). Forming an alliance with known crime lords Tommy Lucchese, Charlie Luciano, Vito Genovese and Frank Costello, they set up one of the most influential crime organizations that penetrated almost every facet of American life (Gangsters, 2008).

The Bonnano crime family derives its money from illegal drugs, video pornography, bogus telemarketing schemes; gambling and even legal means such as pizza outfits and espresso cafes (Gangsters, 2008). One of his enduring legacies in Mafiosi history was his involvement in putting up the “Commission”, an official group overseeing the Mafia activities consisting of the five Mafia Families, of which the Bonnano family was a member (Spiritus-Temporis, 2005). In his later years he would author a book, “A Man of Honor”(Spiritus-Temporis, 2005), he actually helped to bring down the same group he helped establish (Gangsters, 2008).

The Lucchese Family The Lucchese family got its start from one Gaetano Reina (1890-1930). Starting with an ice distribution monopoly centred in the Bronx area of New York, virtually running a monopoly of the commodity in the city (Gangsters, 2008). The Lucchese family ran in its criminal tentacles in legal undertakings such as construction, waste management and illegal activities like extortion, narcotics, gambling and loan sharking (Gangsters, 2008).

Though originally aligned with the group of Joe Masseria, he secretly defected to the camp of Salvatore Maranzano when Maranzano arrived in New York in 1925 (The American Mafia, 2008). In true Mafia style of settling accounts, Masseria ordered the killing of Reina in 1930 (The American Mafia, 2008), thus triggering the Castellammarese War (The American Mafia, 2008). **The Colombo Family** Founded by close Bonnano friend and ally Joseph Profaci (1897-1962), the Colombo crime family deals in the illegal drugs trade, gambling, loan sharking, pornography, fraud, hijacking, cigarette smuggling and counterfeiting (Gangsters, 2008).

Maranzano gave Profaci the boss' chair of the family as a reward for his dedication to him during the Castellammarese Wars (The American Mafia, 2008). In recent times, a power struggle erupted in the Family, between the factions of Carmine “The Snake” Persico and acting Boss Vic Orena. Persico won, putting Alphonse Persico, Carmine's son, on the boss' chair. Carmine is currently serving jail time for murder and racketeering charges (Gangsters, 2008). Alphonse is also incarcerated, as the mastermind behind the brutal murder of rival William “Wild Bill” Cutolo (Gangsters, 2008).

The power struggle within the family has shaken the organization to its roots, leaving it in disarray and sharply divided (Gangsters, 2008). Conclusion Though the time of the big time Mafia men who captured imaginations of people is almost over, the new generation of Mafia are out to prove that they are just as ruthless and cold blooded as their forebears. It will be interesting to see how the young guns, so to speak, will try to match up with the legacies and accomplishments of the old boys from the Italian mainland and the United States bred Mafiosi.