

Philosophy of the italian american mafia



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The Italian mafia came to power in America in the 1920's from Sicily, Italy (Staff). It became known as organized crime (also known as "the Mob") and became centered in New York City, divided among five major crime families, which included nineteen additional family units around the country (Jrank). The five major families were the Bonnano, Columbo, Gambino, Genovese, and Lucchese families who were organized through the efforts of Salvatore Charles ("Lucky") Luciano. (Jrank). This was the beginning of the very powerful counterculture American crime syndicate. A counterculture is a subcultural practice, which is consciously intended to challenge the values of the larger society, rejecting the major values, norms, and practices of the larger society, and replaces them with a new set of cultural patterns (Thomas).

From a "sociological perspective," which is "a look beyond commonly held beliefs to the hidden meanings behind human actions," Lucky Luciano's special contribution to the success of the mafia depended on his running the show like a legitimate business, based on profit and loss capitalism as a board of directors would be run by a CEO (Thomas 4). One major difference, however, was that Luciano, as the CEO, conducted business as an absolute dictator who saw no limitations on taking down oppositional viewpoints through violence. It was like an inner government within the larger society that had factions within (like political parties, in this case opposing families) that conducted wars against each other.

"Sociological Imagination" as defined by C. Wright Mills is "the ability to see the connection between the larger world and your personal life." It is also "the capacity to range from the most impersonal and remote [topics] to the

most intimate features of the human self-and to see the relations between the two” (Thomas 5). Luciano started out his career in a legitimate business as a clerk for a hat company around 1914. But by 1916, he was dealing with drugs and had his major run-in with the law, which earned him six months at a reformatory for that crime (Editors). From that time on, Luciano got involved with other questionable businesses such as bootlegging, prostitution, gambling, loan sharking (charging very high interest rates), drug distribution as a natural extension of bootlegging, and labor racketeering (Jrank, 2/5). All of these enterprises had certain small levels of legitimacy but always ended up tinged with major levels of criminality, illegal operations, and various deviant legal practices. Luciano and his fellow colleagues saw no conflicts in carrying out these controversial businesses with an iron hand and with few moral and ethical considerations.

“ Ethnocentrism” is defined by W. LaVerne Thomas as “ the tendency to view one’s own culture and group as superior.” In addition, it is the belief that the characteristics of one’s group or society are right and good, helping to build group unity.” (Thomas, 35). This kind of situation was a very dominant characteristic of the American mafia organization in its heyday. It was initiated from Sicilian culture in Italy, and nearly all the bosses and godfathers who led the family organizations had roots in Italian culture that came from Sicily. The New York mafia was dominated by New York’s five major families previously mentioned, along with other more minor Italian families with names like Profaci, Gagliano, Mangano, Marazano, and Masseria. (Bio, 2/4). The only way to move up in the organization of the New York mafia was to be geographically located in the New York City area and

be of Italian (preferably Sicilian) heritage. There were major exceptions to the Italian rule, however, most notably Lucky Luciano's most trusted and important Jewish friends and allies from his youth—Meyer Lansky and Benjamin “ Bugsy” Siegel. (Bio, 1/4). Nevertheless, neither of those two non-Italians was ever able to climb to the very top of the leadership of the mafia organization or lead one of the major or minor Sicilian crime families. There were also other ethnic communities that competed with the American Italian mafia—primarily the Irish, Russians, and Polish organizations.

Thomas defines “ Cultural relativism” as an attitude in which there is a belief that cultures should be judged by their own standards rather than by applying the standards of another culture.” In other words, it is the “ attempt to understand cultural practices from the points of view of the members of the society being studied,” (Thomas, 36), In the case of the American mafia that was based on Sicilian origins; this means that ethics and morality came from a culture that is male-dominant, sexist, and machismo. There was always a defined code: It was a mixture of ethics, friendship, family, property, and lifestyle intermixed with violence, corruption, trust, faith, and “ a certain sense of honor.” (Gambetta). The family always came first with a strong sense of loyalty. It was run as a real true government, but a “ clandestine” one that was “ better obeyed” and even “ better understood.” (Repetto)

I cannot say that I agree with the basic philosophy of the Italian American mafia as described in this paper as an example of a good countercultural philosophy. Although they seem to have an organized structure that imitates the structure of our overall American government and society working within

<https://assignbuster.com/philosophy-of-the-italian-american-mafia/>

a capitalistic for-profit basis, what it is definitely missing at its core is a reasonable moral and ethical code based on democratic principles. They are totalitarian in nature, prone to violence against the poor and less powerful, and definitely ethnocentric, sexist, and out primarily for their own good. They do not care for the needs of the common man, only themselves. This is how they basically keep themselves in control and have power over everyone else. This is how they try to be above the common laws and liberties of the land. Their very existence flies in the face of the US Constitution. Even after Lucky Luciano was in prison at the tail end of his career, he tried to offer the US help in the war effort during World War II “ by using his criminal connections in Italy to advance the Allies’ cause.” (Bio) This effort, of course, was rejected by the US government, but it certainly showed how Luciano’s ethics and moral base was constantly challenged and off base. Even later than that, after Lucky Luciano was deported to Italy, never to return to the US legally, he traveled to Cuba where he was also later deported back to Italy because of criminal activity, where he remained under surveillance and not allowed to leave Naples. He was still involved with drug trafficking at that time until his death at a Naples Airport in January of 1962. Ironically, he was on his way to meet with a film and television producer who was going to make a movie about his life as an infamous “ hero/villain” of the 20th century. In my opinion, Lucky Luciano is certainly more than a footnote of history, but he and the mafia are definitely not proud examples of a morally acceptable counterculture lifestyle.

Works Cited

Editors, Biography. com. *The biography. com website* . 15 June 2015. 9 march 2017.

Gambetta, D. *The Sicilian Mafia* . 1993. Harvard University Press.

Jrank, law. *law. jrank. org* . 2015. 10 march 2017.

Repetto, T. *American Mafia: A History of Its Rise to Power* . Kindle.

Staff, history. com. *history. com* . 2009. 9 march 2017.

Thomas, W. LaVerne. “ Cultural Diversity.” Holt, Rinehart, Winston. *Holt Sociology The study of Human Relationships* . Austin: A Harcourt Education Company , 2003. 39.