



Robert M. Lombardo. *Organized Crime in Chicago: Beyond the Mafia.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013. Illustrations. xv + 257 pp. \$85.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-252-03730-6; \$25.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-252-07878-1.



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The Chicago Mob

The Chicago Mafia is the stuff of legend. Larger-than-life characters, such as Al Capone and Frank the Enforcer Nitti, and gangland executions, most notably, the St. Valentine's Day Massacre, have shaped popular perceptions of the history of organized crime in America. The glitz and glare surrounding these celebrities and their brazen violence have both forged the Mafia mystique and posed problems for scholars. Expanding our understanding of organized crime beyond the murderous exploits of the most infamous gangsters is difficult, for those involved in criminal networks typically operated in the shadows of society, usually shunned attention, and rarely left detailed (or credible) records of their activities. "Even to gain access to the observations made by law enforcement and investigative bodies," Robert M. Lombardo writes, "one must have connections. Fortunately," he adds, "I had these connections" (p. xi). A longtime resident of the city, Lombardo had relatives in organized crime; served as a Chicago police officer for nearly three decades, including a dozen years in the Organized Crime Division; earned a PhD in sociology; and

teaches in a local criminal justice program. Thus, he is especially qualified to write the history of organized crime in Chicago.

Reflecting his academic training, Lombardo explores the topic from a sociological perspective. He argues that the "alien conspiracy theory dominates the literature and is the generally accepted explanation for the emergence of traditional organized crime" (p. 8). This model posits that a vast, international, hierarchically structured network, headquartered in Sicily, controlled organized crime in America during the twentieth century. Lombardo, drawing from the theoretical framework of the Chicago school of sociology, challenges such an interpretation. Like Ernest Burgess, Robert Park, John Landesco, and the other towering figures of the early twentieth-century Chicago school, Lombardo emphasizes ecological forces and concludes that American conditions, rather than the international conspiracy of legend, fueled the rise and triggered the relative fall of organized crime in Chicago. In particular, Lombardo asserts that social disorganization in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-

century working-class, immigrant neighborhoods produced and shaped organized crime in the city. Poverty, disease, and the relative collapse of formal institutions of social control redefined the goals, values, and aspirations of neighborhood residents. With mainstream paths of social mobility blocked, Chicago immigrants and their children sought other avenues for respect and power. A racket subculture, in which corrupt politicians forged alliances with vice entrepreneurs and other criminals, filled this vacuum. Protected from law enforcement by ties to the local political machine, criminal networks flourished and provided an alternative route to status in Chicago neighborhoods. Gangsters and politicians ruled the civic life of the community and provided the only examples of success for young boys to emulate, Lombardo avers (p. 112). Organized crime, in short, began not in Sicily but on the streets of Chicago, where local conditions allowed criminals to operate with impunity, command authority, and accumulate wealth.

In the first three-quarters of *Organized Crime in Chicago*, Lombardo traces the development of the networks linking vice entrepreneurs to the corrupt politicians who traded votes for protection and directed the police to ignore particular illegal activities. During the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, saloonkeepers and gambling hall operators dominated these alliances. Recounting a familiar story, Lombardo explains how Prohibition triggered a period of explosive growth for the Chicago underworld. The distribution and sale of illegal alcohol created immense opportunities for the criminals able to control the marketplace, which could be accomplished through close ties to politicians and law enforcers and through violence and coercion. Neighborhood gangsters expanded their small-scale vice networks; cemented their ties with the political machine; and emerged bigger, richer, and more powerful than ever. Common crooks, Lombardo explains, were transformed into sophisticated gangsters, with Capone's syndicate gaining supremacy (p. 7). When Prohibition ended, Capone's criminal organization adapted to the new market conditions and refocused its activities on gambling. The transformed, post-Prohibition Capone syndicate, known as the Chicago Outfit, controlled the local underworld until the closing decades of the twentieth century. As the ethnic and racial composition of old neighborhoods changed and as the Reagan administration and federal law enforcers targeted the Outfit, the organization waned, though it has survived in a weakened form.

Lombardo devotes the closing chapters of the book

to the late twentieth-century Outfit, and here he draws on his connections, particularly early 1990s interviews with Chicago gangsters. Lombardo provides a colorful, detailed description of the organizational structure of the modern mob, complete with discussions of bosses, underbosses, made guys, and connected guys. He also explains the relationships among different layers of crime networks, noting the responsibilities of made guys, for example. In his most original contribution, Lombardo analyzes mob recruiting, based on a 1987 police list of 191 Outfit members, and he determines that ethnic bonds within organized crime grew stronger during the late twentieth century, even in the face of suburbanization and the relative decrease in ethnic affiliation in the larger community.

For all of his emphasis on the Chicago school's ecological framework, however, Lombardo devotes relatively modest attention to early twentieth-century neighborhoods, social conditions, patterns of immigration and migration, or group identity. Although the book's introduction and conclusion underscore the local roots of early twentieth-century criminal networks, Lombardo stops short of placing his gangsters in the context of Chicago neighborhoods and society. For example, while he skillfully charts the increasing role of Italian Americans in the Chicago mob, he does not explain why Italian immigrants and their children came to dominate the city's underworld. How did their neighborhoods, political ties, or social experiences differ from those of other early twentieth-century residents, who played more modest roles in the city's criminal networks? Put differently, if neighborhood conditions in Chicago at the start of the last century created the city's criminal underworld, why did this process occur in areas with first- and second-generation Italian immigrants more than in sections of the city with Polish or Greek or Bohemian or Russian immigrants? Closely related, Lombardo does not systematically draw from the rich historical literature on ethnicity, crime, and working-class culture in Chicago, much of which challenges the Chicago school view of uprooted, alienated immigrants living in disorganized communities and embracing deviant value systems. Nor does Lombardo's narrative style in *Organized Crime in Chicago* always mesh comfortably with his theoretical framework. He takes a top-down approach to the history of organized crime in the city, devoting particular attention to leading mobsters—with such colorful names as Jake Greasy Thumb Guzik, William Potatoes Daddano, and Anthony Big Tuna Accordo—and their most daring raid, almost famous crimes, and gangland exe-

cutionsâ (pp. 106, 109, 142). Lombardo focuses less of his analysis on the more commonplace, prosaic neighborhood activities that characterized the business of organized crime in Chicago.

The authorâs source material also influences the narrative in important ways. Until the closing chapters of the book, he relies largely on English-language newspapers, especially accounts from the conservative, stodgy *Chicago Daily Tribune*. But these journals helped to create the Mafia legend, and their reporters tended to treat Italian crime in stylized, caricatured terms, celebrating the most flamboyant, brash exploits of Capone, Nitti, and other high-profile underworld figures. Italian-language newspapers, such as *LâItalia*, might have offered a differ-

ent perspective on crime and illegal networks in the city. Finally, historians of immigration, crime, and Chicago will likely dissent from Lombardoâs core assertion that the alien conspiracy model remains the leading explanation for the development of organized crime in America.

In short, Lombardoâs engaging narrative does not transform our understanding of the early history of organized crime as much as it adds nuance and detail. His discussion of the Chicago mob during the closing decades of the twentieth century, however, offers fresh insights on the structure and character of criminal networks. Thus, *Organized Crime in Chicago* represents an interesting, valuable contribution to the scholarly literature.

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