The Origin of Organized Crime in America

The New York City Mafia, 1891–1931

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1 Introduction

This is far from the first book covering organized crime and the Italian-American Mafia[1] in New York City before the 1940s. Journalists writing long after the events depicted have had a free hand to write stories that inflate the Mafia peril. Under the headline "The Conglomerate of Crime," for example, *Time* magazine in 1969 declared, "The biggest and most important truth is that La Cosa Nostra and the many satellite elements that constitute organized crime are big and powerful enough to affect the quality of American life."[2]

Forbes alerted its readers, "Organized crime's profits—some $50 billion a year—are in a class by themselves."[3] Such sources have, in the absence of critical historical research, formed the empirical foundation of much of the current historiography.

Off-the-shelf narratives of colorful New York crime figures of the stripe of Arnold Rothstein, Frank Costello and Lucky Luciano are much the most popular form of propagation of this history. They frequently trade mass-market sales for lack of context, repetition, and a cavalier attitude towards precision and verification. But with few exceptions, social scientists and researchers have avoided the field of empirical research into American Mafia organizational structure and composition. Left unanswered are a number of important questions.

New York City's organized crime "Families" that America's governments, since the 1950s, have spent so much time and manpower fighting are the direct successors to the Mafia constructions attended to in this book. But what has been strikingly absent is a fresh look at this history, systematically marshalling the full range of resources presently available in order to interrogate benchmark accounts.

Because "real life" cases have informed the theoretical proposals and are frequently used for illustrative purposes by scholars, they are included here where appropriate. Easily overlooked, in addition, is the inescapable fact that journalists have been by far the most active in attempting to chronicle this history. Texts "of varying quality," Jacobs revealed, are "typically the only readily available account of various events and personalities."[4]

The book charts the growth of New York City Italian-American Mafias between 1891 and 1931 within the framework of a dispersed, and in large measure restrictive Italian-American criminal underworld. Reports that a far more dangerous creature emerged in 1931, La Cosa Nostra (LCN), are explored and counterposed against earlier forms of Mafia organization, principally those centered on New York City.

A misleading historiography of the formative organization of New York City Mafia crime has arguably distorted governmental priorities, diverting scarce resources to fight a largely mythical foe utilizing tools that threaten civil liberties and democratic accountability, but which have had a wide appeal in Western Europe. According to Alexander and Caiden, "Laws continue to be framed with the Mafia mystique in mind."[5] Fijnaut and Paoli among others argue that European governments have blithely accepted an alarmist history of the U.S. experience of Mafias in order to frame domestic legislation "towards the suppression of this particular type of crime."[6] Block and Chambliss referred to "the Al Capone or gangster imagery" as having "a rather perverse effect on European scholarship."[6] "This conception of organized crime," Paoli contended, "has been imported into Europe, with particular success in those countries with little or no direct experience of the mafia phenomenon."[7] The strategic danger from contemporary organized crime has also been contrasted against a history of the U.S. Mafia's evolution that embodies caricatures and exaggerations.

Material collected for this book suggests that New York City's Mafias were localized and diffuse in their procesess and structure, and that ties to other U.S. Mafia groups were loosely defined and operationally devolved. No single line of development uniting Mafia groups was discernible beyond the need at the enterprise level to respond in comparable ways to market conditions.

Nonetheless, in major East Coast cities such as Buffalo, Philadelphia, and New York City, similar organizational forms, means of adjusting disputes and admission rituals were noticeable, suggesting a common historical root in Sicily. In other U.S. locales, the "Sicilian" effect was weaker.

One type of Mafia historiography proven especially influential detects U.S. organized crime history as moving through successive evolutionary stages towards a single destination. The credibility of the approach depended on the writer in question lumping together disparate time frames, cities and organizations in order to fit a preconceived pattern at the cost of denying the reality of innumerable variations that spoiled the resulting explanatory norm.[8]

PERSPECTIVES ON MAFIA ORGANIZATIONS

Cressey's concern in 1969 was that organized criminals were "gradually but inexorably stealing our nation."[9] Underpinning his hypothesis was the supposition that American Mafias were enough alike in their goals, lines of authority and communication systems to permit a unity of purpose and action. Within this scenario, the LCN became part of a single nationwide

conspiracy, a view that continues to carry considerable weight outside of academia.[10] But concrete evidence for the thesis remains elusive.

The previous view (more evident in Italy than in America) of the Mafia as a "state of mind" rather than as a structured set of organizations[11] was shattered by *pentito* Tommaso Buscetta with respect to Sicily in 1984, when he detailed a set of powerful "*Cosa Nostra*" ("Our Thing") criminal syndicates that he and others belonged to. Subsequent Sicilian cooperating witnesses[12] have confirmed Buscetta's seminal description, which matched the data released in America years earlier.

In the United States, statements casting the Mafia as a menace to national security were a recurrent theme but lacked factual support. They were nonetheless given official sanction by the Kefauver Committee in 1951 and through periodical pronouncements made by the Federal Bureau of Narcotics (FBN), which had chased Italian narcotics traffickers since the 1930s.[13]

The discovery of several dozen Italians at the Apalachin, upstate New York, estate of Joseph Barbara Sr., in November 1957, ignited a national debate. Through its post-Apalachin "strategic intelligence" gathering operations, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) uncovered the specifics of several of the larger Mafia formations, and learned of the existence of the "Commission" which is addressed in Chapter 8.[14]

During the latter part of 1962, a federal inmate convicted of heroin trafficking, Joseph Valachi, began to talk to the FBN and later to the FBI about the inner workings of the New York City Mafia as he knew it as a Genovese organized crime Family "soldier." Valachi's 1963 recollections before the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, as they were construed, formed the empirical basis for subsequently devised models.

Valachi was judged by the Subcommittee in its 1965 report to have exposed "the reality of organized crime."[15] The "alien conspiracy" case that emerged from this interpretation reflected central assumptions made in the 1950s, tracing the evolution of American *Cosa Nostra* organizations from Mafia infested towns and villages of rural Sicily where it functioned as a "terrorist society."[16]

An unambiguous thread of understanding led from the discovery of the Apalachin meeting, to Valachi's recollections, to the passage of contentious anti-racketeering laws after 1970. A version of Valachi's testimony as specifying a centralized, rigidly hierarchical, and monolithic criminal empire run by Italians, stood as the framework used to explain the former, and gave a reason why the latter measures were justified.

But intelligence data publicly surfacing from 1969 cast doubt upon the perspective. Primarily the result of prolonged FBI surveillance work, a reasonably consistent picture emerged which was at odds with the interpretation favored in political and media circles after Valachi's testimony. The released information made no mention of a nationwide conspiracy. Instead, it indicated a fragmentation of structure with no overarching control system

apparent. Businesses connected to Mafia members tended towards a modesty of scale, whether operating in the licit or illicit spheres.[17]

Notwithstanding signs of a shift in the historiography attempting to take into account the revelations, no study has yet related the discourse to the history of Mafia organization in that most influential site of activities, in the five boroughs of New York City. Perhaps because of a misguided perception of the difficulty of the task, the formative years of Mafia evolution in New York have failed to elicit sufficient attention, in spite of their importance.

TIME FRAME CHOSEN

The selection of 1931 as the end point for the volume reflected suppositions about the manner in which Mafia groups emerged into a dominating force by means of the La Cosa Nostra, instituted according to legend in 1931. Anchored to the LCN agenda was the "Americanization" proposal that referred to the same events and that remains a principal explanation of change at the leadership level. But neither the LCN approach, nor the Americanization proposal, is empirically sustainable.

Subtopics influenced by the LCN and "Americanization" hypotheses include relations between the U.S. Mafia and the Black Hand (Chapter 2), interactions with Sicilian Mafias (Chapter 3), U.S. recruitment practices (Chapter 4), and the admission of non-Sicilian Italians into the New York City Families (Chapters 5 and 8). The implications for existing theory are summarized and assessed within each chapter.

NEW YORK CITY

New York was, over the period 1890 to 1931, the biggest American city with the greatest number of Italian immigrant residents. Between 1901 and 1913, "a little less than a quarter" of Sicily's population departed for America, most living in New York for a time if not setting up permanent residence there.[18] Nelli calculated that "In the years before World War I, New York housed more Italians than Florence, Venice and Genoa combined."[19]

How the American Mafia phenomenon has been depicted is heavily attuned to the professed experience of Mafia groups in New York City. "Out of town" police witnesses before the 1963 "Valachi Hearings" for example felt a continuous need to refer to their "own" crime syndicates in ways that matched in their form New York City's Mafias as they were believed to function and to organize.[20]

The application to other cities of "titles" and of an organizational structure mainly found within the New York Mafia, together with the LCN approach—

based on a New York City Mafia history—have slanted the record. New York City has housed the largest number of American men of honor,[21] who have functioned as a reference point for lesser Mafia organizations.

A comprehensive and accurate exposition of the city's history is therefore essential if the U.S. Mafia phenomenon is to be better understood. And conclusions made about New York City's first Mafias have a wider resonance than for any other site of American Mafia operations.

DATA SOURCES

Unlike researchers in Sicily, American historians have fought shy of devoting the required time and resources to systematically exploring this topic using archival assets. According to Reuter, "It would be difficult to identify as many as half a dozen books that report major research findings, or even that many articles."[22] Potter complained, "Researchers initiating a project soon find that they are immersed in tainted data of questionable validity and almost no reliability."[23]

Margaret Beare spoke for many, when she contended, "All too much of what passes for information consists of oft-repeated anecdote combined with "moral panic" generalizations."[24] For Albini, "the literature reveals a multitude of contradictions that reduce the lay reader, as well as the researcher of organized crime, to a state of almost complete confusion." Lupsha argued the case for "data, testable conceptualization, and analytical rigor," while Albanese called for "objective and detailed information that meets a high standard of proof."[25]

"So many writers have accepted and repeated myths and distortions of fact so many times," Nelli commented, "that inaccuracies have become accepted as truths."[26] "As far as New York is concerned," according to Block, "it is dismally clear that historical studies of organized crime outside the popular genre are virtually absent and sorely needed."[27]

Due to the lack of alternatives, respondents in the sample of researchers noted by Gallagher and Cain found themselves stuck to studying familiar informational pathways.[28] The demand for more systematically accurate and precise data harnessed to the explanatory level is plain and pressing.

Firestone wrongly attributed the difficulties identified to "the lack of primary source material."[29] Three principal types of data are used in this study: newspaper articles, the statements of cooperating witnesses and informers, and other official records.

Press stories supplied indispensable information, but concentrated on the more "newsworthy" items, usually involving momentary cases of public disorder or violence. Long range historical analysis was not their forte. Their accuracy was also sometimes questionable.

Trial transcripts, police reports and evidence before government committees were only partly satisfactory for this project, since they doggedly

pursued a particular reading of the materials. Sundry official documents such as naturalization papers and census returns were required for checking basic facts and for generating leads.

Allegations made by Mafiosi facing prosecution must be viewed with skepticism, since "true repentance in a man of honour is comparatively rare."[30] Many defectors "are opportunists who attempt to give the kind of information they believe their interrogators wish to hear."[31] They may also repeat gossip that made for good headlines—but not for good history.[32]

Mistaken beliefs were sometimes the result of the way in which information in the mob was passed along. The FBI was thus given information from a member source that many first-generation Mafia leaders came to America to escape "the purges directed at them" by Fascists, then in power in Sicily.[33] Yet as Chapter 8 explains, virtually none came from Sicily in the time frame.

Even the experienced Nicolo Gentile was taken in by the great Purge myth of 1931 when stating, "60 fellows destined to die. My name also appeared on this list."[34] At other times events were inflated in significance by publications to increase sales, or to support a preset thesis. Nevertheless, such sources supply essential material.

A reliance on documentary materials has limitations. We cannot question them, and they sometimes address themes of little interest. Most were created with scant regard to the requirements of historical research. Similarly to other sources, they may create errors or compound ones already made.

Information can be categorized according to the degree of corroboration attached to it. Particularly where single items are deployed, the origin and type of data is considered before an assessment is made as to its value and validity.

When material from a large variety of resources was collected and sifted, biases became transparent, to act as a means for understanding the sources of divisions and conflicts. Factual discrepancies also emerge. Through the mechanism of multiple sourcing, the problem of over dependence on solitary pieces of untested data is directly and comprehensively addressed.

PREVIOUS WRITINGS

Within the sphere of published works, few have emerged since the 1970s that cover in a substantial manner the formative years of Italian-American organized crime. With a handful of exceptions, efforts to address the early Mafia issue have been poorly formulated, sketchily drawn, and empirically weak. Conjecture has for too long replaced substantiated information.

The otherwise valuable Jacobs et al. volumes on the New York *Cosa Nostra* do not add to a debate on the early years.[35] In an otherwise important study, Block in 1980 did not attempt to connect his evidence of the 1930s to the issue of Mafia organizations, and his conclusion that "The most efficient 'organized criminals' were the most individualistic; the least

committed to particular structures" was atypical within the Mafia segment of organized crime.[36]

Albini in 1971 put forward propositions about the characteristics of criminal syndicates as generic forms. But he barely mentioned New York, aside from an extended debunking of Joseph Valachi's evidence on *La Cosa Nostra*.[37]

The Iannis' fieldwork was important but, for the historian, extremely frustrating. In order to preserve the anonymity of their subjects, they used pseudonyms throughout, disallowing followup researchers from independently evaluating the usefulness or validity of their findings.[38]

Petersen's "The Mob" attempted to trace "200 years of organized crime in New York." Petersen's uncritical use of often-cited sources however gave the book a familiar feel that opened up no new possibilities.[39] Reuter's otherwise perceptive study of gambling in 1960s New York City barely touched on the Mafia issue, while Haller's contributions were limited, on the Mafia specifically, to a few pages of observations.[40]

Within the popular literary genre, "Gang Rule in New York" by Thompson and Raymond (1940), reflected the somewhat sensationalistic treatment afforded to gangsters of its era.[41] "Murder Inc." by Burton B. Turkus and Sid Feder (1952), can be read similarly.[42]

In 2004, Patrick Downey's "Gangster City" covered some of the same terrain as the present work, but with an over reliance on the agendas set by mass-market pubications. While well written, "Gangster City" suffered from a lack of originality or ambition, the general absence of information beyond accounts of violence, and a repetition of errors first made elsewhere.[43]

As Block argued, "In a subject plagued by unreliable works, based on unsubstantiated sources, one must go as often as possible to the actual record."[44]A sufficient quantity exists to make robust and defendable conclusions.

Not unexpectedly given the subject area, a number of gaps in the record were encountered. But they did not interfere with the task of assessing the current historiography on the topic, and of presenting alternatives to prevailing beliefs and frameworks.

SOCIETAL CONTEXT

A work like this, seeking to isolate the history of Mafia organizations from background factors, is by definition narrower in its focus and scope than an alternative that includes broader political, economic and social variables in the analysis. "None of these organized activities," Beare argued for the latter school, "can be understood without understanding the social, economic, and political context."[45]

Because of their preoccupation with contextual factors related to organized criminality, researchers adopting the perspective have little incentive to explore the history of a city's Mafia organization. Indeed, attempts to resurrect talk of the Mafia and nationwide conspiracies

featuring Italian mobsters only serves "to confuse and distract attention away from failed policies, institutional corruption, and much systematic criminal activity that was more costly, damaging, and destructive than 'Mafia' crimes."[46] Emphasizing the Italian-Americans in organized crime diverts awareness from exploring societal causes of deviance.

The "enterprise" explanatory model, recognizing the economic activities of organized criminals as no different in principle from those in the legitimate sphere, partly shares this standpoint. Both seek to explore the wider landscape and the social construction of concepts of organized crime; but with a major drawback that the specific features of Mafias are submerged.

At its extreme, the contextual perspective may deny the very existence of the U.S. Mafia as an important form of criminal organization, despite the wealth of evidence to the contrary that has emerged from both sides of the Atlantic.[47] Such a position refers to a time before the 1970s in America (the 1980s in Sicily) when the misrepresenting of basic facts by writers was commonplace, caused by the lack of high-grade source information.[48]

After stating that, for example, "the nature of organized crime in North America has been based largely on unprovable assertions," Jay Albanese asks why *La Cosa Nostra* was not heard of before Valachi's appearance before the American public. In fact, FBI surveillance picked up the term from at least 1961.

Albanese also questions why "historical inquiries (have) been unable to corroborate Valachi's account of a national 'Castellammare War'."[49] But Valachi was not the only witness to the War, and the expositions of two other participants do not significantly conflict with Valachi's.

Within this setting, Potter and Jenkins' book *The City and the Syndicate* (Lexington, Mass.: Ginn Press, 1985), is notable for missing the large quantity of records later unearthed by Celeste A. Morello in three books on the Philadelphia Mafia.[50] Such skeptics, while making excellent points on other aspects of organized crime, have apparently not delved beyond predominantly English-language and published items. Although one can argue about the place of the Mafia in organized crime, neither its existence, nor its presence in America since the late 19th century, is any longer in doubt.

The agenda ignored or debased the special strengths of Mafias. Many recommend decriminalization and regulation of "victimless crimes" as a solution to removing gangster types from whole sectors of the economy.[51] However, the decriminalization case assumes a high degree of Mafia involvement in the activity in question to be effective.

This belief may be only partly true, an argument pursued in Chapter 9.[52] Decriminalization in New York and adjoining states of forms of gambling previously prohibited had, for instance, a modest impact at most on Mafia influence in the aggregate.[53]

Furthermore, Mafia members have exploited opportunities to make money within licitly regulated industries. The New York City's Mafia's increasingly powerful "predatory" (non-market driven) enterprises have no relevance to the decriminalization discourse and legalization campaigns.[54] Once present, Mafia power in segments of the licit economy is highly resistant to removal.[55]

"The Mafia provides," Reuter stressed, "the most enduring and significant form of organized crime."[56] Kelly indeed found that there would still be a "racketeering" problem without the Mafia.[57] But Italian-Americans in organized crime maximized the openings created by faultily designed regulatory regimes, frequently deploying the economic leverage their control over corrupt labor unions permitted.

The approach this book adopts understands the exceptionality of Mafia organizations and their resilience in the face of changing marketplace and state conditions. The limiting of political, economic and social variables from the analysis also permits a clearer comparison to be made against other writings on the topic. It, lastly, acknowledges that this history is where the most empirical research needs to be conducted.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

For New York City, two long-range historical trends were identified. The ability of Mafia syndicates to create and to defend a territorial domain indicated the limits of Mafia political and economic influence at any juncture. "Cosa Nostra is like a state," Dickie maintained, "because it aims to control territory."[58] "Any cosca," Paoli wrote of Calabria and Sicily, "associated with either Cosa Nostra or the 'Ndragheta claims sovereignty over a well-defined territory, usually corresponding to a town or a village."[59]

Each ethnic group involved in organized crime in New York City had its own distinctive territorial boundaries.[60] Territorial control had an economic component as the best means to exercise a high level of control over the types of crimes that Mafia Family members operated. Bonanno, the former head of one, stated, "in the economic sphere one of the objectives of a Family was to set up monopolies as far as it was possible."[61] Politically, power over a large territory was a road to heightened status in the Mafia fraternity.

Contrary to the Sicilian experience, where labor unions proved unable to embed themselves into the economic fabric,[62] they were powerful in New York City. A second dimension to territoriality therefore emerged in New York, in which Mafiosi attached themselves to union locals chiefly representing Italian-American workers in blue-collar occupations. *Cosa Nostra* bosses regarded such locals as "property" to be utilized and defended as a base by Family members, alike to geographical hegemony. Following the movement of their *paesani* into organized labor was the major method, outside of the trade in narcotics, by which men of honor broadened their influence across the city.

Compared to their Sicilian counterparts, New York Family members could move across geographical divisions with ease in pursuit of opportunities. In other contexts, territorial boundaries could be a bone of contention. However, a mechanism for resolving inter-Family problems ensured that the Mafia element of the New York underworld did not suffer warfare over disputed terrain. Family members were instructed to "clear" their illicit activities with superiors in the organization, for instance, and the information was passed to other Families affected.[63]

Equally important was residential movement. Upcoming Mafia leaders such as Salvatore D'Aquila, for example, lived for years in East Harlem before moving elsewhere in the city to form their own Mafia organizations. But they retained fraternal connections to Harlem men of honor that could smooth over difficulties as required.

U.S. Mafias were mostly found where a substantial and densely populated southern Italian immigrant community existed. When Mafia men ventured far from familiar streets, they were usually less sure-footed. "Once they move abroad," Behan observed, "major criminals do not wield the same influence they previously did at home."[64]

A further feature was that of a steadily rising complexity of Mafia organization. The earliest known New York City Mafia formation (dealt with in this book) had few "ranks," with direct communication between leaders and followers the norm. Few barriers existed between the bosses and underlings. An influx of new members after the 1940s apparently altered this relationship, making face-to-face contact less feasible.[65]

By the 1960s, a several-layered organizational structure had solidified. Through the means of passing down instructions via a few trusted confidants, "top-ranking members" avoided "all obvious links to criminal operations."[66] The "insulating" mechanism that developed made prosecution of Mafia's bosses "usually extremely difficult and sometimes impossible." Its significance was underscored by the Senate for helping to preserve "30 years of silence, broken publicly only by Joseph Valachi."[67]

Typical positions in a 1960s New York City Family ranged from the "boss," (*capo*, *representando officiale* or simply "Father") through to "underboss" (*sottocapo*), *consiglieri* (advisor) and "acting boss." Beneath were "crews" or "*regimes*" led by group leaders or "*caporegimes*"(Americanized as "captains," "skippers" or "lieutenants").

The lowest level in the typical Mafia hierarchy, and by far the most numerous, was rank and file members. They were colloquially known as "button men," "good fellows," or "soldiers" (*soldato*).[68]

The noun "Family"[69] (*Famiglia*) is here deployed to indicate individual groups or units in the Mafia (*Cosa Nostra,* honored society or *Onorata Societa*) community. Less employed terms to designate an Mafia organization included "*borgata*," "*brugad*," and "administration." In western Sicily, individual Mafia groups were also known as *cosca,* in the plural as *cosche*.

American Mafiosi were, of any status, referred to as "*amici nostri*" ("friends of ours"), "men of respect," "wiseguys," "button men," or "men of honour." Initiated members were said to be "made" or "straightened out."

A degree of variation given to the "name" of exclusively Italian American criminal organizations by their own members existed. According to an informer, for instance, the Milwaukee "outfit" met in August 1963 to discuss reports on Joseph Valachi's information. Of the approximately 15 people there, only 2 had heard the name "*Cosa Nostra*." "The consensus of opinion of those present was that *Cosa Nostra* was just another name for the Mafia."[70]

Albini emphasized the point that such "positions" are better understood as denoting differences of power, as opposed to being analogous to the "fixed" patterns characterizing a bureaucratic structure of authority.[71] Consequently, "In an enterprise where nothing was ever written down, lines of authority might cross, be cut, or become entangled."[72]

The Pittsburgh *capo,* for example, "had the office," but the lowly member Nicolo Gentile "had the power."[73] It followed that "not all members of the same ranks are necessarily equal."[74]

CHAPTERS

To avoid drowning the analyses in a mountain of specifics, a decision was taken to insert the secondary material with the endnotes, where it can be consulted alongside the sources. Factual mistakes made in other works are by and large also noted in the endnotes.

Within each chronologically ordered chapter is an examination of the key issues thrown up by the information presented. In keeping with the objective of deploying fresh materials wherever possible, original records are stressed in the main text.

Chapter 2 outlines the immigration backdrop and the first sizeable Italian toeholds in New York City's organized crime. Prior to the mass arrival of Sicilians to New York, a thriving "Italian" underworld existed. The chapter progresses to the infamous "Black Hand," that criminal phenomenon that had a distant relationship to the American Mafia. Data is presented suggesting that Mafia organizations rarely became involved in this form of extortion. Long neglected, the Calabrians were an important Black Hand element.

Questions are asked in Chapter 3 as to whether New York Mafias were exact replicas of organizations in Sicily. One influential paradigm for instance posited that the American Mafia phenomenon was wholly the outcome of American conditions. Excellently situated to examine the matter was the counterfeiting combine led by Giuseppe Morello, head of the first of New York's five Families. Empirical findings identify striking similarities with Sicilian practices, and routinized links are revealed between America and Sicily.

The Morellos' staple illicit enterprise required, though, a readiness to adapt to local circumstances. Connections to other American cities are noted, but they do not suggest the existence of a vast criminal network with Morello at its core. Nor did the Morello hierarchy resemble that described in the 1960s.

The Morellos were but one of two factions emerging from the Sicilian Mafia base of Corleone. Exhaustively covered in Chapter 4, the Barnet Baff murder investigation exposed a cadre of Corleonesi with links to both Sicilian and American men of respect, yet acting in an industry where Jewish organized crime was of primary importance.

Three issues unfolding from the Baff case are pursued. First is the influence of locality and kinship in structuring Mafia relationships. Second, the opportunity is afforded to revise theory on recruitment routes into Mafia organized crime. Third, the effect of ethnicity in the context of industrial racketeering comes under scrutiny.

Sicilians were not alone in Italian-American crime. From their headquarters in Brooklyn, Chapter 5 portrays how a formidable Neapolitan crime organization with substantial resources, connections in the municipal government, and a fearsome fighting ability mounted a temporarily effective assault on the Morellos' Manhattan strongholds. Organizational differences with the Morellos are explained, as is the role of the wider Mafia constellation in the conflict.

Selectively admitting mainland Italians into the American honored society, to the chagrin of traditionalists, averted another interracial conflict. Non-Sicilians formed the nucleus of the "Americanized" leadership cadre that came to dominate popular depictions of the "Mafia" faction of U.S. organized crime.

The 18th Amendment to the Constitution embargo over the domestic manufacture and sale of alcoholic beverages, in January 1920, was a gift not only to upcoming crime figures but also to established *amici nostri*, who easily realized the potential for profit. Yet bootlegging encompassed a vast array of interests and ethnicities, in which the Italians were but a minority. Licit enterprises like those analyzed in Chapter 6 are frequently overlooked. The racketeering issue is reintroduced. Furthermore, while Chicago's experience over the course of National Prohibition was "the one that everyone associates with the regime of the gangsters,"[75] it failed to capture the variations and fissures in New York City.

By the end of the 1920s, the Mafia structure in New York City was stronger than before. New Families were formed, triggering tensions that formed a backcloth to the celebrated "Castellammare War." Because of its role in creating a series of powerful myths about the course of historical development in the American Mafia, issues surrounding the War occupy the whole of Chapters 7 and 8.[76]

Among others, Lupsha identified the Castellammare War as indicating "a turning point in Italian-American groups and in the further Americanization

of organized crime in the United States."[77] But the War's actual impact was limited even within New York City, where a traditionalistic power structure remained.

The evidence presented is summarized and extended in Chapter 9. Questions are asked as to the American Mafia's control over gambling, where Mafia power was assumed to be at its most potent. Allegations made of the profitability of Mafia run organized crime are also queried. Ethnic factors have limited Mafia influence. Given the rewards to be gained by Mafia membership or affiliation as denoted by Haller and others,[78] Mafiosi have tended to shun extensively working with non-Italian operators, limiting their overall influence in organized crime.

2 Black Hand, Calabrians, and the Mafia

INTRODUCTION

As economic and political conditions worsened or refused to improve, emigration from Italy to the new world rose. Immigration to New York from Italy jumped from 74,687 in 1890, to 145,429 by 1900.[1] Between 1900 and 1910, 2.1 million Italians came to the United States, over 80 percent from the south where secret criminal societies were active.[2] Newly accommodated Italian immigrants tended to huddle into subgroups. "A spirit of regionalism, or *campanilismo*, prevailed," that could erupt into hostilities with outsiders but which could also lead to cooperation.[3]

Selvaggi noted, "Once settled in their new homeland, the Italian immigrants faced a grim reality: crowded, noisy, filthy slums, endemic unemployment and ugly prejudice."[4] Problems facing the southern Italian and Sicilian masses after their arrival in the Promised Land promoted the re-emergence of ethnically based organized crime.

Joseph "Joe Cago" Valachi, born to immigrant Neapolitan parents in East Harlem, explained, "I came from the poorest family on earth—at least that was the way I felt when I was a little boy."[5] Valachi used to bring home wood from work and coal from dumps to keep warm; his mother made bedroom sheets from old cement bags sewn together.[6] Stealing to help pay the rent, Valachi walked with bandages around his feet for shoes.[7]

Although a large concentration of Italian immigrants was a precondition for the emergent of a Family in America, many came from the centre and north of Italy, where Mafia-type societies were absent. As a result, U.S. Mafia penetration, even in Italian communities, was uneven. Networks of immigrants from particular localities in Sicily would commonly reside in the same American area or town, following work opportunities and the availability of support services. Chart 2.1 indicates a selection of localities in Sicily from which American *Mafiosi* traveled.

Some returned to Italy, a feature that encouraged the movement of Mafiosi between American and Sicily.[8] The shape and composition of Italian immigration also supplied the territorial outlines that Mafia groups would eventually inhabit. Sections of Manhattan, Brooklyn and the Bronx became notorious for harboring Mafia elements. "Such neighborhoods," remarked

Figure 2.1 Immigrants in New York harbor. (Courtesy of the Library of Congress)

Abadinsky, "have traditionally provided the recruiting grounds that ensure the continuity of traditional organized crime."[9]

Oldest of the New York City "Little Italies" was that which centered around Mulberry Street in lower Manhattan, where "green" immigrants got their first taste of the downside of living in America. "Mulberry Bend," including Mulberry, Mott, Hester, Prince and Elizabeth Streets, was notorious for an unsavory, decrepit appearance.[10] In "The Bend," individuals and families "lived in damp basements, leaky garrets, clammy cellars and outhouses and stables converted into dwellings."[11]

Overcrowding, the search for work, and congestion led to the development of Manhattan's second Italian settlement based around East 108th Street, and was made up predominantly of southern Italians. "At its peak, Italian

Figure 2.2 Mulberry Street's "Little Italy." (Courtesy of the Library of Congress)

Harlem extended to about 104th Street on the south, Third Avenue on the west, north to about 120th Street, and east to the river," Orsi remarked.[12]

Chart 2.2 indicates the degree of Sicilian and Neapolitan criminal involvement on East 107th Street. The chart also denotes businesses mentioned in Chapter 4.

Several of the conspirators in the Baff murder of 1914 had addresses in close proximity to each other in East Harlem. Antonio Ferrara was born on East 108th Street and lived on 107th St. for some 20 years, where the Zaffaranos (Antonio and Joseph), had a feed or feather store. Giuseppe Arichiello resided on 107th Street across the way from Tony Ferrara. Tony Cardinale had a chicken market on 108th Street, near First Avenue. At the time of his death, furthermore, Ippolito Greco was accommodated at 230 East 107th Street.

Partly in reaction to the underdeveloped welfare infrastructure, but also to preserve cherished cultural values and institutions, Italians in New York City "lived together as far as possible, intermarrying and celebrating the traditional fests."[13] "Among ourselves," observed Joseph Bonanno, "we spoke Sicilian. English was hardly necessary to our lives."[14]

Wherever Italians settled in larger numbers, they gained a reputation for "banditry and general turbulence."[15] Sporadic outbursts of bloodletting appeared to vindicate the stereotype. In 1922, for example, Giovanni Magliocco was arrested for the shooting of Frank D'Agati. Evidence

1 - Marsala
Giuseppe Masseria***

2 - Castellammare del Golfo
-Salvatore Maranzano***
-Gaspare Milazzo***
-Bonanno family***
-Bonventre family***
-Buccellato family
-DiGregorio family***
-Magaddino family***
-Sabella family***

3 - Camporeale
-Joseph Scacco**

4 - Partinico
-Carlo Costantino*
-Antonio Passanante*

5 - Cinisi
-Paolo Palazzolo**

6 - Carini
-Giuseppe Fanaro*
-Vito LaDuca*
-Tomasso Petto*

7 - Belmonte Mazzango
-Giuseppe Traina**/***

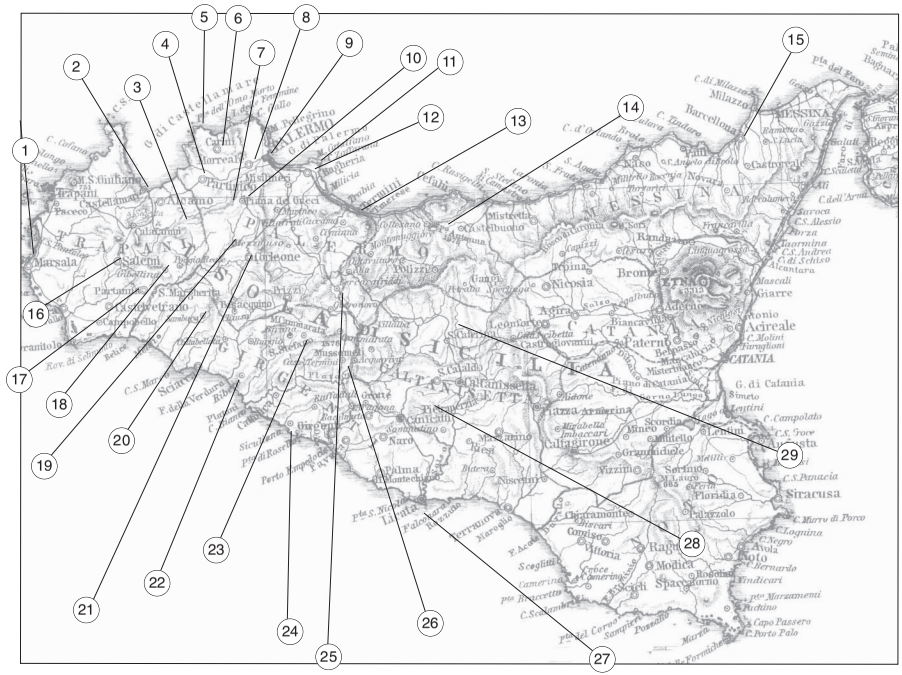
8 - Monreale
-Joseph Vaglica**

9 - Palermo
-Vito Cascioferro*
-Salvatore Cina*
-Salvatore D'Aquila†
-Pasquale Enea*
-Salvatore LoVerde***
-Gaetano Lucchese***
-Ignazio Lupo*
-Vincenzo**/*** and Filippo Mangano
-Stefano Rannelli***
-Gambino family***

10 - Piana Dei Greci
-Giovanni Pecoraro*

11 - Villabate
-Emanuel Cammarata**
-Giuseppe Fontana*
-Giuseppe Magliocco**
-Joseph Profaci**

12 - Bagheria
-Giuseppe Aiello***
-Giovanni Zarcone*



13 - Termini Imerese
Vincenzo Moreci*

14 - Cerda
-Michael Russo**

15 - Barcellona
-Joseph Biondo***
-Umberto Valenti†

16 - Salemi
-Frank Cucchiara†
-Gaspare Messina***
-Joseph Lombardo†

17 - Partanna
-Giuseppe Palermo*

18 - Gibellina
-Salvatore Lombardino**
-Santo Calamia*

19 - San Giuseppe Iato
-Vincenzo Troia***
-Francesco Longo†
-Zito family

20 - Sambuca
-Calogero Gulotta*

21 - Corleone
-Antonio Cecala*
-Michale Coniglio*
-Angelo Gagliano*
-Tommaso Gagliano***
-Ippolito Greco*
-Stefano LaSalle*
-Marco Macaluso*
-Antonio Milone*
-Ignazio Milone*
-Salvatore Oliveri**
-Gaetano Reina***
-Leoluca Trombatore*
-LoMonte family*
-Morello/Terranova family*

22 - Ribera
-Philip Bacino**

23 - San Stefano Quisquina
-Vincenzo Giglio*
-Ignazio Italiano**

24 - Siciliana
-Nicolo Gentile***

25 - Lecara Friddi
-Giuseppe DiPriemo*
-Salvatore Lucania***

26 - Casteltermini
-Calogero Sanfilippo**

27 - Licata
-Salvatore Tilocco**

28 - Serradifalco
-Bonaventura Pinzolo***

29 - Vallelunga
-Cassandro Bonasera
-Samuel** and Joseph DiCarlo†

*1900s Morello member or associate.
**Attendee at 1928 Cleveland meeting.
***1930/1931 Castellammarese War figure.
†Other prominent Mafia figure

Chart 2.1 Birthplaces of selected Sicilian-born American Mafiosi.

Addresses located on East 107th Street:

207 - Giuseppe Morello, 1909 - 1910.
- Stefano LaSalle, 1909.

208 - Helmar Social Club, 1931.
209 - Salvatore Speciale, 1930.
213 - Fortunato LoMonte, 1914.
214 - Vincent Rao, 1925.
- Calogero Morello, 1912.

222 - Joseph "Pip the Blind" Gagliano, 1947.
225 - Frank "Big Dick" Amato, 1925.
- John Ormento, 1951.

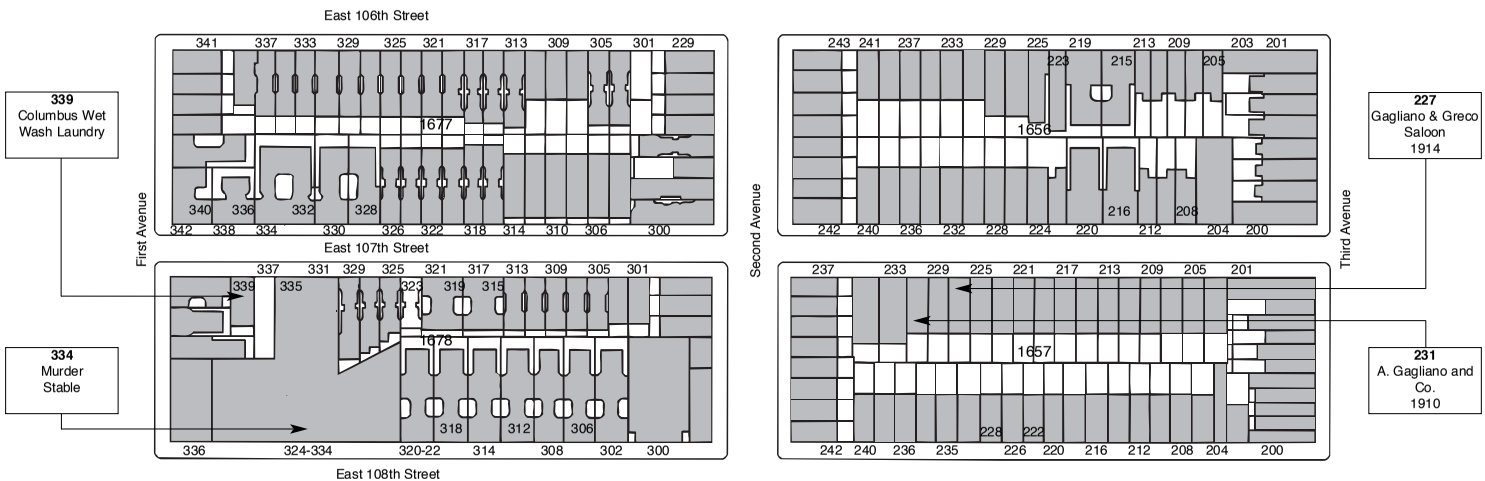
231 - Calogero "Charles" Rao, 1915.
- Frank Livorsi, 1910, 1915.

235 - Vincent Rao, 1930, 1935, 1938.
236 - Frank Callaci, 1943.
300 - Salvatore "Tom Mix" Santoro, 1951.
331 - Stefano LaSalle, 1914.
334 - Joseph Vento, 1952.
338 - Giuseppe "Joe Peppe" Viserte, 1913.
339 - Chuck Nazzaro, 1915.

227 - Gaetano Reina, 1914.
229 - Morello's plastering business, 1910.
230 - Ippolito Greco, 1915.
- Giuseppe Arichiello, 1917.

231 - Angelo Gagliano, 1910, 1916.
- Salvatore Speciale, 1925

231 - Stefano LaSalle, 1910.
- Calogero "Charles" Rao, 1915.
- Frank Livorsi, 1910, 1915.



Addresses located on East 108th Street:

234 - Louis Lazzara, 1912.
236 - Frank Costello, 1915.
312 - Joseph Valachi, 1910.
327 - Giuseppe "Joe Peppe" Viserte, 1920

Addresses not shown on map, but located in immediate area:

East 107th Street:
124 - Joseph Rosato, 1930.
400 - Frank Monaco, 1911.

East 108th Street:
335 - Pasquarella Spinelli, 1912.
335 - Joseph Valachi, 1932.

East 109th Street:
318 - Gennaro Galluci, 1909.
- Giouse Gallucci, Gallucci's bakery and restaurant, 1909.

329 - Giouse Gallucci's cigar store, 1909.

Chart 2.2 East 107th Street.

adduced that D'Agati in a drunken stupor had shot and killed his wife Antonia Magliocco.

Her father Giovanni Magliocco, who lived in the same building on Union Street, turned a revolver on D'Agati. His plea of self-defense was accepted and Giovanni Magliocco was freed.[16] Magliocco was the father of three brothers who went on the either run or to participate in the Profaci organized crime Family in Brooklyn (Chapter 6).

A few Sicilians chose to pursue a double life, on the one hand engaged in organized crime, on the other achieving acceptance as generous benefactors. The descendant of one, Gaetano "Tommy" Reina, remembered him best as a "hard working immigrant that made a life for his family with a legitimate business venture . . . at a time when many families could not feed themselves." Reina should "be remembered as an American success story."[17] The offspring of another, Vincent Mangano, explained, "Joining a 'family' comprised of their fellow countrymen gave the Italians a certain power over their own survival and a fighting chance in the 'food chain.'"[18]

PAOLO ANTONIO "PAUL KELLY" VACCARELLI

Even before Sicilians made a mark, Italians were powerful in New York City. In this era, former professional flyweight boxer Paolo "Paul Kelly" Vaccarelli was "perhaps the most successful and the most influential gangster in New York history,"[19] as the leader of the Five Points gang, active in the area between Broadway and the Bowery, 14th Street and City Hall Park. Kelly's gang was predominantly Italian, while his chief rival, Monk Eastman, (real name Edward Osterman), was Jewish.[20]

Both Eastman and Kelly had connections to the New York County Democratic political organization, colloquially known as "Tammany Hall."[21] "There was always some unseen but powerful influence," said the *New York Times,* "that reached out and saved Kelly from more serious charges."[22] The two gangs furnished "repeat" voters to favored district politicians, in exchange for virtual immunity from arrest or prosecution. Always a worry for their political patrons though were cases where gunfights forced them to intercede, and the police to launch "crackdowns."

Kelly, born in 1876 in New York City to parents from Potenza, Italy,[23] was later depicted as "a perfect example" of the "dapper, soft-spoken chap who seldom engaged in rough-and-tumble fighting . . ."[24] Kelly's commercial interests included the New Brighton Dance Hall on Great Jones Street (his headquarters), the Noonday Social Club, a "disorderly house," the Stag Auto Garage, and the Independent Inglander Dramatic and Pleasure Club, a "high class gambling joint."[25]

In the wake of Monk Eastman's jailing for ten years in April 1904,[26] Vaccarelli's stock briefly rose. But action against his saloon and the Paul Kelly Association in 1905 soured the triumph, as did reform group campaigning;[27] he

moved uptown for good.[28] Kelly went on to pursue a successful career in organized labor, and was among the first of the Brooklyn "waterfront czars."

Intimations emerged of Vaccarelli's ties to the rising New York Mafia. He lived for a time on East 116th Street with the Terranovas, according to Thompson and Raymond.[29] Valachi also mentioned "Paul Vaccarelli" as having a partnership in a Bronx numbers bank in the early 1930s with Valachi's chum Girolamo "Bobby Doyle" Santuccio, and other upcoming Family members.[30]

THE "BLACK HAND"

Black Hand crimes defined the southern Italian immigrant experience so far as the public was concerned.[31] The stigma of the Black Hand was applied "to the Italian community's criminal problem and sometimes to Italians in general."[32]

Such was the political impact of the Black Hand issue that it influenced the debate on immigration, with a rise in Black Hand atrocities correlating to the laxity of controls at ports that permitted criminals from Italy to enter apparently unhindered.[33] Presuming that the problem lay in the Italian badlands from whence the perpetrators came, it was argued that the Black Hand would also be eradicated by the better use of police resources, and through better intelligence given to the police by the Italian-American community.[34]

It was pointed out that the overwhelming number of victims of the Black Hand was also from Italian stock. Nelli's research indicated, moreover, that Black Hand activity was exclusive to those districts where "compliant, hard-working" victims were concentrated.[35] While there were non-Italians who indulged in blackmailing, their use of the technique was far less systematic.[36]

HISTORIOGRAPHY AND DEFINITION

Because it was content to replicate the contents of articles on the Black Hand's rise and decline, Pitkin's book, the sole one devoted to this phenomenon, was of limited value. The key question of whether or how the Black Hand related to the Mafia was sidelined, and arising theoretical issues were left in abeyance. Like the Fried,[37] Rockaway[38] and Joselit works,[39] Pitkin dealt with published reactions to minority claims from within the agenda of crime scares.

Confusion surrounds the correct categorization, and the parameters, of the "Black Hand." Downey and Messick believed that Mafia families were once called Black Hand gangs.[40] Flynn called the early Mafia "the Black-Hand Society,"[41] whereas Joseph Petrosino, the great New York

City detective, thought the Black Hand was "practically identical" to the Camorra, a criminal society active in Naples and surrounding provinces.[42]

The Black Hand label was applied to most unsolved "Italian-on-Italian" crimes. As Lombardo argued, "Because of newspaper publicity, vendetta killings and almost every other crime in the Italian community was soon attributed to the Black Hand."[43] It echoed Landesco's comment; "The police call every mystery murder in the Italian community (murders in which no information is forthcoming) a 'black hand' murder."[44]

Assuming that unsolved homicides involving Italians were automatically the work of the Black Hand could obscure the real reasons for fatalities. Pellegrino Scaglia (alias Antonio Viola) was arrested in St. Louis in August 1911 for the slaying of Bartholdi Cardinali, assassinated as he sat at the window of his 21st Street home.[45] Scaglia had previously been seriously wounded in a "stiletto" attack; raising the spectre of a feud slaying or of the dreaded Black Hand.[46]

One of Batholdi's brothers, Giuseppe, had been assassinated in 1908, his body found in Coffey Park, Brooklyn. A friend had gone to Giuseppe for help once he received a Black Hand letter. Giuseppe also received a death threat, and Scaglia was the last person known to have seen him alive. Scaglia disappeared until he was reported as residing in St. Louis.[47]

An investigation revealed that the Scaglia and Cardinali families had been warring in their native town of Burgio, Sicily, and that the American deaths were probably tied to that cause, accounting for another Cardinali murder in New York.[48] Bartholdi's uncle perished in the conflict, and a sniper resembling Scaglia mortally wounded Bartholdi in 1911. Scaglia became affiliated with the Pueblo *Famiglia* and was mowed down in Pueblo, Colorado, in May 1922.[49]

In December 1910, fruit dealer Damien Capuano was killed in "Dago Hill," St. Louis. Joe and Tommaso Viviano, brothers or cousins, were held for the crime. Capuano was a friend of Tommaso's, who was arrested nearby the Capuano body with a discharged pistol in his hand, which Tommaso said was only used to attract the police to the crime scene.

It was reported as another "Black Hand" case. But there was no attempt at robbery; it was an act of revenge.[50] Capuano's daughter later married Pasquale Santino, a high-ranking St. Louis organized crime figure assassinated in 1927.

The Black Hand, in its letter writing form, was simply one method of parting a susceptible Italian immigrant from his money. Yet though usually defined by the sending of correspondence signed with the "Black Hand" or "*La Mano Nera"* emblem utilized to frighten victims,[51]many of the larger "Black Hand societies" employed neither letters, nor the Black Hand logo.

Pennsylvania "Black Hand" societies for example, were equally in the blackmail game, but did so by pressuring victims into paying a "membership fee," the chief source of their income, for which little was received in return.[52]

NEW YORK CITY BLACK HAND

The constant factor throughout was the extortion of the Italian-born via threats of harm to persons and/or property if their demands were unmet. Within the letter-writing wing, a Black Hand episode began with the sending of several letters. If these failed to have the desired effect, a "friend" of the victim may have conveniently appeared on the scene, in the role of a conciliator anxious to settle the matter to the satisfaction of everyone by arriving at a compromise figure. Once it was paid, however, the extortionists might return for more. Bomb attacks were a trademark of the letter sending variant of the Black Hand (guns and knives were rarely used).

The Cappiello case of September 1903 was the first reported use of the term "Black Hand."[53] Nicolo Cappiello, a wealthy contractor of 2nd Place, Brooklyn, received a letter signed by the "Mano Nera," demanding $1,000 with the warning that his house would be otherwise dynamited. When the money was duly supplied, another $3,000 was asked for. At this point, Cappiello went to the police and Biaggio Giordano of Sackett Street was arrested.[54]

The Black Hand was prevalent in every American city with a sizeable Italian community, with New York City being the largest single site of activity. Recorded bombings rose there from 44 in 1908, to 70 in 1911. One estimate claimed that for every incidence of blackmail reported, 250 went unrecorded.

In response to the upsurge of Italian crime, Police Commissioner William McAdoo in September 1904 announced the creation of an "Italian Squad"[55] under Detective Sergeant Joseph Petrosino, which soon increased in size to 30 men with a branch in Brooklyn under Lt. Antonio Vachris. But convictions remained rare. (In 1908, for instance, only 36 were noted in "Black Hand cases."[56])

MOTIVES

In opposition to the popular perception of the Black Hand victim and his tormentor invariably being strangers,[57] Petrosino suggested that Black Hand criminals often had a prior relationship with their targets.[58] Cases were by no means unknown of less prosperous Italians helping Black Handers to select their more successful victims.[59] Failing merchants, in addition, might work hand in glove with arsonists assuming the guise of the Black Hand to burn down their premises for insurance money.[60]

Business rivalry furnished another rationale for a Black Hand scare. A case in point was the bombing in 1908 of the home of Joseph DiGiorgio, a fruit importer of Baltimore, who received intimidating letters from his chief commercial rival Antonio Lanasa. "The obvious objective of the operation," Nelli observed, "was to eliminate Lanasa's rival, using the Black Hand as cover."[61]

Another instance concerned a dispute between two saloonkeepers on East 151st Street. After the rent was raised, causing his competitor to promptly take over his business, the ousted businessman ended up throwing a bomb