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American Gangs of the Roaring Twenties, Al

Capone and Chicago Mobs

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Dedication

To my angel mother,

To my dear father,

To every dear person to my heart.

Ahmed

Dedication

I would offer a few words to dedicate this humble work to my family that continues to set a good example for devotion and perseverance in the face of many life obstacles. They have loved, honored, cherished each other in sickness and in health and I am grateful they have blessed me with a loving family of origin.

Yaakoub

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Abstract

This study primarily investigates the appearance of mafia, Black Hand and Organized Crime in the American society during the Roaring Twenties. It provides a brief history that shows the genesis of gangs in the United States of America. It was characterized by different groups in which each one altered from the other. The United States became a wealthy nation with a high standard of living, several kinds of cars, large houses and a new way of living in which everybody wanted to get money whatever the means. This research emphasizes on the rise of organized crime associated with Al Capone. Therefore, such a study has a crucial importance in order to shed light on the way gangs like Al Capone's arose in Chicago during the 1920s. The research approach adopted in this dissertation is a historical one. The findings from this research provide evidences that the emergence of organized crime in the 1920s lies behind several reasons one of them is the prohibition of liquor.

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General Introduction

America's history was shaped through a colossal sum of events; it is also full of extraordinary incidents, as well as tremendous characters that made America the way it is today. Hitherto it is common and agreed that the 1920s America "the Roaring Twenties" are the best years Americans have ever had, without forgetting to mention that these years had their heavy side of bad circumstances as well. It was the time of leisure, pleasure, and prosperity; it was also the time of gangs, bootleggers, smugglers, and organized crime.

Through this thesis: "American Gangs of the Roaring Twenties, Al Capone and Chicago Mobs," the role of gangs during the twentieth century is deeply felt. Accordingly, this work is aimed at revealing and shedding light on the emergence of Al Capone in a period when America was described as the wealthiest country in the world with no obvious rival. Gangs found the prohibition of liquor as a way of living, cities such as Chicago were full of corruption and syndicates, each city had its major gang, but Chicago with Capone was the most famous one.

With reference to the Western historical works about the staggering appearance of organized crime during the Roaring Twenties, the following questions could be raised: How could criminal gangs like Al Capone's appear and prosper in an age of abundance like the 1920's? How did the different events of the Roaring Twenties help in thriving the gangs' activities?

Following a historical and biographical approach, one might assume that the reason behind the rise of criminal gangs like Al Capone's during the Roaring Twenties is the investment in illegal activities, namely bootlegging, gambling and prostitution. It can be said that the Roaring Twenties with its various and divert events was an era of cursed blessings for it witnessed both; affluent economy and organized crime.

This thesis is divided in two chapters; the first one deals with the Genesis of the 1920s Mobs and their development through time, giving a historical background and a brief definition for each of Mafia, Black Hand and Organized Crime, moving on to deal with the most significant Italian gangs that were scattered all over the United States of America between the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries to narrow the study and make it concerned more about Chicago gangs' history and so to conclude with a brief biography of Al Capone.

As for the second chapter, it aims at explaining the reasons behind the spread of delinquency and the rise of gangsters' profits; it also sheds light on the most important events that –besides prohibition- paved the way for the upward spiral of organized crime in Chicago under the leadership of Al Capone during the 1920s, to end it up with the fall of the king of the underworld.

Chapter One

The Genesis of the 1920s Mobs

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1.1. Introduction

The origin of the American gangs of the 1920s is dated back to the eighteenth century with the emergence of mafia at first and the abrupt rise of the Black Hand¹ in the late nineteenth century second. This chapter entitled “the Genesis of the 1920s Mobs” aims at setting the historical background of the Roaring Twenties gangs and situating them in the political, social and moral milieu they inhabited. The current chapter is composed of three main parts; the first part discusses the origins of Mafia, Black Hand and organized crime. This element is a conceptual one when three key terms related to the field of criminality are historically defined. The second part is an exploration of the major Italian gangs in the United States of America. This subsequent element solely sought to define and give an overview of some of the most powerful Italian gangs in the United States during the 1920s, along with their illegal activities and wide notoriety around the country. The last part of this chapter is an attempt to cover the historical background of Chicago’s gangs. This part is a precise version of the previous one; it is devoted to trace the roots of Chicago mobs, taking Chicago as one of the main cities of the United States, where criminals have set solid grounds in the 1920s for their hideous crimes. Here Italian gangs emerged to be the most powerful ones compared to other communities’, with a so powerful and wise leadership notably Al Capone.

¹ A criminal organization controlled by Sicilian and Italian gangsters in the Italian communities of New York City, Chicago, New Orleans, Kansas City, and other United States cities from about 1890 to 1920. The Black Hand activities focused mainly on threatening rich people by sending a letter printed with Black Hands.

1.2. The Origins of Mafia, Black Hand and Organized Crime

The terms: Mafia, Black Hand, and Organized Crime might be confusing in America, especially when it comes to their way of use. Sometimes people even refer to them as synonymous (Iorizzo 1). Each of these concepts emerged in a different period of time, however, it is impossible to say at which point along the continuum these terms became separate and the fact that these concepts had some features in common, made people unaware of their actual meaning. Mafia was the first one to appear on the scene.

1.2.1. Mafia

The very seeds of Mafia began to appear in western Sicily where people joined gangs to protect their properties because the government failed to provide them the security they sought. This system led to the appearance of *cosche*; criminal groups that were hired to rob; kill and blackmail weak people. Members of the band took the vow of *omertà*; an oath forced them to deal with their own problems without the interference of the law and which encouraged the spread of delinquency. Each mafia syndicate labelled foreigners as untrustworthy, therefore to be a member in the group one had to be from the same home town. So if any betrayal occurred among the *cosche* it would be of course from one of them (Iorizzo 1-2).

By the beginning of the 19th century and due to the waned economic and political situation in Italy a massive influx of Italian immigrants accompanied with criminal elements headed to the United States picturing it as the land of opportunities. The years from 1890 to 1900 marked a remarkable portion of foreigners, New York City alone had about 145, 429 Italian immigrants and by 1910 the United States became overwhelmed by

2.1 million Italian immigrants who, most of them, used to live in criminal areas where mafia activities were hyper-active (Critchley 14).

In order to gain an official involvement among mafia groups one had to perform certain rituals such as piercing his finger with a sharp object so that he bleeds, swearing an oath as a sign of loyalty while carrying an igniting image of a patron saint. In addition, other rules were set in which one had to never attack one another and never involve in sexual affairs with another member's girlfriend or wife. These rules were blessed by the mafia members; respecting them was a primary thing for any mafia member; in fact they recognized themselves as men of honour (Mafia in the United States 4).

The Italian Mafiosi ideas and principles started to play a focal role in the mafia dealings by the 1900s. While this latter was highly condemned and occasioned vehement opposition by the newspapers, a new face of criminal acts known as the Black Hand catapulted to the scene through the use of new strategies different from the ones the mafia used to rely on (Dickie 161).

1.2.2. Black Hand

It was not that long before the term Black Hand became known for people in America. Originated from Italy and spreading in the very beginning of the 1900s; the Black Hand members implied the use of threatening letters printed with a hand in ink to demand money on pain of death from local merchants and wealthy individuals for more than fifteen years. Under these circumstances, criminals were effortlessly taking benefit of their own category. Black Hand members epitomized a true example of this type of criminal activity by frightening their companion immigrants (Iorizzo 2-3).

The Black Hand likewise mafia had its own rules and rituals, their rules were written down in a book called *Bible of the Black-Handers*, such rules were embodied in respecting the other companions and never insult one another, Black Handers were sworn to secrecy concerning their activities and other things that happen within the Black Hand society. They worked in affinity when it comes to common interests through resorting to vote. To officially join the pack one had to be aware of the local laws and during the ceremonials of the Black Hand a new joiner was taken to the meeting with his eyes covered and after having a conversation with the leader of the group he got to see the other members (Critchley 25).

Ordinary people experienced humiliation and affliction at the hands of the Black Hand members, sometimes they sought the help from mafia; mafia members offered their protection in exchange of money. Besides, mafia members disdained the Black Handers deeds. Things started to change as soon as people became aware of the fact that they could rely on local police and federal forces against criminal terror. Shortly after, many reputable Italians realized that local police were not in alliance with the blackmailers and as a reaction they collaborated with law enforcement and eradicated the Black Hand in 1920. Notwithstanding, it was the federal government that annihilated such crimes by taking legal procedures against those criminal practices. When the Black Hand was evaporated, a new kind of crime burst on the scene that rests upon complex connections among its members known as organized crime (Iorizzo 2-3).

1.2.3. Organized Crime

Unlike the terms Mafia and Black Hand the concept of Organized Crime was coined in the United States during the Roaring Twenties. At first, organized crime focus was mainly on gambling and prostitution, the best example for that is Big Jim Colosimo;

an Italian rich gangster who collected his wealth from brothels and gambling profits, but after the announcement of the Volstead act and the prohibition of liquor the organized crime turned its attention to the bootlegging activities since it brought as much money as gambling and prostitution did. The 1920s witnessed a tremendous growth of Organized crime; it survived in a community that embraced Italian immigrants in places which were characterized by poor conditions. Criminal minds such as Johnny Torrio, Al Capone, Lucky Luciano, created organized crime in America. They shaped its core to a new extent. Criminal groups were highly organized and in some cases they seemed untraceable for political institutions, in the same time organized crime leaders sought the help of politicians when they needed it, the gangs knew well how to control the bootlegging activities in their speakeasies which were spread all over New York, Chicago and Los Angeles, and with the help of politicians their illegal dealings were guaranteed. It was common for gangsters to fill political positions or even be chosen to a governmental position (Iorizzo 4).

Taking a look at the cline of the three concepts (mafia, Black Hand and Organized Crime) shows that even though they share some elements like the criminality feature. Still, each one differs from the other. Mafia syndicates as Iorizzo explained in his book *Al Capone, a Biography of a Self Made Man* (2003), were hired often times by rich people who wanted their dirty stuff to be done instead of doing them themselves, in the other hand the Black Hand ring chose their targets by their own will, who by the way were rich in most of the times, sometimes even leaders of organized crime were blackmailed by the Black Hand members, both of Big Jim Colosimo and Capone were harassed several times because they owned a huge amount of money, and last but not least, the organized crime racketeers used every possible way to get their job done. In opposition to both mafia and Black Hand, organized crime criminals sought the protection of the law and federal

institutions to have their problems fixed. Italian gangs were famous figures of the time; they controlled the main criminal activities in the major cities of the United States (Iorizzo 4-5).

1.3. The Major Italian Gangs in 1920s America

The Italian mafia has been famous both in Italy and the United States. The domination of the Italian gangs on the American organized crime during the Roaring Twenties traces its history back to the Sicilian mafia which in turn was created in Italy then moved later on to the United States of America in the mid-1800s to bring together the Sicilian peasants against their opponents. The Sicilian Mafia, which was initially a group of respectable Sicilian men, became an organised criminal group in the 1920s. The Sicilian mafia subsidized New York's biggest five crime families which were the main tree from which the other minor gangs were derived.

1.3.1. The Five Crime Families

Of all United States' 20 crime families, New York only contained five² which took the lead of organized crime making it the capital of delinquency and dirty activities in the United States. On the other hand, other cities could barely contain one family. Thus, the Big Apple³ became the headquarters from which the other cities' crime families took orders (Mafia in the United States 3).

The powerful position the families have acquired in New York through illegal activities, namely bootlegging and prostitution had helped in investing large amounts of money into other cities, from the East Coast; Florida and California to the West Coast, mainly Las Vegas where tremendous quantities of liquor were consumed through the many

² Five crime families make up La Cosa Nostra in the New York area: the Bonanno, Colombo, Genovese, Gambino, and Lucchese families

³ New York City Nickname

casinos that were scattered all around the city, converting a drowsy desert town into an international gambling mecca (Raab 10).

Bonanno, Colombo, Gambino, Genovese, and Lucchese were the infamous five families of New York that mustered their strength over the years to become the kings and queens of the underworld, therefore, it resulted into an inevitable domination over other Mafia organizations, diminishing their power, some even to nothingness (Ibid).

For the Cosa Nostra New York was a crown jewel, it helped furnishing the gangs businesses and financial affairs via the sale of different products. They diverted their illegal benefits in hideous secretive ways such as in times of filling up gasoline. They took over the huge commerce in the country's biggest port. Their benefits of construction estimated about a billion-dollar, getting money from every possible domain they could reach and from every man they could blackmail. The five crime families showed no mercy towards those who tried to bar the way of their despicable operations. New York alone could not contain the five crime families' germ; the Sicilian mafia's ideas and traditions soon were transferred into other cities spreading this germ at an unprecedented scale (Ibid).

1.3.2. Sicilian Mafia “La Cosa Nostra”

La Cosa Nostra is the incarnation of the organized crime in the United States; it was formed out in New York City during the beginning of the nineteenth century to grow up later on in an extraordinary way mainly in New York City area and Chicago in the 1920s and impose a monopoly over illegal activities such as; prostitution, gambling, bootlegging, and racketeering (Finckenauer 84). La Cosa Nostra's greed for narcotics dollars accelerated crime rates, law-enforcement corruption, and the erosion of inner-city neighborhoods in New York and throughout the United States; it also supported the five crime families within the Big Apple. All the benefits brought out by the aforementioned

activities helped corrupting politicians in sensitive posts, which in return had to guarantee the mafia businesses (Finckenauer 86).

The Sicilian mafia is considered to be the most dangerous and the most powerful organization in the United States of America, with its 2,500 members it could manage to run its activities as diverse as; drugs dealings, counterfeiting, political corruption, frauds, and other racketeering crimes. The Sicilian mafia crimes swept over everyone who stood on its way even high ranking officials including; generals, judges, mayors and parliament members could not survive its threats. The Sicilian mafia paved the way to other Italian gangs essentially the Outfit (Ibid).

1.3.3. The Outfit

As for Italians, they were treated as foreigners and were disenfranchised at first, but when the government announced the prohibition of liquor they seized the moment and started extending their power over Chicago. Italian gangs used to live on the profits of gambling and prostitution it was rare to have any trouble, but with the bootlegging in the field several things changed. Assassins were hired to kill famous gangsters, gangs planned ambushes for each other and murders were just familiar daily events. Italians formed the Outfit gang, M Dickson's Chicago Outfit, History of the Chicago Mob defines the Outfit as: an Italian vicious group that appeared in New York in the 1900s to move later on to Chicago; Illinois in 1910. The Outfit earned their bad reputation under Giacomo Big Jim Colisimo leadership in the 1920s, but they were feared more under the rein of Johnny Torrio and his partner Al Capone. The Outfit gang was addressed with several names; Chicago Outfit, The outfit, The Organization and Chicago Mafia (Dickson 3).

The Outfit succeeded escaping the law each time they commit a crime, all they needed to do was to bribe the right person. Nelli's history of Italian crime points: "Many

Chicago policemen worked illegally and in close harmony with criminals and politicians” (Nelli qtd. In Humbert 379). Policemen were suborned and paid for, and for those who dared to apply justice they ended up facing inevitable death. The Outfit gang was only one example of New York’s notorious gangs which later on took Chicago as its main area of illegal activities (Ibid).

1.4. Historical Background of Chicago’s gangs

The history of mobs in Chicago is dated back to the eighteenth century. It starts with Irish then moves to Italians. These gangs have had fierce challenges against each other to control the city. Following a code of loyalty that granted them endless support and made it easy for them to survive and evolve generation after generation. Hagedorn states:

... We can begin to understand why some gangs persist for decades despite changes in leadership and police repression. Institutionalized gangs are not merely an “expendable tool...of dynamic leaders” or sustained only by profits from drug sales. These gangs are “living organisms” instilling in their members, as well as the community, a belief in the organization itself. This belief persists despite organizational performance since it is essentially cultural, not rational, and handed down as tradition through generations (9).

Compared to the other cities in Illinois State, Chicago was the worst; its public institutions had suspicious dealings that brought direct advantage to both gangsters and politicians. The underworld term was coined in Chicago. Chicago witnessed impassable roads during winter in the years 1855-70, which made it urgent to raise the grade level of streets downtown and along the river. When the bootlegs era came, Gamblers made their

offices below the buildings and gave birth to a new word. The first people to appear on the surface of delinquency were the Irish (Ibid).

1.4.1. Early Irish Gang

It is a well-documented fact that the Irish gangs were the first mobs to emerge in the United States of America. As any other gang, the Irish has their famous mobsters; Mike Cassius McDonald was on the top of the Irish gang through the nineteenth century. He managed gambling, prostitution and developed relationships with politicians. In that period Chicago was the quickest growing city in the world, its population shot up from 29,000 to one million. The red-light houses; places that were full of prostitutes, were all over the city, so were the gamblers. For the Irish, their days as kings of the underworld would end in the nineteenth century, mainly by their own selection. By 1900, the Irish had occupied half of all civil service jobs in Chicago, most of them were either policemen, or firemen. As late as 1930, three quarters of all police captains were Irish (Hagedorn 3). Irish politicians like John Coughlin Bathhouse and Kenna Hinky Dink would make coalition with gamblers and red light business owners. Coughlin and Kenna controlled Chicago by counterfeiting elections and bribing the city's politicians (Ibid).

By the 1890s, the Irish handed over the rein to the Italians. They dropped being gangsters in favour of filling political positions. Mike McDonald's days as a gangster were over. Big Jim Colosimo, an Italian gangster took over as the vice king and continued drowning the city in alcohol and prostitution. It was the time for the crime in the United States to wear a new suit, in other words; the crime became Italianized. Italian gangs such as the 42 Gang, Taylor Street Crew and the Circus Gang adhered to blackmailing. (4)

1.4.2. The Forty-two Gang

The Forty-two gang name has a suggestive story behind it. In his book *Organized Crime in Chicago* (1968), Landesco explains that the gang was labelled as the Forty-two gang after the legend of Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves. Initially, the gang started its activities with forty members to include other two afterwards. Originally the name was the Forty Thieves and by distortion of language turned into Forty Teefs and later the Forty-twos (Lombardo 121).

The Forty-two gang is a group of criminals who emerged in the United States of America during the years between 1925 and 1934. The Forty-two Gang was a group of teenagers who committed a variety of brutal crimes in Chicago city from auto theft, coin-box looting and smash-and-grab burglary to armed robbery and murder, even Chicago's mayor wife "William H. Thompson" was robbed by members of the gang. The leadership of the gang was assumed to those who have great knowledge of the streets; accordingly, they were named the smart heads. The gang never had an official leader, the old members exploited the new ones and that was the way things were run in the gang. The brains of the Gang were chosen by the adult gangs in Chicago, including those led by Bugs Moran, Joseph "Red" Bolton, and Al Capone (123).

1.4.3. Other Ethnic Gangs

There were several gangs in Chicago during the 1920s. Starting with the Chinese who were wane and weak to be prime political players, but Chinatown's place near the levee⁴ and ghetto was a primary zone for whoring and gambling. Chicago's mobs were organized by criminal brains (Hagedorn 5). Ko-lin Chin stated after studying the Chinese

⁴ A low wall built at the side of a river to prevent it from flooding

mobs in New York that they “are not simply expressions of adolescent mischief.” (Ibid) The rest of the 1920s gangs were Polish in origin, they were not powerful tsars vis-à-vis Italians who emerged as great leaders during the prohibition era breaking the laws that forebode selling alcohol. Italian gang leaders such as Johnny Torrio, Lucky Luciano and Al Capone topped the list of those who shaped a true morbid image of criminality during the beautiful image of the Roaring Twenties (5-6).

1.5. Capone in Chicago

It was the year 1893 when the Capones immigrated to America, having no idea, of course, that they would give birth to a child that at an early age would set his footprint in the world’s history of criminals later on.

1.5.1. The Early Years

Alphonse Capone was born on January 17th 1899 in Brooklyn, New York, into an immigrant family; to Gabriel and Teresa Capone. They, initially, settled on Navy Street and later on moved to Park Avenue next to the Brooklyn Navy Yard. This area was a tenement for many immigrants. His father Gabriel was a perfectly respectable barber, his mother Teresa was devoutly religious woman to the end of her life. Against the odds their son grew up to be a great bandit (BBC – Crime Case Closed – Al Capone 1).

The Capones, like most immigrants, had a harsh daily life; they were a hardworking family trying to fit in their new society. Their house was near to the popular gangs of Manhattan; therefore it was easy for anyone in that area to become a member of the mobs who operated in the lower east side of New York. The hard conditions Capone faced made him a tough boy; by age fourteen he was the *anna* of a gang named The Navy Street Gang in order to stop the harassment of the Irish to the Italian women and girls.

Until the sixth grade Alphonse excelled at school, but shortly afterwards he was expelled for hitting his teacher in reprisal for hitting him first. After that incident the Capones changed their neighbourhood, a move which opened up new vistas for the family and had a huge influence on Capone's criminal future (Iorizzo 24).

The new house was adjacent to Italian gangster Johnny Torrio who had a major impact on Capone's career. At the age of sixteen Capone worked for Frankie Yale who by his turn worked for Torrio. Capone as a collector insured payments from deadbeats; he also worked as a pimp, then as a bartender at the Harvard Inn where he got his nickname Scarface after insulting a patron's sister. Three gouges were curved on his face by the customer using a bottle opener (Ibid).

Being involved with Torrio and street mobs did not stop Al from working and supporting his family. On December 30, 1918 Capone married Mary (Mae) Coughlin (Al was nineteen, Mary was twenty one) three weeks after giving birth to their child Albert Francis, known as Sony, Johnny Torrio became his son's godfather (BBC – Crime Case Closed – Al Capone 2).

After having a son, Al resigned from the Harvard Inn and started working as a bookkeeper for a construction firm. His wife Mae influenced the direction of his future so much that he started working at legitimate jobs in factories having a salary of three dollars per week. He quit the gang and began looking for a respectful life that suits his wife and son. Abruptly, his father died of a heart attack on November 14, 1920. It was a big change in Capone's life. He went back to Brooklyn. Six months later Big Jim Colosimo was killed and Johnny Torrio took the lead after him. At the time Capone was suspected of killing a whore, and a man who has debts for Frankie Yale, the bad reputation he sustained to have made both of Yale and Lucky Luciano recommend him to Torrio. Luciano advised Al to

leave Brooklyn saying “you gotta get the hell outa town and don’t bother to pack” (Iorizzo 28). Giving him \$2000, Capone went back to Chicago and accepted Torrio’s deal (27-28).

1.6. Conclusion

The origin of criminality in the United States of America was brought by the Italian immigrants in the eighteenth century. Starting with the mafia, then moving to the Black Hand that burst on the scene in the onset of the twentieth century to evaporate and clear the way for a new sophisticated kind of criminal groups known as the Organized Crime. Cities like New York and Chicago were fertile lands for all kinds of crimes from coin-box looting and gambling to murdering and blackmailing. At first the focus of gangs was upon gambling and prostitution from which the gangs’ fortunes were made, but by the time when prohibition was announced, a new source of money making caught the attention of the organized crime leaders, particularly Al Capone who masterfully fished in the troubled waters of prohibition during the 1920s.

Chapter Two

Al Capone and Chicago Mobs

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2.1. Introduction

The spread of Organized Crime in the 1920s was related to many events and several conditions. This chapter entitled *Capone and Chicago Mobs* sheds light on the way gangs flourished their illegal activities in an era like the 1920s. The current chapter is composed of three main parts; first, the Booming 1920s and Organized Crime, this title talks about the relation between the profits of Gangs and the prosperous life of the Jazz Era. Second, The Volstead Act¹ and its Unexpected Aftermath, this element explains and gives an overview of some of the most results that were a by-product of the Prohibition announcement in the United States during the 1920s. The last main element in this Chapter Chicago, a City of Corruption, shows and tells how was the life in Chicago during the Roaring Twenties, and how did Al Capone's gang control the city.

2.2. The Booming 1920s and the Rise of Organized Crime

The 1920s or what is also known as the Roaring Twenties were an era that stretched from the end of the First World War to the crash of the American economy in 1929. It is a controversial period which can be described through conflicting images. Throughout this epoch the country was characterized by witnessing numerous alterations. These alterations were occasioned by the First World War. During this period women gained a new level of independence, when men were obliged to serve in the army, women took over their places and filled their positions at work, that gave them more sense of freedom, made them earn wages, and finally, they were enfranchised (Moore 64).

¹ The act that prohibited alcohol in, the United States during the 1920s

Music and appearance were the most important things in society; people were obsessed by the latest lifestyle craze over their old standards, and that was eloquently describes by a French professor during his existence in the United States when he said “In its pursuit of wealth and power, America has abandoned the ideal of liberty to follow that of prosperity” (Moore 109).

Transportation also characterized the twenties as the Ford Company sold fifteen million automobile which led to the building of roads and highways and service stations. It was possible for everyone to travel wherever and whenever they wanted. Trips became a mainstream and everyone could commute easily between their places of work and their homes (112).

Even-though the era thrived with new businesses all around the country and people were thrilled with what they have got there, still, there was a black side for the Golden Decade. The huge change in morals was the shadow of that glamorous period. The abrupt alteration that has been experienced by the American society in morals during the Roaring Twenties was one of the most important causes behind the consumption of liquor first, and doubling the incomes of the gangs second. Everybody knew that it was illegal to drink liquor but the new morals of the time made it desirable. The new pleasures that the youth of the 1920s indulged in created a unique atmosphere for drinking alcohol. Famously nicknamed Brothels in Wheels, the automobile was utilized as a place to engage in love and sexual affairs, teenagers who did not have their own car borrowed their parents’ so they get to be alone with their intimate and in addition to that they were able to drink with utter freedom. It was not that long before cars started already changing and transforming the traditional way American people used to live with. By Sunday people started having picnics using their cars instead of going to the church. It roughly was clear that this

transport new machine was dissembling the old American society piece by piece (Wiegand 207-208).

Unlike the old respectable American lady, women during the twenties would wear comfortable dresses; go out alone with men and would get high on alcohol without adult supervision. Sex became a fad that most of teenagers were very keen on. What helped making things worse was the erotic movies that were seen by thousands of teenagers, romantic films, which according to a study at Chicago university demonstrated that 40 percent of teenage girls wanted a guy to make love to them after seeing a romantic film, that were published and advertised turned the innocent soul of the American young generation from being conservative to another different one characterized by irrational and irresponsible behaviour (Moore 70).

The corruption of the American society appeared when the prohibition of the eighteenth amendment in 1919 led to the spread of illegal selling of alcohol in speakeasies that were scattered all over the big cities. Prohibition occasioned smuggling, and this latter caused the rise of gangsters who seized the chance of prohibition to promote for prostitution, gambling, and organized crime. The profits of gangs reached their peak and that was of course due to the strong demand; people before Prohibition never cared about being dry of liquor and that is what made its price very cheap but with the new laws it made them struggling to have their share of alcoholic products, which in the other hand caused the rise in the prices of alcohol and granted bootleggers fortunes they have never dreamt of (moore17).

2.3. The Volstead Act and its Unexpected Aftermath

What was just a useless attempt at the beginning to persuade people to refrain from consuming alcohol, later on, it escalated by resorting to the use of law enforcement to ban any investment in it. American Prohibition was the fruit of decades of work by the Temperance movement, which believed Prohibition would save families, particularly women and children, from the impacts of alcohol mistreatment. As a matter of fact, by 1914, 23 states and many boroughs had prohibited liquor. For instance, most of the people of Michigan City supported the idea of prohibiting the sale of alcohol all over the country by the beginning of May, 1918 (National Constitution Centre 3).

The Volstead Act, also known as, the National Prohibition Act came into effect on January 16, 1920, which prohibited drinks with alcohol amount above 3.2 percent. The 18th Amendment had forbidden the sale, transportation and production, but not the purchase or consume, of alcohol in America. It was obvious to some, that millions neither desired this law nor would abide by it (Ibid). One of the most significant characters in Chicago was its mayor William H. Thompson, who stated his opinion in a loud and clear way revealing that he was against prohibition “I’m wetter more than the middle of the Atlantic Ocean” (Iorizzo 90). There was apparently a gigantic market for what in the 1920's was an illegal product. It was the mobsters who controlled diverse cities that supplied this commodity. Speakeasies were scattered everywhere, especially in New York City area and Chicago (Ibid 93).

Even though the prohibition was paved with good intentions by the United States government, however it limited people’s personal freedom, helped in spreading a huge wave of law breaking and gave rise to the appearance of organized crime. What thought to

be a solution for a healthy community empty of alcoholic hazards and damages turned to be the most dangerous misstep towards the opening of the hell gates of organized crime. Prohibition offered Italians a big chance. Gangsters such as Al Capone knew very well how to manipulate prohibition for their own hidden agenda. While people considered him as a racketeer and rascal, Capone defined himself as a businessman, he went further to claim:

If I break the law, my customers, who number hundreds of the best people in Chicago, are as guilty as I am. The only difference is between us is that I sell and they buy. Everybody calls me a racketeer. I call myself a business man. When I sell liquor, it's bootlegging. When my patron serves it on a silver tray on Lake Shore Drive, it's hospitality (Qtd. in Hill 69).

Capone lived up to the motto that all people who purchased alcohol were responsible in breaking the law as much as he did, he also was irritated from the fact that people lashed out at him for the result of their own choices, in other words; it takes two to tango. Capone tried to depict a good image of a gentleman who liked modernity and adored Jazz music, but in reality he rose to power with deadly combination of raw brutality and brainpower. He happened to be the leader of the most notorious gang among all of Chicago Italian gangs' history which dominated the scene of organized crime in Chicago and had a nationwide reputation (Ibid).

2.4. Chicago, a City of Corruption

During the Roaring Twenties Chicago City was full of gangs and mobsters who dominated all over its streets. To demonstrate the way these criminal syndicates worked

throughout the Prohibition Era, one might need to examine the criminal activities that were operated in the 1920s in Chicago City which in its way incarnated the true essence of criminality with infamous criminal tsars such as: Big Jim Colosimo, Lucky Luciano, Johnny Torrio and Al Capone. At first, Gambling and prostitution were the major fields among all types of delinquency; they caught the attention of several crime leaders with their prodigious benefits and their huge incomes (Hill 70).

Brothels and speakeasies were spread everywhere, whenever you find a bar you find prostitutes around it, and that was enough to attract the attention of several criminals and people who used to live a filthy life. Big Jim Colosimo was on the top of those who run such businesses, with the help of his genius nephew Johnny Torrio he managed to gain a colossal fortune which helped him bribing the politics to remain silent and keep away from his illegal activities. With the announcement of prohibition Torrio saw the great advantages that could be mustered and gathered from the bootlegging field, he insisted on Colosimo to enter the new business that has been seen as a life chance for everyone who was ready to dare and break the law, but Colosimo refused his nephew's tips which led to his death. Torrio took over as the new boss and started applying his plans with his new partner Al Capone; these two were too ambitious that no one could stop their plans, as a matter of fact their rivals had no great deal of choice, in other words; they were either bribed or killed (Ibid).

Besides the Volstead Act there was a pile of events and reasons that helped thriving corruption and Organized Crime activities in Chicago City. Ironically, the Jazz music; one of America's most vital and crucial contributions, was also one of the most significant elements that occasioned flourishing the Organized Crime activities during the Roaring Twenties. It is well known and documented that Jazz music was the creation of African

Americans; it burst onto the scenes in the beginning of the 1920s, first in Black communities such as “Harlem” then it moved on to roll in all over the nation (Wiegand 364).

Although New Orleans was the home of this new art, Chicago became its beating heart. Jazz music was an essential and necessary element in Chicago’s nightclubs and bars, people were mocking the prohibition act over and over, some was singing “You Cannot Make Your Shimmy Shake on Tea” (moore17); by means, you need alcohol to enjoy the music. Of all Chicago’s 10,000 nightclubs and bars that were playing Jazz music, Capone’s were the most desired ones. He could afford the elite of Jazz players and among those: Waller, Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Bessie Smith and Jelly Roll Morton. People were attracted to the new craze; Jazz music, they flooded to nightclubs where they found prostitutes and drunk liquor, oftentimes gamble and waste their money (Moor 52).

The same situation was spread in New York City, people would stay awake all the night to enjoy the music, it was a source of joy and comfort for many, Ellington depicted the enthusiastic life of Jazz Age musicians in New York City:

A lot of guys liked to play so much that in spite of being on a regular job, they’d still hire out to work matinees, or breakfast dances...Nobody went to bed at nights and around three or four in the mornings you’d find everyone making the rounds bringing their horns with them (Duke Ellington, quoted in *Reminiscing in Tempo* by Stuart Nicholson).

Another focal point was transport machines which helped in tainting the city; all the bootleggers’ products were moved to speakeasies by vehicles, and for those who were far from the city centre could make it their by Henry Ford’s products (Moore 20). Such events

encouraged people to follow notorious gangs' leaders such as Al Capone who by the middle of the Golden Decade turned to be a famous celebrity (Moore 93). Most of the families were running illegal activities, drugs, bootlegging, back-street abortions and pimping (Moore 94). There was a famous song that crowded people's minds, the song was entitled *My God how the Money Rolls in*, the singer in this song explains and demonstrate how the people, also gangs, made their fortunes by doing numerous kinds of illegal activities, he says that the sister's mission was to sell drugs, while the father engage in bootlegging, even the grandmother contributed in the corrupted society by doing back-street abortions, to end his song with the brother's job which was pimping (Ibid 95).

The way gangs dealt with people made it hard for good people to not be criminals; the weather of the city itself was corrupted, for Landesco:

It would be foolish to expect such an environment to produce a moral and law-abiding youth, possessing the right theories of life and of success, when everywhere around him he sees official lawlessness and vice in the saddle; when he sees his hardworking father labouring for a few dollars a day and accumulating nothing, and the bootlegger and the gambler riding in limousines (7).

The image that was pictured by the young, which were the future of the city, made them indulge in illegal activities which was more profitable and easy to be done (Ibid). Even the people who were supposed to defend and protect Chicago City from bootlegging were working in alliance with smugglers. Federal institutions cooperated with gangsters in order to drawn the city in alcohol.

2.4.1. Gangs and Politicians

Politicians and gangs were oftentimes working in unanimity. Bribery kept politicians silent and immunity was a fair price to be paid by gangsters like Al Capone and his rivals (Borgan 500). Organized crime (mobsters) controlled mass-production and delivery of alcohol. Thousands of illegal speakeasies were opened to provide alcohol and millions of common Americans refused to obey the law by purchasing and concealing alcohol (Ibid 501). The authorities could not impose the law due to the huge numbers of people that were breaking the law and few were caught for a short period of time. Violent crime arose as gangs fought for control of the trade in alcohol. Gangsters moved into other areas of crime such as gambling and prostitution. Smuggling increased and gangsters such as Al Capone built criminal empires using terror and violence (503-504).

Money and wealth were both used by gangsters to bribe police and public officials to say and do nothing about their perennial law-breaking. Most of the Americans regarded prohibition as a half joke by the end of the 1920s. The falsity and corruption which increased with it made them mislay their deference both for the law and for the persons who were presumed to force it (O'Callaghan, 95).

The 1920s were marked by quite a bit government corruption, most of which can be pinned to the administration of Warren G. Harding; a newspaper publisher and a popular politician from Ohio was elected as the president of the United States in 1920. Harding himself was not corrupted but he picked terrible friends, he encircled himself with an "Ohio gang" of mates, authorizing to them a great deal of executive power that they misuse resulting to series of sleazy disgraces. Taxes for businesses and rich people were cut by the secretary of the Treasury Mellon Sharply (Wiegand 230).

For crime leaders like Al Capone, it was necessary to have companions in the political field. Chicago was a major city for gang-politician deals and with Capone in the scene there were plenty of politicians to be bribed so he gets his dirty deeds covered.

2.4.2. Taking Control over Chicago City

When Torrio took the lead and became the head on the Italian gang he saw that all the gangs over Chicago city were competing against each other to be have the biggest share from the bootlegging activities which jeopardized the profits of smuggling. So, he proposed a peaceful plan to make all the gangs work in peace and he succeeded doing that by putting a truce that worked for three years from 1920 to 1923. Each gang controlled a piece from Chicago city and the works were thriving until Torrio was set up by Deon O'Banion in a liquor deal in 1924. That sort of action ended the truce, and that was clear when Torrio lynched O'Banion in reprisal for what he has done to him. On November of the same year Torrio had his men killing his major threat in Ceciro, place in Chicago, Eddie Tancl. After that gangs started putting ambushes and assassinating each other, Torrio himself was ambushed by two of O'Banion gangsters Weis and Moran, as a result for that he was injured and hospitalized then he spent a period of six months in prison for the fake deal that O'Banion made. Having his life on the edge convinced Torrio that it was the time for him to leave Chicago and ride back to his motherland; Italy, leaving the control for his notorious partner Al Scarface Capone. Capone was about to face a war with all of Torrio's enemies (Iorizzo 36).

2.4.3. Capone's Leadership and the Chicago Gangs War

It was true that Torrio left Chicago, but O'Banion gangsters which were under Weiss's Control hold that grudge on Capone and kept trying to remove him from the scene. After two years from taking control of the organization from Torrio, Capone knew that being number one would cost him a high price. The abrupt departure of Torrio brought about him new enemies; there were old matters to be dealt with; vengeance were to be planned by O'Banion guys. Capone was targeted by every gang in Chicago, more than that he was considered to be the enemy number one for government. Soon after, a war of gangs started; or what was commonly called the Beer Wars. The major participant gangs were the Gennas; the Aillo Brothers who were allied with the O'banion-Moran forces, and Capone (Iorizzo 40).

The initiation arose by the O'Banion gang (Weiss and Moran), they attacked Capone's sites several times; one noticeable move was when they raided Hawthorne Headquarters utilizing eight touring cars. The operation was planned in which they shoot blanks to entice people outside then bullets started spewing like rain from their machine guns, 1000 rounds were fired, yet no one got killed in that horrifying attack. Seeking vengeance from Weiss, Capone sent a hit squad comprised of: Anselmi, Scalise, Frank Nitti, Anthony Accardo, and Frank Diamond. On October 11, 1926 Weiss was shot to death with one of his three companions near to his headquarters (Ibid 42-43). The second hit came from the Gennas' side when they sent Albert Anselmi and John Scalise to kill Capone, but what was beyond the Gennas' prediction is that these two companions stabbed them in the back; by murdering each of Angelo, Mike, and Antonio Genna in 1925 after being convinced to work in favor of Capone. This late deed took over the Gennas' control

on the *Unione Siciliana*² which gave more freedom to Capone to turn his interest to the surviving O'Banions (42).

On October 20, 1926, John Dingbat O'Berta called over a gangland meeting held at the Hotel Sherman in Chicago; the meeting was about a peace truce between the gangs. Each of Capone, Moran, Drucci, Jake Greasy Thumb Guzik, Ralph Shildon, William Skidmore, Jack Zuta and a few others agreed that hurting themselves is unnecessary while there is a pile of loot to be had by all if only they would let bygones be bygones. The efforts of the meeting went for naught, after two months of peace Saltis killed a member of Shildon's gang, likewise Ralph Shildon avenged by killing two of the best men Saltis had. Horrified, Saltis sued peace which was granted by Capone in return for having a big share from Saltis' operations. Having the rest weakened, Capone utterly took control of the Southwest side of Chicago (44).

2.4.4. The St. Valentine's Massacre

In 1927, a sum of \$50,000 was to be granted by Aiello to anyone who would dispatch Capone. He would bring a bunch of assassins from several cities to execute the operation but soon Capone figured it out and ordered the killers to be killed. There was another desperate attempt to contaminate Capone through the use of his cook but this endeavor went in vain when the cook divulged it to Capone. Capone's patience ran out when Aiello and Moran shot down one of his comrades Pasquilino Lolordo in the 6th of

² Originally a benevolent mutual benefit society whose loose national ties made it an inviting target for gangsters to control and use for criminal purposes; the Chicago gangster Anthony D'Andrea took it over before Prohibition and by the mid-1920s the name *Unione Siciliana* was used to identify the Mafia in New York.

January, 1929. He went after Moran seeking revenge which resulted in the infamous bestial fury known as the St. Valentine's Day Massacre (Iorizzo 48).

The 14th of February 1929 was a hell of a day for Americans in general, and for Chicagoans in particular. The Americans awoke on gory news; seven men were viciously shot to death bringing to the world's surface the St. Valentine's Day massacre. A butchery has been planned on Capone's orders to get rid of Moran. McGurn set up a fake deal that Moran couldn't decline. He arranged a delivery of very reasonably priced Canadian Whiskey in which neither he nor Capone would be present. The plan took place at a garage on North Clark Street; McGurn's men stole a police car, three of them disguised as policemen and two in plain clothes. Believing that Moran was in the garage, they entered convincing the seven men there that it was a police raid by ordering them to put down their weapons and lean against the wall. Right after Moran's men faced the wall, 150 bullets penetrated their bodies. Although the St Valentine's Day Massacre removed all of Capone's rivals, yet it was the reason behind the fall of his reign for organized crime in Chicago (BBC – Crime Case Closed – Al Capone 4-5).

2.5. The Fall of the King of the Underworld

After the butchery he has done, people started angrily asking the government to put an end for such evil deeds and that turned all the eyes on Capone. In 1929 Capone was imprisoned one year for carrying a concealed weapon in Pennsylvania, but many respectable Italians were unsatisfied by that saying that they needed him either dead or imprisoned for a long term of time. The United States' president himself Herbert Hoover ordered federal agents to do whatever is necessary to put Capone behind bars; he was the public enemy number one. The government came to conclude that all the illegal activities

that Capone was suspected of were no official evidence to imprison him, therefore, the best way to put him behind bars is to accuse him of income tax evasion³, and this strategy proved especially effective in the case of Capone. All they needed to do was simply to prove that Capone had earned a substantial amount of money that he had failed to declare as income. Like any crime leader Capone proved that he was a wily old fox. There was no registered income to speak of, he had nothing written under his name and he used cash to pay for everything. He made sure that no one could have any evidence against him. He showed a great intelligence when it comes to hiding his financial affairs (Iorizzo 73-74).

Capone was confident that the authorities would not be able to cause him a big hit, but soon things took another way. In March 1931, the mobster was indicted, and later that year he was convicted guilty on three accounts of tax income evasion for 1925-27 and two counts of failure to file a return for 1928 and 1929. On October 24, 1931, Capone was convicted to eleven years imprisonment by Judge Wilkerson who also imposed a fine on him with \$50,000 plus court costs of \$30,000. It was the severest prison sentence ever charged for tax evasion (80).

Capone's days as a crime boss were over, Aged thirty three, Capone entered Atlanta penitentiary⁴ in May 4, 1932, where he was diagnosed with tertiary syphilis⁵ stage. Later on, in August 1934 he was transferred to the new Alcatraz⁶ prison. In November 1939, suffering from the general deterioration of paresis⁷ (a late stage of syphilis), he was

³ The crime of deliberately not paying all the taxes that you should pay.

⁴ A prison in Atlanta.

⁵ Syphilis: A disease that gets worse over a period of time, spreading from the sexual organs to the skin, bones, muscles, and brain. It is caught by having sex with an infected person.

⁶ Federal penitentiary in San Francisco Bay, harboring the most hardened criminals. It housed Capone from August 22, 1934, to January 6, 1939.

⁷ Inflammation of the brain in the later stages of syphilis, causing progressive dementia and paralysis

released and entered a Baltimore hospital. The government then sent him to Lewisberg Federal prison where he would be set free on November 16 under parole that would last until May 3, 1942. He spent his last eight years in his house at Palm Isle where he was served by two servants. Soon his body weakened; he looked like he aged sixty when he was forty years old, he acted like an insane often times. The symptoms of his disease were killing him day after the other. He managed to live his life like a normal person until his body gave out. Aged 58, Capone died on January 25, 1947 (Iorizzo 101-100).

As a gangster Capone used brutal and cruel techniques against anyone stood in his way, he was known as a rascal and notorious person, even for the government he was declared as the enemy number one. But for those who knew him closely Capone was a son, husband, father and a brother. Unlike Torrio, Capone did not leave the United States. Instead, he stayed there and continued his illegal activities; he was fighting the government and the gangs at once.

2.6. Conclusion

The hidden world of the 1920s was under total control of gangs, crime leaders like Johnny Torrio and Al Capone managed to further their power all over Chicago city. Chicago became laden with numerous illegal activities such as bootlegging, prostitution and gambling that later on strike it rich for those gangs resulting in a fierce competition ended up with gory assassinations and brutal massacres (St. Valentine's Day Massacre). It was urgent for the United States government to put an end to such delinquencies by imprisoning most of the gangs accusing them of tax income evasion. In fact, the fruits of tax income evasion law were seen when the king of the underworld eventually was put behind bars.

General Conclusion

The very roots of criminality in the United States of America started in the eighteenth century. Italian immigrants brought their devilish practices with them when they headed to the new world. The first wave of delinquency started with the mafia. At first mafia members were supposed to protect weak people who hired them against the foreigners, but later on rich people started using mafia services for dirty businesses. While mafia deeds were spreading, the Black Hand with its new strategies expressed its terror over those who were well off, to disappear gradually with the beginnings of the 1920s and handover the authority of delinquency to a new rival known as the Organized Crime.

The 1920s America witnessed a variety of changes in all aspects of life which in another way helped in unleashing a flood of illegal activities. Notorious gangsters seized the moment and used the divergent advantages they found in front of them during the Roaring Twenties. Cars, Jazz, movies and many American productions that were supposed to deliver good services ended up igniting the torch of filthiness and corruption within the American society. It is true that the era was characterized by prosperity and all kinds of lavish life, but it was also full of all despicable kinds of crime. Gambling, Prostitution and bootlegging, those were the hidden face that appears instead of the nights' stars. Criminals were scattered all over the country, each city was characterized by its famous gang but the most prominent was Chicago with Al Capone. The federal government was not adept at handling the new emergence of crime syndicate. The era of Prohibition became a breeding ground for all types of lawbreaking. It was illegal to make, sell or purchase alcoholic beverages and at the same time it was not a crime to possess and consume them. This flaw allowed numerous felons to return to the streets after being arrested. A whole network of

illegal alcohol businesses such as distillers, smugglers and speakeasies (secret night clubs) where alcohol was sold, purchased and consumed for profit by organized crime families.

The bootlegger era made criminal tsars competing over whom controls the things over Chicago city which in the end resulted in the rise of murders, assassinations and ambushes that were planned by gangsters towards their opponents. One of the By-products of the gangs war was the St. Valentine's Day massacre; a gory event marked and demonstrated how criminals like Al Capone used cruelty to further their control over the bootlegging activities and so to impose their utter leadership overall Chicago. In the end, such individuals were a print of shame in such a great country like the United States, therefore it was necessary, far more, it was obligatory for the government to eradicate them. Using tax evasion income the government succeeded in arresting many despicable figures, on the top of them Scarface Al Capone, yet the organized crime in America did not fade.

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Appendices

Appendices

1. Colosimo, James “Big Jim” (1877–1920)

First Italian American syndicate leader in Chicago; he gave start to Torrio and Capone.

2. Genna Brothers

Angelo, Antonio, Mike, Pete, Sam, and Vincenzo “Jim” came from Marsala, Sicily. They set up an alky cooking empire in Chicago’s Little Italy; their principal customer was Capone, who protected them from the Moran gang. In an effort to control the *Unione Siciliana*, they turned on Capone, only to be betrayed by Anselmi and Scalise.

3. Luciano, Charles “Lucky” (1897–1962)

Leader in getting Italian gangsters to get away from regional ties and integrate among themselves and with non-Italians; he helped to bring about a working relationship among gangs throughout the country under his leadership and that of his chief partner, Meyer Lansky.

4. McGurn, “Machine Gun” Jack (1904–1936)

Hit man for Capone and principal suspect in the St. Valentine’s Day killings. Formerly James Vincenzo De Mora.

5. O’Banion, Dion (1892–1924)

Leader of one of Chicago’s most feared gangs and chief rival of the Torrio-Capone outfit.

Appendices

6. Torrio, Johnny (1882–1957)

Mentor of Capone and a major architect of modern organized crime; he used force when necessary but mainly preached peaceful aggression through patience and business methods, and was an advisor to the likes of Lucky Luciano, Meyer Lansky, and others.