

five families the rise decline and resurgence of americas most powerful mafia empires selwyn raab

Five families: The rise, decline, and resurgence of America's most powerful mafia empires is a captivating account that chronicles the tumultuous history of organized crime in the United States. Written by Selwyn Raab, this book delves deep into the intricate web of power, betrayal, and survival that has characterized the American Mafia's journey over the decades. Raab, an investigative journalist and true crime author, provides an in-depth analysis of the five major families that have dominated organized crime in America: the Gambino, Genovese, Lucchese, Bonanno, and Colombo families. This article will explore their rise to power, the factors contributing to their decline, and their surprising resurgence in recent years.

The Rise of the Five Families

The early 20th century marked a significant turning point for organized crime in America, particularly with the influx of Italian immigrants who faced discrimination and limited opportunities. The establishment of the five major Mafia families in New York City laid the groundwork for a powerful criminal empire.

1. The Gambino Family

- **Founding and Leaders:** Founded by Carlo Gambino in the 1930s, this family became one of the most powerful in the United States.
- **Key Activities:** The Gambinos engaged in various illegal activities, including extortion, loan sharking, and narcotics trafficking.
- **Notable Figures:** Under the leadership of John Gotti in the 1980s, the Gambino family reached new heights, with Gotti's flamboyant lifestyle making headlines and increasing the family's visibility.

2. The Genovese Family

- **Founding and Leaders:** Considered the most secretive and powerful family, the Genovese family was founded by Vito Genovese in the 1930s.
- **Key Activities:** They were heavily involved in labor racketeering and various illegal enterprises, including drug trafficking and gambling.
- **Notable Figures:** Frank Costello, known as the "Prime Minister of the Mafia," played a significant role in the family's operations during the mid-20th century.

3. The Lucchese Family

- **Founding and Leaders:** Named after its founder, Tommy Lucchese, this family emerged as a significant force in organized crime during the 1950s.
- **Key Activities:** The Lucchese family was known for its involvement in garment industry racketeering and narcotics distribution.
- **Notable Figures:** Paul Vario, a prominent figure in the family, gained notoriety through his connections and influence in various legitimate businesses.

4. The Bonanno Family

- **Founding and Leaders:** Founded by Joseph Bonanno in the early 1930s, this family experienced significant internal strife and power struggles.
- **Key Activities:** The Bonanno family was known for its bootlegging operations during Prohibition and later shifted focus to drug trafficking and loansharking.
- **Notable Figures:** After Bonanno's deportation, the family saw turmoil under new leadership, leading to its decline in power.

5. The Colombo Family

- **Founding and Leaders:** Founded by Joseph Colombo, this family faced numerous challenges and infighting that impacted its strength.
- **Key Activities:** The Colombo family was involved in various criminal enterprises, including extortion and illegal gambling.
- **Notable Figures:** The family gained notoriety in the 1970s for its violent power struggles, leading to significant media attention.

The Decline of the Five Families

The decline of the Mafia families can be attributed to several factors, including law enforcement crackdowns, internal conflicts, and changing societal attitudes towards organized crime.

1. Law Enforcement Crackdowns

- **RICO Act:** The introduction of the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) Act in the 1970s allowed law enforcement to prosecute organized crime more effectively.
- **High-Profile Prosecutions:** Key figures from the five families were arrested and convicted, leading to a significant loss of leadership and power.

2. Internal Conflicts

- Power Struggles: Infighting and power struggles among family members weakened the organizations, leading to further decline.
- Diminished Loyalty: The code of silence, or "Omertà," began to erode as members turned informants, providing crucial information to law enforcement.

3. Changing Societal Attitudes

- Media Influence: The portrayal of the Mafia in popular culture shifted perceptions, leading to a decline in romanticizing organized crime.
- Economic Changes: The rise of technology and the internet changed the landscape of crime, making traditional Mafia operations less viable.

The Resurgence of the Five Families

Despite the challenges faced, the five families have seen a resurgence in their influence and operations in recent years.

1. Adaptation to New Technologies

- Cybercrime: The Mafia has adapted to the digital age, engaging in cybercrime, identity theft, and online gambling.
- Modern Money Laundering: New methods of money laundering have emerged, allowing the families to reintegrate their illicit gains into the economy.

2. New Leadership

- Emerging Leaders: Younger, more savvy leaders have emerged, bringing fresh ideas and strategies to traditional Mafia operations.
- Global Connections: The families have established connections with international crime syndicates, expanding their reach and influence.

3. Continued Infiltration of Legitimate Businesses

- Front Companies: The Mafia continues to infiltrate legitimate businesses, using them as fronts for their illegal activities.
- Labor Unions: Their historical ties to labor unions have been revitalized, allowing them to exert influence in various industries.

Conclusion

Selwyn Raab's *Five Families: The rise, decline, and resurgence of America's most powerful mafia empires* provides a comprehensive examination of the intricate dynamics of organized crime in America. The story of the Gambino, Genovese, Lucchese, Bonanno, and Colombo families highlights the resilience and adaptability of these criminal organizations in the face of adversity. While their fortunes have ebbed and flowed over the decades, the Mafia remains a significant part of America's criminal landscape, adapting to the changing times and continuing to exert influence in various illegal and legitimate enterprises. As history has shown, the Mafia is far from extinguished, and its resurgence serves as a testament to its enduring legacy in American culture.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the main focus of 'Five Families: The Rise, Decline, and Resurgence of America's Most Powerful Mafia Empires'?

The book focuses on the history and influence of the five major New York Mafia families: the Gambino, Genovese, Lucchese, Bonanno, and Colombo families, detailing their rise to power, decline due to law enforcement efforts, and resurgence in recent years.

Who is the author of 'Five Families' and what is his background?

Selwyn Raab is an investigative journalist and author with extensive knowledge of organized crime, having reported on the Mafia for decades and written several books on the subject.

What historical events does the book link to the rise of the Mafia families?

The book examines the Prohibition era, the post-World War II economic boom, and the social changes in America that contributed to the rise of organized crime in the United States.

How does Selwyn Raab describe the decline of these Mafia families?

The decline is attributed to increased law enforcement efforts, including the use of RICO laws, the cooperation of former mobsters with authorities, and changing societal attitudes towards organized crime.

What role does the media play in the perception of the Mafia according to the book?

Raab discusses how media portrayals, including films and television shows, have shaped public perception of the Mafia, often glamorizing their lifestyles while also exposing their criminal activities.

Does 'Five Families' address the resurgence of these Mafia families?

Yes, the book outlines how some families have adapted to modern challenges, including new criminal enterprises and the use of technology, allowing them to maintain influence in organized crime.

What are some key themes explored in the book?

Key themes include loyalty and betrayal within the Mafia, the impact of law enforcement on organized crime, and the cultural significance of the Mafia in American society.

How does Raab illustrate the internal dynamics of the Mafia families?

The author provides detailed accounts of the leadership structures, rivalries, and power struggles within and between the families, highlighting notable figures and their influence.

What evidence does Raab use to support his claims about the Mafia's activities?

Raab utilizes a combination of interviews, court documents, law enforcement records, and historical accounts to provide a comprehensive view of the Mafia's operations.

What can readers learn about the future of organized crime from 'Five Families'?

Readers can gain insights into how the Mafia is likely to evolve in response to law enforcement tactics, societal changes, and the shifting landscape of crime in America.

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