



Five Families: The Rise, Decline, and Resurgence of America's Most Powerful Mafia Empires

By Selwyn Raab

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Genovese, Gambino, Bonnano, Colombo and Lucchese. For decades these Five Families ruled New York and built the American Mafia (or Cosa Nostra) into an underworld empire. Today, the Mafia is an endangered species, battered and beleaguered by aggressive investigators, incompetent leadership, betrayals and generational changes that produced violent and unreliable leaders and recruits. A twenty year assault against the five families in particular blossomed into the most successful law enforcement campaign of the last century.

Selwyn Raab's *Five Families* is the vivid story of the rise and fall of New York's premier dons from Lucky Luciano to Paul Castellano to John Gotti and more. The book also brings the reader right up to the possible resurgence of the Mafia as the FBI and local law enforcement agencies turn their attention to homeland security and away from organized crime.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

The Mafia has long held a spot in the American imagination. Despite their earned reputation for brutality, the Mafia has been glorified in countless movies, books, and television shows. Not so in this book. Selwyn Raab makes no attempt to perpetuate myths about the Mafia; instead, he exposes them as a serious threat to honest citizens: "The collective goal of the five families of New York was the pillaging of the nation's richest city and region," he writes. These five families--Bonanno, Colombo, Gambino, Genovese, and Lucchese--were responsible for corrupting labor unions in order to control waterfront commerce, garbage collection, the garment industry, and construction in New York. They also ran illegal gambling operations, engaged in stock schemes, and initiated the widespread introduction of heroin (among other drugs) into cities of the East and Midwest in the 1950s, leading to "accelerated crime rates, law-enforcement corruption, and the erosion of inner-city neighborhoods in New York and throughout the United States." *Five Families* offers a comprehensive look at the inner workings of the various clans along with vivid profiles of the gangsters who led--and continue to maintain--this criminal empire.

Beginning with a brief history of the Sicilian origins of the Mafia, Raab exhaustively explains how the Mob took over New York before spreading to cities across America, particularly Las Vegas, their most successful outside venture. He also shows how the New York Mafia lost a great deal of power in the 1980s and '90s due to many significant busts and effective plea-bargaining. However, since the attacks of September 11, 2001, the F.B.I. has been focused mainly on external threats, leaving the Mafia room to regain some lost turf by moving into new avenues of crime. An investigative reporter for 40 years, Raab interviewed dozens of prosecutors, law enforcement officers, Mafia members, informants, and "Mob lawyers," providing anecdotes and inside information that tell the true story of the Mafia and their influence over the past 80 years. --*Shawn Carkonen*

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. Former *New York Times* crime reporter Raab sets a new gold standard for organized crime nonfiction with his outstanding history of the Mafia in New York City. Combining the diligent research and analysis of a historian with the savvy of a beat journalist who has extensive inside sources, the author succeeds at an ambitious task by rendering the byzantine history of New York's five families—Bonanno, Colombo, Gambino, Genovese and Lucchese—easily comprehensible to any lay reader. Of necessity, Raab also illuminates the Mafia's origin in 19th-century Sicily and its transition to this country. Throughout his survey of the mob's evolution—from simple protection rackets to pump-and-dump stock schemes—Raab renders the mobsters (including men less well known than John Gotti, but no less significant) as three-dimensional figures, without glossing over their vicious crimes and their impact on honest citizens. Law enforcement's varying responses as well as society's view of gangsters enrich the narrative, which merits comparison with the classic true-crime writing of Kurt Eichenwald. While Raab surprisingly gives short shrift to the 1980s pizza connection case, which revealed the growing influence of the Sicilian Mafia on America's heroin trade, he otherwise demonstrates mastery of his subject. This masterpiece stands an excellent chance of becoming a bestseller with crossover appeal beyond devoted watchers of *The Sopranos*. 24 pages of b&w photos not seen by *PW*. (Sept.)

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From [Booklist](#)

Beginning with its 1931 organization into five gangs, the history of the Sicilian Mob in New York unfolds in

Raab's riveting reportage. To be sure, that history has been explored in numerous books, but Raab drills deep into the investigations and trials that have taken place over the past 20 years. Until adoption of the RICO law (Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations), mobsters weren't much bothered by law enforcement, Raab explains, before turning to a dramatic recounting of key investigations that led to RICO indictments. The narrative kicks into high gear as Raab describes how one leg-breaker or another, confronted on tape with his crimes, breaks the Mob's code of silence and starts singing for the feds. Eventually resulting in the imprisonment of all five godfathers of the recent past--"Gaspipe" Casso, Joe Massino, John Gotti, "Chin" Gigante, and Carmine Persico--these investigations solved a number of murders and exposed the Mob as never before. With vivid characterizations of a cavalcade of thugs, Raab's account is the most lively and informative Mafia history in years. *Gilbert Taylor*
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