Corrupted Chicago Essay, Research Paper

Of all the things Chicago is known for, organized crime is the most widely recognized. Even though it has been nearly fifty years since the rattle of tommyguns has died in the streets, all over the world when people think of Chicago, they think of gangsters (Lombardo 1). Organized crime in Chicago began in the 1870 s and is still around today. During the roaring twenties, it reached its climax not only in Chicago, but all over the US. This rise in crime was attributed to Prohibition and the increasing demand for illegal alcohol. In the years leading up to the twenties, gambling and prostitution were the major trades of organized crime, supported by shabby politics and corrupt police forces ( Organized Crime ). During the twenties, Chicago was truly the most corrupt city in the Midwest.

The passing of the prohibition allowed the opportunity for many criminal organizations and gangs to make a lot of money very quickly. Johnny Torrio and Al Capone ran the first of the most successful syndicates. This syndicate was originally built by James Big Jim Colosimo. Big Jim started as an alderman s aide for the city of Chicago, which gave him considerable control over prostitution and other vice activity in the Levee District (the red light district in Chicago during the late 1800 s and early 1900 s)(Lombardo 8). From 1902, Big Jim was the head of organized crime in Chicago. He owned plush brothels, saloons, and a nightclub ( James Colosimo ). He recruited his New York relative, Johnny Torrio to help protect him. Torrio s usefulness included protecting Big Jim from extortion and overseeing the bordellos. In 1920, Torrio had Big Jim murdered because Big Jim did not want to go into bootlegging; Torrio found this unacceptable (Lombardo 9).

The corruption had become extremely obvious in the political structure of Chicago and its neighboring communities. William Dever, a reform mayor, was elected in 1923. He believed firmly in the law, and immediately ordered the police to impose prohibition by force. The police closed over 7,000 restaurants and soft-drink parlors within weeks after Dever s election. Torrio and Capone soon moved their operations to Cicero. For the 1924 election, Cicero Republicans struck a deal with Capone. In return for helping the Republicans keep control of Cicero, Torrio and Capone would be able to sell alcohol unrestrained. When Election Day came, Capone sent 200-armed gunmen to the polls to make sure everyone voted Republican (Lombardo 11).

The height of corruption in Chicago occurred in the latter half of the decade. The Torrio/Capone syndicate s main rival was Dion O Banion s North-side Gang. The rivalry heated-up in the summer of 1924, after O Banion set up Torrio in the sale of a North-Side brewery that O Banion knew was to be raided by the police. Torrio and thirty-one of his men were arrested (Lombardo 13). After Torrio s 9-month prison term, he left Chicago for New York and transferred all control to Capone. Capone avenged Torrio by having his men gun down O Banion in a floral shop. Succeeding O Banion in command of the North side gang was Earl Hymie Weiss. For the next two years, the alliances of the Chicago gangs changed (Lombardo 14). On September 20, 1926, Hymie Wiess along with George Bugs Moran and Vincent Schemer Drucci ambushed Capone s headquarters with the intent to eliminate Capone. Seven cars fired over 1000 bullets into the restaurant beneath Capone s headquarters, where he was eating. Oddly enough, no one was killed (Lombardo 15). For the next several years, gang wars raged on between the Capone mob and the North side gang. Capone finally gained supremacy of the Chicago underworld when his men murdered the leaders of the North side gang in the St. Valentine s Day Massacre (Lombardo 16).

In 1930, Al Capone was the dominant crime boss in Chicago. Heading an operation that controlled 6,000 speakeasies and 2,000 illegal horse betting parlors, it was estimated that revenues from illegal activities were $6,260,000 a week. With the competition eliminated, all that was left to take was the government of Chicago. The new mayor of Chicago, Big Bill Thompson, was back in power due to the efforts of Al Capone. This alliance was an important milestone in the development of organized crime in Chicago. Capone was allowed to carry on his illegal activities because of his influence on the political structure of Chicago (Lombardo 17). The city had become so corrupt that a group of businessmen intervened. Their actions lead to the formation of the Untouchables headed by Eliot Ness (Lombardo 18). This was the beginning of the end of Al Capone and organized crime in Chicago.

Works Cited

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