The Rise Of Al Capone Essay, Research Paper

History Written Assignment:The Rise Of Al Capone

Al Capone is definitely one of the most ruthless and notorious crime czars of all time. He was a self made man and earned millions upon millions of dollars illegally, whether it is through bootlegging or gambling joints and many more ways. Al’s father Gabriele was one of the 43,000 Italians who arrived in the U.S in 1894. He brought along his wife Teresina, his 2 year old son Vincenzo and his infant son Raffalelle. He moved into a small neighbourhood in Brooklyn to settle down. Teresina gave birth to her third son in the New World, Salvatore in 1895, then on January 17, 1899 Alphonse (Al) was born. Later children born were Amadeo, Ermino, Umberto, Matthew, Nicholas, Rose and Mafalda. ” The Capone’s were a quiet, conventional family.” (Bergeen)

At the age of in 1904, the young Al went to public school; educational prospects for Italian children were very poor. Al did quite well in school until the sixth grade when his steady record of B’s deteriorated rapidly. At 14, he lost his temper at a teacher, she hit him and he decided to hit her back. He was expelled and never went to school again. ” About this time his family moved from their place on Navy Street to 21 Garfield Place.”

(Schoenberg) This move would have a lasting impact on Capone because in this new neighbourhood he would meet the people who would have the most impact on his future: his wife Mae and the gangster Johnny Torrio.

A few blocks away from the Capone house on Garfield, was a small building that was the headquarters of one of the most successful gangsters on the East Coast. ” Johnny Torrio was a new breed of gangster, a pioneer in the development of a modern criminal enterprise.” (Schoenberg) From Torrio, young Capone learned valuable lessons that were the foundation of the criminal empire later built in Chicago. ” He was a role model for many boys in the community. Capone like many other boys his age were running errands for Johhny Torrio. Over time, Torrio came to trust young Al and gave him more to do. In the meantime Al learned by observing the wealthy and respected racketeer and the people in his organization.” (Bergeen) In 1909, Torrio moved to Chicago and Al fell under other influences. Kids growing up in Brooklyn ran in gangs of all different races. ” Capone was a tough scrappy kid and belonged to the South Brooklyn Rippers and then later to the Forty Thieves Juniors and Five Point juniors.” (Kobler) He still lived at home and did what he was expected to do when he quit school which was go to school and help support the family. For about 6 years he worked at boring jobs at munitions factories and then as a paper cutter. ” He was a good boy, well behaved and sociable” (Bergeen) Then Al met Frankie Yale who was the opposite of the peaceful Torrio, Yale built his turf on muscle and aggression, and was both feared and respected. Yale opened up a bar on Coney Island called the Harvard Inn and on the recommendation of Torrio hired 18 year old Al Capone to be a bartender.

Capone’s job at the Harvard Inn was to be the bartender and bouncer and, when necessary, to wait on tables. In his first year, Capone became popular with his boss and the customers. Then his luck turned suddenly when he waited on the table of a young couple. The girl was beautiful and the young Capone was entranced. He leaned over her and said, “Honey, you have a nice ass and I mean that as a compliment.” The man with her was her brother Frank Gallucio. He jumped to his feet and punched Al. Capone flew into a rage and Gallucio pulled out a knife to defend himself. He cut Capone’s face three times before he grabbed his sister and ran out of the place. While the wounds healed well, the long ugly scars would haunt him forever. Al’s insult caused a bit of an uproar. Gallucio went to Lucky Luciano with anger and Luciano went to Frankie Yale. Yale made Capone apologize for the incident. ” Capone learned a valuable lesson from this experience, which was to restrain his temper when it was necessary.” (Shcoenberg)

“Yale took Capone under his wing and impressed upon the younger man how business can be built up through brutality. Yale was resourceful and violent man who prospered by strong-arm tactics.”(Schoenberg) At the age of 19, Al met a pretty blond Irish girl named Mae Couglin, who was 2 years older then he was. Albert Francis Capone was born on December 4, 1918. The couple married shortly after and Johnny Torrio became the godfather of the baby. Sonny (Capone’s son’s nickname) seemed ok at birth, he was in fact the victim of congenital syphilis. Year’s later Al confessed to doctors that he had been infected before he was married, but he believed that the infection had gone away. With a wife and a baby to support, Al focused on a legitimate career. He stopped working for Frankie Yale and moved to Baltimore where he worked as bookkeeper for Peter Aiello’s construction firm. Al did very well. He was smart and was very reliable. When Al’s father died November 14, 1920 his life took a turn for the worse. He resumed his relationship with Johnny Torrio, who had during theyears expanded his racketeering empire to Chicago. Torrio beckoned from Chicago and early in 1921 Al accepted.

“When Al Capone came to the city in 1920, the flesh trade was becoming the province of organized crime. The kingpin of this business was “Big Jim” Colosimo along with his wife and partner, Victoria Moresco, a highly successful madam. Together their brothels were earning an estimated $50,000 per month.” (Murray) Big Jim brought in the discreet Johnny Torrio from Brooklyn to operate and grow their empire. The downfall of Big Jim was a pretty young singer who stole his heart. He foolishly divorced Victoria and married the young immediately afterward. Word of Colosimo’s folly got back to Brooklyn where Frankie Yale took notice of opportunity and decided to muscle in on Colosimo’s huge empire. On May 11, 1920, Yale assassinated Big Jim in his nightclub. Yale’s attempt to take over Colosimo’s empire failed. Johnny Torrio was able to maintain his grip on the multi million dollar a year business of whorehouses, speakeasies and gambling joints, which Prohibition gave a big boost to. Soon Al became Torrio’s partner instead of his employee. Al took over as manager of the Four Deuces, Torrio’s headquarters in the Levee area. The Four Deuces was a speakeasy, gambling joint and whorehouse all in one. “Al became associated with a man that would be his friend for life, Jack Guzik.” (Murray) Al was doing quite well financially and bought a house for his family in a respectable neighborhood. He brought not only Mae and Sonny, but also his mother and other siblings. Al posed to his neighbours as a dealer in second hand furniture and went out of his way to make sure that’s what they thought.

For several years after Capone arrived in Chicago, things were comparatively quiet among the various gangs that had been running Chicago. Torrio and Capone decided to put many operations out of the city into the suburb of Cicero, where they could purchase the entire city government and police department. Shortly after opening up a brothel in Cicero, Torrio took his elderly mother back to live in Italy, leaving Capone in charge of the business in Cicero. Capone made it clear that he wanted an all-out conquest of the town. . Al focused on gambling and took an interest in a new gambling joint called the Ship. He also took control of the Hawthorne Race Track.” For most part, the Capone conquest of Cicero was unopposed, with the exception of Robert St. John, the crusading young journalist at the Cicero Tribune. Every issue contained an expose on the Capone rackets in the city. The editorials were effective enough to threaten Capone-backed candidates in the 1924 primary election.” (Murray) On Election Day, things got ugly as Capone’s forces kidnapped opponents’ election workers and threatened voters with violence. As reports of the violence spread, the Chicago chief of police rounded up seventy-nine cops and provided them with shotguns. The cops dressed in plain clothes, rode in unmarked cars to Cicero under the guise of protecting workers at the Western Electric plant there. Frank Capone, who had just finished negotiating a lease, was walking down the street when a convoy of Chicago policeman approached him. Someone recognized him and within seconds Frank’s body lie dead on the ground. The cops called it self-defense, since Frank seeing the police with their guns drawn, pulled out his own revolver. ” Al was enraged and escalated the violence by kidnapping officials and stealing ballot boxes. One official was murdered. When it was all over, Capone had won his victory for Cicero, but at a price that would haunt him for the rest of his life.” (Murray)

Capone threw his brother a funeral unmatched in opulence. The flowers alone provided by racketeer florist Dion O’Banion, cost $20,000.

Capone’s temper stayed under control for about five weeks. But then, Joe Howard, a small-time thug, assaulted Capone’s friend Jack Guzik when Guzik turned him down for a loan. Guzik told Capone and Capone tracked Howard down in a bar. Howard had the poor judgment to call Capone a dago pimp and Capone shot Howard dead. William H. McSwiggin, called “the hanging prosecutor,” decided to get Capone, but in spite of his diligence he wasn’t able to win a conviction, mostly because eyewitnesses suddenly developed faulty memories. Capone got away with murder, but the publicity surrounding the case gave him a notoriety that he never had before. He had broken out of the Torrio model of discreet anonymity once and for all.”

(Bergeen) “At the age of twenty five after only four years in Chicago, Capone was a force to be reckoned with. Wealthy, powerful, master of the city of Cicero, he became a target for lawmen and rival gangsters alike. He was keenly aware that the next lavish gangster funeral he attended could be his own. The fragile peace that Torrio had constructed with other gangs was blown apart by Prohibition. Gangland murders were reaching epidemic proportions” (Bergeen)”While Capone’s name was often linked with these murders, the fact was that there were many other gangsters responsible that Capone and Torrio had tried to keep in line. One flamboyant example was Dion O’Banion who had a burgeoning bootlegging and florist business.” (Schoenberg) O’Banion was known for bizarre behavior which included gunning down a man in front of crowds of people for the flimsiest of reasons and then killing a man after meeting him at Capone’s Four Deuces, which dragged Capone into a murder investigation needlessly. There was a growing sense of realization that something was going to have to be done about Dion O’Banion’s irresponsible and childishly impulsive behavior.

(Schoenberg) On November 10, 1924, 3 gangsters went into Dion’s flower shop in which he expected them to pick up a wreath. O’Banion went to shake the hands of the men, a clerk in the back was heard to have said he heard 6 gunshots, he ran in to help his boss only to discover him dead lying in a pool of his own blood. Dion’s funeral was a celebration for Torrio and Capone because they took over excellent bootlegging territory and they had finally rid themselves of a dangerous colleague. While the police scratched their heads over who killed O’Banion, Dion’s friend “Hymie” Weiss knew exactly who was responsible and he vowed revenge. From that moment on, Capone and Torrio looked over their shoulders constantly for “Hymie” Weiss and his another Dion associate, Bugs Moran. “Hymie” Weiss’s real name was Earl Wajciechowski, which he shortened to Weiss. The nickname “Hymie” stuck somehow and everyone assumed he was a Jewish gangster, when he was in fact a very devout Catholic. George Moran was a violent and unstable man who got the nickname “Bugs” because everyone thought he was nuts or “buggy”.

Torrio was so concerned for his life that he decided to leave Chicago for awhile and went to Hot Springs, Arkansas. Capone was just as worried and took every possible security measure. Still, over the next 2 years, the former colleagues of Dion O’Banion would make a dozen attempts to assassinate Capone. In January of 1925, twelve days after the Weiss-Moran gang tried to assassinate Capone; Johnny Torrio came back to Chicago. He and his wife Ann were just returned from a shopping trip and got out of their car to walk to the door of their apartment building.

Torrio walked behind her carrying packages. Weiss and Bugs Moran jumped out of a car and, thinking that Torrio was still in his automobile, fired wildly, wounding the chauffeur. When they finally saw Torrio, they shot him in the chest and neck, then his right arm and his groin. Moran held a gun to Torrio’s temple and pulled the trigger, but the firing chamber was empty and poor Johnny Torrio, the peacemaker, heard only a faint click.

At the hospital, Capone took over while surgeons removed the bullets in Torrio’s raw body. The hospital was a dangerous place for a gangster. The security was rotten. So Capone arranged for Torrio’s security on his own, which included Al sleeping in his room on a cot making sure that his beloved mentor was safe. Torrio. He called Al to the jail in Waukegan in March of 1925 and told him that he was retiring from the Chicago rackets and going to live abroad. Torrio was turning over his vast assets to Al.

Shortly after he took over Torrio’s empire, it was clear that Capone was a major force in the Chicago underworld. ” Now Al was almost respected in Chicago, he was a prominent figure” (Bergeen) He was a devoted family man and the illness of his son prayed on his mind.

In the next few years Al Capone established himself as the most powerful crime czar in the U.S. He was involved in countless murders and assassinations including that of Frankie Yale and the notorious St. Valentines Day Massacre in which Capone’s men slaughtered 5 members of the Bugs Moran gang. Witnesses in Capone trial’s constantly ” lost their memory” and just seemed to forget what happened. Al Capone’s streak of good luck was soon to come to an end. His lavish spending was beginning to be noticed by many government officials. When he bought his 14 room, Spanish style estate on Palm Island in Florida he brought on unneeded attention especially from that of Herbert Hoover who at the time was the President of the U.S. Hoover then pressured Andrew Mellon who was the Secretary of Treasury to spearhead the government’s battle against Capone. Al was now nationally recognized as a gangster and was treated as one, police were constantly following him and harassing him. U.S. Attorney, George E. Q. Johnson gathered evidence to prove income tax evasion and prohibition violations on Capone. Also involved in the case were Eliot Ness who was a prohibition agent and Elmer Irey who was with the IRS special intelligence unit. Capone was now considered public enemy #1. Now all Capone’s bootlegging breweries, gambling joints and speakeasies were being shut down and raided which was helping the team to convict Capone gather more evidence against him. The team of investigators watched Capone for almost 5 years and finally convicted him on 22 counts of tax evasion. He was to spend 11 years in jail.

Initially, Al was a prisoner at the U.S. Penitentiary in Atlanta and quickly became its most famous prisoner. There were charges almost immediately that he was living “like a king.” While that was certainly an exaggeration, he clearly lived better than the rest of the prisoners. He had more socks, underwear, sets of sheets, etc. than anyone else. He maintained these extravagances by virtue of a hollow handle in his tennis racket in which he secreted several thousand dollars in cash. In August of 1934, Capone was sent to Alcatraz. His days of living like a king in prison were gone. “Capone would run nothing on or from Alcatraz; he wouldn’t even know what was happening outside. There would be no smuggled letters or messages.

The syphilis that he had contracted as a very young man was moving into the tertiary stage called neurosyphilis. By 1938, he was confused and disoriented.

Al spent the last year of his sentence, which had been reduced to six years and five months for a combination of good behavior and work credits, in the hospital section being treated for syphilis. He was released in November of 1939. Mae took him to a hospital in Baltimore where he was treated until March of 1940. For his remaining years, Al slowly deteriorated in the quiet splendor of his Palm Island palace. Mae stuck by him until January 25, 1947 when he died of cardiac arrest, his grieving family surrounding him.

“In his forty-eight years, Capone had left his mark on the rackets and on Chicago, and more than anyone else he had demonstrated the folly of Prohibition; in the process he also made a fortune. Beyond that, he captured and held the imagination of the American public as few public figures ever do. Capone’s fame should have been fleeting, a passing sensation, but instead it lodged permanently in the consciousness of Americans, for whom he redefined the concept of crime into an organized endeavor modeled on corporate enterprise. As he was at pains to point out, many of his crimes were relative; bootlegging was criminal only because a certain set of laws decreed it, and then the laws were changed” (Bergreen).

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