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In apologizing for writing a review devoted to only a small section of my book, Michael Woodiwiss says ‘it is part of the specialist’s job to carp’, and so it is, just as it is expected that an author, in responding, will focus on areas of disagreement with his reviewer.

Before beginning that process, however, I would like to acknowledge that Woodiwiss is a thoughtful historian of American crime, and that he has performed the reviewer’s duty of explaining the main thrust and concerns of the book under scrutiny – subject to a small caveat. Pointing out, *inter alia*, that I attempt an assessment of the roles of attorneys general, he lists a number of them, and I wish he had added Edward H. Levi, who in the course of his tenure (1975–7) attempted a thoroughgoing reform of the FBI, only to be rejected by Democrats because he was a Republican, and despised by Reaganite Republicans because he was not a neoconservative. That little gripe aside, I am pleased with Woodiwiss’s fair-minded account of *The FBI: a History*.

Commenting on my reference to the Louis ‘Lepke’ Buchalter case, Woodiwiss regrets my use of the word ‘nationwide’ in relation to the deaths generated by Murder, Inc., the underworld organism with which Lepke was associated. He uses this reservation as the springboard for a wider discussion of the nature of organised crime, in which he argues that there never was a nationally-organised Mafia ‘conspiracy’, that organised crime in America has not been a purely Italian-American affair, and that it has been a complex, locally-generated phenomenon and not something imported from abroad.

My use of the word ‘nationwide’ may seem strong in that it is not supported by evidence of convictions for murder spread throughout the United States, and I do agree that for self-serving reasons the contemporary media and FBI publicists puffed up Murder, Inc., making it out to be a greater menace than it was. Yet a rejoinder is in order. The full Murder, Inc. story never came out, and for good reasons. First, there was the code of silence in the underworld. As a spate of assassinations confirmed, testifying against the mobsters in murder cases was not a good idea if you valued your life. That is one reason why murderers were incarcerated for lesser offenses. Al Capone went to prison in 1931 for tax evasion not homicide, and Lepke was convicted on a charge of racketeering before he went to the chair in 1944 for murder. Though he was strongly suspected of being directly responsible for at least 14 eliminations out of a total of 85 thought to have been committed by Murder, Inc., Lepke died for just one of them.⁽¹⁾

Second, the FBI operated under the authority of federal law directed, as required by the U.S. Constitution, at interstate crimes. Presidential assassinations excepted, murder was a state, not a federal crime. It was only because they offended against non-homicide laws on an interstate basis that Lepke and others attracted the attention of America’s premier detective agency, the FBI. Lepke was under suspicion for killing people outside the State of New York, but the FBI did not have the authority to act directly and to build up a conclusive dossier on Murder, Inc.

Woodiwiss is sympathetic with J. Edgar Hoover’s 1950s view that the Mafia was an exaggerated phenomenon, and points to the ethnic bias of the Kefauver committee. The argument made by the sociologist Daniel Bell in the 1950s was that America was a nation unriven by class or ethnicity; the idea of an Italian crime syndicate reflected prejudice against Mediterranean immigrants and was a myth.⁽²⁾ Based on what I say in the book, my counter-cautions would be as follows. At least Kefauver investigated a serious phenomenon, organised crime, whereas his higher-profile contemporary investigator Joseph McCarthy did

not when he attempted to chase down communists in government. It was to say the least convenient for Hoover to pooh-pooh the concept of the Mafia when he had made so little progress against the Mafiosi. His failure to nail the Mafia is not evidence that the Mafia did not exist, but an indication of misallocation of resources. In 1959, the FBI assigned 400 special agents to tracking down communists in New York, but only four to the investigation of organised crime.

To go further and say that there was an organised and disciplined central Mafia would be risky, as Woodiwiss rightly suggests, and I do not use the word 'conspiracy' in that sense in my book. He is correct in reminding us that the Italians did not monopolise organised crime. Lepke was, after all, Jewish. To give just one of many other possible examples, James J. 'Whitey' Bulger, last seen in 2002 and perhaps the most notorious mobster in Boston's history, was of Irish-American extraction. Woodiwiss is also right to question claims that most American serious crime is imported from abroad.

At the same time, there has been at least loose cooperation between the various Mafia clans. The Apalachin meeting was not a tea-party but a business meeting with an agenda, the profitability of drugs dealing, proposed new membership of the Mafia's ruling (if not very effective) 'Commission' and, as ever, territorial issues. There were representatives not just from New York, Newark, Miami and San Francisco, but also Boston, Chicago, Detroit, Philadelphia, Providence and St Louis.

Equally, it is more politically correct than correct to deny that Italian Americans have been prominent in organised crime. The surnames of the Apalachin delegates (Bonanno, Bufalino, Catena, Vasisko, etc.) tell their own story. Running through lists of mobsters prominent in the last 80 years and starting with the letter 'A', one finds the names of Abati, Accardo, Agueci, Aiuppa, Alioto, Amari, Amato, Amuso, Anastasia, Anastasio, Antinori, Ardizzone and Armone. Their families did not originate in Islington.

The external connections of the Mafia did exist. The U.S. government recognised them more than once. Charles 'Lucky' Luciano, the leading Mafioso of his day, was released from prison early because he agreed to use his Sicilian criminal connections in behalf of the Allied military offensive in World War II.⁽³⁾ A generation later, the Sicilian prosecuting judge Giovanni Falcone supplied local knowledge to help the FBI unravel the Pizza Connection case. When the Sicilian end of the Mafia assassinated Falcone, President Bill Clinton put the FBI's DNA experts at the service of the Italian police, and FBI chief Louis Freeh in 1993 visited Palermo to promise international cooperation in the effort to stamp out what was self-evidently an international menace.

It is true that populist politicians and opportunistic journalists exaggerated the external connections of crime syndicates and that this was a way of evading discussion of the causes of crime at home. It is equally true, though, that organised crime, whether run by Americans, Chinese or Albanians, has become more and more a multinational business in our age of easy travel and instant communication. I have argued elsewhere that a multinational intelligence and policing effort has become increasingly necessary.⁽⁴⁾

In a final flourish, Woodiwiss calls for law enforcement to be supplemented with an effort 'to construct policy that reduces criminal opportunity'. Perhaps this is a reference to the 'Two Prohibitions' thesis: in the 1920s, when one man's thirst was another man's opportunity, Prohibition enriched the mobsters who supplied alcohol; today, we have a prohibition of narcotics and other mood-affecting drugs, and the result has been an illegal trade involving not just the Mafia but also the Triads, Al Qaeda, Taliban, Russian syndicates, Colombian drug barons and other criminal organizations that the FBI and other nation-based detective agencies find difficult to crack. Milton and Rose Friedman advocated legalisation as a means of deploying the 'disciplinary forces of the market' against drugs crime.⁽⁵⁾ However, as Woodiwiss has elsewhere reminded us, in American history crime has tended to reinvent itself.⁽⁶⁾ Many benefits did flow from the ending of alcohol prohibition in 1933, but the criminals survived by moving into new areas of business such as the labour movement and real estate.

Notes

1. The FBI's file on the Lepke case is at <[Back to \(1\)](#)
2. Daniel Bell, 'Crime as an American way of life', *The Antioch Review* (1953), reprinted in Bell, *The End of Ideology* (New York, 1962), pp. 127–150.[Back to \(2\)](#)
3. R. Harris Smith, *OSS: The Secret History of America's First Central Intelligence Agency* (Berkeley, California, 1972), p. 86.[Back to \(3\)](#)
4. Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones, 'The idea of a European FBI', in *Strategic Intelligence. Vol. 4: Counterintelligence and Counterterrorism*, ed. Loch Johnson (5 vols., New York, 2006), pp. 73–96; 'Europol and the FBI: scope for mutual learning', *Euobserver*, 25 September 2006 <[Back to \(4\)](#)
5. Milton and Rose Friedman, *Free to Choose: A Personal Statement* (Harmondsworth, 1980), p. 269. [Back to \(5\)](#)
6. Michael Woodiwiss, *Organized Crime, USA: Changing Perceptions from Prohibition to the Present Day* (Brighton, 1990), p. 14.[Back to \(6\)](#)

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