

CHAPTER 1

WHAT IS ORGANIZED CRIME?

1. **Why do you think *The Godfather* is the best-selling book about crime ever published, and that there is continuing fascination with organized crime in movies and on television?**

Although it is a novel, people are fascinated by organized crime, the mafia, and all the associated descriptions. Perhaps the personalities of organized crime figures, combined with the fact that organized crime often provides goods and services in public demand (that happen to be illegal), contribute to our continuing interest in organized crime in all its manifestations.

2. **How did the President's Crime Commission characterize organized crime in its report 40 years ago?**

"Our knowledge of the structure which makes 'organized crime' organized is somewhat comparable to the knowledge of Standard Oil which could be gleaned from gasoline station attendants."

3. **What is a consensus definition of organized crime among authors who have written on the subject?**

Organized crime is a continuing criminal enterprise that rationally works to profit from illicit activities that are often in great public demand. Its continuing existence is maintained through the use of force, threats, monopoly control, and/or the corruption of public officials. See Table 1.1 in the text.

4. **What is the difference between white-collar and organized crime?**

White-collar, or organizational, crime most often occurs as a deviation from legitimate business activity, whereas organized crime usually takes place through a continuing criminal enterprise that exists to profit primarily from crime. In many ways, these two forms of "organized" criminal behavior are similar. See National Advisory Committee conclusion (quoted in text).

5. **How can the savings and loan scandal of the 1980s be seen as part of organized crime?**

There were continuing criminal conspiracies found to exist among savings and loan officials (insiders), and accounts, lawyers, and real estate developers (outsiders). Just like traditional organized crime, continuing conspiracies, combined with corruption of government officials, formed the basis of this scandal.

6. **How is terrorism different from organized crime?**

Terrorism involves crimes designed to intimidate or coerce civilians or a government in order to achieve political or social objectives. Examples would include hostage taking in order to secure freedom for those seen as imprisoned unjustly, or acts of violence done in retribution for perceived past injustices. In every case, an act of terrorism has a political objective, unlike the profit motive

that lies behind organized crime.

7. What are the three general categories of organized crime activity?

Provision of illicit goods, services, and infiltration of legitimate business (see Table 1.2 in the text).

8. What constitutes provision of illicit services?

Attempt to satisfy public demands for money, sex, and gambling that legitimate society does not fulfill. Specific offenses include loansharking, prostitution, and gambling.

9. What constitutes provision of illicit goods?

Provision of products desired by the public that cannot be obtained legitimately. Sale and distribution of drugs and fencing and distribution of stolen property are examples.

10. What constitutes the infiltration of legitimate business?

Coercive use of legal businesses for illegal means. Examples include labor racketeering (use of force or threats to obtain jobs or insure labor peace) and coercive control of businesses, such as waste disposal companies or pizza parlors, to conduct illegal acts (such as dump wastes illegally or distribute drugs).

11. How are the provision of illicit goods and services most clearly distinguished from the infiltration of legitimate business?

Provision of illicit goods and services is consensual in nature, involving no inherent violence, whereas infiltration of business usually involves extortion or threats (i.e., non-consensual).

12. How is the infiltration of legitimate business more predatory than the provision of illicit goods and services?

Infiltration of business is an attempt to create demand for services, whereas provision of illicit goods and services attempts to exploit an existing market. See differences between bribery and extortion in Table 1.3 in the text.

13. Why is description of organized crime in terms of ethnicity misleading?

Organized crime is committed by a wide variety of ethnic groups, a great deal of organized crime is inter-ethnic. Market conditions and criminal opportunities are superior predictors of organized crime activity.

14. Why are the 11 different types of organized crime groups described by the President's Commission on Organized Crime a curious mixture?

It is haphazard. The 11 are defined by nature of activity (cocaine rings), geographic origin (prison gangs), and means of transportation (motorcycle gangs), in addition to national origin and ethnicity.

Such a scattershot definition muddles discussion of the true nature of organized crime.

15. Why are biographical attributes (e.g., ethnicity) of organized crime groups not very useful?

They may help to describe a particular person or group, but they do not help to explain that person's or group's behavior (especially when compared to those having that biographical attribute that do not engage in organized crime).

16. How do we know that no single ethnic group accounts for organized crime, and that local criminal opportunities offer a much more powerful way to explain organized crime?

Through historical accounts and ethnographic studies of organized crime groups. Note the historical study by Block that found Jews, Italians, Greeks, Irish, and Blacks were involved in illicit narcotics activity in New York, and that some of these groups worked together. Likewise, Adler's ethnographic study of drug trafficking in the Southwest found the demands of the market, rather than ethnic structures, defined narcotics trafficking in the groups she studied.

17. Why is catering to public demands through illicit goods and services a more common form of organized crime activity than infiltration of business?

It is easier, takes less energy, and involves less of a threat of detection to cater to an existing public demand, rather than attempting to "manufacture" a criminal opportunity through intimidation or extortion.

18. What did James Calder find in his study of the lives of "mafia women"?

They have significant insight and awareness of the activities of their male counterparts, and they are not contented or happy with their lives or position. They frequently feel cheated or manipulated by their men, and occasionally rebel against them.

19. How have women become more involved in organized crime in Italy?

Successful prosecutions and jailing of male members of organized crime has resulted in the increasing incidence of women using their maiden names to open "clean" bank accounts, start new businesses, and collect protection money.

20. A study of 40 organized crime cases in the Netherlands found women to have what role in the illegal activity?

It was found that women "not only have knowledge about illegal activities but they also have crucial functions in the context of shielding illegal activities" from authorities.

20. Why are police arrests not a true indicator of the extent of organized crime activity?

Much crime is undetected; some that is detected is not reported to police; and arrest rates go up and down depending on police activities and priorities, rather than on changes in criminal activity.

21. How have arrests for gambling changed over the past 38 years, and why?

They are eight times lower in 2008 than in 1970. This is because of a shift in public perception and policy from gambling as a vice to a legal form of recreation in an increasing number of manifestations and jurisdictions. (See Table 1.4 in the text.)

22. How have arrests for drugs changed over the past 40 years, and why?

They are 26 times higher today than in 1970. This is due to growing public concern and legal/policy changes reflecting that concern, over the same period.

23. Why are all gambling, drug, prostitution, and stolen property arrests not necessarily related to organized crime?

Many of these arrests are of individuals possessing illicit goods, or engaging in illicit services, without any connection to organized crime.

Critical Thinking Exercise 1.1

THE CASE OF SELLING A HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL PLAYER

1. Explain how any of the crimes discussed in this chapter might apply in this case.

Conspiracy between the coaches and boosters to provide the services of the football player in exchange for cash and property in violation of NCAA rules. They conspired to provide illicit services in violation of NCAA rules. Also, the high school coaches appeared to make extortionate demands to colleges for goods and services for the privilege of having their player go there.

2. If supply and demand form the basis for most organized crime, identify the supply and demand issues in this case. How can they be controlled more effectively?

The desire for a winning football program has outweighed in some instances the deterrent force of the rules. Severe sanctions against violating rules (e.g., “death penalty” for football program, or other severe sanctions may serve as a general deterrent). Another approach would be that bowl game and television earnings would be shared among all schools, regardless of whether they have a football program—to remove an important selfish motive for winning.

Critical Thinking Exercise 1.2

THE CASE OF AN INTERNET STOCK FRAUD

1. Explain whether you would characterize this scheme as white-collar crime or organized crime.

It is organized crime because it was not a deviation from a legitimate business. It was a wholly fraudulent scheme to scam those who participated.

2. Explain how any of the crimes discussed in this chapter could apply in this case.

If he acted alone, conspiracy would not apply. The case is a violation of securities regulations on the unlawful trading and representation of a stock. It is closest to a variation of stolen property, given the attempt to sell a misrepresented product as something it is not.

Organized Crime at the Movies: The Godfather

1. *The account in The Godfather seems real, even though it is fiction, because of its authentic portrayal of old Sicilian traditions and how they might serve the interests of organized crime activity (e.g., respect, unquestioned leadership, male domination of the family). Some have said the movie was based loosely on the life of Joseph Bonanno, but the events do not come close to Bonanno's life. Instead, the charismatic Godfather who serves as family patriarch helps to portray organized crime as the public believes it to be, rather than the way in which it truly is in actual accounts.*
2. *A good script, combined with good actors, usually makes for a good movie. The story of the intra-family drama, and the events that occur over the course of a life, probably would have been a good movie even if it was done as an Irish or other non-mafia family. The biographical depiction of both Vito and Michael Corleone over the course of the movies portray interesting characters dealing with a series of life events and crises, told in an interesting way. Also, there is inherent public fascination with the mafia as a criminal organization in the United States and elsewhere.*