



Mafia Summit: J. Edgar Hoover, the Kennedy Brothers, and the Meeting That Unmasked the Mob

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***Mafia Summit* is the true story of how a small-town lawman in upstate New York busted a Cosa Nostra conference in 1957, exposing the Mafia to America**

In a small village in upstate New York, mob bosses from all over the country—Vito Genovese, Carlo Gambino, Joe Bonanno, Joe Profaci, Cuba boss Santo Trafficante, and future Gambino boss Paul Castellano—were nabbed by Sergeant Edgar D. Croswell as they gathered to sort out a bloody war of succession.

For years, FBI director J. Edgar Hoover had adamantly denied the existence of the Mafia, but young Robert Kennedy immediately recognized the shattering importance of the Appalachian summit. As attorney general when his brother JFK became president, Bobby embarked on a campaign to break the spine of the mob, engaging in a furious turf battle with the powerful Hoover.

Detailing mob killings, the early days of the heroin trade, and the crusade to loosen the hold of organized crime, fans of Gus Russo and Luc Sante will find themselves captured by this momentous story. Reavill scintillatingly recounts the beginning of the end for the Mafia in America and how it began with a good man in the right place at the right time.

Mafia Summit: J. Edgar Hoover, the Kennedy Brothers, and the Meeting That Unmasked the Mob Details

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Lee says

A short book on how the Apalachin mafia conference broken up by the State Policy in 1957 helped shape how the mafia is portrayed in American Society. The author covers how some events prior to the conference helped lead to the events that happened and how what happened their helped shape future responses by politicians and law enforcement to the mafia. Good read.

John says

Though fictionalized and exaggerated in film and TV (Godfather, Sopranos, Boardwalk Empire, Inside the Mafia), big time mobster activity in mid-20th Century was for real and this book details that reality. In November 1957 virtually all big-time U.S. mobsters congregated in rural New York state in order to carve up underworld territory. The conclave was well planned with a mutually agreed alibi that they were there only to visit a sick buddy. Sixty detained imparted the same fib; another 40 escaped the net. Scores of indictments and convictions eventually resulted mostly because of the event's notoriety. In due course also revealed was the game changing scope of national crime syndicate interrelationships. Especially interesting is the story of New York state police detective Sgt. Edgar Crosswell who sniffed out the mob gathering time and place and who organized initial detentions. Had he not had the host under long-term surveillance, the big bust might not have taken place.

Gary says

Mafia Summit is non-fiction about the heydays of the mafia in the United States. The book chronicles the lead up to the pinnacle of their mafia's power. The central event of the book is a large gathering of the kingpins of US mafia that took place 1957. Up to this point the Mafia was largely flying under the radar of Law Enforcement. The FBI (and Hoover) where even denying the existence of the mafia before this summit meeting. The book goes into the story of the key leaders who fought and scratched their way to head of the mafia in the 30s, 40s and 50s. In these early heady days of the mob, they really did own the police and courts as can be witnessed by their multiple murder arrests that were almost always followed by non-convictions.

The book also tells the story of a police officer who refused to be bought (unlike almost everyone around him in the department) that ultimately leads to the discovery of the summit meeting and thus the exposure of a conspiracy of these bad actors.

The timing of the summit and its subsequent exposure of the criminal underworld offers a cause that two brothers ultimately ride into the White House and the head of US Justice department (the Kennedy brothers).

Though the book is more about the lead up to the summit and how invincible the mafia was in America during this time period, it also carefully documents how the summit and its discovery leads to enormous public scrutiny. Also how this starts and long slow decline of the unchecked power of these organizations.

I very much enjoyed this book and now look forward to reading more about some of the central mafia figures and their history.

Erik says

Does a great job detailing what actually led to, and happened during, the Apalachin 'raid.' Shows the common "random cop just happened across a bunch of cars," and "they were double crossed by someone" version of events weren't what happened. For that contribution, it's worth reading -although maybe just for those who read a lot of mafia history. That being said, it's often kind of cheesy. I'd say 'read it,' but understand you won't be blown away and will often find yourself rolling your eyes.

Ti.Me says

Extreme detail of the upstate NY barbecue at the root of the Mafia's downward spiral in the U.S.

A lot more than is covered herein than that that day's events. We learn of a wealth of prior history, subsequent court cases, political embarrassments, and even of the last years of all the main players.

At times, Mafia Summit reads like a textbook -- one that might be used in a criminal justice course. This style and level of minutiae leads to some dryness, and the reader may be tempted to speed through large sections. I certainly was. But, this book is almost a must-read for mafia history buffs. The facts in this biography are not laid this bare in any well-known text on the Mafia (coming from someone who's read them all).

Giordi DeAngelo says

Taking place not far from my hometown, Reavill does an excellent job of recounting the Apalachin Summit, from what led up to it to it's aftermath. He discussed his book at one of our local libraries to a packed house. Many of whom came to share their stories or stories that were passed down. Very nice guy. Definitely worth the read.

Jaamal says

Very entertaining and informative...

Sarah says

This mob raid is very much a local legend around here (and is always met with a bit of incredulity with transplants, who just can not believe that the Mafia had connections in this area, despite its strong Italian roots. Reading it in a larger context -- of how it changed the police outlook on the mafia; and the FBI particularly, made this read worth it alone.

The book has its rough spots - its a little hokey at times; and very repetitive, but is unique and well researched.

Denny says

Straightforward accounting of the organized crime summit in Apalachin, N.Y., in 1957. Meeting set in historical context from Lucky Lucciano's reorganization of the American "Mafia" into a hierarchical structure in the early 30s to it's history throughout the 20th century.

The meeting came out of the shadows because a N.Y. State policemen, who regularly spot-checked (known criminal) Joe Barbara's property, noticed many expensive autos from across the country parked at nearby hotels and Barbara's property. Roadblocks captured about half (70+) of the fleeing attendees, some trying to escape through the surrounding woods.

Apalachin baffled law enforcement which was stuck with "catch-and-release" of the detained alleged mobsters gathered at Barbara's compound since no existing law addressed this type of situation. Event eliminated ability of FBI and J.E. Hoover to continue to deny the existence of a national organized crime organization, known to the public as the Mafia, later found to be called "La Cosa Nostra (Our Thing).

This event eventually led to the RICO statutes, i.e., a criminal organization by its very existence is illegal. First major RICO litigation was the mid-80s Mafia Commission Trial.

Scott Rhee says

November 14, 1957 was an extremely important day in American history. It was the day that the Mafia in the U.S. began its steady decline and fall, and it started with an observant police sergeant running the license plate of a Chrysler Crown Imperial limousine, a car that seemed out of place for the small Upper New York town of Apalachin.

Gil Reavil's fascinating true-crime book "Mafia Summit" describes an incident that, for many, has become a folk legend, one that did not involve gunplay or violence of any kind, but the repercussions of it started a chain reaction that led to the virtual destruction of the organized crime syndicate known as the Mafia. Of course, the Mafia still exists today, but its heyday of splendor and glamour has long since passed, and much of the credit is due to primarily three men.

It was a rainy Thursday when Police Sergeant Edgar Croswell noticed the limousine driving through the wooded back roads of his small town. It was one of many odd vehicles he noticed driving up to the property owned by Joe Barbara, a local well-to-do businessman whom Croswell had been keeping an unofficial eye on. For all intents and purposes, Barbara was a legitimate business owner, but Croswell had had a hunch, for years, that something about the old man wasn't kosher. After running the plates of a few cars, Croswell and his fellow law enforcement officers began to understand what was going on. Various members---mostly bosses, underbosses, and "made" men---of different mob families were traveling from as far as New York City, Miami, Cleveland, Chicago, Vegas, and L.A. to meet at Barbara's lavish estate. Apparently, the Mob was meeting for a summit, the purpose of which was unclear to Croswell and his men, but the very fact of their presence meant something big was happening. When Croswell gave the order to approach the property,

the mobsters inside panicked. Despite some of the more colorful embellished versions of the story, a violent gun battle never took place. No one was killed or injured, but many mobsters---there were close to 60 in attendance---were caught jumping out windows and running through the muddy forests in three-piece suits and expensive shoes. Some of them got away, but many of them were held for questioning. For a time, at least. When Croswell realized that he had no actual crime for which to hold them, he was forced to release them. The damage, however, had been done.

Much of the damage was done to J. Edgar Hoover's credibility. The famous director of the FBI had, for years, told the general public that the Mafia was a fairy tale. It didn't exist. Organized Crime was, for the most part, a myth. And the general public bought it. Until the photos of mobsters jumping out the windows of Joe Barbara's house were splashed on the front pages of almost every newspaper in the U.S. Literally overnight, the Mafia was the topic of conversation for everyone. Clearly, Hoover had been wrong. Not only that, but Hoover's obsessive and myopic preoccupation with "communists" had helped the federal law enforcement agency to seriously overlook the very real threat of organized crime members who had, like the alleged communists, infiltrated and/or corrupted law enforcement and government officials with bribes and pay-offs.

In the right place at the right time, Robert Kennedy, brother of the President of the United States, John F. Kennedy, became attorney general and went after the Mob like white on rice. Perhaps, as Reavill theorizes, as an attempt to overcome the accusations of nepotism or an Oedipal projection of hatred of his father, Joe Kennedy (notorious for his many mob connections), Bobby's passion for destroying the Mafia became less of a job and more of a religion. Arrests and convictions happened in droves. Bobby pissed off a lot of mafiosi, receiving constant death threats, many by people who could easily pull it off. (Many JFK conspiracy theorists use this fact to support their theory that the Mafia had JFK murdered as a warning to his brother to back off, a theory that Reavill doesn't discount completely, although he does make the point that members of the mafia are notorious for their inability to shut their mouths and keep secrets, so for a secret conspiracy to remain quiet for this long seems pretty unrealistic.)

Reavill's reportage is fascinating and fairly thorough. At the very least, it makes for an exciting read. At its best, Reavill's book examines the complex lives of three very extraordinary men---Croswell, Hoover, and Kennedy---whose intersection in history resulted in something grand and powerful.

Bob Costello says

Listened to this book on a road trip out west. Very interesting brief history of the Mafia in America. One thing I learn from this book was that J. Edgar Hoover's FBI gave the Mafia a free pass for years. Who had files on who?

Louise says

Author Gil Reavill begins with a reality check on the Apalachin Summit. Despite all the hype and bluster, it was not a bust, and no significant charges against the attendees ever stuck. What it was, was an event that exposed the existence of a national crime syndicate and forced authorities to deal with it.

Reavill begins with a short history of the Mafia, profiles of the some of the key Mafia figures and a

description of the political environment in which they operated. The FBI, under J. Edgar Hoover, denied the existence of the mafia and used the bureau's resources for safer headline grabs by chasing communists and for building files on his "enemies" (and bosses). Given this neglect, it is not surprising that the strange flight of well-heeled men with large wads of cash was precipitated by state troopers far down on the organizational chart.

NY State Police Sergeant Edgar Coswell didn't fully stumble on it; He had been following the careers of local mobsters. He didn't know where his road block was going, but he wisely let the situation unfold. The resulting flight of the mobsters yielded great headlines and forced federal and state law enforcement officers to deal with the mob. Reavill gives some anecdotes on the finger pointing and turf wars that followed (i.e. NYS chiefs argue about whose district Apalachin is in; Hoover says there is no Mafia, but admits to a Cosa Nostra, etc.)

The Apalachin Summit "bust" ended not only ended FBI neglect it alerted politicians to an area ripe for good press. One of those crusaders was Robert Kennedy who had success pulling in agencies together for the common goal. Reavill notes that after his brother's death, RFK ended his anti-Mafia campaign and took up social justice in its stead. Reavill does not believe the Mafia was involved in JFK's death, although, he clearly thinks RFK did.

The book is brief and uneven. Some mobsters are well defined and others not. There are longish and interesting pieces on Vito Genovese and Joe Barbara. Stefano Magaddino is noted as being so important that this meeting occurred in his territory, but he isn't profiled. There are some good photos of the Barbara estate and maps of the compound and its area. Almost a third of the book is devoted to an Appendix (briefs on the attendees, again, absent Stefano Magaddino) and Endnotes.

The value of the book is in focusing on why the summit and its aftermath are important.

Caleb Ross says

Walt says

It is about time someone looked closely at the Apalachin meeting. There is so much speculation that the subject begs more rigorous examination. Reavill does a good job at examining the minute chronology of the meeting and the subsequent investigations. He could have done more to investigate the confirmed attendees; but appears to have stuck largely with newspaper accounts full of minute detail. He also claims to use some material from an actual attendee.

The bombshell that one of the attendees was actually an informant is amazing. Reavill uses the first-hand account to definitively state who was there, what they were doing, and what was discussed. However, it is not until the end, when he is discussing his sources that he reveals this fact, and that it is based on the oral story of the informant's State Police handler, who died in 2011. You will need to read the book to learn the identity of the informant...sorry, no spoilers here.

This omission goes into one of the main mysteries of the meeting. Who was there? He rarely speculates about other attendees. He clearly states that 60 people were caught in the initial raid; and that wide

speculation steadily increased that number. Without naming his inside source, he states that the Chicago mob and Stefano Magaddino were present; but decided not to leave the house. Interesting tactic. I would like to have more information about the attendees than what he includes as an appendix. He does not assign mafia affiliation, criminal history, and a little modus operandi. More would have been helpful.

Overall, it is a useful addition to the literature. It could have been a much better book had he taken the time to do more research. Overall, it is a good addition to any crime library because of the subject.

Anna-Kate says

It was a bit dry, but an interesting look at a world I am not at all familiar with. These guys are messed up. I will have to read more, and re-watch the Godfather.
