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ABSTRACT

This *Kentucky Justice & Safety Research Bulletin* examines the antecedents of modern-day organized crime in Kentucky. The question to be addressed is whether the genesis of organized crime in a predominately rural, southern state, such as Kentucky, follows well-established patterns of development found in historical analyses of Chicago, Philadelphia, New York, and other north-eastern and midwestern locales. This question is addressed by an examination of primary and secondary historical data sources relevant to early forms of organized crime. The research concludes that while Kentucky exhibited strikingly different forms of economic, social and political organization compared to northeastern and midwestern locales, the genesis of criminal organizations was much the same. Political corruption; a clearly defined consumer market for vice and the products of criminal enterprise; close social integration between criminal under-worlds and economic upper-worlds; and highly flexible and loosely structured organizational forms are common to organized crime activities without regard to geographic location. While many of the forms of early criminal organization in Kentucky differed from those found in the north, the basic organizational dynamics and social forces were similar.

The Antecedents of Organized Criminality in Kentucky

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The development of organized crime in the United States is well documented for major industrial cities of the north and midwest. New York, Philadelphia, Detroit, and Chicago have all been the subjects of numerous histories tracing the roots of organized crime to political machines, gambling, saloon and prostitution operators, professional thieves, and street gangs made up of newly arrived immigrants.

What is less well known is how criminal organizations developed in more rural and southern states like Kentucky. It is clear that such organizations developed, and by the 1940s and 1950s that organized crime was as entrenched in southern locales like Newport and Covington, Kentucky; New Orleans, Louisiana; Memphis, Tennessee; Phenix City, Alabama; and, Hot Springs, Arkansas as anywhere in the country. What is unclear is what pattern of development preceded the establishment of major syndicates in these areas.¹

In many ways we would expect the genesis of organized crime to follow similar and consistent patterns everywhere. For example, it is well-established in the organized crime literature that citizen demand for illicit gambling, liquor, sex and other goods and services spurs the develop-

ment of criminal syndicates. It is also a virtual maxium that such syndicates cannot develop and take hold without powerful support from political and economic entities in the communities in which they operate.

But there the similarities seem to end. The major cities of the north and midwest were heavily and densely populated. Kentucky and the rest of the south were more sparsely populated and predominantly rural in character. The north and midwest were commercialized and in the process of industrializing when organized crime took hold. Kentucky and the other southern states were caught in a feudal economy based on labor-intensive agriculture and slavery, which would hold them back almost two centuries in economic development.

The northern and midwestern cities had developed strong political party organizations, usually supported by immigrant-populated youth gangs, which sanctioned and controlled illicit vice. Kentucky and the rest of the south had a consistent single-party system often with slavery and segregation disguised as states rights, as the only principle of organization.

Yet, perhaps surprisingly, organized crime took root in Kentucky within the same general context of vice and corruption that historians have isolated for the northern and midwestern cities. The context was the same, but the flavor was distinctly southern, with the early formations of organized crime occurring around some activities that would scarcely be imagined by northern and midwestern counterparts.²

Political corruption was, of course, central to early organized crime in Kentucky. But political corruption had a larger context and therefore was a more powerful impetus to organized crime in the south. Of course, the sheriff, judge, mayor, and governor were involved, but in the southern states these forces were insufficient. In order for organized crime to take hold, the aristocratic, slave-owning planters and the mercantile traders of the great river port cities had to become integral to syndicate development.

The vices, liquor, prostitution, and gambling obviously formed an economic service core for Kentucky syndicates, but even these basic vices took new forms. River boat faro games were syndicated. River ports were the vice districts of the south. And procuring, kidnaping or acquiring young girls for the prostitution trade, was even more profitable and more highly-organized than the prostitution business itself. The liquor trade involved not just tax evasion and smuggling, but also production in highly-organized enclaves.

Equally important were crimes not imagined in the north. Slave-stealing, as well as land and river piracy were also integral to the development of organized crime in Kentucky and other southern states.

The basic models of organized crime development articulated by Albini, Smith, Chambliss and others were as important in the rural system of feudalism that dominated southern culture as in the great cities of the north and midwest. They merely adapted themselves in southern forms: ocean piracy, land and river piracy, organized gambling, prostitution and procuring, and moonshining and bootlegging.³

THE AGRICULTURAL ECONOMY, LOCAL GOVERNMENT, SLAVE STEALERS, LAND PIRATES AND RIVER PIRATES

In the late 1700s and early 1800s, several gangs operated in Kentucky and other southern states as land pirates. Land pirates were primarily highwaymen who attacked and stole various kinds of shipments of merchandise. Many land pirates also specialized in "slave-stealing," a trade which involved kidnaping freed slaves, slaves who were away from their plantations on errands, or occasionally, slaves actually on plantation grounds and reselling them at auctions or privately to other slave-holders.

"Slave-stealing" had a kind of official sanction, in that gangs specializing in this activity also hired out to slave-owners to track down runaway slaves, thus acting in a quasi-official capacity as "slave patrols." Slave patrols, of course, were the earliest form of local law enforcement in the rural south. These land pirates also, on

occasion, operated as "private armies" or mercenaries for large land-owners, serving as enforcers and boundary patrols of huge southern estates.⁴

River pirates attacked travelers traversing the waters of the Ohio River either as settlers of the western regions of the United States, or as merchants conducting trade between the northern river ports and Natchez, Mississippi, and New Orleans, Louisiana. Many, although not all, of the river pirates operated from the area known as Cave-in-Rock. Cave-in-Rock is a large limestone cave on the Illinois side of the Ohio River that in the late 1700s became the headquarters for land and river pirates operating in the region.

It is important to note that both Natchez and New Orleans were much more than ports for legitimate trade. They were also "open cities" featuring gambling, prostitution, stolen goods, fencing, and slave-trading as vital components of their economies.

It is also important to note that the distinction between river pirates and land pirates was only one of venue. Both types of gangs typically operated on land and water and both were pioneers of organized crime's twentieth century emphasis on extortionate control of commerce.⁵

Samuel Mason

Samuel Mason (1739-1803) was a land and river pirate operating in western Kentucky along the Ohio River. Mason had been one of George Washington's officers in the Revolutionary War. Following the war, in 1784, he emigrated to Kentucky, and by 1797 had set up headquarters at Cave-in-Rock, turning the 55-foot-wide cavern into a tavern and bordello. Mason's gang, estimated by some sources as large as 100 members, conducted vice operations, exercised extortionate control of passage along the Ohio River, and ran a professional theft and piracy ring from the cavern.

Mason, much like other early organized criminals in Kentucky, operated with official sanction and the protection of local law enforcement. In fact, Mason served as both justice of the peace and associate judge, thereby guaranteeing immunity from prosecution and being invested with the power to declare ownership of "salvage" on the rivers. Mason's piracy was made legitimate by salvage documents he filed on the boats granting himself ownership of the property he pillaged. This is an early and crude form of money laundering, a device now integral to operation of organized crime syndicates.⁶

From Cave-in-Rock, Mason would dispatch gang members up river toward Louisville. The gang members would often offer to guide flatboats through the treacherous waters of the Ohio. When the boats neared Cave-in-Rock the gang members would either pilot them onto sand bars or disable the boats allowing the Mason gang to rob the travelers, sometimes killing them in the process. Other travelers were simply lured ashore by promises of liquor and "entertainment" and then were waylaid and robbed by gang members.

Mason and his cohorts were also involved in the procurement of prostitutes for brothels on the Ohio River called "floating hog pens," and brothels operating in the wide-open vice

districts of Natchez and New Orleans. Young women traveling on the keel boats that the Mason gang seized were simply kidnaped. Less attractive young women were sold to the “hog pen” operators; more attractive young women were sold or auctioned off to the procurers for subsequent resale to New Orleans and Natchez brothels.

While Samuel Mason had virtual immunity from prosecution in Kentucky, he was not so well protected in Mississippi. In 1803 the governor of Mississippi offered a \$500 reward for Mason’s capture, an enormous sum for that time. Mason’s inability to establish political protection in Mississippi, along with poor personnel choices related to his gang, led to his demise. Members of his own gang, led by Wiley Harpe (discussed below) who along with his brother had joined the Mason gang, killed and beheaded Mason for the reward money.⁷

The Harpe Brothers

In the early 1800s the Harpe brothers took up residence in the Cave-in-Rock area, operating both independently and sometimes as an adjunct to the Mason Gang. Micah (“Big”) Harpe and Wiley (“Little”) Harpe were among the most notable of the many land pirates who operated along the Wilderness Road in Kentucky and the Natchez Trace in Mississippi. The Harpe brothers, tradition has it, were born into a Tory family in North Carolina, and were active participants in the Tory “rape gangs” that sought to terrorize supporters of the American Revolution. They fled to the Tennessee and Kentucky areas after the American revolution.

The Harpe brothers are credited with killing dozens of men, women and children moving west on these early settlement trails in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The Harpes operated along the Wilderness Road and from Cave-in-Rock as highwaymen, cattle rustlers and thieves. From Cave-in-Rock, the Harpe gang, joining with other outlaws took part in a syndicated river theft operation which involved luring flatboats and settlers to the shore and then killing them and stealing their possessions.

The Harpe Brothers’ gang was broken up by a frontier posse in 1799 when Micah was captured, killed and beheaded. His head was boiled and his skull placed on a post for all to see near the town that is now “picturesquely” called Harpeshead, Kentucky.

Wiley and the other gang members escaped and in 1803 joined Samuel Mason’s piracy syndicate. The Mason gang had already been operating as horse and slave thieves for almost a decade when Wiley joined them in 1799.

Unfortunately for Samuel Mason, Wiley Harpe was not particularly trustworthy. After getting word that a large reward was being offered for Mason in Mississippi, Wiley and other gang members cut Mason’s head off with an axe and traveled to Natchez, with the head, to collect the reward. They delivered the head to authorities in Natchez and settled down to wait for the reward money. Being less than patient, however, Wiley and his associates soon got bored and decided to steal some horses to augment the value of their trip. They were caught and hanged at Greenville, Mississippi, in 1804 before they could collect the price on Mason’s head.⁸

Bully Wilson and the Ohio River Pirates

Both contemporaneous with and succeeding the Harpe brothers was the gang that operated from Cave-in-Rock. From about 1800 to 1824 Bully Wilson operated a land and river piracy syndicate at Cave-in-Rock at Hurricane Bars, located off a dangerous channel on the Kentucky shore of the Ohio River between Red Bank and Smithland.

The Cave-in-Rock syndicate, under Wilson’s leadership, consisted of about 100 men. Like the Mason gang before them they would lure settlers ashore in two ways. Sometimes they would place markers on the river which would guide the rafts and keel boats into the rocks and then attack them. Wilson and his cohorts would also lure thirsty settlers to shore with signs advertising liquor and entertainment. If all else failed they would simply attack the rafts and keel boats from skiffs or canoes. The passengers would be killed and their goods shipped for resale to merchants in New Orleans who dealt with the Cave-in-Rock gang on a regular basis.⁹

Colonel Plug

Another of the river pirates who operated in the Cave-in-Rock area in the 1800s was Colonel “Plug” (born Fluger). Plug and his gang operated in much the same manner as other river pirates. Taking advantage of the vast unpopulated wilderness and uncharted waters that stretched from Louisville to the mouth of the Ohio River at Fort Massac, Plug and his cohorts would offer to guide the flatboats of unwary pilgrims through the treacherous waters of the Ohio. Like the Mason gang, Plug’s associates would either pilot the boats aground or attack travelers to whom they had provided whiskey and entertainment ashore.

Plug got his name from his own variation on this theme. Frequently his gang members, while guiding boats down the Ohio, would sabotage the vessels by boring a hole in the hull or digging out the caulking on the boat’s bottom, thereby causing the flatboat to be brought to shore for repairs where the attack would take place. Colonel Plug also engaged in a crime called “bucksnoatching” up and down the river. Bucksnoatching involved the use of skeleton keys on the locks of warehouses located along the river and the subsequent removal of the goods being stored. Colonel Plug met his end, appropriately enough, when he was drowned during a storm on a flatboat he had just finished sabotaging.¹⁰

James Ford, “Satan’s Ferryman”

Very close to Cave-in-Rock was a crossing point on the Ohio River known as Ford’s Ferry. Prior to the construction of the navigation dams the Ohio River was not as wide or deep as it is today. Movement of goods and people across the river was a common occurrence. At Ford’s Ferry was a small island in the Ohio called Hurricane Island, separated from the Kentucky shoreline by Hurricane channel, a treacherous piece of the river requiring skillful navigation. Ford’s Ferry connected to an early highway, named Ford’s Ferry Road, that ran through Crittenden and Hardin Counties in Kentucky. Travelers moving west by land, rather than traversing the Ohio River, had to pass along this road. Ford’s Ferry was named after ferry operator James Ford, who was also a salt

manufacturer, farmer and hotel owner in Kentucky during the 1820s.

Much like Samuel Mason, James Ford enjoyed political prestige and protection in Kentucky, serving as a delegate to Kentucky's first constitutional convention; serving as an officer in the state militia; serving as a justice of the peace in both Illinois and Kentucky; serving as county sheriff in Kentucky; and, serving as a county judge in Kentucky. Much like Samuel Mason, James Ford and his associates also controlled travel and commerce through extortion, robbed and pillaged the goods of merchants and travelers, and engaged in slave-stealing.

James Ford's gang of about 20 or 30 outlaws conducted large-scale piracy in the area of Hurricane Island. In fact, this gang was so active and was reputed to be responsible for so many acts of piracy, theft and murder, that James Ford earned the appellation of "Satan's Ferryman." Much like Samuel Mason, James Ford filed official documents indicating dozens of salvages of flatboats, complete with their cargo, livestock, money and personal possessions, which apparently had been beached in the Hurricane channel.

The only things missing from the boats that Ford claimed salvage rights for was the people who had been traveling on them. While less likely to result in salvage claims, the Ford gang also waylaid travelers and merchants moving by land. In the 1820s, James Ford appears to have controlled land and river piracy on both sides of the Ohio from just west of Louisville to Fort Massac where the Ohio joins the Mississippi.¹¹

There is also considerable evidence that Ford operated in concert with slave-stealers Lewis Kuykendall and John Hart Crenshaw. Both Crenshaw and Ford held leases for the Lower Lick Salt Works, and upon Ford's death, control of the salt works passed to Crenshaw. In addition oral traditions of the era link Ford directly to James "Bully" Wilson's gang of pirates at Cave-in-Rock.

John Hart Crenshaw

John Hart Crenshaw was a salt manufacturer, toll bridge operator, farmer, saw mill operator, railroad builder, land speculator and distiller. He was also a land commissioner, state bank director, grand juror, Democratic Party leader, lay official in the Methodist church and board member of several educational institutions.

John Hart Crenshaw was also a slave-stealer. Crenshaw would move kidnaped slaves south from Illinois across Ford's Ferry. He would also move slaves from Kentucky north to Illinois to work in the salt fields, a labor intensive seasonal industry.

Crenshaw was indicted by grand juries for slave kidnappings in both the 1820s and in 1842. While the state was able to prove the abductions, it was unable to prove that the slaves had been sold out-of-state, a necessary condition for conviction. Later, evidence was developed that the slaves involved in these abductions had been sold to slave holders in Texas, but the protection against double jeopardy prevented Crenshaw from being tried again.

The slave-stealing operation involved the smuggling of

abducted slaves into Kentucky through Ford's Ferry where they were hidden in the basements of private residences in a kind of reverse underground railroad as they were moved south to be sold. The business connections between Crenshaw and James Ford make it probable that the Ford gang was responsible for the Kentucky end of the slave-stealing business.¹²

Slave-Stealing in the Bluegrass

Slave-stealing was not confined to western Kentucky. In fact, the Lexington-area was noted for its involvement in the illegal sale of slaves "down-the-river" to the cotton plantations of the deep south. The illegal trade in slaves was encouraged by economic and agricultural conditions in Kentucky.

While slaves were frequently used in the tobacco fields of southwestern Kentucky and in the salt fields along the Ohio River, they were less important to the other agricultural enterprises of the Commonwealth. The growing and harvesting of hemp, vegetables and fruits, and the production of livestock were far less labor-intensive than the growing of cotton.

In Kentucky the slave population exceeded the agricultural needs of slave-owners. Too many slaves on a Kentucky plantation was an economic drain on the resources of the owner. So, "excess" slaves, rather than being freed, were smuggled south by slave-traders operating openly in the Bluegrass Region.¹³

One of the most notorious slave-traders was Edward Stone who ran his business from Paris, Kentucky. Stone's business was centered around his house, a large, rambling structure named "The Grange." One of the most distinctive features of his home, was iron-barred windows and doors and the wall shackles which decorated his basement. Stone openly advertised for and purchased slaves which he then transported to the slave auctions of New Orleans and Natchez. Stone and four members of his organization were killed on September 26, 1826, when the slaves they were transporting down river mutinied and killed them on the Ohio River.¹⁴

Other slave-stealers operated in a less open and flamboyant fashion through the 1830s and 1840s. But a substantial increase in the price of cotton in 1845 and the granting of statehood to Texas as a slave state also in 1845, created a new and highly-profitable demand for more slaves. Many slave-stealers responded to these economic exigencies, but none more openly and flagrantly than Lewis C. Robards of Lexington.

Like Stone, Robards advertised openly in the local newspapers for slaves available for purchase. He also engaged in the abduction of freed slaves who would be sold back into slavery. At least partly due to the openness of Robards' slave-trading, Lexington became a hub for slave-dealing second only to New Orleans in the 1840s and 1850s.¹⁵

PROCURING AND PROSTITUTION

Prostitution and procuring young girls for the prostitution trade was a major vice industry in New Orleans and Natchez. The

trade, buttressed by the chattel laws which also protected slavery, flourished throughout the 1800s. While prostitution was widely tolerated in a number of open cities in America, the complementary racket of procuring young girls for the trade was universally denounced, except in New Orleans where it emerged as a mainstay of 19th century organized crime.

The Sam Purdy Gang

As early as the 1780s, through 1805 or so, Sam Purdy operated as probably the best known “white-slaver” in the U.S. Purdy usually secured young girls for sale by buying them from their families, frequently poor settlers having great difficulty supporting their children. To augment his supply of young women, Purdy and his gang would use the same tactics as land and river pirates, stealing young girls off keel boats and rafts, and kidnaping them from their families along the wilderness trails.

The girls would then be taken to Natchez and auctioned off to prostitution operators, or sold to “hog pen” operators on the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers. The youngest and most attractive girls were taken to New Orleans where they were sold directly to madams operating exclusive brothels as part of an ongoing contract arrangement with Purdy.

The Purdy syndicate was huge, actually consisting of several gangs headed by other notorious white-slavers, including Lou Evans, Blackie Coe, James Fenney, Johnny Gaines, Joe Bontura, and Tommy McMurren. The Purdy gang had amazing longevity and great financial success, dominating the river slave trade for almost three decades.¹⁶

Lewis Robards

Lewis Robards (discussed above) was more than a slave-stealer. He was also a major procurer for the brothels and syndicates of New Orleans. Robards made a special effort to purchase light-skinned, young, attractive, female slaves for the prostitution business. In fact, Robards was a specialist in the purchase of what was known as “quatrooms,” fairly complexioned slaves of mixed ethnicity who could be sold by procuring syndicates to private owners as sexual slaves. Robards openly advertised his trade in this “choice stock.”¹⁷

New Orleans Procuresses

One of the most famous of the New Orleans procuresses was Mary Thompson, who in the mid-1800s operated a cigar store on Royal Street. While cigars were ostensibly her business, her real profits came from selling young girls to houses of prostitution. The prices ranged from \$200 to \$400 for inexperienced girls, depending on the marketability of their physical appearances.

Thompson is famous for having one of her young girls arrested for theft when she escaped the procuress’ clutches. The girl, a fifteen-year-old, had been sold to an elderly gentleman for \$350 when the girl ran away from him. Mary Thompson had her arrested and charged with theft of services for the clothes, toys and candy Mary had bought for her. Thompson was awarded \$50 in damages.¹⁸

By the late 1860s procuresses were not just supplying the brothels of New Orleans, but were also supplying prostitution operations in Atlanta, Memphis, Galveston and other Southern cities. By this time procuresses were taking “orders” and their supplies were divided into “stock” and “fresh stock” depending upon virginity and age. One of the best known of the post-Civil War procuresses was Louisa Murphy, a New Orleans school-teacher, who managed prices as high as \$800 for a young, “unspoiled” girl.¹⁹

By the 1880s, procuring was a major racket. Miss Carol, Mother Mansfield, Spanish Agnes, Emma Johnson, and Nellie Haley dominated the now very public and very profitable trade in young girls. Spanish Agnes operated an “employment agency” for prostitutes on Burgundy Street in New Orleans. Throughout the 1880s and 1890s her agency supplied a steady stream of prostitutes for brothel keepers in Galveston and New Orleans. Emma Johnson operated the studio, a brothel on Basin Street. Procurers commonly sent out circulars advertising their available stock. It was not until 1917, when the Navy intervened in New Orleans vice operations and shut down the brothels, at least temporarily, that procuring began to fade as a major source of illicit income.²⁰

Prostitution in the Bluegrass

While prostitution was certainly not unknown in the major cities of Kentucky, probably the most prominent purveyor of this vice was Lexington’s Mary Belle Brezing. In 1879 at the age of 18, Brezing went to work as a prostitute at a brothel owned by Jennie Hill on West Main Street in Lexington. Several years later she opened her own brothel in a rented townhouse. For the next decade Brezing operated a relatively modest business from that site.

But in 1894, bankrolled by a client from Philadelphia who had substantial interests in the saddlebred industry, Brezing purchased a house at 59 Megowan Street. This establishment became Lexington’s premiere house of prostitution. It was an elegantly appointed brothel, with strict rules of decorum for clients and a stable of the most refined, beautiful and elegant sex workers in the Bluegrass region. Belle Brezing’s house entertained a clientele of the rich and famous, drawing customers from all over the United States and Europe.

Ms. Brezing was able to operate her prostitution business with little interference, and indeed, considerable assistance from state and local officials. She was a generous contributor to political candidates. From the early 1880s until her house finally closed in 1917, Brezing had only one run in with the law. She was convicted of operating a house of ill repute, but was promptly pardoned by a special executive order issued by Governor Luke Blackburn.

In 1917, Brezing’s house, along with several dozen other Lexington brothels, was closed by order of the army in attempt to protect the morals of young troops stationed at Camp Stanley on Versailles Road.²¹

Brothels of the Twentieth Century

In the 20th century, brothel prostitution continued

throughout most of Kentucky. Brothels operated in Lexington and Louisville and in most other cities in the Commonwealth. The most infamous site for prostitution was Northern Kentucky where the Bridewell brothers operated several brothels in Newport and Big Jim Harris, the city marshal, ran the infamous Hi-De-Ho Club in Wilder.

In Newport prostitution was so well organized that some brothels (day houses) opened during the day to serve the traffic flowing out of Cincinnati on Newport's one-way, and others opened in the late afternoon to serve traffic flowing back into Cincinnati (night houses). (See Table 1 for a partial list of brothels in Newport.) In addition, Newport had (and still has) a well-developed "Bar-Girl" trade which combines exotic dancing and on-site acts of prostitution.

Table 1: Known Houses of Prostitution, 1959-1960, Newport Kentucky

Brothel	Address	Description
345 Club	345 Central Avenue	Night House, with gambling
Columbia Café	101 West Fourth Street	Night House, with gambling
Florence's	212 Columbia Street	Day House
Fourth Street Grill	Fourth and Columbia	Night House, with gambling
Frolics	Monmouth Street	Bar Girls, with gambling
Galaxie	Manmouth Street	Bar Girls, with gambling
Goldy's	28 West Second Street	Day House
Harbor Bar	201 Columbia Street	Night House, with gambling
Kitty's	30 West Second Street	Day House
Mabel's	26 West Second Street	Day House
Ray's Cafe	116 West Fourth Street	Brothel, open both day/ night
Silver Slipper	Monmouth Street	Bar Girls, with gambling
Stardust	Monmouth Street	Bar Girls, with gambling
Stork Club	Monmouth Street	Bar Girls, with gambling
Vivian's	21 West Third Street	Night House
Wanda's	213 York Street	Day House

SOURCE: Personal Communication with Hank Messick

In Bowling Green, Pauline Tabor operated a series of houses of prostitution from the early 1930s to 1969. Tabor started her enterprises much like Belle Brezing, in a small, rented house on the outskirts of Bowling Green. But by 1944 she had opened several other houses, including her best-known and most luxurious house at 627 Clay Street. Ms. Tabor entertained soldiers from Fort Knox and Fort Campbell at her less elegant locations and wealthy businessmen at the Clay Street address. Never seriously inconvenienced by law enforcement, Ms. Tabor retired in 1969.²²

GAMBLING

Like pre-prohibition organized crime in New York, Philadelphia, Chicago and the other Northern cities, gambling and prostitution were the backbones of illicit enterprise in the 19th century south. Prominent gamblers and gambling syndicates plied their trade in vice districts along the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers and on the river boats that traversed those arteries. Some of those gamblers were independent operators who plied their trade with a small group of confederates and others operated as parts of well-established, highly profitable, gambling syndicates.

Card Sharping and Faro Syndicates

Gambling on the Mississippi River itself was prone to syndication as the case of Elijah Skaggs demonstrates with regard to the high-profit game of faro. Skaggs was born in Kentucky about 1810 and made a career of card sharpening on the Mississippi River. Skaggs operated primarily out of the Nashville area where he made a considerable fortune cheating other gamblers.

But his major contribution to Southern organized crime was his role in institutionalizing the game of faro along both the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers. Skaggs served as banker and manager for faro games up and down the river and in the 1840s was netting \$100,000 a month from this syndicate's faro games.

By 1847 Skaggs was a millionaire who augmented his faro income by studying other cardsharps on the riverboats and in the gambling halls lining the river banks and blackmailing them into paying him so he wouldn't reveal their methods of cheating. At the age of 37 Skaggs retired from gambling and purchased a massive plantation in Louisiana.²³

Other gambling operators also flourished on the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers. Some like James Ashby were independents and more con men than gamblers. Others like George Devol and his partners Tom Brown, Canada Bill Jones, Pinckney Pinchback and Holly Chappell, operated with a higher degree of organization.

Devol and his associates, from the 1840s through the 1880s, banked faro, poker, and seven-up games on river boats from Cincinnati to New Orleans. In his autobiography Devol claimed to have made about \$2 million gambling on the Mississippi. Devol and his partners operated a syndicate that netted \$200,000 a year running games on river boats. One of Devol's proteges and partners, Pinckney Benton Stewart Pinchback, later became acting governor of Louisiana. In the 1880s Devol married and settled down in Cincinnati where he lived out the rest of his life in considerable comfort.²⁴

Many other gamblers plied their trade on the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers in the 1840s. James Fitzgerald was a New Orleans-based steamboat gambler. Thomas Mackey, James McLane, "Umbrella Jim" Miner, John Powell, Jules Deveareax, and Colonel Starr made fortunes running games on the river boats. James Hargeaves, who made a 30-year run on the river from 1840 to 1870, reputedly retired with \$2 million in his pocket after killing eight or

more men in duels over the outcome of card games.²⁵

Zachariah Simmons and the Kentucky Lottery

One of the most successful of the Southern gambling syndicates of the 1800s, operating outside of New Orleans and off the rivers, was actually headed by a New Yorker named Zachariah Simmons. During the 1870s Simmons organized the independent policy gambling operators in New York City into a cooperative confederation which he headed. He was assisted in this venture by an overt alliance with the politicians of Tammany Hall. The Simmons takeover was effected by Tammany arranging for police raids on all independent policy bankers in New York in the summer of 1870.

Those who aligned with Simmons suddenly found police pressure had eased. Simmons and his three brothers in cooperation with Boss Tweed, effectively took control of 75 percent of New York's policy gambling action. By 1872 the Simmons syndicate had expanded its operations to Baltimore, Chicago, Philadelphia, Washington, D.C. and Richmond, Virginia, and annual profits exceeded \$1 million.²⁶

The Simmons empire expanded even more in 1875 when he was named one of the managers of the Kentucky State Lottery and the Frankfort Lottery of Kentucky. After all, who was better to head a state-run racket? Simmons was an effective administrator who also profited handsomely from his new position.

After taking control of the official lotteries in Kentucky, Simmons presided over a remarkable string of coincidences. It seems that the numbers drawn for the official games in Louisville and Frankfort were almost always the same numbers, drawn in the same order, as those selected in New York. Conjecture would suggest that Simmons selected the numbers in New York and wired them to Frankfort and Louisville. The numbers were then announced in Kentucky and wired back to New York through Jersey City and Cincinnati. Simmons was able to keep up this profitable scam until he retired and turned both the legal and illegal operations over to Albert Adams who had started his gambling career as one of Simmons' policy runners.²⁷

The Illegal Casinos of Kentucky

A legacy of river boat gambling in Kentucky was the massive presence of illegal casinos in the Commonwealth from the Prohibition Era (1919-1932) to the early 1960s. Although gambling was clearly illegal in all forms in Kentucky, it was both omnipresent and exceedingly profitable. It, of course, goes without saying that the establishment of a casino in a permanent location, in an urban area, with a large neon sign outside, could not possibly escape the attention of local enforcement and political authorities.

Corruption and casinos went hand-in-hand. And where political corruption was sufficiently well-organized, open prostitution, in the form of well appointed brothels, was also commonplace. While it is well beyond the purview of this discussion to present the history of syndicate-controlled gambling and prostitution in detail, a quick overview is important to an understanding of the roots of contemporary organized crime.

Gambling and prostitution were organized by both local operators, who frequently ran "bust-out-joints," small stakes casinos with games very unfavorable to players, and by major syndicates who ran "carpet joints" appealing to high stakes games and offering Las Vegas style entertaining and accommodations.

Prominent among the locally known syndicates operating gambling in Kentucky were the "Cleveland Four" (also known as the "Mayfield Road Mob"), who later went on to establish the world famous Desert Inn and the Sands Hotel in Las Vegas, and the Levinson brothers (Eddie and "Sleep-Out" Lewis) who were closely associated with Meyer Lansky's gambling operations in Cuba, Florida, the Bahamas, and Las Vegas.

The list of documented illegal casinos operating in Kentucky is enormous. What is even more staggering is the fact that according to experts on casino memorabilia, there were at least 150 other casinos operating in the state whose histories have been lost with the passage of time (see Table 2).

Table 2: Known Illegal Casinos in Kentucky, 1920 - 1968

CASINO	CITY	OPERATING YEARS	Known or Probable Syndicate Affiliation
222 Club	Covington	1940s-1952	Melvin Clark and Steve Payne
316 Club	Newport	1940s-1955	Taylor Farley
345 Club	Newport	1930s-1950s	The Bridewells
633 Club	Newport	1930s-1961	Arthur Dennert/Levinson Brother
Alibi Club	Newport	1940s-1955	Melvin Clark/Screw Andrews
Avenue Club	Newport	1930s-1961	Unknown
Beacon Inn	Wildler	1930s-1940s	Buck Brady
Belmont Club	Newport	1940s-1954	Unknown
Beverly Hills C. C.	Southgate	1930s-1961	Pete Schmidt/Cleveland Four
Club 3141	Newport	1940s-1950s	Unknown
Club Alexandria	Southgate	1940s-1961	Unknown
Club Keeneland	Covington	1940s-1952	Unknown
Club Kenton	Covington	1940s-1952	Unknown
Coconut Grove	Newport	1954-1961	Melvin Clark/Screw Andrews
Congo Club	Newport	1950s-1961	Melvin Clark and Steve Payne
Copa Club	Newport	1940s-1950s	Melvin Clark and Steve Payne
Dogpatch	Covington	1940s-1952	Unknown
Flamingo Club	Newport	1930s-1961	Art Dennert/Levinson Brothers
Glenn Hotel	Newport	1940s-1960	Peter Schmidt
Glenn Rendezvous	Newport	1940s-1960	Peter Schmidt/Levinson Brothers
Golden Horseshoe	Newport	1920s-1930s	Unknown
Grandview Gardens	Wildler	1940s	Unknown
Guy and Dolls	Cold Springs	1940s	Unknown
H-De-Ho Club	Wildler	1940s-1955	James Harris
Iroquois Club	Lexington	1940s-1960s	Unknown
Kentucky Club	Covington	1940s-1952	Unknown
Kid Able Club	Newport	1940s-1956	The Bridewells
Latin Quarter	Wildler	1947-1961	Cleveland Four
Lookout House	Covington	1930s-1952	Jimmy Brink/Cleveland Four
Mecca Club	Newport	1940s-1950s	The Bridewells
Melbourne C. C.	Melbourne	1940s-1950s	Cleveland Four
Merchants Club	Newport	1940s-1961	Cleveland Four
Monmouth Cigar	Newport	1956-1961	Unknown
New Concept I	Louisville	1940s-1952	Unknown
New Sportsman's	Newport	1961-1968	Unknown
Nineteen Hole	Newport	1940s-1950s	James Harris
Old Sportsman's	Newport	1940s-1960s	Unknown
Playtorium	Newport	1951-1955	Peter & Glenn Schmidt
Primrose Club	Wildler	1940s-1947	Buck Brady/Cleveland Four
Rocket Club	Newport	1940s	Melvin Clark & Steve Payne
Rocket Club	Covington	1940s-1952	Unknown
Silver Slipper	Newport	1952-1956	James Harris/Cleveland Four
Snax Bar	Newport	1955-1961	Glenn Schmidt
Sportsman Club	Newport	1940s-1961	Steve Payne/Screw Andrews
Spotted Calf Cafe'	Newport	1950s-1961	Unknown
Stardust	Newport	1956-1961	Unknown
Stork Club	Newport	1940s-1952	James Harris
Sycamore Club	Louisville	1930s-1960s	Unknown
Teddy Bear Lounge	Covington	1940s-1952	Unknown
Tin Shack	Covington	1940s-1952	Unknown
Tropicana	Newport	1960-1961	Cleveland Four/Tito Carinci
Turf Club	Covington	1940s-1952	Unknown
Varga Club	Newport	1940s	Melvin Clark and Steve Payne
Yorkshire Club	Newport	1940s-1961	The Bermans/Cleveland Four

SOURCES: J. Laudeman, *Newport*; *The Real Sin City*; Messick, *Razzle Dazzle*; Messick, *Syndicate Wife*.

The various local and national syndicates which competed for control of gambling and vice reveal much about the evolving character of organized crime in Kentucky. At the national level the Cleveland Four and the Levinson Brothers ran up-scale casinos serving good food and providing headline entertainment. They constantly found themselves at odds with the local syndicates which offered rigged games, such as “Razzle Dazzle” and prostitution services. In fact, both of the national syndicates operating in Kentucky supported and helped bankroll “reform” campaigns which were designed to close down the smaller, less reputable operators, under the slogan of “Clean Up, Not Close Up.”

Over the years, both the Cleveland Four and the Levinson Brothers successfully “muscled” some of the local operators out and took over the operations. They also helped to establish what was the largest sports and horse betting “layoff” book in the nation, which operated out of Newport. It was only when the Cleveland Four and the Levinsons left Kentucky for the greener pastures of Las Vegas and the Caribbean that any substantial local efforts to control illegal casino gambling began.³⁰

The local gambling syndicates were a motley collection of characters. For example, the Bridewells came out of Jackson County in Eastern Kentucky to operate three urban casinos. Their primary business was not casino gambling, but rather brothels. Similarly the Farley brothers, Taylor and Rip, who had come into the gambling business from Prohibition-era bootlegging while operating casino gambling, were also primarily prostitution purveyors until a run-in with the Cleveland Four necessitated early retirement.

Buck Brady was another veteran of the Prohibition bootlegging era who operated small casinos until the Cleveland Four forced him out of business. “Big” Jim Harris was the Marshal of Wilder, a position which protected his gambling interests. But once again, Harris was primarily involved in the prostitution business. His Hi-De-Ho Club, while featuring some gambling, was actually one of the more famous brothels in America.

Harris was also engaged in a major extortion racket. He had electronically wired the rooms at the Hi-De-Ho Club and frequently blackmailed some of his patrons, a practice which led to his eventual arrest and conviction. Steve Payne and Melvin Clark were local African-American gambling operators who maintained a strong presence in casinos catering to the African-American community of Cincinnati until Screw Andrews (born Frank Andriola) took over the black clubs using an unseemly amount of violence.

The most enduring of the local syndicates was headed by Peter Schmidt and his son Glenn, the original owners of the Beverly Hills Country Club. Peter Schmidt, another veteran of the bootlegging syndicates, engaged in a thirty-year political struggle, with the Cleveland Four, a struggle he usually lost. To the Schmidts' credit, though, they, along with Screw Andrews, were among the gambling operators who survived into the 1960s after the syndicates had pulled up stakes and headed for Las Vegas and the Caribbean.³¹

The wide-open illegal casino gambling in Kentucky was both a vestige of earlier efforts to organize crime and a precursor to criminal organizations which were to come along in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

BOOTLEGGING AND MOONSHINING

The production and distribution of “white liquor” (illegally produced and distributed spirits) and “red liquor” (spirits, usually whiskey, bought legally but sold in dry areas) is a popular theme in Kentucky folklore. The quaint and often amusing portrayals of “hillbilly” moonshiners and bootleggers conceals an important truth about the illegal liquor industry. Rather than being an illicit business conducted by barefooted country bumpkins with straw in their teeth and young rednecks with greased ducktails and fast Fords, the illicit liquor industry was and is a highly syndicated-economically, socially and politically integrated and, historically vital component of early southern organized crime.

From the initiation of the illegal liquor industry in response to British taxes in colonial America through the Whiskey Rebellion protesting the first federal tax on alcohol, and prohibition, to a contemporary underground economy evading federal state and local taxes and circumventing local liquor prohibitions, bootlegging and moonshining have been well-organized and integral parts of rural organized crime in Kentucky and other southern states.

Kentucky is one of the few states that openly brags about its moonshine and bootlegging heritage (not to mention its present prominence in marijuana cultivation). While the illegal liquor industry thrived in most of the state, primarily because a local option kept much of the state dry, two areas stand out as important historical centers of the moonshine trade. The first is one of the most notorious locations in America, famous not just for liquor, but for what locals call “killings.” (“Killings” are what would be referred to as murders in most states, but in Kentucky a “killing” is a purposeful murder seen as justified by the perpetrator and is often not thought of as criminal, immoral or wrong.)

The place famous for feuds, “killings,” and the widespread use of violence is Coe Ridge, a rugged seven-mile stretch on the Tennessee-Kentucky border. Just one raid on Coe Ridge during the 1920s produced seven seized stills, 4,000 gallons of mash and forty gallons of moonshine. The other very important moonshine enclave was the Golden Pond area in the Land Between the Lakes, situated neatly between the Cumberland and Tennessee Rivers. During Prohibition, Golden Pond whiskey was a highly prized commodity in the United States. In an area with no more than 300 inhabitants, and no airport, it is said that dozens of planes flew in and out on a weekly basis carrying the illegal brew to Chicago and New York.

The local moonshiners supplied much of the needs of the Capone syndicate (Capone’s syndicate also purchased moonshine in Eastern Kentucky) in the early days of prohibition and sold to Meyer Lansky, Bugsy Siegel and Owney “the Killer” Madden in

New York throughout the entire “dry decade.” Moonshining was so organized and demand so intense that each hollow had as many as fifteen stills operating throughout the area. In addition to producing some of the best illegal liquor, Kentucky also produced the most-famous of the “blockade runners” (couriers who drove the liquor to its destination), Jaybird Philpot of Manchester, Kentucky. Philpot was famous for ramming his way through roadblocks with his tanker car.³²

CONCLUSION

Organized crime is one of the most highly adaptable social organisms commonly found in human cultures. Dependent on public demand for illicit goods and services, organized crime can adapt to the exigencies of absentee landlords and feudal means of production in Sicily, heavy immigration and industrialization in the Northern United States, and slavery-based agricultural production in the Southern States. Its ability to effectively and efficiently adapt to political and economic forms, and to create functional alliances with those exercising political, social, and economic power, no matter the mechanisms being employed, is its greatest strength. This brief study of the genesis of Kentucky organized crime teaches the same basic lesson as other historical accounts of such activity. It is not the criminality of syndicates that allows them to succeed, perpetuate, and persevere over the years; it is their integral role and usefulness in communities and societies which guarantees their success. Until we stop treating organized crime as an aberration or a phenomenon alien to extant social structures, we cannot understand it as the tenacious and well-integrated entity that it is. Whether it allies with industrialists, slave-holders, landlords, Southern sheriffs, Northern police, or the Italian military; whether it profits from feudalism or modern capitalism, the fact is that organized crime persists because it is necessary to the maintenance of power in whatever location or historical era it is found.³³

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6. Money generated by organized crime in the United States is estimated at \$300 billion annually. Syndicates earn huge profits on the illegal goods and services they sell to the public. Of profits much is in the form of cash, and virtually all of it must be converted to legitimate forms before it can be invested or spent. The process of turning illicit profit into legitimate investment capital is called money laundering. Organized criminals who accumulate large cash inventories face serious risks of prosecution if considerable, unexplained hoards of cash are discovered. In order for the criminals to enjoy the fruits of their illegal enterprises, they must first convert those cash proceeds to a medium that is both easier than cash to use in everyday commerce and that avoids pointing, even indirectly, to the illegal activity that produced it. Money laundering conceals the source of the illegal money and gives that money a legitimate history and paper trail.

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33. These conclusions may seem rather sweeping in the context of the present research. But the findings of this study are remarkably congruent with the findings of all other case studies of organized crime in the United States, whether historical, geographic, or industry-based. While it is well beyond the purview of this paper to present a comprehensive theory of organized criminality, it is possible to briefly discuss two complementary models which are

both descriptive of the empirical literature in general and this study in particular.

Joseph Albin, in his study of organized crime in Detroit (The American Mafia), concluded that organized crime was made up of criminal patrons who exchanged information, connections with governmental officials, and access to a network of operatives for the client's economic and political support. The roles of client and patron fluctuated, depending on the enterprise, and combinations were formed, dissolved, and reformed with new actors. Albin (p.229) suggests that organized crime actually consists of "syndicates" in a "loose system of power relationships."

Organized crime groups are simple social-exchange networks in the community. The power of organized crime is found in its loose structuring, flexibility, and adaptability. Key organized crime figures occupy focal points in social participation networks that interconnect private and public sector organizations and licit and illicit enterprises. Organized criminals occupy intersections and are critically positioned facilitators in complex social relationships that permit clients to deal with the larger society. A social network of connections with the police, public officials, and other criminal operatives are at their disposal. An organized criminal has sufficient contacts for providing coordination and locating specialized talents and services necessary for criminal entrepreneurship.

Individuals involved in organized crime and its operations in this web of social participation are not, in many cases, directly part of an organization. Albin (1971: 288) argues that "rather than being a criminal secret society, a criminal syndicate consists of a system of loosely structured relationships functioning primarily because each participant is interested in furthering his own welfare."

William Chambliss' study of organized crime in Seattle (On The Take), depicts an overlapping series of crime networks with shifting memberships highly adaptive to the economic, political, and social exigencies of the community — without a centralized system of control. Chambliss argues that whatever control there is in organized crime comes far outside the criminal organization itself and is imposed on the illicit market by powerful political and economic forces in the community. Chambliss conceives of organized crime as being a network of individuals, the most powerful of which are businessmen, law enforcement officials, and political officeholders who direct the activities of criminal actors involved in prostitution, gambling, pornography, and drugs. As such, individuals often called "organized criminals" are seen by Chambliss to be more appropriately employees of the crime network participants.

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