

FEDERAL COURTS LAW REVIEW -- 2005 Fed. Cts. L. Rev. 6
BOOK REVIEW
OC INSIDE OUT

A review of Organized Crime (Seventh Edition)
by Howard Abadinsky (Wadsworth/Thomson 2003)

Hon. David D. Noce *

[1] Howard Abadinsky studied organized crime (OC) as a state parole officer for 15 years, a sheriff's office inspector, a university professor of criminal justice, the founder of the International Association for the Study of Organized Crime, and a presidential consultant on OC. Organized Crime is, first of all, a college text, created to facilitate the course he taught. The first edition in 1981 introduced students to the basic characteristics of OC and the writers of its classic studies on which Abadinsky frequently draws to great effect. Each successive edition reflected the changes he observed in OC groups and in the nation's responses to them.

[2] Organized Crime combines the author's micro-observations and descriptions of criminal groups and their activities into a macroscopic picture. His language and organization make a book that is easily read by laypersons, justice professionals, college students, and casual readers. The seventh edition reduced the anecdotal detail, including some references to the ever-colorful nicknames of prime OC characters, found in the sixth edition. Even so, readers will appreciate how Abadinsky has blended principles and theories with stories from the streets. Organized Crime puts flesh on such charging and sentencing concepts as "jointly undertaken criminal activity", "same course of conduct", and "common scheme or plan".

[3] Criminal organizations sap national and international vitality, divert economies from the common welfare, wreak havoc on law abiding lives, and provide self-sustaining petri dishes for the replication of evil. The history and the landscape of America are littered with the detritus of criminal organizations. For their limited membership and small numbers, they commit an extraordinary amount of criminal activity. Their activities can be simple or complex, continually looking for areas of opportunity. They defraud millions by "cramming" telephone bills with unauthorized charges and they demand protection money. They require a reasoned, vigorous, and strong response from criminal justice systems, not only in law enforcement but also in pre-sentence investigations and post-sentence supervision. The proper responses must understand OC's national causes, international roots, and entrenched cultures that require the use of criminal informers (e.g., the "pentiti" in Italy).

[4] Organized Crime is a primer that also provides modern tools for further research. It chronicles OC in the United States and describes its international, multi-cultural roots, its history, its notorious characters, the businesses that sustain its life, and the sociological factors that direct it.

[5] The work's five parts are divided into fifteen chapters. Each chapter is well organized and includes review questions for students and internet sites for further investigation and information on the treated subjects. Approximately 1,600 different factual sources and professional studies--which are compiled in an alphabetical reference list--are cited in the book. Other indices list alphabetically the cited authors and the treated subject matter. Peppered through the work are undercover police photographs and

boxed textual asides that stimulate interest ("Also Not Rocket Scientists. He was called 'Frankie the Beast' because of his skill in using a baseball bat on victims. This enforcer for the Colombo Family spotted the concealed video camera and turned to a very fearful Vinnie, the informant who had led him into an elaborate FBI sting: 'Hey, looks like a great [security] system you got here, Vinnie.' His capo, he explained, was looking for a security system for his home. Vinnie had one installed, gratis (Bonavolonta and Duffy 1996: 148)."

[6] The book's five parts lead the reader through OC in the United States, its structures, its sociological seeds and underpinnings, its international roots, its specific business interests, and the American government's attempts to limit its reach by legislation.

[7] OC defies precise, generally accepted definition. Abadinsky has selected eight criteria for inclusion here. Perhaps the most disappointing aspect of Organized Crime derives from the limitations imposed by the first of these criteria: that OC is non-ideological. Abadinsky's considerable efforts thus focus on groups motivated by money and power, not social doctrine, political beliefs, or ideological concerns. Among the groups necessarily excluded by this definition are terrorists and the Ku Klux Klan. Whether criminal groups are motivated by ideology or money and power, their actions are illegal, often violent, and injure the innocent. Perhaps Abadinsky will cast his net wider in a future edition. Nevertheless, the author shines brightly in his presentation of the long history of criminal organizations and the vital literature about them.

[8] The other attributes of criminal organizations refined by Abadinsky are important markers. OC groups use a hierarchy to control, have a limited or exclusive membership, perpetuate themselves in ongoing criminal conspiracy, use illegal means to achieve ends, specialize and divide the labors of members, are monopolistic, and operate with rules and regulations. OC groups follow either the bureaucratic/corporate model (e.g., outlaw motorcycle clubs) or use a patrimonial/patron-client network (e.g., American Mafia).

[9] OC groups evolve with the profitability of their operations. They exist in a dangerous environment and must continually adapt to survive. For example, illegal motorcycle gangs have moved from leathers and choppers to business suits and limos, and developed relations with Mafia families.

[10] Abadinsky surveys the history of OC in America, but offers a note of caution about journalistic sources. Journalists tend to be unreliable historians of useful facts, because they highlight and perhaps create sensational events for the public appetite. In addition, journalists themselves can be prey to the political ends of anonymous government sources.

[11] The root causes of OC are discerned from basic sociological principles. Abadinsky surveys differential association of potential group members with mentors, differential opportunities for criminal success, social control theory, and ethnic succession, to understand the broad scope of OC. OC thrives in national subcultures formed from economic, ethnic, and racial discrimination--circumstances that prevent individuals from entering mainstream life. The Irish emigrated on account of devastating famine and terrible government policies only to find themselves similarly disadvantaged in America with lack of education, wealth, and influence. The ability to speak English and rotten machine politics bound them into a formidable force for self-preservation.

[12] The American Mafia occupies much of the first five chapters and is the main subject of Chapter 7. The members and associate members of the various Families are labeled with significant monikers: made guy, wise guy, button, being straightened out, goodfella, amico, and "a friend of ours." The importance of the groups' rules sometimes take second place to personal influence. Not every new member must kill someone; those with powerful friends can be exempt from such dirty work. Yet, the strength of the oath of American Mafia membership is such that upon orders one must kill even a relative without hesitation. Crime group members do not earn salaries in a traditional sense; they generate income by operating their own criminal activities almost as independent franchise holders. Competition for money can cause conflict between the Families and the basic method of dispute resolution, other than gunfire, is arbitration, a "sitdown" or a "table" meeting.

[13] The Italian experience, which ultimately resulted in the American Mafia, differed historically from the Irish. For a thousand years, in the hostile environment of southern Italy's Mezzogiorno area, especially Sicily, such principles of self-preservation as famiglia (the ties of blood relationship), comparatico or comparaggio (the god-parenthood of outsiders being allowed into the group for limited purposes), omerta (non-cooperation with authority), and vendetta (revenge for any slight to the family) developed. In modern history, the political unification of Italy resulted in the economic suppression of and social discrimination against the southern Italians. Abadinsky explains that the lowercase term "mafia is a state of mind, a way of life" and ought to be distinguished from the illegal, secret Mafia organization.

[14] Organized Crime surveys important historical events of OC, especially in New York and Chicago. Abadinsky recounts the characters and events that enlivened New York's Castellammarese War in 1930 and the city's Five Mafia Families. In Chicago, the reader is given a geography lesson (everything north of Madison Street is the North Side; south of Madison is the South Side; everything west of intersecting State Street is the West Side; and there is no East Side). Chicago's OC is traced from Mike McDonald's victory in the mayoral election of 1873. In different eras, Chicago's organized crime activity was expressed through the likes of "Hinky Dink" Mike Kenna, John "the Bath" Coughlin, William Thompson, Mont Tennes, and, of course, the Prohibition-era Chicago Wars, Al Capone, and the emergence of "The Outfit" and its "street crews". Of interest to investigators is the fact that in New York informers are sometimes "made guys", but not in Chicago.

[15] Chapter 6 chronicles African-American and Black OC. Soldiers returning from the Viet Nam War used their contacts with Asian heroin producers and bypassed traditional OC groups. Abadinsky describes the generation and operation of Frank Lucas in New York, the Gangster Disciples, El Rukns/Black P. Stone Nation, the Bloods and the Crips, the Nigerians, and the Jamaicans. Chapter 8 treats Latino OC, including the Cuban-Colombian drug connection, the many drug cartels, economic causes of Mexican drug trafficking, and the Mexican Mafia, Mexican-Americans who influence criminal activities inside and outside west coast American prisons. Chapters 9 and 10 discuss the formation and history of Russian and Asian OC in America.

[16] Chapter 11 discusses the principle that the business of OC is extortion and the criminals who create the illegal goods and services are in fact its parasitic victims. The goods and services of OC include gambling, loansharking, theft and fencing, and the business of sex. Chapter 12 chronicles the history of labor racketeering from the post-Civil War era through the development of the "Big Four" unions, the crime-busting efforts of United States Attorney and then New York Mayor Rudolf Giuliani in the Fulton

Fish Market. The author includes business racketeering and restraint of trade as OC evils, especially in the construction industry and the private solid waste carting (the business of television's Tony Soprano, Abadinsky reminds us).

[17] Chapter 12 also describes the evils of OC in legitimate business activities. In these endeavors profits are increased by coercion, crime proceeds are laundered with legitimately generated cash, legitimate wealth is transferred to OC members, OC members are given employment when released on probation or parole, and legitimate businesses can front for illegal activities. Abadinsky describes various bankruptcy fraud scams and stock fraud.

[18] Chapter 13 discusses the history and operation of the national and international drug trade. Morphine was first derived from the poppy around 1700 and around 1900 led to heroin which was initially marketed as non-habit-forming. The Opium Wars of the 1800's, followed China's initial outlawing of the importation of opium and the Chinese authorities' dumping of opium waiting to be off-loaded from foreign ships. In 1840 and in 1856, British forces attacked China, coerced the payment of compensation for the dumped opium, and Hong Kong became a British colony. Chapter 13 also discusses the deviant international politics that led to the American Harrison Act in 1914 which required federal registration of certain drug trafficking. Abadinsky again gives a geography lesson when describing the business of heroin in the Golden Triangle and the Golden Crescent of Southeast Asia. The businesses and development of cocaine, methamphetamine, marijuana, barbiturates, methaqualone, phencyclidine, ecstasy, LSD, and their analogs and designer drugs are like swatches of a crazy quilt of crime.

[19] Chapter 14 describes some of the federal statutes that energize the war against illicit drugs, the constitutional limitations on law enforcement, the effects of corrupt law enforcement, and the use of informants. Chapter 15 describes law enforcement efforts of executive branch agencies, including those of the Department of Justice and the Department of Defense (active in drug interdiction), and the international cooperation that supports INTERPOL.

[20] Abadinsky thoughtfully concludes his work with an expansive overview of OC in America's history, including corporate crimes of recent years. OC is a dynamic phenomenon, likely always to be with us in one form or another. Government's role is to "trim the herd while occasionally dealing shattering blows to organized criminals and their organizations." Proper policy responses to OC must be mindful of its history and the potential side effects of proposed policy changes. The forces opposed to OC must be ever-mindful of its presence and must cooperate to limit its vast power to destroy.

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