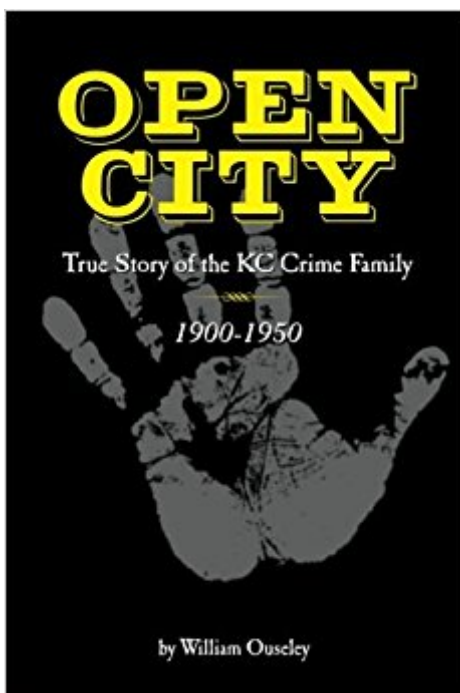




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Open City: True Story Of The KC Crime Family 1900-1950



Synopsis

Open City is the true historical account of the birth and growth of the Kansas City organized "Crime Family" during the first 50 years of the 20th Century resulting in a reputation as a city dominated by political corruption and a powerful crime syndicate. With roots traced back to the secret societies of Southern Italy and Sicily, a Mafia-like clan came to be in Kansas City's Little Italy community - a band of extortionists victimizing the community in what was labeled the Black Hand era. The development of the "Crime Family" is followed through prohibition, an alliance with the powerful and corrupt Tom Pendergast Machine, the roaring 20s, a wide open city of the 30s, and hard times in the 50s. It is a story of a captive city, unbridled politicians, powerful and colorful mobsters, gangland murders, racket activities, links with other city's criminal syndicates, and courageous police officers and reformers. The author's FBI career allows for an uncommon insight and analysis of the historical materials that make up this exceptional story.

Book Information

Paperback: 390 pages

Publisher: Leathers Publishing (June 12, 2008)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1585974803

ISBN-13: 978-1585974801

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.7 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.2 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.1 out of 5 stars 24 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #509,904 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #171 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Regional U.S. > Midwest #740 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > True Crime > Organized Crime #5486 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Historical > United States

Customer Reviews

William Ouseley retired as Supervisor of the Kansas City FBI Organized Crime Squad, after a 25 year career. Over 20 of those years involved the investigation of organized crime and prosecution of "Crime Family" members and associates. He has testified in federal courts as an expert witness in various areas of syndicated crime and testified before a U.S. Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations. He is the author of the book, "Mobsters in Our Midst - The Kansas City Crime Family.

Written from an interesting perspective (the author being a retired law enforcement person who

previously worked to help bring down Cosa Nostra in KC), this book mostly covers history and ground that has been written about in several other books (The Mafia and the Machine and Blackhand-Strawman, just to name a couple), but it also does go into some greater detail about certain vice operations the Kansas City mob were involved with back in the day, such as numbers, narcotics, alcohol, and the labor unions. However, it also can sometimes go far afield by taking the story away from Kansas City too much. Also, it was very poorly edited (many grammar and spelling mistakes) and not well referenced (told like the author was there for all of the history mentioned instead of what sources he used specifically to obtain the information and the conjectures he raises). All in all, not bad, but could have been better.

Written by a former FBI agent, he provides a great deal on the history and structure of the Kansas City Mafia from its inception to the beginning of the Civella era. He includes information from the Kefauver Hearings and background files, from the recently published MAFIA book (from the Federal Bureau of Narcotics and with an intro by Sam Giancana, the former crime boss's nephew), Nicola Gentile and the Kansas City Star. Unfortunately he gives no sourcing except for a small list of books that covers two pages. I wish he had footnotes or endnotes. The writing style is also rather dry and matter-of-fact, but it is accurate. As someone who has researched organized crime for over twenty years, I can definitely recommend this book.

My family history includes characters mentioned in this historical description of the rise & fall of the "family" and the political machine in Kansas City. A good friend of mine comes from the political machine side of the story, and my past is connected to the Italian American side. A very interesting and education read.

Ouseley does a competent job outlining KC Mafia history to 1950. The major players, criminals and political bosses, are all discussed, and the significant historical events are described in detail. However, his limited writing ability, a lack of consideration for fellow historians and his sketchy awareness of Mafia history outside of Missouri cause problems for readers. The author deserves credit for attempting to trace the evolution of organized crime to the region's very early history and for spending time on the mysterious Nick Gentile, whose memoirs provide glimpses of early Mafia history in the U.S. This sort of thing was lacking in Frank Hayde's otherwise excellent "The Mafia and the Machine." But Ouseley does not weave the early history into a coherent narrative. Criminal activity in the early 1900s is presented as isolated incidents. The author fails to find causal links or

common themes and so does not justify the inclusion of the material in his book. The writing throughout is not up to par. There are many examples of poor structure and countless typos, which distract the reader and erode confidence in the author. (The reader cannot make it through the Table of Contents before encountering an error.) There are also a few factual errors in discussions of organized crime history beyond the confines of Kansas City. Most disturbing for crime historians is the book's tiny and very general bibliography. It isn't possible that Ouseley wrote this book based upon the presented sources alone. His refusal to document his findings makes the original material within the book's covers virtually useless to historians. Another glaring problem with Open City is the scope of the book. Ouseley, a federal agent who investigated organized crime in the region, certainly had access to abundant information on the KC Mob in more recent years. His decision to focus on the 1900-1950 period is a curious one. Perhaps Ouseley intends this book to be Volume 1 of a continuing history.

A bit tedious but very informative. Overall a good and interesting read

A must read for anyone from KC or even remotely interested in KC.

What a great story about the mafia of Kansas City and the history of our city and law enforcement officials who give their all.

Good book

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