

CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

DATA

In a subject plagued by unreliable works based on unsubstantiated sources, one must go as often as possible to the actual record ... primary source documents.¹

Alan Block (1983)

Law Enforcement Intelligence Documents

The majority of the research data utilized in this study is derived from confidential law enforcement files. The agencies that created the law enforcement documents are the Philadelphia (PPD), Camden, New Jersey (CPD), New York (NYPD) and Metropolitan (Washington, D.C. – MPD) Police Departments, and the regional offices of federal law enforcement agencies including the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF), the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and its predecessor, the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs (BNDD). The United States Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania's Organized Crime and Racketeering Section (Criminal Division) also compiled several helpful documents, including minutes of its Strike Force meetings, as did the Office of Drug Abuse Law Enforcement (ODALE).² Additional sources of information include the press releases of these agencies, although it was rarely the case that a press release contained information distinct from the intelligence files themselves. On occasion, the agencies, either independently or in conjunction with other law enforcement agency assistance, would compile internal histories and synopses of the group being investigated, and these are analyzed as well. Some of the most insightful research involved the memoranda within and between agencies. The informal nature of the memoranda provided the most concrete picture of what an agency understood its

1 Alan A. Block, *East Side-West Side: Organizing Crime in New York, 1930-1950* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Books, 1983), p. 12.

2 The Philadelphia Office of the Justice Department's Special Strike Force consisted of representatives from the following agencies: Federal Bureau of Investigation, Internal Revenue Service, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, Drug Enforcement Administration, New Jersey State Police – Intelligence Division, Camden, New Jersey Police Department – Intelligence Division, Philadelphia Police Department – Intelligence and Organized Crime Units. The Strike Force apparently relied heavily upon reports from ODALE. Thus, on a few occasions I have cited the Strike Force, even though the analysis may have been conducted by ODALE.

investigative role to be, and more importantly how a case should be developed. The memoranda serve as a guide to the resolution of investigative questions. As historian and criminologist Alan Block (1991) has found in similar studies, this rich collection of files includes, among other information, data on the significant matters of "ethnicity, residential mobility, the organization of criminal activities, and most especially the relationship between organized crime and other sectors of U.S. society."³ For a select few cases, court transcripts have been located and utilized. The "Black Mafia" was most heavily pursued by the Philadelphia Police Department's Organized Crime Unit (OCU). Thus, while each of the aforementioned agency's documents are employed, the project is grounded on OCU files.

The OCU began a file on the "Black Mafia" in April of 1972. The lag was partly attributable to the structure, and thus the information-transmission process, of the Department at that time. The Department's Intelligence Unit received all city-wide intelligence and then would dispense parts to the appropriate units. Thus, if several seemingly individual acts of extortion in different sections of the city were reported independently, there was a chance that different detective divisions would have been notified even if they were indeed related. Similarly, if there was a group which dealt primarily in narcotics, the information would be earmarked for the Narcotics Unit. There was a possibility that other independent "non-narcotic" criminal information would not be associated with the narcotics data, thus leaving gaps in the perceived complexity of the organization. Only if the Narcotics Unit independently found evidence of other criminal activities would the information be re-routed to OCU. This was often the case in the preliminary stages of the "Black Mafia" investigations. Any in-depth look into law enforcement documents is likely to reveal a series of gaps in the transfer and proliferation of files. This is so when discussing both intra-agency and inter-agency communications and investigations. In the case of the "Black Mafia", this dilemma is perhaps even more pervasive since the group's activities were not only varied (i.e. homicide, extortion, gambling, prostitution, narcotics trafficking, and thus "pieces" of intelligence and cases were frequently doled out to the appropriate unit within the relevant agency), but were spread out over several sections of Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey. Thus, until the Department's Organized Crime Unit had the opportunity to compile a comprehensive intelligence file on the group's *overall* activities, the individual criminal investigations were divided among the various homicide, intelligence, detective, vice and narcotics units. Additionally, the "street" cops were not fully aware of the significance of many of the people they arrested or investigated. It is also clear that even after OCU began maintaining a comprehensive file, there were still relevant items that were maintained by independent units within the Department which did not find their way to OCU. Once files became the property of OCU, however, there was a series of information maintenance safeguards including the use of standardized forms. To further complicate the centralization of intelligence,

3 Alan A. Block, *The Business of Crime* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1991), pp. 20-21.

several federal agencies were also extensively involved in the ongoing investigations, as were other municipal police departments and state police organizations. As the OCU file was created, numerous files which were already developed, or in the process of being developed, in different investigative units in the Department were incorporated into the OCU “Black Mafia” file.

The Philadelphia Police Department has no formal definition of organized crime, nor does it maintain a protocol for which cases fall under the domain of OCI (the Organized Crime and Intelligence Units merged in 1982 to create OCI – Organized Crime-Intelligence). However, in the case of Philadelphia’s “Black Mafia,” the criteria being used at the time, no matter how arbitrary, easily placed the calculated acts of extortion and violence in the category of organized criminality. As the group became increasingly involved in both the extortion of narcotics dealers, and the trade itself, and its power and influence grew, whatever concerns the Department had over which unit should handle the investigation were put to rest. This is not to suggest that the Department’s Narcotics Unit did not play a pivotal role in providing intelligence to OCU, but that it was clearly not the lead investigative body.

Because the investigations were based within the Philadelphia Police Department circa 1970, a few comments are necessary relating to the use of intelligence files. Relations between minorities and the police were complex and often discordant. Part of the acrimony originated with the department’s Civil Defense (CD) Squad, created in 1964. The unit was designed to “muzzle a growing number of public demonstrations without confrontation” but quickly expanded its mission.⁴ The CD Squad gained a reputation for developing informants, and their mandate was primarily to infiltrate so-called radical groups.

According to Sal Paolantonio (1993), the CD Squad was the model for the FBI’s notorious counterintelligence program (COINTELPRO).⁵ I should thus note I am aware of the numerous FBI-led, COINTELPRO efforts to discredit and subvert “Black Nationalist” and other civil rights groups during the crucial “Black Mafia” investigation time period beginning in the late 1960s.⁶ Two key points need to be made. First and foremost, Philadelphia’s “Black Mafia” organized crime in an overt fashion. It was not, in any fair sense of the terminology, a group whose concerns rested with the broader enhancement of the African-American community. Victims, targets, witnesses, social commentators, politicians, religious officials and others were well aware of the group and its activities. Importantly, almost all of all of these persons were African-American. Thus, while not unreasonable, the concerns of government conspiracy in the case of the Black Mafia have proven unfounded. Secondly, this study is grounded on Philadelphia Police Department Intelligence files.

4 S.A. Paolantonio, *Frank Rizzo: The Last Big Man in Big City America* (Philadelphia: Camino Books, 1993), p. 95.

5 Ibid.

6 See, for example, Kenneth O’Reilly, *Racial Matters: The FBI’s Secret File on Black America, 1960-1972* (New York: The Free Press, 1989).



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