

CHAPTER 3

1968–1972: THE ORIGINS OF THE BLACK MAFIA

GROUP ORIGIN

The Black Mafia was “founded” by Samuel “Sam” Christian in September 1968.¹ Christian, a former Black Panther with an extensive arrest record who stood 5’10” tall, was described by one reporter as a “thick-necked, 215-pound bully”.² Christian, Ronald Harvey, Richard “Pork Chops” James, Donald “Donnie” Day and several others spent the previous several years holding up crap games and extorting drug dealers, numbers men, as well as illegitimate businessmen. According to Lt. Charles Bush, then in the Philadelphia Police Department’s Intelligence Unit, “They would intimidate persons who would not report them to police.”³ This was clearly the most significant rationale for the group’s choice of targets, though there were others. For instance, as Bruce Jacobs (2000) has noted with particular regard to drug dealers, such targets are “perfect victims” in that they are visible, accessible, and plentiful, and “they deal strictly in cash and tend to have lots of it.” Lastly, such victims can’t “rely on bystanders to come to their aid; operative norms dictate that witnesses mind their business or suffer the consequences.”⁴ While the efforts of Sam Christian et al. were successful and each person had his own reputation, the group lacked the necessary notoriety to engage in large-scale extortion. Thus, sometime in September of 1968, the group adopted the name “Black Mafia”. Figure 3.1 lists the original Black Mafia “command”, along with the ages of each individual at the time of the group’s incorporation.

It is possible the group had other members, and almost assuredly had associates, beyond those listed. However, because of the lack of intelligence on the beginning of the group, these individuals have never been identified according to the numerous sources used in this study.

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- 1 See the U.S. Attorney Strike Force’s “Intelligence Summary: Black Organized Crime – Philadelphia, Pennsylvania,” n.d.; PPD OCU’s “History of Black B. Inc., “ March 7, 1974; and PPD OCI’s September 1990 summary report on the Black Mafia (no title). Note: Because *the group* was not investigated until 1972, it was necessary to research the backgrounds of the individual members, and to use sources beyond law enforcement in order to provide a detailed history of the Black Mafia’s origins.
 - 2 James Nicholson, “The Underworld on the Brink of War: Part 1 – The Muslim Mob Gets It On,” *Philadelphia Magazine*, November 1973, p. 126.
 - 3 James Nicholson, “Philadelphia’s Black Mafia,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, TODAY, August 12, 1973, p. T-8.
 - 4 Bruce A. Jacobs, *Robbing Drug Dealers: Violence Beyond the Law* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 2000), p. 1.

FIGURE 3.1. *Original Black Mafia Members, 1968**

Samuel "Sam" Christian, 29	Robert "Bop Daddy" Fairbanks, 33
Eugene "Bo" Baynes, 30	Clyde "Apples" Ross, 30
Ronald Harvey, 28	Richard "Pork Chops" James, 34
Robert "Nudie" Mims, 28	Jerome Barnes, 23
Grady Dyches, 29	Charles "Black Charles" Toney, 31
Roosevelt "Spooks" Fitzgerald, 39	Walter Hudgins, 33
Donald "Donnie" Day, 28	Nathaniel Williams, 23

*In order of importance based on law enforcement intelligence sources. Several sources were cross-referenced to compile this listing. Age listed is as of 1968.

The command structure in 1968 consisted of fourteen individuals with a mean age of 29.⁶ Each of the founders had extensive arrest records, with most cases involving violence. Law enforcement officials had difficulties prosecuting members of the group, however, because witnesses would rarely cooperate, fearing retaliation, and cases were dropped more often than not. This not only permitted the offenders to continue their criminal activities, but also allowed their reputations of being "untouchable" to flourish, thus enhancing their influence on the street. The earliest documented act committed by the Black Mafia was the April 19, 1969 murder of one of the group's founders, Nathaniel "Rock and Roll" Williams. Williams arranged a crap game above a barbershop at 14th and South Sts. As usual, several Black Mafia leaders participated in the game. Curiously, Williams was absent from his own crap game. Thus, when two gunmen "burst into the room and robbed the pot and the players," suspicions were aroused. The Black Mafia leadership almost immediately heard on the street what they already suspected, that Williams had engineered the stick-up, using neighborhood gang members, and that Williams had driven the getaway car himself. "An hour and a half after the robbery, witnesses saw two men marching Williams out of a bar at 15th and South Sts. at gunpoint. Williams' corpse was found in an isolated area near the Naval Base in South Philadelphia. Four bullets had been pumped into his back."⁷ Police would later characterize the homicide as a "Black Mafia execution." Jerome Barnes was arrested for the Williams murder on August 12, 1969. In a trend that would be repeated

5 Nicholson, "Philadelphia's Black Mafia," p. T-8. Also see Nicholson's, "The Underworld on the Brink of War: Part 1 – The Muslim Mob Gets It On," *Philadelphia Magazine*, November 1973; Strike Force's "Intelligence Summary: Black Organized Crime – Philadelphia, Pennsylvania" n.d.; and OCU's "History of Black B. Inc.," March 7, 1974.

6 The Black Mafia's average age was much less than the prominent Italian-American group in the city at that time. See Annelise Graebner Anderson's study of Philadelphia's Bruno "family," *The Business of Crime: A Cosa Nostra Family* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1979), pp. 41-43. This is likely because the Black Mafia was an emerging organization, unlike the Bruno group which had been in place for some time.

7 Nicholson, "Philadelphia's Black Mafia," p. T11.

numerous times throughout the Black Mafia's tenure, charges against Barnes were dropped when "police were unable to line up witnesses who could identify him."⁸

One of the first incidents attributed explicitly to the Black Mafia by law enforcement officials was the beating of Pennsylvania Deputy Insurance Commissioner David Trulli in May of 1969. Trulli, then investigating an insurance fraud case, was beaten with a lead pipe by Richard "Pork Chops" James, apparently at the request of a third party. Trulli lost three teeth, and required 26 stitches to close his wounds. Before James could be brought back from jail in New York City, where he had been arrested for murder on November 23, 1969, he died of a drug overdose. At the time of his death, James had a history of 32 arrests. Camden Police Department Intelligence files state that James was sent to New York on the orders of "Bo" Baynes to fulfill a contract of murder. He "killed a woman and a child and wounded the man he was to murder."⁹ The files further state that James' subsequent overdose in jail was, in fact, a "hot shot" given to him by members of the Black Mafia. The Strike Force concluded the overdose was arranged "to ensure his silence in a Black Mafia-related assault case."¹⁰

Just as the Black Mafia hierarchy was taking shape and its "membership" was increasing in 1969/1970, they began their first community group (of three), the Council for Youth and Urban Development (CYUD) on March 30, 1970. The CYUD was supposedly created to serve as a "charitable, scientific and educational" group to assist youths in African-American communities, but, as described in Chapter 6, this was not the true reason for the group's existence.¹¹ It is clear, both from intelligence reports and from arrest records, that the original Black Mafia was engaged almost exclusively in robbery and extortion, with minimal activity in the "contract" or "assault/murder-for-hire" business, at least until the summer of 1970 when they first began trafficking narcotics themselves. The group's activities were confined to the city's predominantly African-American neighborhoods in North, West, South and Southwest Philadelphia, and their extortion and robbery targets were predominantly illicit businessmen. On several occasions throughout 1969 and 1970, Ronald Harvey, with the assistance of cohorts like Sam Christian, Richard James and Donnie Day, shot up establishments and their occupants. For example, on September 21, 1970, Harvey, Day and Grady Dyches entered the Lambert Bar at 2012 W. Susquehanna Ave., shot the bartender, and robbed him of \$250. Predictably, the charges were *nolle prossed* when witnesses would not cooperate. The group's violent reputation, a prerequisite for serious extortion outfits, was built

8 George Murray and Mike Leary, "Black Mafia Figure is Shot, Critically Hurt," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 6, 1975.

9 Camden Police Department, Detective Division, memo, "Information received during interviews with informant," August 15, 1973, p. 5.

10 Strike Force's "Intelligence Summary: Black Organized Crime – Philadelphia, Pennsylvania," n.d., p. 5.

11 The investigation into the CYUD is discussed throughout both the OCU and Strike Force files. See, "History of Black B. Inc.," March 7, 1974.



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