

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

For the sociologist, history can place social behavior within the frame of time. The longitudinal view offered by the observation and documentation of phenomena through time can provide for a more complete analysis and understanding of the emergence, scope, and persistence or change of given social organization and behavior, and as such, history becomes the very framework of detached inquiry.¹

James A. Inciardi et al. (1977)

Following an intensive investigation by the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs (BNDD), the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), the Office of Drug Abuse Law Enforcement (ODALE), the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and other agencies, Frank Matthews was arrested in Las Vegas on January 5, 1973.² In subsequent weeks, he was indicted for several offenses including federal income-tax evasion and conspiracies to distribute heroin and cocaine. If convicted, Matthews likely faced more than 50 years in prison. Despite the pleas of several high-ranking authorities, federal court Judge Anthony J. Travia reduced Matthews' bail to \$325,000, which had previously been reduced from \$5 million to \$2.5 million, on April 9th. That same day, 29-year-old Matthews posted bail, \$100,000 in cash, and was released from jail. He did not appear in Brooklyn federal court as ordered on July 2, 1973, and thus on January 25, 1974, the DEA announced a reward of \$20,000 for information relating to his whereabouts, then one of the two highest rewards ever offered.³ Matthews has not been seen since, and various reports state that he had stashed between \$15 million and \$20 million overseas, possibly in Algeria.

Matthews, a well-known African-American drug dealer, was one of the nation's largest narcotics dealers in the 1960s and early 1970s. It was not uncommon for him to handle multi-million dollar shipments of heroin, as evidenced by two noteworthy deals in 1971 and 1972, respectively. In 1971, Matthews successfully imported

1 James A. Inciardi, Alan A. Block and Lyle A. Hallowell, *Historical Approaches to Crime: Research Strategies and Issues* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1977), p. 9.

2 Donald Goddard, *Easy Money* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1978). The most concise, substantive discussion regarding the Matthews organization is found in *United States of America, Plaintiff-Appellee, v. Barbara Hinton, William Beckwith, Charles William Cameron, James W. Carter, John Darby, Thelma Darby, David Bates and Scarvey McCargo, Defendants-Appellants*, Nos. 1018, 1019, 1023, 1062-1065, 1390 – September Term, 1975. Nos. 75-1402, 75-1418, 75-1441 – 75-1445, 76-1024, United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit, 543 F.2d 1002; 1976 U.S. App. LEXIS 6904, September 27, 1976. Barbara Hinton was Matthews' common-law wife.

3 Ibid. According to Goddard, p. 362, only John Dillinger in 1931 "had such a high price on his head."

approximately 400 kilos, earning him \$4 million. The following year, Matthews had a 175 kilo-shipment intercepted by the BNDD. At the time, it was the largest shipment ever seized by federal authorities.⁴ Authorities considered him a major dealer in twenty-one states, who had quality overseas contacts for heroin and cocaine. Matthews had contacts with Cuban wholesalers who controlled vast portions of the South American cocaine trade to the United States. His primary contact, starting in 1967, was Rolando Gonzalez who operated out of Caracas, Venezuela, and who was “then the largest Cuban dealer in New York.”⁵ “Spanish Raymond” Marquez, with whom Matthews shared an interest in policy⁶ (gambling), had introduced Matthews to Gonzalez. The Matthews heroin networks also originated with Cubans. He was perhaps best known for hosting a meeting of some of the most prominent African-American and Hispanic narcotics dealers and importers. The meeting took place in Atlanta during the second week of October in 1971. The primary purpose of the meeting was to devise ways to circumvent whatever impediments existed to the direct importation of cocaine and heroin, namely the Italian-American groups along the Eastern seaboard. Interested parties came from such locations as New York, Philadelphia, Chester (PA), Rhode Island, Baltimore, Chicago and Baton Rouge.

Frank Matthews lived the life of a millionaire, renting several lavish apartments and owning a fleet of luxury cars and a mansion (which he had custom-built) in Staten Island’s exclusive Todt Hill section that cost him \$200,000. His neighbors included the borough president, Robert Connor, assemblyman Lucio Russo, and prominent gangster Paul Castellano of New York City’s Gambino “family”. Needless to say, Frank Matthews became a legend in organized crime circles, on the “street” among other gangsters and within the law enforcement community. Federal officials called his organization the largest in the country selling predominantly to African-Americans.⁷ The street status earned by Matthews was evidenced not only by his domination of certain markets, but also by his growing confidence in holding his own with competitors. During one particular confrontation with predominant Italian-American gangsters, Matthews was quoted as warning them, “touch one of my men and we’ll drive down to Mulberry Street ... and shoot every wop we see.”⁸

4 Ibid., pp. 124-125.

5 Ibid., pp. 107-108.

6 According to Robert M. Lombardo, “The Black Mafia: African-American organized crime in Chicago, 1890-1960,” *Crime, Law and Social Change* vol. 38, no. 1 (2002), p 46:

Policy is the name given a lottery gambling system that was once common in black communities. Players, who wager a small sum of money, select combinations of three numbers. A drum or ‘wheel’ is used in which seventy-eight capsules containing numbers from one to seventy-eight are whirled about rapidly. A blindfolded person selects twelve numbers at each of the drawings, which are held as many as three times a day.

7 Max H. Siegel, “8 Convicted as Members of a Drug Ring for Blacks,” *The New York Times*, October 9, 1975.

8 Hank Messick, *Of Grass and Snow: The Secret Criminal Elite* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1979, p. 27) quoted in Howard Abadinsky, *Organized Crime* second edition (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1985).

At least one group of competitors was apparently not impressed with Matthews' bravado, however.

Frank Matthews' primary distributor in Philadelphia was "Fat" Tyrone Palmer, like Matthews a young millionaire. On April 2, 1972, leaders of a relatively unknown organized crime syndicate in Philadelphia, the "Black Mafia", assassinated Palmer. Matthews believed the Tyrone Palmer killing was a Black Mafia message to him. One of Matthews' lieutenants, Charles W. "Swayzie" Cameron, said Philadelphia's Black Mafia felt they were: "invincible ... they killed and killed and killed until people paid off. They kept killing and scared the other people ... After a while, 'Hey, let's pay off. Give them 10 percent'."⁹ The Black Mafia eventually murdered three of Matthews' Philadelphia intermediaries as the group asserted itself in the lucrative heroin and cocaine trades. As Cameron noted, at that time in the early to mid-1970s the Black Mafia "controlled all the drug traffic in Philadelphia."¹⁰ The group was also engaged in a variety of other illicit activities, and would soon gain notoriety for their numerous criminal conspiracies and also infamy for their violent actions spanning more than two decades.

Philadelphia's 'Black Mafia': A Social and Political History provides the first historical and sociological analyses of the group. The Black Mafia has organized crime (with varying degrees of success) in predominantly African-American sections of the city dating back to the late 1960s. Using primary source documents, including confidential law enforcement files, court transcripts and interviews, the group's activities are explored in detail, with explicit depictions of some of the most notorious crimes in Philadelphia's history provided. Furthermore, some of the group's alliances, conspiracies and conflicts with Philadelphia's predominant Italian-American crime "family" spanning 30 years are explored. The organization of the Black Mafia is also examined, complete with descriptions and commentary on the group's structure, rules, meetings and membership oath. The activities of the Black Mafia, of course, were part of a larger social structure that included politicians, lawyers, financiers, media personalities and actors in the criminal justice system. The book comprehensively analyzes the multi-dimensional sets of relationships that are fundamental to the understanding of both Philadelphia's Black Mafia in particular, and to the understanding of organized crime in general. *Philadelphia's 'Black Mafia'* is thus a first step in developing both data and sophisticated theoretical propositions germane to the ongoing study of organized crime.

Few books in this area have utilized primary source documents such as those employed in this book. There are also relatively few historical studies of organized

9 Goddard, p. 168.

10 Ibid. Cameron became a target himself, though not at the hands of Philadelphia's Black Mafia. In early February 1975, he was "kidnapped by Black Muslims, apparently for reasons having to do with his narcotics activities. The story of his three days in captivity is a sordid tale of brutality and deprivation ... Suffice to say that he was released ... after the payment of ransom and arrived in somewhat battered condition at a relative's home in Brooklyn shortly thereafter." *U.S. v. Hinton et al.*, p. 16.



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