

CHAPTER XXVI
THE GANGSTERS' APOLOGIA PRO VITA SUA

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CHAPTER XXVI

THE GANGSTER'S APOLOGIA PRO VITA SUA

1. *Psychology of the Gangster.* The gangster's defense of his mode of life arises only when he comes in contact with the legitimate outside world. Only then does he become conscious of a conflicting way of living. In his own group, on the contrary, he achieves status by being a gangster, with gangster attitudes, and enhances his reputation through criminal exploits. His contacts with the police and the courts and his successive confinements in the corrective, reformatory and penal institutions, beginning with the Juvenile Detention Home, then in turn the Industrial Training School, the reformatory and the penitentiary, gain him the prestige of a veteran in his group. His return from the State Reformatory at Pontiac or from the penitentiary at Joliet is the occasion of sympathy and rejoicing from his gang brothers. The bitterness engendered within him by punishment and the feelings of revenge nurtured by his mutual association with other convicts have more deeply impressed upon him the psychology of the criminal world. Then, too, the stigma which society places upon him as an ex-convict identifies him the more with the underworld.

Usually the gangster is brought up in neighborhoods where the gang tradition is old. He grows up into it from early childhood in a world where pilfering, vandalism, sex delinquency and brutality are an inseparable part of his play life. His earliest relation with the law is with the policeman on the beat, who always has something on the little gang, and "copper hating" is the normal attitude. A series of extracts from the life history of a gangster¹ shows how the boy naturally absorbs gang attitudes:

"When we were small we used to watch the older boys and we joined in the same things when we were a little older. There was crap-shooting, pilfering, and rough-housing among them. On election nights or Hallowe'en, we would burn fences or wagons or anything else we could get our hands on which would make a fire. The little fellows would steal potatoes to bake on the fire. One time we burned an old patrol wagon.

"We never could be friendly with the cop because we were always in wrong. We always got out of his way quickly with a warning cry, 'Jigger, the cop.'

"For instance, we would always steal iron from back of the foundry and sell it to peddlers to get our money for shows.

"The truant officer came to the house often, but I was never taken up for truancy."

¹"Life and History of a Gangster," a document specially secured for this study.

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2. *Autobiography of a Gangster: Childhood Period.*

This same man, now an ex-convict from Joliet, has been a gambler, pimp, shoplifter, burglar, and stick-up man. But his criminal career began in early childhood.

"I shot craps as early as I could understand dice, and saw crap-shooting in the alley before that time. When my brother Charlie was driving for the Express Company he sometimes gambled his whole pay away.

"I think this was my earliest remembrance of the 'law;' when I was six years old my oldest brother, Charlie, was arrested by detectives, just before he got the rap at the John Worthy School. I can remember a thundering knock at the door and two big detectives came in. It was about two o'clock in the morning. They made Charlie dress in a hurry. While Charlie was dressing, my mother was getting me to ask the detectives questions in English."

Among the children of the neighborhood no shame attached to stealing. "Copping" was a part of their play life. Going "on a bum from school" and pilfering went together.

"Later, we always went to shows in a gang and would yell and holler and get put out. Sometimes after we were put out we would throw bricks at the back door of the picture show. We liked 'the thrillers.' The nickel shows in those days had a good many shootings and killings.

"We used to 'hitch' the street cars to Lincoln Park. The boys would steal bottles of milk off the porches, maybe a few would steal rolls from the store and in that way we would get our lunches. I don't remember that I ever asked my mother for carfare or lunch. She would be likely to say, 'If you want to eat, come home to eat.'"

Naturally, any mother would be averse to her little boy in the primary grades of a school on the west side starting off for Lincoln Park with a gang of small boys, but the gang made possible this most tempting of adventures.

The parents of this future gangster were Italian immigrants. The father, a laborer for the same industrial establishment for nearly thirty years, also had a news stand on the street corner near the plant. This was tended during working hours by his small sons who stole pennies and nickels from the income. The mother not only cared for nine children in a little back-yard shanty near the railroad tracks on De Koven and later Farquar Streets, but also "carried bundles on her head." Twenty-five years ago the finishing of clothing was largely the work of Italian women in their own homes. The task of providing the necessities of life was tremendous for both father and mother. The situation was made more acute by the virtues of the parents. The mother toiled constantly, as she does today, to keep a clean house. Both parents were thrifty. Toiling so hard to make ends meet,¹ they grudged the spending of pennies for pleasure.

¹ After a score of years their determined thrift has actually accomplished their ambition. They now own a house about two miles west of their original home on Bunker Street, after a series of westward moves. The young children, brought up in

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Without the gang, life would have been grim and barren for these children. Only in rare instances, unless the family moves away, does a boy escape from the demoralizing influence of the neighborhood and the gang.

3. *Same:* Growing up in the gang life is not "a bed of roses." One spends when flush, and when "broke" is in danger of a fall. Arrested without money and with no friends ready at hand, one is likely to be convicted. There are the cousins or friends in politics, but even they, as small fry, cannot "fix" without money. Employment at legitimate occupations is occasional, if not rare, and very often arranged as a convincing blind for criminal occupations.

"I used to be a messenger at night for a telegraph company. That gave me a chance to wear a uniform so that I would not be picked up when prowling around. With another boy I would go in for burglary. One of us would go up in the elevator with the elevator man while the other 'jimmied' the show-cases and cabinets in the cigar stand in the lobby. While I was a messenger I used to send or bring line-loads to the levee and we would steal from stores and hotel rooms and sell to the girls in the burlesque shows on South State Street.

"Very early I would be picked up on the downtown streets, selling papers at night, and I was well acquainted at central police station. Often they took me to Detention Home to stay over night and I made fast friends with the matron. If I would shoot my money away in craps I would go to the Detention Home and stay over night and tell my parents the next day that I was picked up by the police. The next day I would make up the loss, selling papers or stealing."

Out of the gang at the school came the fast friends and the acquaintances of later life who have made their mark in the criminal world. This man can recall famous forgers, leading gamblers, burglars, labor racketeers, and many notorious criminals in every form of criminality, who were neighborhood boys in his own gang.

The above extracts and notes from the autobiography of a criminal have been introduced to show why most gangsters have no apology to make for their criminal careers. The life histories of other gangsters also corroborate

the neighborhood of their present house, have no delinquency record, not even a truancy record, whereas, of the four sons who lived their childhood in the gang area, from Canal Street to Racine, three have records of some kind of delinquency or crime and one has turned out well.

The one son who is an outstanding success, displayed an aptitude for drawing while still in grammar school. One teacher became intensely interested in him, called the parents' attention to his talent and encouraged the boy to pursue this interest. A great deal of his time was spent in sketching at home, isolated from the gangs. When he graduated from this grammar school this teacher secured a job for him in a large firm doing a great deal of advertising. The manager of the Chicago branch noticed the boy's sketching and persuaded him to take an art course in a reputable night school. When this manager first spoke of this plan, the boy's immediate question was: "Will they take a guy from Bunker Street in an art school?" and the second remark was, "Where can my dad get the dough to send me?" The Bunker Street boy's esteem of himself and of his opportunities was low. After attending the art school for one year he was transferred by the firm to the main office in another city and of late years he has risen to the position of a traveling advertising sales manager.

In speaking to the other boys about him they said, "He was lucky he got away from home so soon."

"Do you mean the home or the gang?"

"I mean the gangs around the home."

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the conclusion arrived at by the famous French criminologist, Gabriel Tarde, that certain individuals become criminals in much the same way that other persons become policemen.

The gang youth does make comparisons between getting a job and going into a "racket," but from the standpoint not so much moral as of practical considerations. He takes as his pattern the men in the neighborhood who have achieved success. His father, although virtuous in his grime and squalor and thrift, does not present as alluring an example to him as do some of the neighborhood gangsters. The men who frequent the neighborhood gambling houses are good-natured, well-dressed, adorned and sophisticated, and above all, they are American, in the eyes of the gang boy.

The following case indicates the prevailing attitudes toward the various types of "rackets" as compared with regular employment by youths in an Italian neighborhood:

"When an ex-convict returned to Chicago from Joliet four years ago at the age of twenty-five, one of his first observations was that bootlegging had made many of his neighbors rich. 'Every Wop has got a car in front of his home.' Young hoodlums had been given opportunities in various rackets through connections and influence with resourceful chiefs—one was a gambling house manager, others were employed as a bootleg convoy, another was running a successful 'fence' for stolen goods and others held political jobs. He discussed with his friends the chances of securing a legitimate job while he remained on parole. One of them finally asked him: 'Do you really have a yen¹ for being a poor working sap?' His ironic answer was, 'Yes, my father worked as a laborer for twenty-seven years. He is all worked out now and his boss is going to pin a medal on him.'"²

Where the choice of a young man is between a low paid job as an unskilled laborer and good wages for driving a beer truck, a stigma is soon attached to legitimate employment. The conspicuous expenditures and lavish display of the *nouveau riche* of the underworld confuse and pervert the traditional standards and values of even the law abiding persons in the community.

When Angelo Genna was buried, an Italian woman and her Bohemian daughter-in-law were discussing the funeral. "Did you go to the funeral?" asked the older woman. "No, I didn't," said the daughter-in-law. "I had to attend to the baby, but they sure say it was some funeral. I was to a party with Mrs. Genna a couple of weeks ago and she wore an ermine coat and she was one sparkle of diamonds. Well, I thought, if you're gonna be straight, you're gonna be poor." "But," said the old lady, "you see they get bumped off." "But they like to get bumped off, like this fellow in this house," said the younger one. Later a criminal member of this family was asked about this danger of being "bumped off" and he said, "It's fun to live a marked man," and then went on to tell about the clever precautions and loyalties which his chief had established against the dangers of too sudden an end.³

¹ "Yen"—a longing for; ambition.

² From a life history secured specially for this study.

³ Adapted from notes on an interview obtained for this study from the family of a criminal gangster.

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As intimated in the above case, the risks of an illicit or criminal career are calculated and, in certain cases, due precautions taken. Or the risk itself becomes an added attraction for adventurous young men. This confusion in community standards in regard to the respective merits of legitimate and criminal occupations is generally not clarified by the gangster's first experience with the law. Both with the police and with the courts, the young delinquents center their attention upon the technique of getting "another chance." The most interesting aspect of a criminal career is the "crazy quilt" formed by the due process of law in relation to the criminal.

After a summer of shop-lifting and burglary, which netted in one haul about nine hundred silk shirts, a young chap of Boys' Court age was arrested in a department store with a stolen bathing suit in his possession. He appeared before a court and told the judge he was too poor to buy a bathing suit. The judge released him with a lecture and gave him the bathing suit. At another time he was picked up by a policeman in company with two others. There was evidence of burglary, but they were still of Boys' Court age. The judge asked the boys if they knew Mr. Gelapi. The boys answered, "Yes, we know Mr. Gelapi." The judge explained that Mr. Gelapi called up by telephone with regard to their case, and said that he was from Artie Quinn's Gambling Place on North Clark Street. "I know Artie Quinn," the judge added with fervor; "I went to school with him;" and the boys were dismissed.¹

4. *Protection* The experienced criminal or the boy brought up in
 by Friends. gang culture approaches his "trouble with the law" as
 a matter which can be met in a thousand ways—there
are friends and "fixers," perjury, bribery and intimidation. There is a certain behavior which befits a man of character in his society. He must give no information about his friends, he must not believe the police when they say that his friends have "squealed"—that is a usual method of causing associates to weaken. From the stories he has heard from childhood up he knows that he may have to stand a beating or the excruciating Third Degree, but in his mind he knows it is an experience that will bring him the plaudits of his group, just as a young soldier does under the baptism of fire. If he is convicted, he was not given a chance—it was a "bum rap." This "bum rap" may mean either that he was "framed," or he may be entirely guilty of the charge but he finds a reason why he was discriminated against, because both in his own career and that of his friends there have been instances of equal guilt with no punishment or lesser punishment as a result. This might extend to the most serious of crimes.

Sometimes, as in the following case, after a long period of immunity, a gangster is convicted because his own political "pull" was not as great as that of the man whom he had robbed.

In a long criminal career beginning in early childhood a young man is arrested for a stick-up. He uses his customary influence through a high public official in the county and it fails. It is one of those misfortunes in a criminal career. He has had a "fall." In discussing this situation he makes no attempt to explain that he was innocent of the

¹ Quoted from a document secured for this study.

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charge, but goes into long details of how factionalism in politics had brought about a break between his protector, a county official, and another influential public official; who is a friend of the man who was robbed. He was not punished for his guilt. Rather, he was the victim of competition between the two factional leaders. In this test of their comparative strength his fortunes as a criminal were at stake. He does not deny his crime, nor those of his brother, who is a foremost leader of a notorious criminal gang.¹

The world of the gangster is one in which the burglar is convicted and the "fence" retains the goods. Indeed, the "fence" may be an important figure in the neighborhood's political life. The gangster grows to consider the world a place in which everyone has a "racket" but the "poor working sap," because as he looks around he finds ample customers for his loot, ample police protection for money, and almost anything in his world can be "fixed." The underworld knows in advance when a certain "rap" will be beat. In several important cases, bets were placed prior to the verdict by the jury.

5. The Gangster's Defense.

It is not until the gangster comes into contact with persons outside of the underworld that he gets his first sense of the necessity of justifying his behavior. The following case is typical of the reaction of bewilderment on the part of young gangsters when asked to explain their criminal careers and the disposition to find a defense in the rationalization "that everyone is doing it:"

When a youthful criminal with a long history of offenses from earliest boyhood was asked his own opinion about the causes of his own criminality, he was baffled at first. But later he came out with the answer, "Who around here hasn't a record?"²

The next tendency of the youthful gangster is to make invidious comparisons between the opportunities for success in a criminal versus a "legitimate" career. He contrasts the "easy money" and the "good times" of the gambler, beer runner, "stick-up artist" and "con man" with the low wages and long hours of "the poor working sap." He speaks in flowing admiration of the power, the courage, the skill, the display and the generosity of the outstanding gang leaders. His glorification of the life and the characters of the underworld is complete evidence of the absence of any feeling of inferiority or shame about his own criminal aspirations. The following statement by a gambler and confidence man is representative of the attitudes of the majority of criminals:

"The men of the underworld are the brainiest men in the world. They have to be, because they live by their wits. They are always planning something, a 'stick-up,' a burglary, or some new 'racket.' They are constantly in danger. They have to think quicker and sharper than the other fellow. They have to 'size up' every man they meet, and figure out what 'line' to use on him. The leading men of the underworld can move in every circle of society. They are at home in Chinatown, along the 'main stem,' in gambling dives, or in the best hotels

¹ Notes from the life history of a gangster secured for this study.

² Adapted from an interview with a criminal gangster obtained for this study.

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and the 'Gold Coast.' When they have a lucky 'break' they can live like millionaires; when their money is spent they plan new schemes."¹

When the gangster becomes moralistic in defense of himself, he presents an array of facts to prove his claim that everybody has a "racket." He begins with the police. The gangster is situated where he observes the policeman as the beneficiary of his earnings. At times these exactions by the police become so heavy that he finds himself in a situation where he actually is working for the police.

"I don't mind one man getting a little graft, but now we have four men, four sets of them come one after another. I would be glad if they left me a quarter (meaning one-fourth of his proceeds)."

The gangster points to his "fences," men who dispose of his stolen goods. These "fences" are often men of wealth and respectability in the eyes of the gangster. The politician in the neighborhood where the gangster lives grafts on the criminals when they need "political pull" and uses them for the purpose of fraud and intimidation, as in elections. The gangster does not exaggerate when he says that he has never seen a straight election. His own gang fellows, once given even the minor jobs where they have entree to big politicians and holders of public office, become rich on the basis of the graft they receive for information, favors and protection.

In prison he may be associated for the first time with the defaulting banker or the unscrupulous promoter of dubious ventures. In this way, he sees the seamy side of big business. The more intelligent of his play-fellows in the gang may have worked up from thieves of accessory automobile parts to "fences" for accessories and even for automobiles, and now operate on a large scale, living their daily lives among society people, that is, the people of ordinary respectable status. Others may have gone into the selling of stock in general, stocks which are not listed in the stock exchange or approved by the Blue Sky Laws and the margins between selling short without a basis or selling stocks which may never pay and those which may pay, are only very vague.

In making comparisons between himself as a criminal with grafting police and politicians, the gangster feels his own superior virtue. The best statement of this universal attitude of the underworld has been perhaps best expressed by Al Capone in an interview as follows:

"There is one thing worse than a crook and that is a crooked man in a big political job. A man that pretends he is enforcing the law and is really taking 'dough' out of somebody breaking it, even a self-respecting 'hood'² hasn't any use for that kind of a fellow. He buys them like he would any other article necessary in his trade, but he hates them in his heart."³

In defense of his own criminality, when brought face to face with the righteous, the criminal becomes highly moralistic. He may deem the function

¹ Extract from an interview with a gambler and confidence man.

² "Hood" underworld abbreviation of "hoodlum."

³ Quoted from an interview with Patricia Doherty in an article in the *Cosmopolitan Magazine*.

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of his gang that of protecting the interests of his national group or neighborhood. When a certain west side gangster was told that there were no Jewish gangsters in Milwaukee, his first question was, "Do the Jews get pushed around much in Milwaukee?"¹ The attitude of gangs to protect the community's safety against hostile foreign groups in the race conflict has been the basis of the status of gangsters among the law-abiding people in the neighborhood. Around Davey Miller and his gang, including Nails Morton, there is a tradition of defenders of the race. It is the defense of the Jews against the Poles. But there are innumerable homelier every-day incidents of which the following is an instance:

"A young Jewish workman was frequently attacked by gangsters on his way to his shop. He went into Davey Miller's place, told him his story, and Davey Miller assigned two of his gangsters to accompany the young man to his work. The attacks ceased to occur after the Irish gangsters near the shop observed the companions of their victim—the erstwhile lone Jewish workman."²

6. *Gangsters' Sacrifices for Loyalty.* The large size "racketeer," the big-timer, feels he has a function to perform. He is engaged in violence in connection with labor organization; he points out the instances where the "racketeer" has taken a forlorn or unorganized group and has brought them to a state where they command desirable wages. As one gangster said:³

"They sent 'Quizzy' (Quesse) up. Before he took hold of the janitors there were men begging for room to sleep in so that they would fire the boiler at night. Look at them now. They get salaries of three hundred to four hundred dollars a month and are given apartments to live in."

In the Anselmi-Scalise case, almost the entire Italian group in the city was consolidated in support of these men who were bootleggers and who were accused of killing policemen, on the basis of the inflammatory and prejudicial remarks made against them by the prosecution.

Even the bootlegger and the beer runner are defended by his fellow gangsters and by the sporting world, in addition, as men who are performing a valuable function in society. They may even be extolled with admiration for their bravery in risking their lives in service for their customers. The following statement was made by a man thoroughly familiar with these areas of life in the city where the worlds of gambling, crime, sport and politics overlap:

"If he is a beer distributor or a bootlegger he doesn't make or sell the stuff for himself, he furnishes it to others who want the pleasure of drinking. The only time I ever saw the facts told fairly in the press was when Red Shannon was killed down in Florida. The Miami newspapers came out with a black border and they gave the life of Red Shannon and the risks he took against the coast guard to bring in genuine imported whiskey for the pleasure of all of us."

¹ From an interview with a Jewish gangster secured for this study.

² From an interview secured for this study.

³ An interview with an investigator for this study.

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"Yes," the interviewer objected, "but they 'bump' each other off, and a life is a life."

"Very well, but they choose that life. They choose to fight their own battles and bury their own dead."¹

7. *Is the Gangster
Remorseful?*

Many law-abiding citizens, when they try to picture themselves in the place of the criminal, imagine him constantly tortured with the pangs of remorse. It is difficult for them to believe that the gangster is seldom, if at all, conscience stricken because of his crime. In four years' association with criminal gangsters, the writer encountered little or no remorse among Chicago gangsters. The following cases indicate the nearest approaches to remorse on the part of the criminal.²

A student of criminology invited an ex-convict to attend the Symphony Concert and later the opera at Ravinia (a suburb of Chicago) one Sunday afternoon. This former criminal had served several prison terms and had entered his life of crime after a preferred career in the military service; he was on the one hand a church-goer and a scholar, and on the other, a "con-man" and "jail-bird." Upon first acquaintance and for many weeks thereafter this man always tried to minimize his career as a criminal and would lay the offenses which had been proved against him to drink. On this Sunday afternoon, in the leisure between the symphony concert and the opera, the student suddenly turned upon his "con-man" friend and said, "You are trying to prove to me that you are a drunkard. That doesn't interest me. I am interested in criminology. What interests me is the criminal." This turned the tone of the conversation. There had been the church, music, and art, as well as pleasant associations during the day, which probably brought on a certain tone and memory which recalled to him the wholesome life. He had heard an especially good sermon on the commandment, "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife." He began by telling about the sermon and later he said in a tone laden with remorse, "I have not been punished for the little I stole, but for breaking this commandment." It developed that his work as a "con-man" always involved first a triangular relation with some married woman and it was only after a scandal had already been exposed that the woman would take courage to have the checks, drawn by this man, rejected, and he would then be convicted on a plea of guilty. According to his statement, he would plead guilty in order not to have a trial and bring shame upon the famous name of his family.

Another instance of remorse is that of the president of a labor union which had taken to direct actionism. It is probable that after the direct actionist gained control in the union, the president was a mere figurehead. When the evidence of the violence by way of destruction of property was disclosed, this president committed suicide, leaving a note to his wife insisting that he had always been a good man.

"I tried all my life to live honest and upright. You and all my friends know this—I could never stand the disgrace of being connected

¹ An interview with an investigator for this study.

² Cases specially secured for this study.

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with a matter like this, although I am innocent. One day in jail before I was bonded out is enough for me. Now after twenty-nine years of life, with the best woman in the world, I have to go."¹

These are two instances of remorse. In the first case that of a man coming from a highly respectable group, in a society without a criminal culture. But he had sunk into devious ways, and was definitely disgraced by dishonorable dismissal from an honorable service. His plight was mainly and basically due to the fact that he was a very proud and popular man but could not keep up the enormous expense which was necessitated by his exceptional social opportunities. In prison and out, he always sought to escape the association of criminal society, for no one hates the ordinary criminal more than this man does. Yet his remorse was not for his crimes of stealing, but for his sin of adultery.

The other case is one of remorse by a man who was not a criminal at all, certainly not an habitual or professional criminal. There had been a change of policy in unionism with the increasing restraint placed upon the functions of collective bargaining through injunction, and direct action was the only way out. Before he could realize it, the president was culpable for a situation over which he had little or no control. He had never been anything but a law-abiding, hard working man. Once in the clutches of the law, he could imagine nothing but prison and disgrace. His life had come to an impasse.

Neither of these two cases, then, represents remorse for his crimes on the part of the criminal. Can any case be found in which the gangster feels remorse? Certainly he feels remorse, not for his crimes, but for being caught and convicted. Remorse arises when the efforts and defenses for escape from prosecution are blocked and one reaches an impasse. As long as there is practical hope, then in one's own mind there is a continual surging of possibilities of action, until the final sentence has been pronounced. Even then thought runs through the unused alternatives and to the failures that were merely adventitious. Within the friendly group interested in one's case, there is a stirring about, great amount of discussion, rumor, argument and counter-argument about means that can be used and about resources that can be marshalled which are a counterpart of the surging thoughts in the mind of the victim in the hands of the law. Remorse arises far more frequently in a city where due process of law is effective and the bulwarks of the law are without a breach. When there is nothing to be done about one's trouble, the thoughts turn inward in a self-appraisal. A man mopes about his troubles and remorse follows. The remorse of the gangster is not based on his original guilt for the crime, but in a mistaken maneuver or a mistaken choice of friends or misplaced confidence.

There is a meaning to the fact that three times as many felons confess the offense as charged (without a lesser plea) in Milwaukee as in Chicago.²

¹ *Chicago Tribune*, December 1, 1925.

² Chapter I. Recorded Felonies, a statistical analysis by Dr. C. E. Gehlke, Table A-71.

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8. *Gangsters' Mutual Loyalty.* Although the criminal gangster is untroubled about his crimes, he is stirred to the depths of his feelings and sentiments by any charge of personal treachery to his friends. Betraying a comrade is the only crime in the underworld for which its members are one and all likely to feel genuine remorse.

The cases of Charles (Limpy) Cleaver and of Timothy (Big Tim) Murphy show how deep seated is the resentment against disloyalty to one's fellows.

"With large teardrops rolling down into the deep furrows in his hardened face, Charles 'Limpy' Cleaver, on trial before Federal Judge James H. Wilkerson as the principal defendant in the \$133,000 Evergreen Park mail robbery, today charged William Donovan, one of his alleged accomplices and government star witness, with wholesale murder and robbery. 'Sure he will squawk, and plenty,' Limpy almost shouted to a *Journal* reporter after the morning session. 'He will do a lot of squawking about me, the dirty lying dog.' He rubbed his eyes with a rough palm. ' . . . , they're calling me the brains of them jobs. I never had any brains because if I did I wouldn't know a rat like him. Him and Willis Jackson were the guys with the brains. They pulled some of the biggest robberies in Chicago.'"¹

Captain Shoemaker, chief of detectives, admitted he had advised Cleaver to confess, but that the defendant said he valued his reputation too highly to do that and would go to the penitentiary "like a man and not like a rat." Instead he applied this most insulting epithet of the underworld vocabulary to a fellow defendant.²

While Tim Murphy was in prison at Leavenworth, Frank Conovan, released from the same penitentiary, accused Murphy of being a stool-pigeon. "Even his old pals, sent down with him, give him the cold eye when they meet him. Cosmano and Peter Gusenberg have only looks of scorn for the old leader. He bears no confidence. The rest brand him as a possible stool-pigeon because he is too friendly with the guards."

In answer to Conovan, Big Tim, in his Leavenworth cell, wrote a letter in which he defied "any prison rat" to call him a stool-pigeon. He said further in the letter: "That's a lie. Cosmano and I are the best of friends. He has been transferred to my cell, even, and we are together. If I have got any enemies at all in the penitentiary, they are stool-pigeons."³

9. *Do Gangsters Reform?* If the gangster does not feel remorse, what are the motives that lead to his reform? This question assumes that many criminals forsake the life of crime and turn to law-abiding pursuits. All students of criminology are aware that this change in behavior frequently occurs. There are many reasons for it with different individuals, but the main consideration seems to be the conclusion that *crime does not pay*.

*Often the criminal upon his release from the state reformatory or the state penitentiary attempts to follow a law-abiding life. He frequently suc-

¹ *Journal*, July 26, 1928.

² *Tribune*, July 27, 1928.

³ *Daily News*, November 3, 1923.

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ceeds, even against great odds. But many ex-convicts find the difficulties in the way of reformation almost insuperable.

While on parole one ex-convict tries going straight alone. The struggle is grim and not unmixed with some petty criminality. A parole scandal arises. He is picked up by the police on a queer charge of indecent exposure while dressing in his rooms. The case is pending in the police court. The time is shortly before an election. He gets continuance after continuance until after the election on the promise that he will do *everything* for certain candidates in the election. The case is finally stricken from the records, but meanwhile a warrant has been issued by the Parole Division, which cannot be revoked. He is in jail for several weeks. He is then taken to Joliet and held idle and unassigned waiting for a parole hearing. The hearing is held and he is found not guilty. The papers releasing him are delayed. His writing privileges are limited under the regulations of the prison. He finally reaches a friend who inquires about the papers. They have been held in someone's desk while he was waiting daily and hourly for his release. While he is in prison he breaks out with boils. When he comes out, he has trouble again finding a job. Finally he finds a job not very distant from the protection of his gang interests. As far as his friends achieve success it is success in underworld occupations, and these successes are free from pursuit by the law.¹

The forces operating against the return of a gangster to a law-abiding life can be seen in a different setting in the next case. Here the youth, although profoundly moved by the death of his father, has a vivid sense of his inability to extricate himself from the factors that have shaped his career.

Untrained, the school period wasted through truancy and delinquencies, working intermittently at blind alley jobs or never having worked at all, a gangster, at the moment in a very solemn mood because of the very tragic death of his father, was conversing with a visitor who had come to console the mother. The family was left in difficult straits and this gangster was the oldest of the children. Naturally, the visitor asked what he was doing and what he intended to do, because without question the young man was stricken with grief and appalled by the poverty around him. Earlier in the conversation he had told of his exploits helping to run beer under Dion O'Banion when he was only eighteen years of age and of the toughness and courage of some of his neighborhood "pals." When he was confronted with his responsibility for the bereaved family, he thought for a moment very despondently and then said, "Well, what kind of a job can I get? Who'll give me, with a record, a job?" And then he added, "It is better to be in prison than poor and free."²

A third case shows how powerful a factor in the return to a criminal career is the assistance and kindness of old associates in crime. Their aid is frequently given with more human sympathy than is the more formal help extended by welfare agencies. This contact with old acquaintances in the

¹ From a case secured for this study.

² From notes by an investigator for this study.

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underworld not only places him under obligation to them, but prevents him from carrying out his purpose of reformation.

When a gangster came out of Joliet with the intention of going straight, the various social and public agencies for the supervision and uplift of the ex-convict made their efforts to secure him a legitimate job, but during the rather depressed summer season all of them failed. At the same time his gang, brothers of old acquaintances, noticed his shabby prison "dress-out" suit and the misfit sweater vest, and invited him to come to their homes for a suit. Others contributed "fins," "sawbucks," and "double sawbucks"¹ as philanthropy to tide him over, and finally, through more important criminals, whose acquaintance he made in Joliet, he gained access to a great gangster chief who gave him a permanent job in one of his many outlaw enterprises.²

10. *Gang Standards Versus the Law.*

When an individual gangster reforms, it is not from feelings of remorse for his misdeeds, but because he finds from his own experience that crime does not pay. But the criminal gang as a going concern strives so far as it is able, to make crime both profitable and safe. This is seen not only through its activity in electing its picked candidates and in employing lawyers with reputations as "fixers," but in its resort to violence to insure the freedom of its own members when they become enmeshed in the web of the law.

The gang not only has its own code which governs the conduct of its members, but it even goes so far as to impose it upon outside society. In recent years in Chicago, the public has become familiar with the bold practices of criminal gangs in terrorizing witnesses and in exacting the death penalties upon them and upon members of the gang who are suspected of having given information to the police. An inside view of the attitudes and codes of a notorious criminal gang shows how a closely knit group develops its own standards and is outraged and puzzled by the attempts to deal with them according to the law.

Several youths belonging to this notorious criminal gang held up the clerk of a shady hotel located in a disreputable area. During the holdup, the gunman on guard at the hotel exchanged shots with one of the youths. In this duel the watchman was killed and the young gangster wounded. The wounded youth was taken by his gang fellows in a machine to a hallway and left there. Three hours later, when he was almost exhausted, they picked him up again and took him to a hospital. They allowed this lapse of time probably through fear of apprehension, because they knew the police would likely immediately search all of the hospitals upon hearing that one of the gang was seriously wounded.

At the hospital he received the best medical attention. While the arm was stripped of the entire bicep muscle and the shattered bone was exposed, every effort was made to save it. The boy endured the treatment with great patience and the arm was saved from amputation finally. During the hospitalization period, which extended over months, he had

¹ A "fin" is five dollars; a "sawbuck" is ten dollars; and a "double sawbuck" is twenty dollars.

² Data from the life history of an ex-convict secured for this study.

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a constant flow of visitors with gifts of fruit and cigarettes. Boys brought their own radio sets—he had three or four different sets at work in his room. They arranged to avoid taking him to the House of Correction Hospital by having deputy sheriffs on alternating watches, whose salaries they paid to the county. With an especially constructed frame supporting the arm, he was taken to a court and bail bond was set at over twenty thousand dollars. The bail bond was arranged in cash. The hours during hospitalization were passed in fleet conversation about “jobs” and “raps,” and gossip about gang friends. As soon as he became a little better, the boys would bring up his girl friends who were admirers of the young gangster.¹

There was but one difficulty in the way of beating the “rap.” A taxicab man insisted upon standing up as a prosecuting witness. One day his doorbell rang and as he stepped to the door a shower of shotgun slugs ended his upright citizenship.

In this gang there are periods when trouble upon trouble engulfs certain members. These become the subject of highest interest, with all the resources of the gang bent towards discovering the weakest places in the law’s machinery and making the defense moth-proof. The influence of these boys is far-reaching. While the deputy sheriffs were on guard over the boy in the hospital, they tried in every way to ingratiate themselves with the gang. There had been a change in sheriffs and a Democrat was elected, who later died. During the short period while the change was considered an accomplished fact, the deputy sheriffs feared that they would be displaced in their jobs, and the young gangsters reassured them that they would use their influence with the most powerful of the gangsters, who were friends of the new sheriff, to retain the jobs of the deputies.

There was one rift in the normal order of the gang’s relations. A certain fellow was widely advertised, even in books, as the leader of this gang. Queerly, when on a job with his gang fellows, others would get into trouble but he was never apprehended and would walk around scot free. On the night of the catastrophic holdup he had not acted in a very manly way when he allowed the wounded youth to remain so long without aid, and bit by bit the gang began to suspect that the leader had turned policeman or informer to the police. He incurred the stigma of “the rat” and the hatred of the gang. One night it was reported that this leader had been shot in the back by a policeman who caught him trying to strip a car. Not one of the gang attended either the wake or the funeral, and within the gang it has always been accounted for as one of the typical bluffs of the police—this claim that “they got him.” He had turned informer and the gang claims he got his due at the hands of the gang.

Those members of the gang that have been punished by conviction and sentence—one boy who returned from the reformatory and another from Joliet—have never quite recovered from the puzzling outrage of their fate. In their speculations of how it came about, there is always an increasing number of possible factors as to who could have been the enemy or who

¹ Adapted from a document secured especially for this study.

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could have been the "squealer," or what the ulterior motives might have been for him or the prosecution that they were actually sent up.

Among the members of this gang there is no remorse for their depredations, no regret for their intimidation and even murder of witnesses who dare to testify against them. On the contrary, they form a group dominated by the gangster's code of loyalty, engaged in relentless war upon society and upon all those who seek to see that justice is enforced upon them. The welfare, standards, and laws of organized society evoke no response in their hearts and minds. They seem to have no conception of justice, of laws, and of courts, except as some external superimposed system of oppression which they must by hook or by crook obstruct and evade.

II. Conclusion.

The picture of the gangster presented in this chapter differs widely from the current descriptions of him, whether those of soft-hearted sentimentalists or of hard-headed realists. When allowed to speak for himself, he is seen to be neither an innocent youth led astray by bad companions but ready to make good if given a chance, nor a hardened and vicious individual who has deliberately and vindictively chosen to wage war on society.

The story which he gives of his own life shows him to be a natural product of his environment—that is, of the slums of our large American cities. These slum areas have been formed in the growth of the city. They have been ports of first entry for each new wave of foreign immigration. These slum areas inhabited by national groups, as well as industrial areas like back-of-the-yards, are subject to the constant misfortune of the drawing off and moving away of the legitimately successful people. The constant ambition that grows with the rise of the people is to get out into the better districts of the city. As the successful families move away they leave behind the unsuccessful, laboring foreigner, who is not accepted as a model for the children and youth in their process of Americanization. But there also remain the gangster and politician chief, who become practically the only model of success.

It follows that the gangster is a product of his surroundings in the same way in which the good citizen is a product of his environment. The good citizen has grown up in an atmosphere of obedience to law and of respect for it. The gangster has lived his life in a region of law breaking, of graft, and of "fixing." That is the reason why the good citizen and the gangster have never been able to understand each other. They have been reared in two different worlds.

The stories which the gangsters tell of their own lives should enable the good citizens to deal more intelligently and therefore more effectively with the problem of organized crime. In the first place, it will enable the public to realize how deep rooted and widespread are the practices and philosophy of the gangster in the life and growth of the city. In the second place, an understanding of this should make possible a constructive program that will not content itself with punishing individual gangsters and their allies, but will reach out into a frontal attack upon basic causes of crime in Chicago.