

## **REVIEW OF *MOB NEMESIS: HOW THE FBI CRIPPLED ORGANIZED CRIME*\***

**By**

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Book: *Mob Nemesis: How the FBI Crippled Organized Crime*

Author: Joe Griffin with Don DeNevi.

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*Mob Nemesis* provides a compelling view of the FBI's battle against organized crime through the eyes of Joe Griffin, a former agent, who retired in 1988 after 28 years of service. Griffin, who rose through the ranks to the position of Special Agent In Charge, served in a number of field offices including Little Rock and Mississippi during the tumultuous early 1960's, Louisville, and subsequently spearheaded much of the FBI's efforts to "bring down" the Mafia in Buffalo and Cleveland.

Griffin's story is preceded by a variety of introductory background material. G. Robert Blakey, the RICO architect, provides a brief introduction to the Mafia and Patrick McLaughlin, former U.S. Attorney in Northern Ohio, suggests that *Mob Nemesis* is invaluable because it provides an unvarnished portrayal of La Cosa Nostra, unlike the Hollywood version. Finally, collaborator Don DeNevi pays tribute to the FBI Medal of Honor recipient and to Griffin's account of his activities.

Griffin uses public records, news reports, and his own records and recollections to provide a thorough and sometimes exhaustive account of the activities and strategies involved in investigating top Mafia chieftains and their henchmen in Buffalo, Cleveland, and surrounding cities.

It was during this time, the 1970's and 1980's that the FBI began using new tools for investigating and prosecuting the mob. These tools included authorized electronic surveillance, RICO, and witness protection. Griffin and his colleagues were especially successful using a strategy that he characterizes as "convict, sentence, and flip." Notables who were "flipped" included "Jimmy the Weasel," Fratianno and Angelo Lonardo.

Griffin also provides insights into the squabbles, deceit, and contract killings that were common among upper echelon mobsters and their associates. Disagreements quickly led to violence and subsequently changes in the mob landscape.

Fascinating revelations are sprinkled throughout the book. Some of these deal with mob business such as the divvying up of skimming profits and the practice of "layoff bookmaking" to

protect against heavy betting on one team in sports events. Others deal with the FBI's actions as an agency in the business of investigating and prosecuting mobsters. Discovery of a mole in the Cleveland office and her subsequent arrest reads more like an episode of the *X Files* or *Alias* than real life. The reliance on informants and defectors during Griffin's career is made quite clear as he discusses the cases he and his fellow agents handled. Griffin's frustration with other agencies, particularly strike forces, dealing with organized crime is evident. This gives credence to the contention that interagency conflict is a significant problem in mounting an effective campaign against organized crime.

Griffin's characterizations of various national figures such as Estes Kefauver and Joe Valachi are interesting to say the least. Kefauver is described as "great and gentlemanly," the latter being a more commonly accepted depiction of the Senator than the former. Valachi's "breathtaking" and "stunning" testimony is now being viewed by some sources as largely the result of FBI "coaching."

The agents and police personnel that Griffin worked with and supervised are uniformly viewed as hardworking, dedicated, honorable, terrific, and phenomenal, etc. These individuals provide a welcome contrast to recent revelations about the operation of the Boston FBI office. The dark side of the agency was reflected in the 2002 conviction of John Connolly in connection with the handling of informant Whitey Bulger. In addition, there is also evidence that J. Edgar Hoover had knowledge of a Boston office informant's false testimony that resulted in imprisonment of innocent individuals during the 1960's.

In summary, *Mob Nemesis*: (1) contributes to our understanding of the Mafia's functioning in smaller cities where they had a presence; (2) gives the reader a view of the tactics the FBI used to pursue a variety of mobsters; and (3) gives testament to the career of a dedicated agent in the frontlines against organized crime.

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