



Dark Bayou

Infamous Louisiana Homicides

Alan G. Gauthreaux
and D.G. Hippensteel

Foreword by Charles C. Foti, Jr.

Dark Bayou

Infamous Louisiana Homicides

ALAN G. GAUTHREUX *and*
D.G. HIPPENSTEEL

Foreword by CHARLES C. FOTI, JR.



McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers
Jefferson, North Carolina

ISBN 978-1-4766-6295-4 (softcover : acid free paper) 

ISBN 978-1-4766-2296-5 (ebook)

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGUING DATA ARE AVAILABLE

BRITISH LIBRARY CATALOGUING DATA ARE AVAILABLE

© 2016 Alan G. Gauthreaux and D.G. Hippensteel.
All rights reserved

*No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form
or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying
or recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system,
without permission in writing from the publisher.*

Front cover image © 2016 iStock/Thinkstock

Manufactured in the United States of America

*McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers
Box 611, Jefferson, North Carolina 28640
www.mcfarlandpub.com*

Dark Bayou

So the victims will not be forgotten...

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to acknowledge the following individuals who selflessly assisted with the production of this work:

The Honorable Charles C. Foti, Jr., for his insight and the foreword; the Rev. Dr. Craig W. Rinker, for his constant “loving life” posture, his ability to make the heart and spirit of Scripture come alive, and his ever-present talent in giving comfort to others; Dr. Edward P. St. John, for his lifetime example of believing in students, the process of education, and continued research; Dr. Florent Hardy, Louisiana State archivist, for his inspiration, tutelage, and assistance with primary materials; Bill Stafford, assistant archivist with the State of Louisiana; John Fowler, assistant archivist with the State of Louisiana; Dr. Florence Jumonville, archivist at the University of New Orleans, Earl K. Long Library; Connie Phelps, librarian in Special Collections at the University of New Orleans, Earl K. Long Library; Al Barron, director of the Washington Parish Public Library and fellow East Jefferson High School alumnus; Mary Wenet, archivist, Northwestern State University; Winola Holiday, whose recollections of Bogalusa’s past helped put the history of Washington Parish in a humanistic perspective; Irene Wainwright, former chief archivist at the New Orleans Public Library, Special Collections Division, who never ceases to amaze with her research acumen; Yvonne Loiselle, current chief archivist of the Special Collections Division of the New Orleans Public Library, whose special assistance with the photograph collection proved extremely helpful; Randy “Country” Seal, sheriff of Washington Parish, whose professionalism, candor, and assistance with parts of this work proved instrumental; W. J. LeBlanc, attorney at law, for his insight into the workings of the criminal justice system as they pertained to one of the most bizarre murder trials in recent local memory; Col. Joseph D. Passalacqua (ret.), Jefferson Parish Sheriff’s Office, former chief of the Crime Scene Division; John Fox, historian with the Federal Bureau of Investigation; Patricia L. Lloyd, whose interesting and intelligent viewpoints kept our historical assumptions honest; Shelley Fairbanks, a formidable student and intellectually honest supporter; Allison J. Pitcher, a friend, supporter, and admirer of literature who

left this world too soon, and who encouraged not only literary works, but other artistic endeavors in and around the city of New Orleans; and Lisa Gauthreaux, for her patience with research trips to strange destinations on a limited budget.

Table of Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	ix
<i>Foreword by Charles C. Foti, Jr.</i>	1
<i>Preface</i>	3
<i>Introduction</i>	5
The First Godfather	7
The Other Assassinated Chiefs	22
The Madam's Last Will	40
The Case of the Human Five	52
A Respectable Poisoner	65
The Mysterious Case of Dr. Weiss	76
Louisiana Burning	110
Deadly Friendship	135
The Final Broadcast	163
<i>Chapter Notes</i>	183
<i>Bibliography</i>	197
<i>Index</i>	201

Foreword

by Charles C. Foti, Jr.

In the United States as a whole, the murder rate has been cut nearly in half in the last four decades, falling from 7.9 murders per 100,000 people in 1970 to 4.5 murders per 100,000 in 2013. Louisiana has been part of this trend—the state’s homicide rate fell from 17.5 per 100,000 in 1996 to 10.8 per 100,000 in 2013—but it continues to be plagued by the highest homicide rate in the country.

Murder harms society in many ways. Not only do the victims suffer directly, but their families, friends, and the community also bear the indirect burden of such crimes. Fear swells and people begin to feel unsafe, threatened, and hopeless. The justice system moves at a slow and deliberate pace. Further, the process of reaching a conviction and doling out a sentence, at least when the proceedings are hampered by weak, circumstantial, or tainted evidence and poor or questionable witnesses, does not always lend itself to an outcome that seems equitable, for either the justice system or the victim.

The cases highlighted by Alan G. Gauthreaux and D. G. Hippensteel in this book illustrate the elements of killing, though the perceived gain or justification for the assailant differs in each case. The cases portray numerous murders that occurred in New Orleans, Crowley, Bogalusa, Varnado, Metairie, and as far north as Lake Charles. Gauthreaux and Hippensteel take the reader on a journey of history and criminology through a myriad of murders across time and place: the origins of the first *Mafia* “don”; the sinister assassinations of police chiefs that began in the late 1800s; the tragic case of a notorious madam whose paramour sought to relieve her of her fortune; ritual murders influenced by a teen-aged cult leader; a “cold, calculating, methodical personality with sociopathic traits” accused of using morphine to kill a close family member in a case motivated by greed; an enlightening reassessment of the assassination of Sen. Huey P. Long; racially charged murders that defined a volatile period in Louisiana (and U.S.) history; the true case of a Jefferson Parish housewife who succumbed to one of the most brutal deaths

in Louisiana history; and the truly inexplicable case of a well-known local television personality whose ego convinced him he would be spared from life imprisonment for the murder of his wife. All of these cases keenly illustrate the history, culture, and written law of the time, and they provide insightful historical views of criminal justice procedure and development. Perhaps even more importantly, these cases are truly intriguing—but perhaps little remembered—events that beg for a more complete and unbiased assessment.

In *Dark Bayou*, Gauthreaux and Hippensteel offer readers of this genre a fascinating peek not only into time, and not only into the criminal justice system, but into the dark side of the primal psyche. As the criminal sheriff in New Orleans for more than 30 years, the former attorney general of the State of Louisiana, a prosecutor, and defense counsel, I well realize some of the underlying motivations for murder are emotional, social, religious, economic, educational, political, greed, anger, self-defense, alcohol and drugs, revenge, jealousy, and domestic abuse. Gauthreaux and Hippensteel chose cases that illustrate some of these core causes of murder, and they integrate an unbiased historical precision in describing these cases with their desire to appeal to a mass audience in accomplishing that objective. *Dark Bayou* deservedly belongs among the most important works within the shadowy realm of true crime.

The Honorable Mr. Charles C. Foti, Jr., is a partner with the law firm of Kahn, Swick, & Foti, LLC, in Madisonville, Louisiana, and an advocate for humanitarian causes. He was the sheriff of the Orleans Parish Criminal Sheriff's Office from 1974 to 2003 and was elected Louisiana attorney general in 2004, serving until 2008.

Preface

Dark Bayou began as an historical interest in the peculiar and ghastly, but evolved into an historical and social study of serious crimes in the annals of Louisiana history. The authors realized that a fascination existed with humans' dark imagination and its relation with the unknown, unsolved, or controversial. In Louisiana, there have been several incidents where "Truth is stranger than fiction"—and the cases profiled in *Dark Bayou* well demonstrate that adage.

Although some of the homicides mentioned in *Dark Bayou* might seem familiar to some readers, they have not been very well publicized in the remembrance of Louisiana history. Other cases documented here have received very little attention throughout history but were selected because of their controversy, misrepresentation of justice, or ambiguous documentation. A few of them have been written about in passing, but not as part of a historical record. *Dark Bayou* seeks to correct this oversight by recounting these crimes in a popular history format, instead of consigning them to the droll recitations of authors past.

Serial killers were not included in this work because their crimes can contain volumes of psychological analysis that would detract from the telling of these stories. Also, we felt that the victims should have been treated with far more dignity than they received—an aspect of each case that we made one of the primary missions of this work. However, this omission does not detract from perhaps a later volume, where the crimes committed by serial killers will be the primary area of concentration.

The motives of the perpetrators profiled in this book run the gamut from greed, to jealousy, to religious fanaticism, to racial motives that even the most seasoned psychiatrist would struggle to comprehend. Given the varied rationales of the criminals, *Dark Bayou* seeks to recount the history of the crimes based on the documentation available, focusing on giving a factual perspective rather than a psychological profile.

The cases contained within *Dark Bayou* are strange and bizarre, and stand alone in their own right. The reader will take a journey through Louis-

iana's dark history—a journey filled with shadowy corners and dark figures who invade people's nightmares. When perusing these pages, the reader is advised to remember that the crimes documented actually occurred and the perpetrators of these crimes are no figment of the authors' imaginations. The monsters depicted here actually existed.

Introduction

“The thin line between good and evil does not go through states or ideologies, but through the heart of every man and woman.”—Alexander Solzhenitsyn

Murder is one tragedy of humanity that simultaneously repulses and fascinates us, both as individuals and as societies. Since Cain murdered Abel, religious thinkers, philosophers, novelists, playwrights, and social scientists have tried to identify, comprehend, explain, and predict this act in the human experience. Theories abound.

The authors have not written *Dark Bayou* to provide support, speculation, or proof of any particular theory, as a criminologist might be tempted to do. Nor should this book be taken as simply a “flat” and lifeless historical narrative. Rather, our first hope is that readers will find these cases not just fascinating, but instructive as to human behavior.

Just as American jurisprudence judges each case individually on its own merits and evidence, so our hope is that readers employ their own worldviews to assess the cases of murder in Louisiana history presented in this book. In the preface, we outline several general premises that interested us and prompted us to create this work. More specifically, we began our research by selecting more than 30 cases for possible inclusion into the book that we thought readers might find interesting. As part of the necessary winnowing process, we developed the following criteria for selecting cases: (1) unknown in the literature or reporting, (2) little known in the literature or reporting, (3) misrepresented in the literature or reporting, (4) involved a variety of murderous human behavior, and (5) appealed to a variety of readers.

Although the cases presented here are taken from Louisiana history, each state likely has similar cases embedded in its history and in its present. In the final analysis, these Louisiana cases and similar cases across the American landscape reveal the base characteristics we find so repulsive and fascinating.

The research demonstrated that the boundary between good and evil may not be as clear as one would think, especially when complicated with

human desires and emotions. These are the more primitive traits that move evil hearts to sinister action. Yet these same primitive traits may also render those individuals with pure hearts willing to sacrifice themselves to rid the world of a perceived evil. In our modern society, the efforts to overcome nefarious designs for murder and mayhem rarely garner much notice. Rather, serious societal fascination with the macabre invades our lives with such abandon as to desensitize our personal belief systems and ignite an abhorrent character within us all. The cases within *Dark Bayou* will whet this morbid appetite and satisfy the maddening addiction to the opaqueness of the human soul.

Today, murder and mystery dominate the American public sphere—at least in terms of entertainment. Some estimates note that perhaps as much as 70 percent of television programming, movies, and video games deals with crime, murder, and the “mystery” behind such evil behavior. Certainly, local and national news organizations know that “if it bleeds, it leads.” This approach to grabbing viewers’ attention works because we are fascinated by murder and evil. Usually ignored are the truths behind such human behavior: Murder creates a ripple of evil that changes lives beyond family and friends, beyond the investigators who respond to the calls, beyond the costs to the community and the taxpayer. The ripple of evil is not an abstract, static, inanimate, opposite of good. Evil is alive. It is a virus, a parasite that relentlessly eats away at good. Good and Evil, as Solzhenitsyn knew, resides not in a specific time or place, or in the choice of weapon or strategy, but in the human heart.

Small wonder we are so simultaneously repulsed and fascinated.

The First Godfather

“Three people can keep a secret ... if two of them are dead!”—Sign above the doorway at the “headquarters” of Carlos Marcello

Many historical documents, and just as many legends, have been cited as proof of exactly which individual may have established the Mafia within the United States and the exact point in time when that group’s founding occurred on U.S. shores. The American quest for the first Godfather includes legends throughout the South, and especially in Louisiana, where a rich cultural folklore and dark legacies concerning the “underworld of crime” hold sway not only among Louisianans but also among Americans in general. Historians attempting to conclude who may be the first Godfather must be prepared to make suppositions based upon documented materials that may not unequivocally define the Mafia’s role in American history or precisely pinpoint its growth or origin.

However, interest in the “don of dons” still exists in Louisiana, in the United States, and within the Mafia itself. The Mafia, though certainly a covert organization, could not fully hide its existence. Indeed, it is common knowledge it has roots intertwined with the reams of police corruption and graft among politicians in the Pelican State. One of the individuals credited with becoming the patriarch of the southern “dons” whose emergence led to the beginning and eventual thriving of La Cosa Nostra, both in Louisiana and the rest of the country, was a Sicilian named Joseph P. Macheca.

According to sources, Macheca was born as Peter J. Cervanna, Jr., in Sicily in 1843. His humble beginnings and eventual death led to his immortalization in history as the First American “Godfather.”¹

In Sicily, two years after Peter’s father went to prison, Peter’s mother, who was unable to care for Peter on her own, left the two-year-old at an orphanage. Peter’s mother later remarried, and she reclaimed her son from the orphanage with the stepfather who gave young Peter his name, Joseph P. Macheca. After journeying to Louisiana, young Joseph grew into manhood while rising steadily through the ranks as a Mafiosi. Macheca’s rise to underworld power began when, while still in his teens, he established several legitimate

successful businesses in New Orleans. He also dabbled in politics and made a reputation for himself as a “mover and shaker.” The more successful his businesses became, the more power Macheca sought through whatever means were available to him. Several historians agree that Macheca—the orphaned son of a Sicilian convict—structured much of the Louisiana criminal organization, thereby becoming the “father of the American Mafia.”

Prior to Macheca’s rise, there were very few references to the Mafia. Local newspapers described most crimes involving Italians as vendettas, acts of revenge to settle offenses against either a person or a family member. Moreover, successful Italian or Sicilian immigrants suffered from rumors that they gained their wealth through underworld alliances and unsolved homicides, a path that was all too common in the Old Country. Macheca was also the subject of those whispered rumors, although no documentary proof exists to establish any of these accusations. Successful and influential in his own right, Macheca faced the wrath of a corrupt business community. But as a true businessman, Macheca became adept to the “Louisiana way” and successfully navigated his way through the “Anglo” world.

In February 1861, at the age of 17, when Louisiana seceded from the Union and entered the war on the Confederate side, Macheca served in the 22nd Louisiana Regiment, but for only nine months. According to some incomplete yet decipherable sources, the young Macheca initially enlisted in the Confederate Army for 90 days. Because of the expected invasion by Union forces, however, the state government lengthened the terms of soldiers’ enlistment to nine months.²

After his enlistment ended, Macheca moved the family businesses to Houston, Texas, where he allegedly entered into smuggling for the Confederacy. When the war ended in 1865, he returned to New Orleans with the wealth he garnered from his illegal enterprises and purchased real estate. Macheca’s businesses grew quickly, and he formed a steamship company that began a fruit trade with Central and South America.³

With his lucrative business ventures as backing, Macheca sought to try his hand at Reconstruction politics, but soon realized that Louisiana was not the state he had left a few years earlier. In 1867, Republicans in the U.S. Congress were tagged with the moniker of “Radical” because of their commitment to advocating for blacks’ rights as well as punishing the South for making war. White Democrats within Louisiana, in turn, sought ways to rebel without actually igniting another war.

In March 1867, the federal government divided the former Confederacy, excluding Tennessee, into five military districts, with a major general of the army as each district’s governor. The military governors of each district were given the mandate of registering as voters only those adults who demonstrated loyalty to the Union.⁴ Likewise, all citizens of the affected states had

to swear an oath of allegiance. Despite the active leadership and the advancement toward more diverse and equitable treatment of blacks in Louisiana, the federal troops who remained in the city when the war ended took up the cause of the Republican Party and fervently sought to limit the rights of former secessionists. These were the capricious conditions that Macheca would encounter in his new pursuit of the political power in Louisiana.

In 1868, in a concerted effort to combat the rising tide of Republican rule in Louisiana, the “Knights of the White Camellia” formed, with intentions similar to those of the Ku Klux Klan, which had organized in Pulaski, Tennessee, the year before. The Knights of the White Camellia terrorized both blacks and their allies, the Republicans, forcing voters to choose between the “right” political party or beatings—or worse.⁵

In the fall of 1868, Macheca got involved with the Democratic Party in Louisiana. Thanks to the renown he enjoyed from his successful business enterprises, he was welcomed into the party leadership in New Orleans.⁶ He campaigned for the Democratic candidate for president in that year, Horatio Seymour. In turn, for the first time, local newspapers alleged Macheca to be the head of the Sicilian Mafia entrenched in the city of New Orleans because of the influence he seemed to wield in both business and politics.⁷

The sudden publicity brought Macheca to the forefront of underworld notoriety. Newspapers and law enforcement at the time contended that the Macheca “family” fought with another faction led by Raffaello Agnello for control of both the New Orleans docks and any and all “business” that may have been conducted clandestinely beneath the noses of local law enforcement for well over a year. In an effort to seize control of these businesses, and in typical Mafia fashion, Macheca ordered the murder of Agnello. On April 1, 1869, Agnello allegedly suffered several gunshot wounds while walking to meet with Macheca at the latter’s business in the present warehouse district. Several years later, Agnello’s brother, Joseph, suffered the same fate. With his power consolidated and despite the fact that he had been accused of several, if not most, gangland murders in the state, Macheca still sought some level of anonymity, yet wanted to be recognized as a “legitimate” businessman and a warrior for the American ideals of democracy.

By 1869, Louisiana had become overrun with “scalawags,” homegrown supporters of the Republican Party, and “carpetbaggers,” Reconstruction-era migrants from the North seeking financial opportunities. The new state Constitution of 1868 provided civil rights for blacks and school integration. At the same time as pro-Republican forces sought ratification of the new constitution, the state held a gubernatorial election that Republican Henry Clay Warmoth won. Governor Warmoth subsequently used his executive position to increase his wealth and to exact substantial measures intended to garner equality for the freed people. Once elected, however, Warmoth felt the hatred