

GAY TALESE

Author of UNTO THE SONS

HONOR THY FATHER

“STUNNING...

A book about a vanishing
way of life in America:
the Mafia.”

NEWSWEEK



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HONOR THY FATHER

Gay Talese

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An explanation about this book and how it was researched will be found in the Author's Note, which follows the final chapter.

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For CHARLES, JOSEPH, TORY, and FELIPPA
in the hope that they will understand
their father more, and love him no less . . .

Salvatore Bonanno
(1878–1915)

Catherine Bonventre
(1883–1920)

Joseph Bonanno
(1905–)

Bill Bonanno
(1932–)

Rosalie Profaci
(1936–)

Charles Bonanno
(1958–)

Joseph Bonanno
(1961–)

The Bonannos



Charles Labruzzo
(1870–1939)

Marie-Antoinette Bruno
(1874–1944)

Fay Labruzzo
(1904–)

Catherine Bonanno
(1934–)

Joseph Bonanno Jr.
(1945–)

Tory Bonanno
(1963–)

Felippa Bonanno
(1964–)

AUTHOR'S GLOSSARY

JOSEPH BONANNO Patriarch of family. Born in 1905 in western Sicilian town of Castellammare del Golfo. An anti-Fascist student radical in Palermo after Mussolini came to power in 1922, Bonanno fled Sicily and entered United States during Prohibition. Decades later, a millionaire, Bonanno was identified by U.S. government as one of top bosses in American Mafia.

FAY BONANNO Wife of Joseph Bonanno. Born Fay Labruzzo in Tunisia of Sicilian parents who later emigrated to United States and settled in Brooklyn. There, in 1931, she married Joseph Bonanno.

SALVATORE (BILL) BONANNO Eldest son of Joseph and Fay Bonanno, born 1932.

CATHERINE BONANNO Daughter of Joseph and Fay Bonanno, born 1934.

JOSEPH BONANNO, JR. Younger son of Joseph and Fay Bonanno, born 1945.

ROSALIE BONANNO Wife of Bill Bonanno, whom she married in 1956. Born Rosalie Profaci in 1936; niece of Joseph Profaci.

JOSEPH PROFACI Millionaire importer of olive oil and tomato paste. Until death from cancer in 1962, boss of Brooklyn organization with close ties to organization headed by Joseph Bonanno. Born Villabate, Sicily, 1897.

JOSEPH MAGLIOCCO His sister married to Joseph Profaci; after Profaci's death, Magliocco, a longtime aide, succeeded to leadership of Profaci organization. Suffered fatal heart attack in December 1963.

JOSEPH COLOMBO Succeeded Magliocco; negotiated uncertain peace within factionalized Profaci organization following Gallo brothers revolt of 1960, but organization never

regained power it had during 1950s and 1940s under Profaci. Colombo in 1970 started Italian-American Civil Rights League; in 1971, at League outdoor rally, Colombo was shot by black man posing as photographer.

STEFANO MAGADDINO Boss in Buffalo area. Native of Castellammare del Golfo, distant cousin of Joseph Bonanno, but enemy of Bonanno since 1960s.

GASPAR DI GREGORIO Magaddino's brother-in-law, loyal member of Joseph Bonanno organization for years—until in 1964, disenchanted by elevation of thirty-two-year-old Bill Bonanno in organization, led internal revolt that led in mid-1960s to so-called Banana War. Magaddino, among others, backed Di Gregorio's cause.

FRANK LABRUZZO Brother of Fay Bonanno and loyal captain in Joseph Bonanno organization.

JOSEPH NOTARO Loyal captain in Bonanno organization.

JOHN BONVENTRE Cousin of Joseph Bonanno and veteran officer in organization who in 1950s returned to native Sicily to retire. In 1971, in Italian government's anti-Mafia drive, Bonventre was cited as leader and exiled with other alleged mafiosi to small island off northeast coast of Sicily.

FRANK GAROFALO Loyal Bonanno captain; returned to peaceful retirement in Sicily in 1950s, where he died natural death.

PAUL SCIACCA Bonanno member who quit organization in 1964 dispute, joined Di Gregorio's faction.

FRANK MARI Bonanno member who joined Di Gregorio and became identified as top triggerman against Bonanno loyalists during Banana War in mid-1960s.

PETER MAGADDINO First cousin of Stefano Magaddino, the boss in Buffalo; Peter Magaddino left Buffalo and supported Joseph Bonanno, his boyhood friend in Sicily, in the dispute with Di Gregorio's faction.

SALVATORE MARANZANO Old-time Sicilian boss from Castellammare del Golfo; friend of Joseph Bonanno's father. In 1930, Maranzano organized group of Castellammarese immigrants in Brooklyn to fight against New York organization headed by Joe Masseria, a southern Italian who wanted to eliminate Sicilian clan. This feud, extending from 1928 until 1931, became known as the Castellammarese War and is referred to in Chapter 12.

THE MAFIA Called by several names—and never *Mafia* by members—is of ancient origin in Sicily. In United States it

became organized along modern business lines after completion of Castellammarese War in 1931. At that time it realigned itself into a national brotherhood of approximately 5,000 men belonging to twenty-four separate organizations ("families") located in major cities in every region of the United States. In New York City, where an estimated 2,000 of the 5,000 members were in residence, five "families" were established, each headed by a family boss, or don. In 1931, at the age of twenty-six, Joseph Bonanno was the youngest don in the national brotherhood.

THE COMMISSION Of the twenty-four bosses, nine take turns serving as members of the commission, which is dedicated to maintaining peace in the underworld; but it is supposed to restrain itself from interfering with the internal affairs of any one boss. Occasionally it cannot resist, and then—as with the Bonanno affair in the mid-1960s—there is trouble. Before the Bonanno affair, however, the commission members subordinated their differences and kept the nine-man membership intact. The commission included the following:

JOSEPH BONANNO NEW YORK.

JOSEPH PROFACI NEW YORK.

VITO GENOVESE Succeeded to leadership of New York-based organization once headed by Lucky Luciano, who, after being sentenced in 1936 to long prison term, was deported to Italy in 1946. Frank Costello, who tried to take over the Luciano organization, was discouraged when his skull was grazed with a bullet in 1957.

THOMAS LUCCHESI New York. Took over leadership of organization headed by Gaetano Gagliano, who died of natural causes in 1953.

CARLO GAMBINO New York. Close to Lucchese; their children intermarried. Gambino heads organization formerly controlled by Albert Anastasia, who was fatally shot in a Manhattan barbershop in 1957.

STEFANO MAGADDINO Buffalo. Born in 1891 in Castellammare del Golfo, he is senior member of commission.

ANGELO BRUNO Boss of organization centered in Philadelphia.

SAM GIANCANA Boss of organization centered in Chicago.

JOSEPH ZERILLI Boss of organization in Detroit.

ORGANIZED CRIME It is most often assumed by newspaper readers that the Mafia is all there is to organized crime in America, when in fact the Mafia is merely a small part of

the organized crime industry. There are an estimated 5,000 mafiosi belonging to twenty-four "families"; but federal investigators estimate that there are more than 100,000 organized gangsters working full-time in the crime industry—engaged in numbers racketeering, bookmaking, loansharking, narcotics, prostitution, hijacking, enforcing, debt collecting, and other activities. These gangs, who may work in cooperation with Mafia gangs or may be entirely independent, are composed of Jews, Irish, blacks, Wasps, Latin Americans, and every ethnic or racial type in the nation.

Because the Mafia, made up almost entirely of Sicilians and southern Italians, has since Prohibition been more ethnically tight and cohesive than most other gangs, its influence and notoriety has been considerable in organized crime circles. But during the 1960s, as old-style Mafia bosses became older and their sons lacked the interest or talent to replace them and had better options in the larger American society, the Mafia structure is now disintegrating as have the great Irish gangs of the late 1800s and the great Jewish cliques of the 1920s (of which only Meyer Lansky remains supreme today). The blacks and Latin Americans have shown signs of emerging in the 1960s as a dominant force to overthrow the last vestiges of white rule of ghetto rackets.

This book is a study of the rise and fall of the Bonanno organization, a personal history of ethnic progression and of dying traditions.

AUTHOR'S FOREWORD

THIS BOOK EVOLVED out of my father's embarrassment—my Italian-born father's embarrassment over the fact that gangsters with Italian names invariably dominate the headlines and most television shows dealing with organized crime. My father, a proud and consummate custom-tailor who immigrated from Italy in 1920 and prospered on the resort island of Ocean City, New Jersey—where I was born during the winter of 1932—always encouraged me to take pride in my ethnic heritage, a heritage he identified with such names as Michelangelo and Dante, Medici and Galileo, Verdi and Caruso. But as I grew up in the early 1940s, the Italian names I saw most frequently on the front pages were those belonging to the reputed leaders of the Mafia—Charles (“Lucky”) Luciano and Al Capone; Vito Genovese, Carlo Gambino, Frank Costello, Thomas (“Three-Finger Brown”) Lucchese, and Joseph (“Joe Bananas”) Bonanno.

Whenever my father saw me reading articles about such individuals he would shake his head and say things like: “It’s all exaggerated! The press will do anything to sell newspapers.” At times he denied the very existence of the Mafia, suggesting it was the creation of publicity-craving FBI agents, or Senate committeemen seeking higher office, or Hollywood moguls and other mythmakers pandering to the American public’s historic addiction with villains and fugitives, with Little Caesars and Godfathers—all to the discredit of millions of law-abiding Italian-Americans like himself. Inevitably this aroused within me a curiosity about the Mafia that would in time lead me to its doorstep, and ultimately beyond the portal into the private world of one of the Mafia’s leading families, that headed by “Joe Bananas” himself.

How this came about is detailed in my Author’s Note, which

follows the final chapter of this book. But I must quickly confess that the completion of this book did not terminate my interest, nor the American public's interest, in the endlessly fascinating world of organized crime. Although many of the people I write about or whom I interviewed while researching *Honor Thy Father* have since been murdered, or have died from occupational stress, most of the book's main characters are still very much alive—including the octogenarian Joseph Bonanno (the *only* Godfather dating from the boom years of Prohibition who *is* still alive); his eternally loyal son, Bill Bonanno, the principal character in my book who has so far survived the ambitions of rival factions; and the Bonanno family lawyer, Albert J. Krieger, who in 1992 took on extra work to defend the alleged *mafioso* John Gotti against Federal charges of racketeering and the murder of an ex-Godfather named Paul Castellano.

All of this publicity—together with the recordings of gangsters' voices that investigators have collected—has left little doubt about the true existence of the Mafia; and even my octogenarian father in New Jersey, whom I visit regularly, is beyond issuing denials about the roles Italian-Americans play within organized crime circles.

But my father, and most other Italian-Americans I know, is far less embarrassed now than before by the prominence of Italian names in crime headlines. The lowly status of Italian-Americans during the World War II period when I was growing up—a period in which Italy was a battlefield enemy of the Allies, and when Italian-Americans' ethnic pride was almost limited to cheering for the baseball star, Joe DiMaggio—has now in the 1990s been altered greatly by the assimilation and success of Italian-Americans into all levels of American life, and by the swiftness with which Italian-Americans will strike back at any American who attempts to associate them generally with the notoriety of the Mafia.

As I was writing this Author's Foreword during the winter of 1992, Governor Mario Cuomo of New York had just learned that, in a secretly recorded telephone conversation between Arkansas' Governor Bill Clinton and a woman friend, Clinton was heard saying that Cuomo "acts" at times like a *mafioso*.

Cuomo's reaction was immediate. He condemned the remark not only as an insult to Italian-Americans but as an assault on

all ethnic minorities; and his statement, widely distributed and applauded by the press nationwide, prompted quick and profuse apologies from the Arkansas governor. There were now approximately twenty million Americans with Italian roots in the United States. They were unquestionably a formidable political force.

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PART ONE



THE DISAPPEARANCE

I

KNOWING THAT IT is possible to see too much, most doormen in New York have developed an extraordinary sense of selective vision: they know what to see and what to ignore, when to be curious and when to be indolent; they are most often standing indoors, unaware, when there are accidents or arguments in front of their buildings; and they are usually in the street seeking taxicabs when burglars are escaping through the lobby. Although a doorman may disapprove of bribery and adultery, his back is invariably turned when the superintendent is handing money to the fire inspector or when a tenant whose wife is away escorts a young woman into the elevator—which is not to accuse the doorman of hypocrisy or cowardice but merely to suggest that his instinct for uninvolvedness is very strong, and to speculate that doormen have perhaps learned through experience that nothing is to be gained by serving as a material witness to life's unseemly sights or to the madness of the city. This being so, it was not surprising that on the night when the Mafia chief, Joseph Bonanno, was grabbed by two gunmen in front of a luxury apartment house on Park Avenue near Thirty-sixth Street, shortly after midnight on a rainy Tuesday in October, the doorman was standing in the lobby talking to the elevator man and saw nothing.

It had all happened with dramatic suddenness. Bonanno, returning from a restaurant, stepped out of a taxicab behind his lawyer, William P. Maloney, who ran ahead through the rain toward the canopy. Then the gunmen appeared from the darkness and began pulling Bonanno by the arms toward an awaiting automobile. Bonanno struggled to break free but he could not. He glared at the men, seeming enraged and stunned—not since Prohibition had he been so abruptly handled, and then it had