The Seamier Side of Life: Criminal Activity in New Orleans During the 1920s.

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THE SEAMIER SIDE OF LIFE: CRIMINAL ACTIVITY IN NEW ORLEANS DURING THE 1920s

The Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical Col.

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THE SEAMIER SIDE OF LIFE:
CRIMINAL ACTIVITY IN NEW ORLEANS DURING THE 1920s

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT .................................................................................................................... ii

ABSTRACT ......................................................................................................................................... v

CHAPTER ONE: THE CITY THAT CARE FORGOT ........................................................................... 1


CHAPTER THREE: THE WETTEST DRY CITY IN AMERICA ..................................................... 73

CHAPTER FOUR: THE FREE STATE OF NEW ORLEANS: GAMBLING IN THE CRESCENT CITY ............................................................................... 130

CHAPTER FIVE: SOILED DOVES: THE ROLE OF THE PROSTITUTE IN NEW ORLEANS ................................................................................................. 189

CHAPTER SIX: "MUGGLES," "INCHY," AND "MUD:" ILLEGAL DRUGS IN NEW ORLEANS ........................................................................................................ 226

CHAPTER SEVEN: THE MYTH OF THE MAFIA: ORGANIZED CRIME IN NEW ORLEANS ........................................................................................................ 275

CHAPTER EIGHT: NEW ORLEANS CRIME DURING THE 1920s: AN EVALUATION ............................................................................................................ 310

BIBLIOGRAPHY ............................................................................................................................. 316
ABSTRACT

Criminals linked with Prohibition, gambling, prostitution, and drugs did a thriving business in New Orleans during the 1920s. In each of these areas, usually associated with organized crime, eager local entrepreneurs sought to satisfy the needs of willing customers. They were aided by a long-standing sybaritic tradition in the city, which created the social climate for furnishing illegal goods and services. New Orleanians, tolerant of the social vices, readily ignored laws which attempted to restrict their access to these illegal activities.

More importantly, however, individual New Orleanians who did not participate in illegal activities did little to aid police and federal officials in enforcing the law. Many New Orleanians showed little concern about what their fellow citizens or visitors to the city were doing. Also the city's dominant political machine, the Old Regulars, tolerated illegal criminal activity. There is evidence that the machine received payments, particularly from gambling and prostitution interests, in return for freedom to operate without being raided by police.

This tolerant attitude by New Orleanians and their government was reflected in their reaction to Prohibition, an experiment doomed from the start. During the Twenties New Orleans remained one of the wettest cities in America. Anyone seeking a drink could always find one in the soft drink stands and speakeasies located throughout the city. The city's location near the mouth of the Mississippi River also made it one of the leading liquor smuggling centers in the United States.
Gambling operations during the decade also remained successful in New Orleans. Handbooks, lotteries, and slot machines did a booming business in the poolrooms, chartered clubs, soft drink stands, groceries, and barbershops of the Crescent City. However, New Orleans gambling was small in comparison to the wide-open operations in nearby Jefferson and St. Bernard parishes, where local officials allowed large-scale casino gambling to flourish.

Prostitutes and pushers did not lack for customers in New Orleans. With the closing of Storyville, the city's legalized redlight district, in 1917, a large number of ladies of the evening moved into the French Quarter, which served as a center for prostitution during the Twenties. Periodic outbreaks of public indignation and police raids failed to halt business in the "Tango Belts" and "Shuttertowns" of the Crescent City. New Orleans also emerged as one of the leading drug smuggling centers in the United States, serving as a convenient port of entry for drugs transported to other locations in the Mississippi Valley. Morphine, cocaine, and opium were the leading drugs, although marijuana was climbing in popularity.

No one individual or group dominated these areas of criminal activity in New Orleans. Though there were organized groups that cornered large shares of the market, the situation in New Orleans remained fragmented with no one group able to gain total control. During the Twenties New Orleans crime did not reflect the growing national trend away from the vicious circle of individual competition and toward consolidation brought about by Prohibition. A good indication of this can be seen in the fact that no all-powerful criminal
syndicate emerged in the city. While a Mafia, headed by Sam Carollo, existed within the Italian community, it was only one of a number of criminal groups competing for a portion of the market in liquor, gambling, and drugs. Unlike its effect in other cities, Prohibition did not mark the emergence of a potent American Mafia in New Orleans. It was only with the rise of Carlos Marcello in the 1950s that a powerful Italian syndicate began to absorb the other competing criminal factions.
CHAPTER I

THE CITY THAT CARE FORGOT

By 1920 New Orleans had emerged as the leading urban center in the South. Lying on the east bank of the Mississippi only about 110 miles from the Gulf of Mexico, New Orleans in 1920 included all of Orleans Parish, an area of 178 square miles. On the north the city was bounded by Lake Pontchartrain, one of the largest lakes in the United States; on the east by Lake Borgne and St. Bernard Parish; on the west by Jefferson Parish; and on the south by St. Bernard, Plaquemines, and Jefferson parishes.¹

In 1920 New Orleans had a population of 387,219, an increase of 14 per cent from the 1910 figure. Ranking seventeenth among American cities, it was by far the largest city in the South. Native-born whites made up a little over two-thirds of the population, with blacks accounting for roughly one quarter. Nearly seven per cent -- approximately 26,000 persons -- of the city's population were immigrants. By far the largest group of these, nearly 30 per cent of the total, were Italians, followed by Germans, French, and Irish.²

Canal Street, the city's major thoroughfare, divided the older


"downtown" Creole section of New Orleans from the newer "uptown" or American section. Below Canal Street along the Mississippi River lay the French Quarter, the Vieux Carré or "Old Square." This was the oldest section of New Orleans and reflected the city's French and Spanish heritage. Its flavor was distinctly European. In the Quarter, contrasts were everywhere apparent. Narrow streets received dank, foul-smelling alleys, which were often littered with garbage. Above the avenues were beautiful overhanging, wrought-iron balconies, reflecting the wealth and craftsmanship of a by-gone era. The dark, narrow passageways also revealed lush tropical courtyards. Moving "uptown," or west of Canal Street, one entered the Garden District, so-named for its graceful homes with their gardens blossoming with magnolias, azaleas, and gardenias. The District was a more recent residential area; it contained homes built by wealthy Americans who settled in New Orleans in the years after the Louisiana Purchase. The Garden District was bounded by Jackson and Louisiana Avenues, Magazine Street, and had St. Charles Avenue as its main artery. 3

For its municipal administration, New Orleans was divided into seven districts. The First District was bounded by the Mississippi, Felicity Street, Melpomene, Washington, South Carrollton, and City Park Avenues, the New Basin Canal, and Canal Street, and was the city's commercial center; it was the hub for most of the parish's manufacturing interests. To the east of Canal Street lay the Second District, bounded by the river, City Park Avenue, the New Basin Canal, Lake Pontchartrain,

Bayou St. John, and Esplanade Avenue. Included in the district was the French Quarter, the most heavily populated area of the city. The Second District also contained the largest portion of the city's foreign population. Basically a residential area, the Third District was bounded by Esplanade Avenue, Bayou St. John, Lake Pontchartrain, the lower limits of the city, and the river. Creoles and Germans made up the bulk of its population. To the west of the First District lay the Fourth District, bounded by the Mississippi, Toledano Street, Melpomene Avenue, and Felicity Street. Also primarily a residential quarter, it included the wealthy Garden District. Algiers, the only portion of the city of New Orleans on the west bank of the Mississippi, comprised the Fifth District. Bounded by the lower portion of Jefferson Parish and the upper portion of Plaquemines Parish, Algiers served as a center for railroad repair shops and dockyard facilities.

East of the river and continuing west one entered the Sixth District. Running from the river and bounded by Lowerline Street, Washington Avenue, and Toledano Street, this primarily residential area contained Audubon Park and Tulane University. Further west lay the Seventh District, known as Carrollton, whose boundaries extended from Lowerline Street to the upper limits of the city, the Jefferson Parish line. They also extended northward to Lake Pontchartrain and to the east along the New Basin Canal, South Carrollton Avenue and Washington Avenue. The Seventh District by 1920 was becoming increasingly populated and contained many dairies and small truck farms.

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Seven Municipal Districts of New Orleans, 1920
Although the fully drained and developed area of New Orleans consisted of forty square miles in 1920, 95 per cent of the city's population resided within only about a twenty-four square mile area. New Orleans' population was concentrated mainly in the old Creole part of the city between the Vieux Carré and Bayou St. John, and in the section just west of the central business district. Much larger areas of land on both sides of the Mississippi fell within the total city limits. Most of the outlying areas of New Orleans were still sparsely populated or unpopulated. Some outlying sections were still swamps or marshes. Lakeside New Orleans was largely uninhabited.

Improved drainage lay at the root of the growth and expansion of the city in the 1920s. Except for ridges of land along the river and Lake Pontchartrain, which were a few feet above sea level, the rest of New Orleans was at sea level or below. By 1920 the city's natural levees had been increased to a height of twenty-one feet to protect against flooding by the Mississippi. An extensive drainage system consisting of six electrically operated pumping stations could handle over 7,000,000,000 gallons of water daily to guard against the accumulation of excess water following a heavy rain. This improved drainage system helped open new areas of New Orleans for settlement. By 1920 expansion had been firmly established. New Orleans continued to develop northward toward Lake Pontchartrain, and the pace was accelerated by the general economic prosperity of the 1920s.

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Contributing to the growth of New Orleans' population was the improved health of its citizens. Prior to 1880 there had been few major improvements in the city's sanitation system. Since that year improved quarantine and disinfection measures led to the elimination of yellow fever, the cause of frequent epidemics during the nineteenth century. By the early twentieth century this disease ceased to be a threat to the city's population. In addition, during the years 1906-1910 the city modernized its water system, which led to safer health for its citizens. Also, following an outbreak of bubonic plague in 1914, a system of rat-proofing the city's homes and wharves eliminated that disease in New Orleans. These improved health measures led to a significant decrease in the death rate in New Orleans, from an average of 28.6 per 1,000 persons in the years 1880-1889 to an average of 17.75 per 1,000 by 1920. Average life expectancy also increased dramatically -- from 35 years in 1880-1889 to 56.3 years in 1920.7

In addition to enjoying a healthy population, New Orleans by the 1920s had developed a vigorous economy as well. In 1920 New Orleans was the nation's second largest port, with a total commerce, both exports and imports, of nearly $1,000,000,000 annually. It led its closest competitor for second place, Philadelphia, by over $250,000,000, and its nearest Southern rival, Galveston, by over $300,000,000. New Orleans was the leading cotton market in the world. Cotton made up about half the value of the city's total annual exports. Of total

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United States exports in 1920, New Orleans handled one-third of the barley, one-half of the rice, and one-quarter of the wheat. As for imports, it handled one-quarter of the coffee, one-half of the bananas, one-half of the sugar, and one-third of the mahogany. 8

New Orleans' success as a port was due to its location and harbor facilities. The city was at the head of a vast system of inland waterways linking it with all the major cities of the Mississippi Valley. Besides being the major port for trade with Mexico, Central America, South America, and the West Indies, the city's proximity to the Panama Canal also gave it access to the western ports of North and South America and the Far East. New Orleans' harbor facilities were remarkable. They included nearly four miles of steel and concrete docks, protected from the weather; huge warehouses and grain elevators with the most modern equipment; an inner harbor with a depth of thirty-two feet year-round; and a recently completed ship canal which extended from the Mississippi through the center of the city to Lake Pontchartrain and the Gulf. The port was served by twelve miles of railroad, nine of which were trunk lines, and the city's climate ensured constant use of facilities. 9

Business activities were on the upswing in New Orleans in the years following the end of World War I. In 1920 there were over forty banks in the city, with total assets of over $300,000,000. There were between 1,500 and 2,000 factories and industries in the

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9 Ibid., pp. 599, 614.
city, including the largest mahogany processing plant in the world. This increased business activity was reflected in the amount of private building construction in New Orleans during the immediate post-war period. These efforts included the rebuilding of the Cotton Exchange and the erection of the first high-rise office building in the city by the Hibernia Bank, both completed in 1921. The value of building permits granted in the first half of 1920 came to nearly $7,000,000, the largest total in the city's history.¹⁰

Keeping a watchful eye on the business activities of the city was the municipal government. In 1912 the state legislature devised a new charter for the city of New Orleans, introducing the commission form of government. This replaced the old seventeen-man aldermanic council, each of whose members was elected by vote of his own ward, the city's political subdivision. Reflecting the reform climate of the Progressive period, New Orleans' new city government consisted of the mayor and four commissioners elected at large for four-year terms. The city commissioners were the four leading vote getters in general elections. Along with the mayor they comprised the Commission Council, the governing body of the city. All legislative, executive, and judicial functions were carried out by the Council, unless otherwise specified by the city charter or state law. These powers were distributed among five separate departments—public affairs, public finances, public safety, public utilities, and public property. Except for public affairs, which was headed by the mayor, the four other

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 555-56, 634.
department heads were chosen from among the Commission Council by a
majority vote.\textsuperscript{11}

The mayor held the key position in New Orleans' city government.
Charged with general supervision of all departments, boards, and city
commissions, he presided at all meetings of the Commission Council.
He could thus exercise a great deal of control over what was discussed
at these meetings. In addition, the mayor also served as an ex-officio
member of each board, commission, and body created by the city. In
New Orleans' case the mayor was particularly important because he was
also the head of the local political machine. Through his control of
the local political caucus the mayor could determine the organization's
candidates for the Commission Council, and in this way exercise total
dominance over that body.\textsuperscript{12}

Dominating the city government for much of the Twenties was the
major force in New Orleans politics, the Regular Democratic Organiza-
tion, better known as the Old Regulars. Founded in 1897 as the Choctaw
Club of Louisiana, the Old Regular organization was an effective
political machine that consistently turned out the vote for its

\textsuperscript{11} Herrmann B. Deutsch, "New Orleans Politics--The Greatest Free
Kendall, History of New Orleans, II, pp. 548-49; L. Vaughn Howard
and Robert S. Friedman, Government in Metropolitan New Orleans,
Tulane Studies in Political Science, VI (New Orleans: Tulane University
in Louisiana" (unpublished M.A. thesis, Louisiana State University,
1940), pp. 50-51, 54.

\textsuperscript{12} Deutsch, "New Orleans Politics," p. 316; White, "Municipal
candidates on election day. It won control of the New Orleans city government in 1900 and dominated city elections for the next twenty years. The head of the organization was Martin Behrman, a master politician. Born in New York City, Behrman started out as a retail grocer, became a clerk in the city assessor's office, and in 1904 was elected to the post of state auditor. Shortly thereafter he was selected as the Old Regular candidate for mayor and won by a large margin.13

Martin Behrman dominated New Orleans politics during the first two decades of the twentieth century. After being elected mayor in 1904 he was reelected three more times before his defeat by Andrew J. McShane in 1920. But Behrman's political career was not over. In 1925 Behrman was elected mayor for a record fifth time. Within a year, however, his health, which had been poor, began to fail, and he died in office on January 12, 1926. The Old Regulars then chose City Treasurer Arthur J. O'Keefe as their candidate, and he was not opposed. Except for the years 1921 to 1925, when McShane was in power, the Old Regulars effectively controlled the city government of New Orleans for the first three decades of the twentieth century.14

Not as powerful a force as the Old Regulars but still a significant factor in influencing New Orleans public opinion were the city's


newspapers. The three major newspapers published in New Orleans during the 1920s were the *Times-Picayune*, the *Item*, and the *States*. Largest in circulation was the *Times-Picayune*, the result of a merger in 1914 between the *Times-Democrat* and the *Daily Picayune*. Headed by Leonard K. Nicholson, the *Times-Picayune* was the city's only morning newspaper during the first half of the Twenties. With its circulation already well established, the *Times-Picayune* could afford to be less sensational in its coverage than the *Item* or the *States*. In the words of one of the paper's city editors, who began his career as a reporter during the 1920s, the *Times-Picayune* was "less street sales-minded" than its competitors. Generally the most objective of the three in its coverage, the paper took a more moderate position on public issues.

The same could not be said for the coverage of the *Item* and the *States*. During the 1920s the *Item* was headed by James K. Thompson, a West Virginian who formed his own news service and purchased the paper in 1907. Thompson appointed Marshall Ballard as editor soon after he took over. Ballard, like his close friend H. L. Mencken, was extremely opinionated. He was not afraid to attack verbally anyone he thought needed criticizing. Ballard, with Thompson's approval,

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15 Thomas Ewing Dabney, *One Hundred Great Years: The Story of the Times-Picayune From Its Founding to 1940* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1944), pp. 377-78, 442. The three major New Orleans newspapers will hereafter be referred to as the *Times-Picayune*, *Item*, and *States*.

16 George W. Healy, Jr., Interview, New Orleans, August 10, 1978. Healy, city editor and later managing editor of the *Times-Picayune*, began his career as a reporter for the paper in 1926.
controlled what was printed in the Item during this period; he was extremely vocal whenever he became passionately involved with issues.17

The third major New Orleans newspaper, the States, was dominated by one man, its owner and publisher, Colonel Robert Ewing. Ewing, the son of a Scottish immigrant, worked his way up the ladder at the States, taking over the running of the paper in 1900.18 He has been described quite accurately as "an imperious, loud-mouthed boss who was known on occasion to summon the mayor to his office at the States when he wanted to throw his weight around."19 Ewing was a member of the Choctaw Club and a supporter of Martin Behrmann during his first four terms; in 1920, however, he broke with Behrmann, complaining of the latter's dominance over the city government. Similarly, he did not support Behrmann's reelection bid in 1925. Ewing used the States to further his political ambitions, always trying to dominate politics by promoting his own candidates in the city and state elections.20

Both the Item and the States were much more political and

17John Churchill Chase, Interview, New Orleans, July 18, 1978; Chase, who worked as an editorial cartoonist in New Orleans for nearly forty years, began his career with the New Orleans Morning-Tribune, a morning newspaper published by the Item, in 1925; John Wilds, Afternoon Story: A Century of the New Orleans States-Item (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1976), pp. 207-08, 211.


19Wilds, Afternoon Story, p. 192.

sensational than the Times-Picayune in their coverage of the news. The major reason was that both papers were competing for the same limited readership in the evening news field. They depended almost totally upon street sales for their success. This necessitated the use of sensational headlines to attract readers. Both papers placed heavy emphasis upon local news, much of it provided by police and city hall reporters. Neither paper placed a premium on quality journalism, and their content was similar.\textsuperscript{21} One authority noted: "In content and presentation it was the Item--tweedledum, and the States--tweedleddee."\textsuperscript{22} Regardless of their uniformity, the Item was the more successful. By 1920 it managed to widen its circulation lead over the States.\textsuperscript{23}

With the post-war economic boom in New Orleans came increased problems related to crime and law enforcement. Crime and what can be termed the crime issue played a significant role in the history of New Orleans during the 1920s. Traditionally known as "the city that care forgot," New Orleans throughout its history had maintained a liberal attitude towards the joys of the flesh.\textsuperscript{24} A city of fine food and excellent liquor, it was famous for its Oysters Rockefeller and its Sazerac cocktail. The enormous crowds who gathered during the Carnival Season of Mardi Gras testified to the city's gaiety and high spirits.

\textsuperscript{21}Wilds, Afternoon Story, pp. 191-92.

\textsuperscript{22}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{23}Ibid., p. 191.

\textsuperscript{24}New Orleans City Guide, p. xx.
New Orleans' tolerant moral attitude was reflected in its becoming a national center for prize-fighting during the 1880s and 1890s, a time when boxing was held in low repute throughout most of the United States. This culminated in the heavyweight title fight between the "Boston Strong Boy," John L. Sullivan and "Gentleman Jim" Corbett in 1892. New Orleans was truly a city where the sybaritic life could be enjoyed to the fullest.

The city's tolerant attitude toward the pleasures of life was reflected in the public's attitude toward certain types of crime usually associated with the rise of organized crime—Prohibition, gambling, prostitution, and drugs. Toward each of these areas except drugs, the people of New Orleans were more tolerant than were the citizens of many other parts of the country. Prohibition, the forbidding by law of the manufacture, transportation, sale, and possession of alcoholic beverages, went into effect nationally with the final implementation of the Eighteenth Amendment in January 1920. Liquor had always been easy to obtain in New Orleans. For example, in 1917 bartenders in New Orleans generally disregarded Sunday closing laws and operated around the clock. Business was so good on Sundays that extra bartenders had to be hired to meet the demand. Under the Old Regulars in the immediate post-war period there was a general understanding between the police and the saloonkeepers: liquor laws were not rigidly enforced provided the liquor interests contributed to the

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coffers of the organization. This arrangement certainly met with the tacit approval of the citizens of New Orleans, who continued to enjoy their Sunday drinks.26

Shortly after the Great War there was widespread violation of Congressional prohibition laws. When Congress on November 21, 1918, passed an act extending wartime prohibition and outlawing the sale of liquor, beer, wine, and other intoxicating drinks for beverage purposes after June 30, 1919, it was greeted with general indignation in the city. An indication of popular sentiment was voiced when, during one week in November 1919, a federal judge in New Orleans declared the war liquor law unconstitutional. The decision was quickly reversed, but it resulted in a tremendous outcry of public approval. Foreshadowing later events was the beginning of liquor smuggling. By January 1919, liquor was passing through New Orleans on its way to other areas of Louisiana and neighboring states.27 After January 1920, New Orleans became a center for the smuggling of liquor from ships in the Gulf and by automobile or trucks traveling along the highways of the surrounding parishes, particularly St. Bernard.

Gambling had a long tradition in New Orleans. Betting on the horses at the racetrack flourished during the ante-bellum period when


New Orleans had five of the finest tracks in the country. The old Metairie course, for example, was probably the most famous racetrack in the United States at that time. By 1920 the Fair Grounds racetrack, located near City Park, was the only course remaining in the city. It did a booming business and racing remained the number one sport in New Orleans. In the immediate post-war period gambling was legal at the track and illegal, but tolerated, elsewhere in the city. Martin Behrman and the Choctaw organization were not in favor of any extensive regulation of gambling. They opposed any attempts by the state legislature to pass anti-gambling legislation. The Old Regulars tolerated all types of gambling establishments within the city. Handbooks, small one or two-man bookmaking operations, conducted business out of saloons, poolrooms, groceries, and other places, taking bets on the races. Gambling devices could be found in the saloons, restaurants, and tobacco stores; poker and dice games attracted large amounts of money. Prior to 1920 gambling was allowed by the machine as long as the interests paid for police protection and contributed to the organization at election time. 28

Prostitution, too, had a long and colorful history in New Orleans. The first prostitutes arrived in the eighteenth century and during the nineteenth century several areas of the city emerged as red-light sections. One of the most famous was the "Swamp," an area of cheap dance halls, brothels, saloons, gambling places, and

cock-fighting pits. Eight hundred murders reportedly occurred within the section's six-block area from 1820 to 1850. Prostitution continued to grow during the rest of the nineteenth century. Finally, on January 29, 1897, the New Orleans City Council, trying to contain prostitution within acceptable limits, passed the ordinance creating "Storyville," the city's famous red-light district.29

Storyville, named after Alderman Sidney Story, a respected businessman who introduced the ordinance, remained in existence from January 1, 1898, to November 12, 1917, when it was closed by the Navy Department. It was unique in being the only legally established restricted district in the United States; prostitution was in effect legal within the district but not outside it. Prostitution was limited to a thirty-eight block area between North Robertson and North Basin Streets, and from Customhouse (later Iberville) Street to St. Louis Street. At its height two thousand prostitutes operated in the district, and as late as 1915 a social survey reported that nearly $2,500,000 a year found its way into the hands of the brothel keepers. Martin Behrman and the Old Regulars supported the restricted district through their control of the City Council. Behrman fought hard to preserve the district until the Navy Department ordered it closed.30

Storyville's closing only meant that prostitution spread to


other areas of the city, including the Garden District and Carrollton.

After 1917 the principal section of prostitution, however, still remained the area around Storyville. The most trafficked area was centered in the French Quarter and included Bienville, Conti, Dauphine, St. Louis, Burgundy, and Toulouse Streets. Prostitutes were also found along North Rampart Street, Julia Street, and Tulane Avenue. Political payoffs to the organization continued, and even when the police made arrests they were ineffective in controlling the situation.31

New Orleans' location also made it an attractive city for drug smuggling. By 1920 the principal drugs smuggled in were morphine, cocaine, and opium. Marijuana was in use during the period, but its use was not as widespread as that of morphine or cocaine. While drugs were a crime problem in New Orleans by 1920, overall they were less so than the difficulties associated with Prohibition, gambling, and prostitution. There is no evidence that the Choctaw organization had any ties to drug-smuggling interests, although there is evidence of payments by liquor, gambling, and prostitution interests to the city's political machine.

Certain sections of New Orleans were high crime areas. The area of the city along the riverfront, where foreign ships docked, was a center for the smuggling trade, both in liquor and in drugs. The "tenderloin" area, the name given to that section around Storyville and the French Quarter, was a major center for prostitution and hand­book gambling operations. One section of the city, however, was no longer as great a high crime area as it had once been. This was the

31 Rose, Storyville, p. 170.
"Irish Channel," the area named for the large numbers of Irish living there. The Channel, located between Constance Street and the river extending from St. Joseph Street to Louisiana Avenue, had once been the home of the notorious "Shot Tower Gang" and the "St. Mary's Market Gang," organizations of thugs which had dominated the area during the latter part of the nineteenth century. Although in 1920 the Channel was still a tough neighborhood, it was not the center of lawlessness that it had been earlier. The "Irish Channel" did, however, produce some tough criminals; Harold Normandale, unquestionably the most publicized criminal in New Orleans during the 1920s, came from the Channel.

In discussing high crime areas, the parishes immediately adjacent to New Orleans—Jefferson Parish on the west and St. Bernard Parish on the east—must be considered. Geographically, both parishes were several times larger than Orleans Parish; both were long and narrow with boundaries along the Gulf of Mexico. In 1920 both parishes were still predominantly rural. Jefferson Parish in 1920 had a population of 21,563, an average of approximately fifty persons per square mile; St. Bernard had a population of 4,968, an average of only about eight persons per square mile. Orleans Parish (New Orleans) had a population density of over 2,000 persons per square mile. While there are no data available on St. Bernard, in 1920 two-thirds of the people in Jefferson Parish were classified as living in rural areas. St. Bernard had no large towns in 1920; Jefferson Parish's largest town,

Gretna, had only a little over 7,000 persons.

Each of the parishes played a significant role in the history of New Orleans crime during the Twenties. Jefferson Parish was the site of a number of large gambling establishments frequented by many free-spending New Orleanians. These establishments were located just outside the city limits and operated on a much larger scale than did the smaller places found in New Orleans itself. Known as the "Free State of Jefferson," the parish and its governmental officials had always adopted a tolerant attitude toward gambling. The gambling establishments in the parish were periodically raided, but generally the local authorities looked the other way as business continued.

St. Bernard Parish was also the site of gambling, but by 1920 it had emerged as a center for bootlegging activities. With its border on the Gulf and its numerous bayous, swamps, and inlets, the parish furnished an ideal refuge for bootleggers and moonshiners. The parish was easily reached by large ships carrying spirits from Cuba, Central America, and the West Indies. Liquor was then brought in by smaller craft through the narrow waterways of the parish and transported by truck or automobile into New Orleans. St. Bernard authorities generally ignored the bootleggers, and residents viewed bootlegging as a reputable and lucrative profession.


gallons of liquor passed through St. Bernard Parish on their way to New Orleans.

Combatting these different areas of crime was the duty of the New Orleans police force. By 1920 New Orleans had made notable progress in many areas, but its expenditures for law enforcement still lagged behind the cities of the rest of the nation. Nationally, New Orleans ranked fifty-sixth out of sixty-nine cities with 100,000 or more population in police expenditures. Out of eleven Southern cities surveyed in 1918 the New Orleans police department ranked ninth in expenditures. The New Orleans police force also had not kept pace with the city's population. The total number of men on the force in 1904 was 347; in 1920 it was only 366. Furthermore, the patrolmen on the beat were poorly paid. In 1920 the average patrolman made from $75-$100 a month, and for this he worked a 12-hour shift, seven days a week, with few holidays. Given these conditions, it was not surprising that police corruption existed.

In 1920 the New Orleans police department was under the control of the police board, which consisted of the mayor, the commissioner of public safety, and three other members appointed by the mayor. The man in charge of the department was the Superintendent of Police, who was appointed by the mayor and the Commission Council. In 1888 a police civil service system had been created by act of the state

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legislature. Appointments were in the hands of the police commissioners, and had to be made from the civil service lists. However, after 1900, when the civil service was virtually destroyed, the police appointment power was controlled by the political machine through its domination of city hall.\textsuperscript{37} Under the Old Regulars, liquor, gambling, and prostitution interests received police protection in return for contributions to the organization. Of course, petty police graft existed in New Orleans in 1920, as it did in many large American cities.\textsuperscript{38}

Politicians, the press, and the police helped shape and were influenced by crime and the crime issue during the 1920s. Crime in New Orleans played a role in the political campaigns of the period. Politicians used it as a tactic to smear their opponents and the press used it as a means of shaping public opinion for or against a candidate. New Orleans' newspapers had definite viewpoints on the crime issue and they used their editorial columns to reflect and make these opinions known.

The police, charged with major responsibility for law enforcement, had to act responsibly in spite of a political machine with a tolerant attitude toward certain crime interests and laws that were less than effective in dealing with many of these problems. Law enforcement officials were also subject to the influence of the press, which kept


a close watch on their activities. In New Orleans all of these forces had an impact upon the history of crime during the Twenties.
CHAPTER II
NEW ORLEANS CRIME:
THE POLITICIANS, THE PRESS, AND THE POLICE

New Orleans crime played a role in both the state and city political campaigns of the 1920s. Certain types of crime, particularly prostitution and illegal gambling, were used by city and state politicians and the press to influence public opinion for or against a candidate. Crime issues were used to discredit the New Orleans machine and to damage the organization's candidates for public office. Long linked by the New Orleans press to certain crime interests, the local political organization was the subject of sensational exposés during the election campaigns. This was certainly true during the 1920 campaign for governor. The two leading contenders were John M. Parker of New Orleans and Colonel Frank Stubbs of Monroe. But the real contest centered on whether the Old Regulars, led by Martin Behrman, would retain their influence over the governorship.

Influence over the state's highest executive office was essential to the New Orleans machine's survival, because the city depended upon the governor for patronage. The state constitution of 1898 granted only limited powers of self-government to the parishes and municipal governments, leaving them subject to decisions made on the state level. Thus it was imperative that the New Orleans organization ensure the election of a state legislature favorable to the machine's interests, as well as election of a sympathetic governor. The machine strategy for years had been to arrange accommodations with the rural parishes.
In return for control of state patronage in the city, New Orleans politicians would agree to support a rural candidate for governor. Since New Orleans contained 20 per cent of the electorate, deals were usually reached. Such bargains had resulted in the election of a Ring-backed candidate for governor in every election since 1900 except in 1912, when Luther Hall was elected. However, when the machine itself became a campaign issue, as it did in 1912, its candidate lost and its influence diminished. With the nomination of John M. Parker in 1920 the specter of 1912 returned to haunt Martin Behrman and the Old Regulars.

After twenty years of success in New Orleans and state politics, the Choctaw organization had acquired a host of enemies. It was vulnerable to a reform candidate, and John M. Parker was such a man. Distinguished in appearance with his iron-gray hair and mustache, Parker looked every inch the Southern gentleman. A veteran reformer on the state level, Parker in 1912 had joined Theodore Roosevelt's Progressive Party and taken part in its national campaign. He was nominated to run as Roosevelt's Vice-Presidential candidate in 1916, but the party disbanded before the election. Returning to Louisiana, Parker ran unsuccessfully for governor in 1916 on the Progressive ticket. In 1919, determined to build an organization which would give him the New Orleans vote, Parker turned to the Orleans Democratic

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Association, headed by John P. Sullivan. Sullivan, an ex-ward boss under Behrman who broke with the Choctaw leader in 1913, modeled the Orleans Democratic Association after the Old Regulars. Despite Sullivan's professed devotion to reform, the Orleans Democratic Association was not a reform organization; rather, it was an opposition political machine. In 1920 it nominated Parker as its candidate for governor. The alliance between the two men—the veteran Progressive reformer Parker and the veteran ward heeler Sullivan—was a bizarre one, founded, as both men realized, upon convenience alone. Their overriding objective was to defeat the Ring-backed candidate. Pitted against them was the machine and its candidate, Colonel Frank Stubbz, a wealthy corporation lawyer who had commanded the First Louisiana Infantry Regiment in France during World War I.²

The New Orleans Ring became a major issue in the Parker-Stubbz campaign. None of the major New Orleans papers supported Stubbz. Two of them, the Times-Picayune and the Item, vigorously endorsed Parker, while Ewing's States, which was shortly to break with Behrman, was more restrained. Crime immediately became an issue as the Times-Picayune and the Item focused their attacks upon what they considered the vice associated with Ring rule. Vice became a term which included all the prostitution, illegal gambling, and corruption linked to the

political machine. The papers used the crime issue to their best advantage in sensational articles attacking what they perceived as an atmosphere of moral degradation prevailing under the Ring.

Most vigorous in its criticism was the Times-Picayune. It gave banner treatment to the speeches of Charles Rosen, a New Orleans attorney and leading spokesman for Parker. Rosen and other Parker supporters harped upon the prostitution issue, particularly Martin Behrman's association with Storyville. Behrman was accused of going to Washington to plead with the Secretary of the Navy not to close the district because it was a "time-honored institution." Rosen referred to Behrman as the "champion of the redlight district," who "constituted himself the champion of the politicians and the habitues of the tenderloin and in their behalf tried to have the district kept open." Behrman and the machine were even blamed for venereal disease; they were accused of allowing a situation where "prostitution might thrive and breed blindness and disease."3

A few days before the election on January 20, 1920, the Times-Picayune unveiled a new strategy. Beginning on January 11 it published a series of articles headlined "New Orleans Nights," with subtitles such as "The Truth Shall Set You Free" and "Little Adventures in Devilment." Focusing upon crime in the city, the articles denounced the Ring's tolerance of prostitution. Seeing itself as guardian of the city's morals and the purity of Southern womanhood,

the *Times-Picayune* chastised Behrmann and the machine for openly allowing prostitution in New Orleans. New Orleans police were accused of lax enforcement, particularly in the case of one Bienville Street madam whose activities had been known to the superintendent of police for more than a year. Only after the paper printed the story, the *Times-Picayune* commented, did the police finally take action.⁵

Gambling, both in New Orleans and outside the parish in Jefferson and St. Bernard, was also viewed as a legacy of the Ring. *Times-Picayune* reporters detailed instances of illegal gambling from Duffy's, a New Orleans gambling establishment where liquor was served over the counter and whose games were protected by the police, to Hyland's, Sheehan's, and Ballard's just across the parish line in Jefferson. A typical article described a visit to Hyland's. Inside a large room the reporter found patrons gathered around dice, roulette, and faro tables. Two hundred people were in the place at the time, and in one dice game $20,000 was on the table. Noting that Hyland's drew its clientele almost entirely from New Orleans, the paper blamed the Ring for such operations, stressing that it was responsible for allowing gambling to spread outside the city. Hyland's was viewed as a "by-product of twenty years of ring rule in New Orleans."⁶

As the election neared, the *Times-Picayune* noted how the machine ordered gambling establishments in the city closed temporarily to allow Choctaw supporters to turn out for a pre-election parade for Stubbs.


Once the parade was over, the gambling places reopened. But more than illegal gambling was linked by the Times-Picayune to the machine. All the nefarious activities associated with the New Orleans "underworld" was blamed on the Ring:

Under TWENTY YEARS OF RING RULE, this crawling, fetid, contaminating monster of the UNDERWORLD, has grown and grown, poisoning and corrupting all it touches. It has spread beyond the city. It has planted its cancerous colonies of lechery and vice across the city lines--reached out to spew its venom in the faces of Jefferson and St. Bernard! "The UNDERWORLD" of Orleans, Jefferson and St. Bernard IS ONE--just as the MACHINES of New Orleans, Jefferson and St. Bernard ARE ONE! And the "underworld" LIVES AND THRIVES under RING RULE.8

The Item, although less vehement than the Times-Picayune, also denounced Behrman and linked the machine to crime and vice. Comparing the machine to the corrupt carpetbaggers of Reconstruction, the Item felt the machine's tolerance was giving pimps, handbook operators, and other criminals a free reign. It pointed out that much of the machine's power came from control over the police, the courts, and the organization's power over the saloons and houses of prostitution. A campaign editorial reflected the Item's position when it accused the machine of protecting criminal interests: "This machine thus assembles, protects, and nourishes the crimes and vices of them all--but disregards the virtue of every one. A machine cannot thrive on incompetence, idleness, graft, vice, or crime, except by protecting them."9

7 Ibid., January 18, 1920, p. 12.
Mayor Behrman attempted to answer these charges. He denied that he deliberately tried to prevent the closing of the restricted district and emphasized that he had implemented the war-time closing order as soon as he had received it. Behrman noted that many of the gambling places named in "New Orleans Nights" were in Jefferson Parish, well outside his jurisdiction. He also emphasized that, if alcoholic beverages were found in some New Orleans establishments, they were the responsibility of federal, not local, officials. But Behrman could not stem the swelling tide of statewide discontent rising against the Ring and its candidate. In the final vote Parker inundated Stubbs in the Democratic gubernatorial primary by a total of 77,686 to 65,685.10

One biographer of Parker argues that a definite factor in the campaign was the metropolitan newspapers' portrayal of New Orleans as a "sin city" under the corrupt guidance of the Old Regulars. Rural areas of the state, reacting against the supposed evils associated with the Ring, threw their support to Parker.11 It should be noted that in none of the state and city political campaigns of the 1920s was crime the paramount issue. Crime was a factor, but never a decisive one, in these elections. The crime issue was used most effectively in illustrating the supposed corruption associated with Ring rule in New Orleans. Despite Parker's strong backing from the city's

10 Kemp, Martin Behrman, pp. 308-12; Reports of the Secretary of State to His Excellency, the Governor of Louisiana, January 1, 1920, cited in Kemp, Martin Behrman, p. 239; States, January 13, 1920, p. 1.

newspapers, the Ring organization efficiently turned out the vote for Stubbs. Parker failed to carry New Orleans, but he ran much more successfully than he had in 1916, losing the city by less than 5,000 votes.\(^{12}\)

With Parker's election the Ring lost its chance for a sympathetic hearing from the state governor. Parker soon moved to undermine the machine's influence in New Orleans. He withheld from the Choctaws all the state patronage given in the city and padded the Dock Board payroll with anti-Ring employees. Next, Parker backed Andrew J. McShane, the Orleans Democratic Association nominee, for mayor in 1920.\(^{13}\) McShane projected the image of the typical self-made man. Raised in an orphanage, he went to work at an early age and became a successful businessman. He made his money in the hide business, becoming a dealer and exporter of hides and their by-products. McShane also married into a socially prominent local family, a circumstance which did not hurt his political credentials. Although he had little governmental experience, he had served in the New Orleans city government as a member of the Board of Fire Commissioners and had been an unsuccessful anti-Ring candidate for city commissioner on the Good Government League platform in 1912. Furthermore, his image as a reformer appealed to members of

\(^{12}\) Reports of the Secretary of State, cited in Kemp, Martin Behrman, p. 289.

\(^{13}\) George M. Reynolds, Machine Politics in New Orleans, and Williams, Huey Long, cited in Kemp, Martin Behrman, p. 298; States, July 17, 1920, p. 2.

an electorate who had become increasingly disenchanted with Ring
rule and garnered him the support of the three major New Orleans
papers.

Focusing upon many of the issues which had highlighted the state
campaign, McShane profited from the crime issue as he attacked Behr-
man's role in Storyville and the prostitution question. Behrman
again was criticized for supporting the district: "The Republic
asked for public virtue, for the suppression of prostitution. Mr.
Behrman, with all the power of his office and all the resource of his
political affiliations, stood for public vice and the perpetuation of
vice. The mayor of New Orleans against the policy of the nation, es-
poused the cause of Tom Anderson [the political leader of the district]
and the keepers of the Red Light dives." In answering a speech by
Martin Behrman criticizing his public record, McShane replied that he
stood for "public decency, free politics and civil progress in New
Orleans." Behrman, he added, stood for "public vice, political boss-
dom and social and civil stagnation."

Other prominent speakers aided McShane's candidacy. Governor
Parker spoke on his behalf, charging the Ring with protecting illegal
gambling. McShane gained additional support from the Gordon sisters,
Jean and Kate, long-time spokeswomen for reform causes. Jean Gordon,
sometimes referred to as the Joan of Arc of New Orleans, had been a
principal force behind the movement to abolish Storyville and a

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15 Times-Picayune, August 8, 1920, p. 12.

16 States, August 7, 1920, p. 1.
nationally recognized champion of child labor laws and women's suffrage. Speaking at a meeting of the Women's Campaign Committee of the Orleans Democratic Association, she suggested that in the campaign the issue was one of "Decency versus Vice." The Gordon sisters blamed Behrman for failing to put an end to vice in New Orleans. For example, Jean stated that a number of black women had told her that prominent city officials operated illegal lottery shops. She noted an instance where she personally had pressed charges against a local lottery vender. Although the man was arrested and fined at 10:30 one morning, she bought another ticket from the same shop later that afternoon. 17

New Orleans' newspapers led the way in supporting McShane and lambasting Behrman and the Ring. Heading the offensive was the Times-Picayune, which in late August and early September published a series of articles titled "Under the Shadow of the Vultures' Wings," emphasizing the Ring's involvement in gambling and prostitution. These articles concentrated upon gambling establishments, which they claimed were doing a brisk business thanks to police protection furnished by the machine. In one of the articles the reporter talked to a lookout at the Crescent Billiard Hall on Canal and St. Charles who scoffed at the idea of a police raid. "It's a joke," the lookout said. "Raids come only before elections, and even then we are always tipped off

17 Kemp, Martin Behrman, p. 304; States, September 8, 1920, p. 3; Times-Picayune, September 1, 1920, p. 1, September 3, 1920, p. 15.
from headquarters. You're safe enough here, kid, kick in!"\textsuperscript{18} The paper noted that for at least two months the Crescent had a city policeman assigned to it for protection. Another place, the Bee Club on Royal Street, freely served liquor to its customers in its gambling room.\textsuperscript{19} Times-Picayune reporters also visited a number of houses of prostitution. On one such visit to a house just off Conti Street the reporter described one of the girls: "There could be no doubt about Ruth. She was an auburn-haired, full-blooded type, typically a prostitute, brazen, impudent." The madam of this particular house was not worried about the police, saying she received police protection. Beer and whiskey were available to her customers, and the description of her house spoke for her obvious prosperity: "Handsome mahogany furniture in every room, carpets of velvet, with a high pile. Mirrors which must have cost small fortunes. Room after room was opened for us. A red room with red hangings and carpet, a blue room and a pink room—all equally gorgeous."\textsuperscript{20} The Times-
Picayune concluded its series by printing some sobering statistics. According to United States Public Health Service experts prostitution was responsible, both directly and indirectly, for over 800 deaths in New Orleans each year.\textsuperscript{21} If the figure was an exaggeration, the paper, nevertheless, achieved its purpose by linking the Ring and

\textsuperscript{18}\textit{Times-Picayune}, August 26, 1920, p. 1.

\textsuperscript{19}\textit{Ibid.}, August 26, 1920, p. 1, September 1, 1920, p. 1.

\textsuperscript{20}\textit{Ibid.}, August 30, 1920, p. 1.

\textsuperscript{21}\textit{Ibid.}, September 7, 1920, p. 1.
these deaths in the public mind.

The withdrawal of patronage by Governor Parker, the efforts of the Orleans Democratic Association, and the heavy criticism of the city's newspapers were too much for even Martin Behrman to overcome. McShane was successful in the September election, although Behrman, despite having the charges and politicians against him, lost by only 1,450 votes (22,986 to 21,536). In addition, the Orleans Democratic Association captured four out of the five seats on the Commission Council. But, as one authority has noted, the apparent reform success in 1920 proved to be a "Pyrrhic victory." McShane exhibited a weakness common to many reformers. Despite the fine rhetoric of his campaign, he was out of his element when it came to running the city government. He had problems with municipal financing, even attempting to operate the city on a "cash and carry" basis, as he had operated his business. Worst of all, McShane's ineffectiveness alienated his reform followers. By the time of the next mayoralty campaign McShane's administration was in deep trouble; he had little chance of being renominated in 1925.22

The defeat in the 1920 election would have finished most politicians, but not Martin Behrman. After the election he temporarily retired from his position of leadership in the Choctaw organization, but slowly worked his way back into power. By the time of the 1924-1925 New Orleans mayoral election Behrman was ready to make his move. However, as the Old Regulars met in caucus to decide their nominee

for mayor, Behrman for the first time was challenged by a fellow member of the organization. Paul Maloney, the Ring's only successful candidate for the Commission Council in the 1920 McShane sweep, also sought the nomination. Maloney, whose life (like McShane's) could have served as a model for the Horatio Alger success story, started out as a fifteen-dollar-a-month office boy for a shipping company; twenty-five years later he owned the business. He had served in the state legislature and as a member of the Orleans Levee Board before running for the city commission in 1920. Maloney became the head of the Choctaw organization when Behrman temporarily resigned, and he felt that as the organization's only representative in the city government for the past four years he had earned the right to be its candidate for mayor. The caucus thought otherwise. It endorsed Behrman as its candidate, and Maloney angrily walked out, taking with him the representatives of four other wards. This dissident group nominated Maloney as its standard bearer. For the first time in its history the Old Regulars had split into two factions.23

The 1924-1925 campaign marked the beginning of Huey Long's impact upon New Orleans politics. Huey Long was undoubtedly the major political figure in early twentieth century Louisiana politics. Later elected governor and then United States Senator from Louisiana, the "Kingfish" from Winn Parish was currently serving as State Public Service Commissioner. He was in the process of building a strong political following, particularly in the rural areas, and had already

run a surprisingly strong race for governor in 1924. But he realized that if he were to be successful in state politics he would need a stronger political base in New Orleans. Shortly after his defeat for governor Long decided to back Maloney, hoping to ensure his future support in New Orleans in 1928. Long also visited New Orleans, meeting with John Sullivan, head of the recently-formed New Regulars, an opposition group created following the breakup of the Orleans Democratic Association, and Colonel Robert Ewing, the publisher of the States. Immediately thereafter each of them announced his support for Maloney. Both Sullivan and Ewing were extremely ambitious; both desired to exert influence over city and state government. The implication in these meetings was that both men decided to support Maloney in the mayor's race and Long in another race for governor in 1928 in return for greater influence in city and state affairs.

While the New Orleans newspapers had been solidly united against Behrman and "Boss Rule" in 1920, in 1925 differences emerged. The Item, doing a complete about-face, broke with the Times-Picayune and the States and supported Martin Behrman's election. Publisher Jim Thompson, repudiating his vigorous attacks upon Behrman in 1920, gave Marshall Ballard a free hand to engineer the Old Regular leader's comeback attempt. Thompson, apparently disgusted with McShane's performance, felt that it was time for a change. But his obvious use of the Item for political interests did little to enhance the paper's record for impartiality. A January 1925 editorial endorsed Behrman's election, stating that it was time to break the grip of the Ewing-

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Sullivan machine upon New Orleans city government. Keeping the crime issue on the front page, the Item attacked the city administration and the police department which it had previously supported. Crime in general, which had not received widespread coverage prior to the election, received front-page treatment:

But When . . . has New Orleans suffered from any semblance of the fearful welter of thuggery, robbery, and murder which has plagued its people during the past twelve months--after some years of the influence of the New Regular Machine. . . . When have unknown miscreants with such impunity ranged unpoliced residence districts and multiplied their brutal attacks upon women? . . . When has so much plain banditry thrived in open daylight in the busiest localities?26

As the campaign progressed, in the opinion of the Item, the city was experiencing a "crime wave" of major proportions. The paper began a day-by-day listing of all the crimes committed, no matter how minor, in New Orleans since mid-January. These included mainly robberies and burglaries, which were given major editorial coverage.27 The Item found the city full of handbooks and lottery shops; gambling and bootlegging were widespread: "We find this saturnalia of lawless gambling, with all its aggressions on the poor, this carnival of bootlegging, with all its attendant evils; equally in scope the alarming, unchecked epidemic of robbery, banditry, and murder."28 If

25 Editorial, Item, January 5, 1925, p. 12; John Wilds, Afternoon Story, p. 211.


28 Ibid., January 10, 1925, p. 1.
the Item was to be believed, New Orleans was a city where crime ran rampant and where the police were powerless.

The Item placed the blame for the current situation upon the police department, its Superintendent, Guy Kolony, John Sullivan, Robert Ewing, and Paul Maloney. Feeling that the police were unable to cope with the crisis, the paper accused the department of being lax in prosecuting corruption within its own ranks. New Orleanians, it claimed, were paying too much for a police force that was unable to deal with crime. Quoting from a published interview given by O. D. Jackson, the head of Prohibition enforcement in the city, the Item charged the police with protecting speakeasies in New Orleans. Jackson remarked on the lack of cooperation he had received from the police and how police were assigned to protect certain night clubs from federal raids. Summing up the situation Jackson stated: "Crime and vice are rampant in New Orleans and the police are doing little to better the condition."²⁹

Using the Item as a forum, Behrman spokesmen attacked the record of Superintendent Guy Kolony. They felt that he did not deserve the credit he had received for breaking up the operations of the Terminal Gang, a group of young thugs who had gained a good deal of notoriety by operating near the Terminal Station on Basin and Canal during the early Twenties. The gang preyed upon unsuspecting persons who sought a taxi near the station: a gang member posing as a cab driver would drive up and the customer would then be driven to an isolated area

outside the city, attacked, and robbed. Several members of the Terminal Gang were suspected of a brutal murder in 1920 but were never convicted. Molony had been successful in sharply curtailing the gang's activities, but this did not impress the *Item*, which never let objectivity interfere with partisan politics. Ballard sarcastically remarked that if Molony was credited with this, "why not credit him with the elimination of the James boys, the Dalton boys, and the building of the great wall of China?"30

Ballard also linked Paul Maloney and John Sullivan to the crime issue. His paper chastised Maloney for voting to protect "Social Vice," its euphemism for prostitution, feeling that he had earlier favored a redlight district but was now changing his position. Crime was blamed on an administration controlled by the Council votes of Maloney and others, influenced by Sullivan and his New Regulars. Sullivan was criticized by the *Item* for his role as a paid political advisor and legislative lobbyist for the bonded breweries in New Orleans. It charged that Sullivan derived a large portion of his annual income from these interests. Sullivan also came under fire for defending certain brewery interests, even after the passage of the Volstead Act and the Hood Act, the state prohibition law.31 Lastly, the *Item* attacked its competitors for supporting Behrman's opponent. The *States* in particular was lambasted: "How then can the *Daily States,*


in its campaign against what it is now pleased to style 'Behrmanism,' a creation of its own, so lack the intelligence as to raise the grinning figure of Thuggery to support the Machine [Maloney and Sullivan]. . ."32

Supporting Maloney, the Times-Picayune answered the Item's charges. Commissioner of Public Safety Stanley Ray viewed the charges of a "crime wave" as a political move designed to smear the record of the police department. He doubted whether the situation was so critical. Behrman was blamed for leaving the police corrupt and demoralized, as well as preventing them from enforcing laws against the city's cabarets, saloons, and gambling establishments.33 Countering the Item's charges, Ray defended the record of the current administration, emphasizing that the city had managed to stop every criminal attempt to corrupt the police department "in spite of the legions of vice and corruption that stand behind Mr. Behrman's candidacy today in one solid phalanx." Praising the administration's record, Ray argued that it had consistently moved against vice, making more arrests in this area in the past four years than in the entire period Behrman was in power.34

The Times-Picayune, in a front-page editorial titled "Thuggery—Falsity!," defended Superintendent Molony's record against what it


34Ibid., January 12, 1925, p. 1.
considered preposterous statements by the *Item*. Giving Molony high marks for courage and character, the paper compared his criminal arrest record with that for the last year of Behrman's administration. In key areas of crime—handbooks, lottery shops, prostitution, and violations of the Prohibition Act—there were far more arrests under Molony than under Thomas Mooney, Behrman's superintendent. Feeling that there was definitely less vice in New Orleans than a few years earlier, the *Times-Picayune* asked the electorate whether the situation should continue: "How about it, you decent people of New Orleans?"\(^{35}\) Furthermore, the paper disagreed with the *Item* on the Terminal Gang question. Stanley Ray pointed out that when Behrman's term ended, on December 6, 1920, not a single member of the Terminal Gang had been convicted of a major crime or even served a day in jail. Observing that the neighborhood around the Terminal Station was now a business center, Ray added that since Molony took over, fourteen of the eighteen men listed as members of the gang either had been killed, sent to jail, or left the city. He argued that within several months after Molony began his term the Terminal Gang's power was broken.\(^ {36}\)

Colonel Robert Ewing and the *States* consistently supported Paul Maloney in campaign editorials. The *States* particularly focused its coverage on what it viewed as the *Item*'s contradictory stance regarding Martin Behrman. Ewing noted how the *Item* in the 1920 campaign associated Behrman with "Thuggery," "Lawless Booze," and "Handbooks


and Lotteries." Reacting in mock horror the States was amazed at how "saintly" Behrman had now become in Ballard's coverage. An editorial accused the Item of conveniently discovering a "crime wave" in New Orleans just on the eve of the election. Ewing even questioned whether the Item was bringing in imaginary criminals to bolster its argument; he asked whether "The Item [had] again resorted to the trick of bringing dips and burglars here to discredit Mr. Maloney and help elect Mr. Behrman?" 38

Illegal liquor became an issue in the campaign as both the Item and the States sought to connect their opponents with a stand in favor of "lawless booze." The Item, reacting against the States' attempts to link Behrman with the rise of bootlegging and hijacking in New Orleans, printed excerpts from a States' editorial published in February 1917, in which the paper stated that the "lawlessness of Booze," which eventually led to Prohibition, was firmly established in New Orleans for at least three administrations before Behrman took office. 39 Ewing, in turn, noted how the Item was printing that liquor was cheaper now than under Behrman, undoubtedly due to the greater supply available. In its sarcastic reply the States wondered if this was a "bid for the bootlegger's vote." Questioning the Item's logic, it wondered: should the bootleggers support Behrman, would the price of

37 States, February 2, 1925, p. 4.


their product increase? Maloney might have been successful in defeating Behrman in the February 1925 election except for one late development—the surprise entry of Mayor McShane into the race. A promoter of electric light companies, who had been refused a city franchise by Maloney, backed McShane's campaign. His strategy was to split off a portion of the Maloney vote, and hopefully force a run-off. The strategy was successful; final figures gave Behrman 35,813 votes to Maloney's 33,406, with McShane receiving 4,484. Neither Behrman nor Maloney had a majority, so a second primary seemed likely. Disappointed at the outcome, the Times-Picayune attempted to do everything it could to discredit Behrman by again linking him with lawlessness and commercialized vice. Behrman's forces were charged with "thuggery," "strong-arm work" at the polls, and even with purchasing votes. Charges of vote buying were rampant regarding the "tenderloin," the old red-light district, where figures showed 142 votes for Behrman to only nine votes for Maloney. Reaffirming its high moral tone, the Times-Picayune asked the "good people" of New Orleans to oust Behrman in the second primary, thereby intimating that all the "bad" people were for his election. The Item defended Behrman from these assaults, finding it hard to believe that any newspaper could be so vicious in

40 Editorial, States, January 12, 1925, p. 4.


its criticism. Ballard excoriated his counterpart for associating Behrman's followers with the "underworld."\textsuperscript{43} But a second primary turned out to be unnecessary. Political defections from Maloney began immediately after the election as the leaders of the city's Fifth and Sixth Wards threw their support to Behrman. On February 8 Maloney, seeing his support dwindle to the point where he had no chance in a second primary, withdrew from the race.\textsuperscript{44} One of Behrman's slogans during the campaign was "Papa's Coming Back." "Papa" was indeed back as mayor for a fifth time.

Behrman, however, failed to serve out his term. In failing health for some months, he died on January 12, 1926, of chronic myocarditis, a degeneration of the heart muscles. Succeeding Behrman as mayor was Arthur J. O'Keefe, who had been commissioner of finance in the Choctaw leader's administration. O'Keefe, a big, burly Irishman, was a businessman who had worked his way up in the Choctaw organization. A veteran ward politician, he lacked the leadership skills of Martin Behrman, and, as a result, the organization suffered. The Old Regular machine was not as successful under O'Keefe's leadership. Elected without opposition in 1926 to fill out the rest of Behrman's unexpired term, O'Keefe served as mayor until he resigned on February 4, 1930. His term, marked by frequent bouts of illness, in effect ended some months earlier in July 1929, when he received an

\textsuperscript{43} Editorial, Item, February 5, 1925, p. 1, February 7, 1925, p. 4.

indefinite leave of absence. The final months of his term were filled by Acting Mayor T. Semmes Walmsley, who succeeded O'Keefe as mayor in 1930.45

O'Keefe led the Old Regular opposition to Huey Long in the "Kingfish"'s second campaign for governor in 1928. Finding Long far too radical and knowing that he would never subordinate himself to their interests, the Old Regulars supported Riley J. Wilson, the Congressman from the northeastern district of Louisiana. The other announced candidate, the current governor Oramel H. Simpson, had taken office following the untimely death of Governor Henry Fuqua in 1926. New Orleans' newspapers supported different candidates in the election; the Item supported Wilson, the Times-Picayune favored Simpson, and the States continued its tenuous alliance with Long.46

Crime as an issue emerged during the 1928 campaign mainly in the editorial columns of the Item, which attacked Long as the tool of organized gambling. In addition to focusing upon Long's alliance with John Sullivan, who had ties with the racetrack interests in New Orleans, the Item also derided what it viewed as Long's association with gambling interests in both Jefferson and St. Bernard, areas where he had strong political support. Ballard referred to Long's association with the "great and growing Gambling Industry of New Orleans, St. Bernard, and Jefferson." This implied a link between


gambling operations in each of these areas, although he advanced no evidence to support such a charge. As the campaign neared an end the Item in its editorials continued to refer to Long as the "Gambler's Candidate." When the first returns showed Long trailing, Marshall Ballard could not contain his exuberance. In a front-page editorial Ballard wrote that Long's defeat was inevitable, and he advised Long to withdraw as a candidate, admit Wilson's victory, and avoid a bruising second primary. Ballard commented that "Neither New Orleans, nor the state of Louisiana, will ever consent to be governed by an oligarchy that reeks with the odor of the race track, the faro bank, and the roulette wheel." Ballard's prediction proved to be premature, however, and he lived to suffer embarrassment over his hasty decision. As the returns from the country parishes poured in, Long's lead mounted to 40,000 votes over Wilson, with Simpson close behind. With Long holding such a huge lead, it was the Old Regulars who gave in first: they decided against backing Wilson in a second primary, forcing him to withdraw from the race. Long's victory was achieved with little help from his New Orleans allies. Despite the strong support of Ewing and Sullivan, he received only about 5,000 more votes in New Orleans than he had in 1924. Disappointed over his city showing, Long's relations with his New Orleans organization deteriorated rapidly; before only a few months had passed he openly broke with


48 Editorial, Item, January 18, 1928, quoted in Wilds, Afternoon Story, p. 231.
Sullivan and Ewing. 49

While the crime issue played a part in both city and state election campaigns during the 1920s, New Orleans' success in combatting crime depended upon the diligence of its law enforcement arm, the New Orleans Police Department. In 1920 police headquarters were located at Tulane Avenue and Saratoga Street, near where the New Orleans Public Library is located today. Built in the early 1890s, the building presented a bizarre appearance to the casual observer. Described as "a building of red brick and redder stone, with towers and gothic turrets, and heavy Romanesque archways, and pointed dormers and other embellishments," it looked more like a grotesque castle than a police headquarters. 50 This bizarre structure also housed the criminal courts and the recorders, or local police, courts, which handled misdemeanor criminal cases. Directly behind police headquarters was the parish prison. 51

In 1920 politics played a more pervasive role in the makeup of the police department than it does today. Local ward leaders had a great deal to say about whether a member of the force was promoted, and their opinion carried considerable weight with the mayor and the Commission Council. Ward politicians could also recommend a man for a position on the force. Besides the problem of political favoritism,


the New Orleans police force in 1920 also coped with a shortage of personnel. It had only 189 beat patrolmen, or approximately one for each 5,000 residents. Poorly paid, making about $100 a month, they had to spend a portion of their salary for a summer and a winter uniform as well as contribute to annual police benefit funds. Though police pay and working hours improved during the decade, the ordinary patrolman still had to struggle to make ends meet. Largely uneducated, the man on the beat normally had no more than eight years' schooling, and had only to pass a physical examination to become a member of the force. 52

City detectives during this period generally came from the same social background as many of the criminals they often arrested. Men such as John Grosch and George Reyer, who would later serve as superintendent of police, but who were detectives during the Twenties, came from the poorer areas of the city. Receiving little formal education, they were a tough breed of men who relied on common sense to do their job. Having grown up with many members of the Terminal Gang, city detectives used this understanding of the gang's motives to undermine its effectiveness. Grosch and Reyer were also colorful characters. Grosch, for example, fancied himself a sharp dresser, and was given to wearing white linen suits with a rose in his lapel. 53

These men were as colorful as the criminals they arrested.


Like the city detectives, several of the men who served as superintendent during the 1920s lacked a high school education but still rose through the ranks to head the department. Tough-minded individuals, they brooked no nonsense in dealing with criminals. The first superintendent, however, did not fit this pattern. Thomas J. Mooney, appointed by Martin Behrman in September 1917, served until December 1920 when Behrman left office. Mooney, a former superintendent of the Illinois Central Railroad, was the least qualified of the four men who served during the Twenties. Virtually inexperienced in police work, Mooney's appointment was the most overtly political. This showed in his inability to curb the activities of the Terminal Gang, who generally operated with impunity during his administration.

Mooney was succeeded by two men whose terms covered most of the decade, Guy Molony and Thomas Healy. When Andrew McShane became mayor in December, 1920, he and the Council appointed Molony as superintendent. Molony, a native of New Orleans, was only thirty-eight years old when he took over. He was a veteran of two wars, the Spanish-American War and World War I: in the latter, he had attained the rank of colonel. A soldier of fortune, Molony also took part in actions in Nicaragua, Honduras, and South Africa. After the Great War Molony returned to New Orleans where he went into private business until he was appointed superintendent, a position he held until May

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Molony was a firm, no-nonsense leader who brought a military discipline to the department. Thomas Healy, his successor, was the same type of individual. Healy, a "big, ruddy Irishman with a big pot belly," rose through the ranks to become superintendent. Starting out on the force at twenty-five as a patrolman in 1908, he rose to the rank of captain in 1919, and two years later became chief of detectives. When the Old Regulars returned to power in 1925 the Council unanimously approved Healy's nomination to superintendent, a post he held until September 1928. Under Healy the police force was a very tightly run organization, and his contacts with his men were much more frequent than is true today. Very jovial, Healy was described as having "a helluva sense of humor." He was accessible to the police reporters who covered the department's day-to-day operations. Often a reporter seeking information could walk right in and talk to Healy about a particular matter.

Healy's successor, Theodore Ray, lacked his predecessor's easy-going nature. Ray was more dignified, even stodgy, in his personal relationships. Like Molony, Ray too served in the Spanish-American War, returning home to hold jobs as a streetcar conductor, fireman, and assistant fire chief. In 1905 he became a member of the New Orleans police force, rose through the ranks to become a captain, and

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then special officer to both Mooney and Molony. An honest, capable man, Ray, like Molony and Healy, was a strict disciplinarian who demanded a high standard of performance from his men.57

The two superintendents who had the most impact upon New Orleans crime during the 1920s were Guy Molony and Thomas Healy. The same pattern appeared in both of their administrations. Both Molony and Healy conducted periodic raids against vice—handbooks, lottery operations, and violations of the moral code (prostitution)—as well as less frequent raids on "soft drink" stands for violations of the state liquor law. There were also periodic raids against persons police considered "undesirables"—small-time crooks who were frequently arrested for things like loitering or for being "dangerous and suspicious" characters. These "clean-up" raids involved a considerable number of patrolmen and resulted in hundreds of arrests annually but proved only a temporary solution to the city's crime problem. Generally they were conducted in response to a public outcry, which had been aggravated by a press that frequently used crime as an issue against an administration it opposed. After the police raids were over, the situation would improve temporarily, but soon illegal activities would be operating the same as before, resulting in additional raids, continuing the cycle. While moving to reduce crime in New Orleans, both Molony and Healy dealt vigorously with corruption on the police force, since most of the corrupt activities involved patrolmen taking bribes to protect liquor or gambling operations. Both superintendents were

57Healy Interview, August 10, 1978; States, October 12, 1928, p. 13; Times-Picayune, September 12, 1928, p. 1.
personally incorruptible and, because of their awareness of the temptations facing the average patrolman, they moved quickly to deal with any evidence of graft.58

Superintendent Guy Molony brought to New Orleans law enforcement a renewed vigor that had been lacking in the administration of his predecessor, Thomas Mooney. This can be seen in the police arrest figures for Molony's term in office. If reduction in crime can be measured by arrest figures alone, Molony was quite successful. For example, the total number of arrests by the police in 1924, the last full year of Molony's tenure, equalled the total number of arrests during the three years of Mooney's administration. In every category of crime, particularly vice-related crimes, there was a yearly increase in arrests during Molony's term. Handbook arrests increased from 121 in 1921 to 389 in 1924; arrests for running an immoral house increased from 50 in 1921 to 159 in 1924.59 One cannot fault Molony for the vigor of his effort. He frequently made personal investigations of conditions in key vice areas of the city. After one such inspection during which he found women openly soliciting men on Canal Street as patrolmen looked on, and discovered other places in the so-called "tango belt"--Storyville and the surrounding area--doing "good business," he issued a terse order: "Close those resorts, arrest the women, clean up the districts." This was immediately followed by a further housecleaning within the department; two patrolmen were

58 General observations based upon coverage by New Orleans' three major newspapers for the years 1921-1928.

59 Times-Picayune, May 1, 1925, p. 1.
suspended and a number of higher officials were criticized for "laxity." But despite Molony's best efforts, crime persisted. The fault lay in other areas, not in the vigor of his efforts.

The problems involved in reducing crime were explained very well by Superintendent Molony himself when he addressed various civic and church groups in New Orleans. A major problem, he stated, involved the current laws governing gambling and prostitution. Local laws placed formidable obstacles in the way of police attempting to obtain sufficient evidence for a conviction. They required the police to catch a guilty person in the act of committing an offense, which was not easy to do. Molony noted that it was easy for police to arrest handbook operators, but very hard to catch them in the act of taking bets on the races. As a result there were only a handful of convictions for handbook violations out of the hundreds of arrests made over several years. For example, of 245 handbook cases in criminal court in 1922, only three resulted in convictions. John Schneider, referred to by the police as a "notorious handbooke," had been charged with running a handbook or a lottery a total of sixteen times from October 1921, to May 1924. Of these sixteen charges, eleven were dismissed, three resulted in acquittals, one case was still pending in 1924, and one ended in a fine of $10. These examples show that if a handbook operator were arrested, chances were good that he would be free and back in business before post time. Molony pointed to additional problems involved in making arrests for violations of the moral code. The records of twelve prostitutes chosen at random illustrate

Molony's problem. Included in these records were the cases of Margaret Hudson, a black, who had been arrested for prostitution 105 times during a three-year period, and Louise Smith, a white, who was arrested seventy-one times during the same period. Prostitutes were being arrested, but usually they were back on the street in time to greet their nightly customers. 61

Superintendent Molony similarly saw a link between what he considered the indiscriminate sale of guns and the suppression of vice. Like many policemen today, Molony believed that as long as guns were being sold to "irresponsible" persons problems would continue. For this reason he favored a measure then before the United States Congress calling for restricting the manufacture and sale of firearms, an early unsuccessful federal effort at gun control legislation. Molony felt gun control would cut down on the number of murders and shootings in the city. The handling of Prohibition cases likewise came in for Molony's criticism; he argued that vice could not be curtailed in New Orleans as long as bootleggers continued to receive light penalties. In addition, Molony criticized the city for being "most niggardly in providing for police protection." By 1923 the force had increased in size, but there were still fewer than 300 patrolmen to cover the city. In Molony's view, this was not nearly enough. Until the city provided the funds to hire more men, about the best that New Orleanians could hope was for the police to arrest the criminals quickly after a crime

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was committed. There could be little hope of the police actually preventing a crime before it occurred.

Another law enforcement problem, in Molony's view, was the abuse of the parole system by some of the city recorders. Recorders were the judges in the local police courts; they were political appointees and less skilled in administering the law than were criminal court judges. The city's recorders courts served, in the words of one reporter, as a "clearinghouse for human tragedy." Their "sleazy" atmosphere was best captured in a description of a typical police night court session in 1915, a description which still applied during the Twenties: "Large numbers of people wandered around or sprawled on the benches. One group was composed of women in evening dresses, their faces startlingly red in spots. Several old and battered women sat patiently, waiting for their husbands to be brought out for the pleas of guilty to charges of drunk and disorderly. Grubby lawyers were buzzing about like flies." 64

Molony's main complaint, which was echoed by his superior, Commissioner of Public Safety Stanley Ray, was that city laws were unfairly interpreted by certain recorders, who were not discriminating

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62 Item, Magazine sec., October 30, 1921, p. 3; States, June 4, 1922, pp. 1, 2; Times-Picayune, May 25, 1923, p. 3; June 6, 1923, p. 2.

63 Warren Ogden, Interview, New Orleans, July 18, 1978. Ogden, who began his career with the Times-Picayune in January 1931, worked for that paper for thirty-five years. Among the areas he covered were the police beat, city hall, and federal and civil court.

in their use of the parole power. This abuse was documented in a special report prepared by Commissioner Ray and presented to the Commission Council in March 1922. Listing parole figures for the period from January 1, 1921, to March 1, 1922, Ray showed that of the nearly 11,000 paroles issued by the recorders, almost 5,000 were issued by the First City Recorder, Judge Leininger, whose district included the area above Canal Street and also Algiers. Leininger, whose cases included every type of crime, was clearly issuing paroles outside his territorial jurisdiction. The report was also critical of the manner in which Leininger issued paroles. Prisoners were often paroled within five minutes after their arrival at the precinct station and, in some cases, the order for a parole reached the station ahead of the patrolwagon bringing the prisoner. Ray emphasized that this indiscriminate paroling sometimes led to the release of dangerous criminals, including one man who was later charged with assault and battery on a policeman.65

Without question the greatest beneficiary of the largesse of the city's parole system was Harold Normandale, who became known as the "Prince of Paroles" for his charmed ability to avoid going to jail. Normandale, a small-time criminal, was arrested a total of thirty-nine times during the period from 1917 to 1922, on charges ranging from disturbing the peace, obscenity, and breaking and entering to reviling and fighting with police. He had actually been convicted on some of

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65 Special Report of the Commissioner of Public Safety, Stanley Ray, to the Commission Council, March 14, 1922, File D, McShane Correspondence, City Archives, New Orleans Public Library.
the more serious charges, but he always managed to obtain a parole that allowed him to stay out of prison. Although he would later spend a considerable amount of time behind bars, Normandale in 1922 had so far managed to thwart the authorities' efforts to send him there.

City officials moved to end the parole abuses. Assistant City Attorney Roland B. Howell ruled that the recorders could issue paroles only within their own jurisdiction. Furthermore, recorders could issue paroles only for violations of city law; paroles for state law violations could only come from a criminal court judge. Also under Howell's ruling the police were to release prisoners arrested for violations of city ordinances only upon authorization from the recorder having jurisdiction in that area. Commissioner Ray implemented Howell's ruling, ordering the police to abide by these new guidelines. Ray also instructed the recorders, particularly Judge Leininger, not to issue any paroles for local politicians, regardless of their affiliation.

Howell's ruling was challenged immediately. Criminal Court Judge Richard Dowling found Ray and Molony in contempt for failing to honor his request to parole two prisoners held for violations of city ordinances. Dowling's contempt action was blocked, pending a ruling by the state supreme court, which in late March 1922, upheld Ray's position and supported the new parole standards. The implementation

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66 Item, March 9, 1922, p. 1.

of Howell's ruling had the desired effect. Figures for March 1922, showed a sharp decrease in the number of paroles issued, and Judge Leininger, who headed the list of abusers, issued only seventeen paroles for March, compared to 502 for the previous two months. Howell's ruling ended the most glaring abuses of the parole system, but police would still run into problems during the rest of the Twenties.

To add to his difficulties, the last six months of Molony's term were marked by charges of police corruption. A number of policemen were indicted by a parish grand jury on charges of bribery and extortion relating to protecting handbook operators and violaters of the state liquor law. The most sensational charges were filed against three city patrolmen, members of Captain Theodore Ray's crack liquor-raiding squad. They were charged with accepting a $500 bribe from Vincent Napolitano, residing on Frenchmen Street, so that he could avoid arrest after the officers found several barrels of illegally manufactured wine at his home. Napolitano's charges spurred Mayor McShane and Commissioner of Public Safety Ray to call upon all citizens of New Orleans to come forward with any evidence of police corruption. A grand jury was called to probe the allegations of police graft and, as a result, the three men were indicted for accepting bribes. Before the grand jury indictments were handed down, however, the policemen were tried and found guilty on charges of neglect of duty, conduct unbecoming an officer, and corruption in office by Superintendent Molony, resulting in their dismissal from the force. Later they were

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68 Ibid., March 7, 1922, p. 1, April 6, 1922, p. 4.
prosecuted in front of a packed courtroom by District Attorney Robert Marr on the grand jury indictments. This time they were acquitted by a Criminal Court jury after only ten minutes of deliberation. While the trial was in progress, the policemen's appeal of their dismissal was denied by the police board. After their acquittal they were also denied a rehearing. 69

The charges of police corruption resulted in a difference of opinion between New Orleans' two leading newspapers, the Item and the Times-Picayune. Of the two, the Item was the most blatantly political in its coverage of the case. Although it had been favorable to Molony when he first became superintendent, it now gave sensational coverage to the corruption charges, accusing Molony, quite unjustly, of trying to "sit on the lid" of the scandal. Never one to let objectivity stand in the way of political considerations, the paper was supporting Martin Behrman in the upcoming mayoral campaign; thus it was to its advantage to blame the current administration for police corruption. The Item felt that the dismissal of the three patrolmen was a "very good start" in dealing with corruption, but it was not satisfied, believing that "their removal doesn't scratch the surface of the plague of police graft." 70 How the Item saw the situation can be seen in the change in its coverage. When the corruption scandal first occurred, the paper's coverage was on page one; when the three policemen were


70 Editorial, Item, October 10, 1924, p. 16, Editorial, October 16, 1924, p. 16.
found not guilty its coverage was buried on page seventeen.\textsuperscript{71} Hoping that District Attorney Marr would act speedily in the cases, the 
\textit{Times-Picayune} took issue with the Item's criticism of Superintendent Molony, charging it with playing politics in the current situation.\textsuperscript{72} As it turned out, for all the sensational charges of police corruption, every policeman charged with accepting bribes to overlook liquor violations was found not guilty in court, or the charges were dismissed before getting to that stage. It should be noted that the retiring parish grand jury in its final report judged the New Orleans police force generally free from graft. It declared Molony's force to be "one of the best in the history of the city."\textsuperscript{73}

Despite this clean bill of health, the police department was rocked by a sensational scandal in Molony's last month in office. This was the case of Raymond Willie Holland, a young aspiring bandit, who was caught in the act of holding up a local drugstore on February 16, 1925. Holland was freed on the robbery charge after testimony at his trial appeared to show that he had been framed by New Orleans police in order that they might make a spectacular robbery arrest. What is amazing about the case is that Holland, a small-time criminal wanted in California for parole violation and several robberies, could

\textsuperscript{71}Ibid., October 8, 1924, p. 1, December 19, 1924, p. 17.

\textsuperscript{72}Editorial, \textit{Times-Picayune}, October 9, 1924, p. 8; Editorial, October 18, 1924, p. 8.

\textsuperscript{73}States, March 3, 1925, p. 1.
have had such a significant impact upon New Orleans affairs. A great deal of this was due to the month-long coverage of the case in the city's newspapers, which only inflamed an already confusing situation.

The Holland case was extremely complicated, being characterized by sudden turns of events. At his robbery trial Holland insisted that he was forced into the robbery by Patrolman Albert Davidson and Captain Charles Hemard, the latter a veteran of nearly twenty years on the force. Holland charged that these two policemen furnished him with the car and the gun used in the robbery. Chief of Detectives Thomas Healy's testimony seemed to back up Holland's story. Healy testified that he later learned from Davidson that the patrolman had lent his car to Captain Hemard on the night of the robbery, and that this vehicle was used to take Holland to the scene of the crime. Davidson, Healy noted, said that a gun was furnished to Holland, but that the spring had been removed so that it would not fire. Healy did not inform Superintendent Molony about these developments. Contradicting this testimony were the statements of Patrolman Davidson and Captain Hemard. Davidson denied that Healy had ever questioned him about the robbery; he further denied that he furnished his car to Captain Hemard for use in the robbery attempt or that he provided the gun used in the holdup. Hemard's testimony supported Davidson's

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74 Item, March 24, 1925, p. 1, March 29, 1925, p. 1; Times-Picayune, March 25, 1925, p. 1, March 29, 1925, p. 1; Transcript of the State of Louisiana vs. Raymond Willie Holland, March 17, 1925, Criminal District Court File, Louisiana Division, New Orleans Public Library.
and vigorously denied charges of a police "frameup."  

Complicating matters even further was the fact that Superintendent Molony, accompanied by Captain Hemard and a Times-Picayune reporter, participated in Holland's arrest. The Item and the Times-Picayune differed in their view of Molony's role in the case. The Item charged that Molony was not even present when the arrest was made. Throughout the affair it took an anti-Molony position and steadfastly supported Captain Healy's version of what had happened. On the other hand, the Times-Picayune accused its counterpart of trying to smear Molony's reputation. Denying that it was attempting to portray Molony as a "hero" in the episode, the paper countered that the Item was ignoring a far more important question—whether Healy or Hemard had committed perjury during the trial, and which one of them had proved disloyal to his superior.

Largely because of the conflicting testimony given in the case, an Orleans parish grand jury was convened to investigate it. Doubtful of Holland's story because of his criminal record, the grand jury gave little credence to his testimony. Its report stated that the evidence "conclusively shows there was no frame-up," and it completely exonerated Captain Hemard and Patrolman Davidson. Superintendent Molony was also cleared of any involvement. The main villain, according to the report, was Captain Healy. He was found to have been

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75 State of Louisiana vs. Raymond Willie Holland; Times-Picayune, April 3, 1925, p. 1.

76 Item, March 25, 1925, p. 1; Times-Picayune, March 26, 1925, p. 1.
"grossly derelict in his duty" in withholding evidence of a "frameup" from his superior. Viewing Healy's motive as purely political, the grand jury charged that because he was a prominent candidate for superintendent in the upcoming administration he was more interested in his own political advancement than in upholding his sworn duty as a police officer. Although the Times-Picayune and the States generally praised the grand jury report, the Item likened its proceedings to that of a "Star Chamber." It labeled the report a "barrel of whitewash" designed to reflect favorably upon the actions of the police department.

The grand jury report, however, was far from the last word in the case. A few days after the report was released new affidavits furnished by Patrolman Davidson and nine other clerks and patrolmen, virtually all of whom had testified before the grand jury, radically altered the situation. Davidson repudiated his grand jury testimony and corroborated Healy's statements. He admitted that he did lend his car to Captain Hemard; he also swore that he told Healy that "the gun was furnished," although he did not admit that he provided the weapon. The other affidavits, taken as a whole, implicated Captain Hemard as the leading figure behind the "frameup." They indicated that Hemard was tipped off at least twenty-four hours before the event that Holland was planning a robbery and that he helped furnish a car.

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77 Item, April 3, 1925, p. 1, April 9, 1925, p. 1; Times-Picayune, April 10, 1925, p. 1.

78 Editorial, Item, April 6, 1925, p. 10, April 10, 1925, p. 1; States, April 4, 1925, p. 6.
and a gun to trap him in the act. Several of the patrolmen stated in their affidavits that Hemard had told them, after Holland's arrest, that Superintendent Molony wanted them to keep quiet about the episode. It was clear from the new evidence that unless all of these men were lying, Captain Hemard was in serious trouble.

The new affidavits must be treated with caution. It is clear that Davidson and the others had perjured themselves, or at least they had been less than honest in their grand jury testimony out of a misguided sense of loyalty to their superiors. Furthermore, their affidavits were signed and witnessed before John C. Davey, a prominent New Orleans lawyer who had served as Martin Behrman's campaign manager. The main beneficiary of the new evidence was Captain Healy, who happened to be the leading candidate for superintendent in Behrman's new administration. It can thus be inferred that these new statements were made to discredit both Molony's conduct as superintendent and the grand jury report.

The new police affidavits forced the McShane Administration to redouble its efforts to solve the case. Superintendent Molony acted by suspending Captains Healy and Hemard, Patrolman Davidson, and four others, charging them with neglect of duty and conduct unbecoming an officer. Molony was in a ticklish situation. Nearing the end of his term, he was faced with the prospect of trying these men, even though he had been indirectly implicated in the episode. Molony made his

79 Item, April 15, 1925, pp. 1, 4; Times-Picayune, April 16, 1925, p. 1.

80 States, April 15, 1925, p. 1.
decision to try the case after consulting with the city attorney. The date for the trial was set for April 24, 1925, only one week before Molony was scheduled to leave office. Not everyone agreed that Molony's decision was the correct one. The Item, for instance, felt that Molony should be removed from command.

Before Molony's decision could be implemented, however, the case took a tragic turn. On April 21 Captain Charles Hemard committed suicide, shooting himself in the head with his service revolver while seated in his bathtub. No suicide note was found, but Hemard had been despondent over the new evidence against him. Until the end he publicly protested his innocence, insisting that Holland had not been framed. A huge crowd gathered for Hemard's funeral, with nearly 100 cars in the final procession. Hemard was buried with full honors and Mayor McShane and Superintendent Molony in attendance. Following his death the Item and the Times-Picayune renewed their attacks upon each other. Accusing the Item of having "blood dripping from its pen," the Times-Picayune in a savage editorial blamed its adversary for hounding Hemard to his death. It charged the Item with using its influence to destroy police morale and of making deliberate misstatements that damaged the Molony administration. For its part, the Item denied that it had driven Hemard to suicide. Deploving the captain's

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81 Item, April 17, 1925, p. 1; April 18, 1925, p. 1, Editorial, April 18, 1925, p. 4; Editorial, Times-Picayune, April 17, 1925, p. 8, April 18, 1925, p. 1, April 21, 1925, p. 1.

82 Item, April 22, 1925, p. 1; States, April 24, 1925, p. 6; Times-Picayune, April 22, 1925, p. 1.
tragic death, it stated that many police reporters knew of the recent deterioration in his condition. The paper believed that Hemard saw his nearly twenty-year career being destroyed and, fearing the consequences, decided to take his own life.\textsuperscript{83}

Though Hemard's death removed one of the key participants, the case continued to move toward a final settlement. One thing definitely decided after Hemard's death was that Superintendent Molony would not try the seven policemen. A civil court judge, acting on a petition filed by attorneys for the accused men, issued a restraining order preventing Molony from hearing the case. With so little time remaining, the McShane Administration realized that it could not overturn the restraining order in time and dropped its efforts to have Molony hear the charges. Behrman had already announced his decision to hold an open hearing to resolve the situation once his term began, and to delay appointing a new superintendent until the case had been decided.\textsuperscript{84} One week after Behrman took office, on May 11, the long-awaited trial began before Acting Superintendent Thomas Capo. In many ways it was an anti-climax. First, Patrolman Davidson failed to appear when his name was called, resulting in his dismissal from the force. The remaining six defendants, including Captain Healy, were tried on the charges, but no evidence was presented against them.

\textsuperscript{83} \textit{Item}, April 22, 1925, p. 1, Editorial, April 22, 1925, p. 12; \textit{Times-Picayune}, April 22, 1925, p. 1, April 23, 1925, p. 8.

\textsuperscript{84} \textit{Civil District Court File}, Louisiana Division, New Orleans Public Library; \textit{Item}, April 23, 1925, p. 1, April 25, 1925, p. 1, April 30, 1925, p. 1; \textit{Times-Picayune}, April 11, 1925, p. 1, Editorial, April 11, 1925, p. 8, April 24, 1925, p. 1, April 26, 1925, p. 1.
Superintendent Molony, their main accuser, had left the state for a new post in Honduras. Acting Superintendent Capo accepted Healy's statement that he had not reported his findings in the Holland case because he believed Molony already knew about the situation. No evidence was presented to contradict the other policemen's statements that they were only acting under instructions from their superior, the late Captain Hemard. In a trial lasting less than forty-five minutes, Capo found Healy and the other defendants not guilty of all the charges. Implicit in the trial testimony was the fact that Molony knew more than he admitted, although there is little hard evidence supporting the charge of his involvement. For Thomas Healy the final result was to clear his reputation. On May 13, 1925, he was elected superintendent by an unanimous vote of the commission council. For the reputation of the police department it was a different story: its image had been badly hurt by the front-page coverage of the case. It would be up to Superintendent Healy to help improve it.

As soon as he was sworn in as superintendent, Healy moved to restore public confidence in the New Orleans police force. He announced an immediate shakeup of the entire department; a number of detectives promoted under Molony were demoted, and a number of officers were transferred to different precincts. Politics was undoubtedly involved, but Healy also wanted to assert his authority, letting members of the force know that he was firmly in charge. Next Healy declared war on crime and vice, creating a special "Underworld Squad" whose purpose was to round up handbook operators, prostitutes, and other undesirable

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characters. This squad, similar to one in operation under Molony, continued to be the leading wedge in periodic crime crackdowns throughout the rest of Healy's term. It was not an innovation on Healy's part, but a continuation of a previous policy.

Probably the best illustration of how intense police raiding activity could be occurred at the end of Healy's administration, in late July 1928. During a two-day period, between 8:00 A.M. Saturday, July 28, and 12:00 P.M. Sunday, July 29, New Orleans police arrested a total of 677 persons throughout the city's twelve precincts. Arrests were made for such offenses as gambling, violations of the moral code, loitering, and being "dangerous and suspicious" characters. As a result, the crowd gathered at the criminal court building became so agitated that two hours before the opening of night court, the courtroom had to be cleared of everyone except prisoners. Again, these arrests did not indicate lax enforcement in earlier years. Rather they typified police activity throughout the Twenties; superintendents ordered periodic intensive raids to satisfy public demand.

Healy's arrest statistics compared favorably with those of Guy Molony. In Healy's first thirty months in office, there were 5,459 arrests for major crimes, i.e., murder, grand larceny, and robbery. This was an average of 181 arrests per month, compared to 146 under Molony. Total arrests also increased under Healy. Statistics for 1927 showed a total of 60,521 arrests for all crimes; Molony's totals

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87 Times-Picayune, July 30, 1928, p. 1.
for 1924 were 54,348. It should be kept in mind, however, that these figures reflect only a normal yearly increase, not a substantial change from the figures during Molony's administration. Healy concentrated more of his attention than had Molony on arresting "dangerous and suspicious" characters; it was his belief that such arrests would hold down the number of robberies committed in the city. In addition, while prostitution arrests for 1927 were up under Healy, handbook arrests and arrests for violation of the Hood Act were down, which reflected a shift in the focus of police activity. Police activity in dealing with all areas of crime was considerably greater under both Healy and Molony than it had been under Mooney's administration.

The end of Healy's three-year term as superintendent was marked by political squabbling, much of it caused by his own indecision. In September 1928, Healy, apparently desiring to return to private life, announced his retirement. When the Commission Council convened to name his successor, three of the commissioners, a majority, voted to nominate Captain Theodore Ray to succeed him. But a conflict erupted among the Old Regulars when Mayor O'Keefe, apparently dissatisfied with the choice of Ray, declared that no vacancy existed and declined to entertain a motion for Ray's appointment. Instead, he began a movement to reinstate Healy, who had been persuaded to change his mind about retiring. O'Keefe's action forced those favoring Ray's appointment to appeal to the courts for relief. A suit was filed in

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civil district court by the commissioners and Captain Ray, seeking to install Ray as superintendent and oust Healy. The suit charged that Healy was holding office illegally, and that Ray had been legally elected by a majority of the council. Healy's attorneys contended that he had retired and then changed his mind, but never officially resigned. On October 30, 1928, the court ruled in favor of Captain Ray, but Healy's supporters appealed the decision all the way to the state supreme court. Anticipating an unfavorable ruling by the court, on December 31 Superintendent Healy voluntarily relinquished his office, retiring on a pension. The suit before the supreme court was then dismissed. However, the last few months of his term did not reflect highly upon Healy's record. He had allowed himself to be used as a political pawn, and his fight to stay in office had caused unnecessary controversy.

Superintendent Theodore Ray was the last department head to serve during the 1920s. A stern disciplinarian like his two predecessors, Ray continued Healy's policy of reforming the different branches of the department whenever he felt they were doing less than their best in vigorously enforcing the law. Ray moved quickly against vice, particularly lottery shops and immoral houses. Ray and the New


Orleans police department were also forced to deal with a new weapon that emerged during the late Twenties, the Thompson submachine gun. The machine gun, with its increased firepower, had gained notoriety with the rise of Al Capone in Chicago earlier in the decade. More and more it was being used by holdup men throughout the United States. To place his department on an equal footing with the criminals, Superintendent Ray acquired the first pair of these weapons ever put in the hands of city police. To make his intentions clear, Ray issued a strong warning to the department's first machine gun crew: "Shoot to kill but be sure you kill the right parties." 91

New Orleans police, under the leadership of Molony, Healy, and Ray, made an effort to control crime. They were not completely successful, but their lack of success was due in considerable part to forces beyond their control. Foremost among these was the current social climate in New Orleans. The city had always had a reputation as a good-time town; if people wanted to gamble or frequent houses of prostitution they would do so, despite the best efforts of the police. This was particularly true during the Twenties, when the social and moral climate was conducive to the growth of various illegal activities. Foremost among these illegal activities were the smuggling and brewing of liquor which came with the advent of Prohibition. In this case enforcement efforts were almost totally federal but the results were the same. Regardless of the passage of a national amendment, bootleggers would never want for customers who were willing to pay for their illegal brew.

91 Item, July 10, 1929, p. 1.
The Eighteenth Amendment furnished New Orleans with its greatest single source of crime during the 1920s. Passed by Congress in 1917, the Eighteenth Amendment became law nationally on January 16, 1920. It prohibited the manufacture, sale, or transportation of intoxicating liquors. Defining intoxicating beverages as those containing more than .5 per cent alcohol, the law did not make it illegal to purchase alcoholic beverages or to consume those alcoholic beverages manufactured before January 1920. Louisiana was one of only five states in which ratification of the Eighteenth Amendment was even close. On August 6, 1918, the Louisiana Senate voted twenty-one to twenty in favor of ratification, the closest vote of any of the thirty-six senates ratifying the amendment. Ratification passed the house two days later, but both votes showed that widespread opposition existed in the state, particularly in southwestern Louisiana and in New Orleans. New Orleanians had not disguised their disapproval of war-time prohibition, and they resented being forced to conform to a national amendment. New Orleans had a long-time wet tradition, and the city preferred to maintain that tradition rather than go along with this attempt at regulating America's drinking habits.

Unlike efforts at curbing prostitution and gambling, the

Prohibition enforcement effort in New Orleans was largely the responsibility of the federal government. The agency specifically assigned the task of enforcing the Volstead Act, passed by Congress in 1919 to provide penalties for violations of the Eighteenth Amendment, was the Bureau of Prohibition. Initially, the agency was part of the Bureau of Internal Revenue within the Treasury Department. However, in the late Twenties the Bureau came under the control of the Department of Justice, under which it remained until Prohibition was repealed in 1933. Charged with preventing the manufacture, sale, and transportation of intoxicating liquors, the Prohibition Bureau was not directly concerned with liquor smuggling, which was the primary responsibility of the Customs Department and the United States Coast Guard. In particular the Coast Guard was responsible for stopping vessels attempting to smuggle liquor through America's territorial waters.²

To facilitate federal enforcement, the Prohibition Bureau divided the country into districts, each of which was under the control of a prohibition administrator. In Louisiana a state prohibition director was appointed who was in charge of federal enforcement efforts covering the entire state. Early in January 1920, D. J. Ganth, supervising federal prohibition agent for the Gulf District, arrived in New Orleans and met with Rufus W. Fontenot, the Collector of Internal Revenue. Shortly thereafter ten federal enforcement agents were appointed. By the end of January the first state prohibition

director took office. He was Jesse Johnson, a Bogalusa lawyer and the brother of state senator Delos Johnson of Washington Parish. Johnson set up operations in the New Orleans Customhouse, which was to serve as state prohibition headquarters during the Twenties.\(^3\)

In 1921 the appointment of a Louisiana prohibition director was linked with Republican control of the White House. Johnson served as Louisiana prohibition director until September 1921, when he was replaced by Hugh Larre, chairman of the Orleans Parish Republican Committee. Larre for a time was in the insurance business and operated a grocery store in New Orleans at the time of his appointment. During Larre's term as director there was friction between the local New Orleans office and national headquarters in Washington. In October 1922, Larre resigned as director, citing disagreements with agents sent from Washington, whom he felt were virtually taking over the running of the New Orleans office. Larre, in a letter to the Republican state committee, particularly blamed E. P. Gueymard, legal advisor to the New Orleans office, for causing trouble and making false statements about the local Prohibition force. After Larre's resignation the two men actually came to blows during an incident in Delmonico's restaurant on St. Charles Avenue.\(^4\)

Following Larre's resignation, in April 1923, O. D. Jackson was appointed state prohibition director, a position he held until 1930.


Politics was a key factor in Jackson’s appointment; his brother was a ranking Republican politician in the district. Born in Baton Rouge, Jackson served in the navy during World War I and later started his own private detective agency in New Orleans. He also briefly joined the Ku Klux Klan during its heyday in the early Twenties, but resigned voluntarily when he was appointed state director. His Klan background was mentioned in the press at the time of his appointment, but it was not significant in influencing public sentiment against him. After the chaos of Larre’s term, Jackson brought a degree of stability to Prohibition enforcement in New Orleans.

Jackson took over a force that was never adequate for its assigned task. This reflected a growing national trend; Congress during the Twenties never appropriated enough money to hire and train a sufficient number of Prohibition agents. The total number of agents and investigators in the employ of the Prohibition Bureau at any one time varied from 1,500 to 2,300 for the entire United States. In New Orleans the total number of agents never exceeded forty, and many of these were frequently assigned to other areas of Louisiana or to other states to help out temporarily. More agents from other areas of the country were sometimes assigned to New Orleans during periods of intensive raiding, but these agents were then withdrawn to their original jurisdiction when the raids were over. For a brief period during the early Twenties Louisiana had a force of less than ten agents assigned to cover the entire state. At one point in 1921

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5 Healy Interview, August 10, 1978; Item, October 3, 1926, sec. 5, p. 1; Jackson, "Prohibition in New Orleans," p. 272; States, April 12, 1923, p. 1; Times-Picayune, April 17, 1923, p. 3.
Theodore Jacques, then head of enforcement in New Orleans, was the only agent active in the city. The others were on duty elsewhere or had been given leaves of absence until Congress appropriated sufficient funds to operate the local office. New Orleans' force increased under O. D. Jackson, but it was never large enough to cope with the vast amount of liquor smuggled through the numerous bayous, rivers, and lakes of the state.

Though Prohibition enforcement was largely a federal function, New Orleans police did make a weak attempt to aid the federal government's efforts. The basis for their action was the passage of the Hood Act, Louisiana's state prohibition law. Soon after the Prohibition Amendment went into effect, virtually all the states passed laws supplementing the Volstead Act, making violations of the national law a state as well as a federal crime. In Louisiana in September 1921, Senator T. L. Hood of Ouachita Parish introduced such a state bill. However, by the time the bill passed two months later, it bore little resemblance to the original proposal and was considerably weaker than the national law. As finally passed, the Hood Act dealt solely with the sale and manufacture of intoxicating liquor; it did not prevent the transportation of liquor for one's personal use, the making of home brew and wine from Louisiana products, or the serving of drinks to legitimate guests within one's own home. Lastly, the bill required the sworn statements of two persons before a search

warrant for liquor could be issued. The entire New Orleans legislative delegation opposed passage of the Hood Act. Senator J. T. Prowell of the Tenth Ward introduced a resolution calling upon Congress to modify the Volstead Act to permit the sale of beer and light wines. Despite the opposition of the dry forces, this resolution was approved by both houses. During the 1920s periodic attempts were made to repeal the Hood Act, but all ended in failure. Weak though it was, the Hood Act remained on the books until the end of Prohibition.

There was a definite lack of commitment to enforcing the Hood Act on the local level. New Orleans police began making arrests for violations of the act as soon as it went into effect on January 1, 1922. However, in spite of the formation of a special "booze squad" by Superintendent Molony, police assistance in moving against Prohibition offenders was at best sporadic. New Orleans police did make periodic raids on "soft drink" stands and cooperated occasionally with federal officials. But, although they always professed to be vigilant, Prohibition enforcement was clearly secondary to efforts against gambling and prostitution. Increasingly during the Twenties federal authorities in New Orleans called for more cooperation on the part of local police. Federal officials wanted the police to concentrate their efforts on arresting small liquor operators, thus allowing the government to focus its energy against the major smuggling rings, which were bringing thousands of gallons of illegal liquor into the

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city. This federal goal was never realized. Police cooperation in enforcing the Hood Act continued to be unreliable, and tension grew between New Orleans police and federal officials.

There were a number of sources of illegal liquor in New Orleans. A major source during the early part of the decade was through smuggling from outside the United States. New Orleans served as a major center for the importation of illegal liquor. If one looks at a map of New Orleans and the coastline of southern Louisiana the reason is readily apparent. There were literally hundreds of ways to smuggle liquor into the city from ships anchored in the Gulf of Mexico. The principal smuggling avenues into New Orleans included Lake Pontchartrain, Lake Borgne, the passes at the mouth of the Mississippi River, and the numerous bayous and inlets of St. Bernard Parish. Bayou Bienvenue, running west from Lake Borgne, and the Navigation Canal were also used by liquor runners to deliver cargoes that quenched the thirst of many New Orleanians. During the first part of the Twenties Lake Pontchartrain served as a haven for liquor smugglers. For example, in 1922 Prohibition agents discovered a major bootleg cache including both liquor and champagne valued at between $50,000 and $75,000 in the area of the lake between West End and Spanish Fort. Later the lake became a problem for smugglers because of the presence

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of hijackers who lay in wait in swift boats ready to pounce upon slower bootleg vessels as they made their way toward the city. The focus of smuggling then shifted to St. Bernard Parish, which throughout the decade remained a constant refuge for illegal liquor suppliers.10

During the early Twenties a Rum Row was set up in the Gulf near the Chandeleur and Breton Islands, located about twenty miles off the coast of St. Bernard Parish. Here a fleet of vessels loaded with liquor anchored for a rendezvous with smaller boats which transported the cargo to shore for delivery into the city. This Rum Row continued in operation until the mid-Twenties, when it shifted farther west to a point off Timbalier Light, where liquor runners made use of Bayou Lafourche and Barataria Bay to gain access to the New Orleans market through Algiers, Gretna, and other west bank cities.11

A major reason for the early success of Rum Row was the lack of federal enforcement efforts in the area. As late as 1923 the Customs Department had only two vessels to patrol all the avenues into the port, and the Coast Guard had only one small vessel to cover the vast area of water around New Orleans. Not until 1925, when the Coast Guard began to patrol the Gulf with swift vessels armed with guns and searchlights, was Rum Row substantially broken up. After that year part of Rum Row continued to operate west of the Atchafalaya River, but the amount of liquor smuggled in never reached the levels of the


The liquor smuggled into New Orleans came from three principal sources—Cuba, the Bahamas, and British Honduras. In general, Europe served as the original source of supply for these countries, but not in every case. Dealers in Nassau and in Cuba were not above selling merchandise that was little better than local New Orleans homebrew, and passing it off as the finest European brands. Fake bottles, labels, corks, and seals helped disguise the true quality of much of their product. Liquor cargoes from Cuba, the Bahamas, and British Honduras went through several steps on their journey to the Crescent City. First, arrangements were made between liquor dealers in Havana, Nassau, and Belize and syndicates in New Orleans. An amount, price, and time of arrival were agreed upon, and the liquor was then transported to Rum Row. Scores of vessels carried the liquor, including fishing boats, boats with large gasoline-powered engines, and small steamships. Many of these ships were under foreign registry, generally British, although quite a few were locally owned. There were also independent operators, who sold to whomever met their price. Some liquor-bearing vessels carried as many as 4,000 cases in a single trip.13

Once a liquor-running vessel arrived in the Gulf, it was met by smaller oyster luggers and speedy pleasure craft that transported the cargo to shore. On the shores of the bayous, swamps, and marshes of

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St. Bernard Parish the liquor was unloaded onto motor trucks or passenger cars. Veteran liquor runners always devised a system to protect their shipments from hijackers. Traveling at night the trucks were camouflaged for maximum concealment. Liquor was disguised as molasses, canned vegetables, and in one case was transported in a funeral coach. Armed gunmen frequently rode with the trucks or followed behind in an automobile with its lights off. The gunmen drove up shooting if a truck was stopped for any reason; they were under orders to do whatever was necessary to get the liquor shipment through. St. Bernard Parish furnished the ideal atmosphere for this type of liquor running. Local residents were generally willing, for fees of $100 to $500, to transfer liquor from the mother ship offshore and then to help transport it to its final destination. Most people in St. Bernard Parish considered bootlegging to be a legitimate way of making a living, and local authorities generally ignored a shipment of liquor passing through the parish.14

Much of the liquor entering New Orleans was landed and loaded onto trucks at Shell Beach on the shores of Lake Borgne. The trucks were then driven at high speed west over the St. Bernard Highway toward New Orleans. St. Bernard Highway extended south and east of the city to the town of Pointe-a-la-Hache in Plaquemines Parish, a distance of forty-five miles. South of New Orleans at the little town of Poydras the highway divided, one section continuing south to Pointe-

a-la-Hache, the other heading east to Shell Beach. Rum runners followed this road from Shell Beach west to the town of Violet, where a canal connected Lake Borgne with the Mississippi River. At Violet there was a bridge which all motor traffic from the south had to cross on its way into New Orleans. Beyond Violet the liquor convoys continued west through Chalmette into the outskirts of the Crescent City.15

The New Orleans liquor wholesaler often paid for his liquor after it had been delivered to shore. He then hired the trucks that drove the shipment into the city, paying their owner roughly $5 a case to protect the cargo from hijackers. A veteran wholesaler hired several armed guards to ride with the liquor shipment. If it were lost or stolen, he stood to lose everything he had invested. Once safely into New Orleans the liquor was delivered to the wholesaler's warehouse, where it was stored until it was sold to a retail bootlegger who distributed it to his customers.16 In the case of some major smuggling operations the New Orleans group controlled all phases of the liquor transaction, from buying liquor in Cuba to the final local sale in the city.

The profits involved in liquor smuggling generally far outweighed the risks. In 1923 it was estimated that the profits made in running liquor into New Orleans ran to over $2,000,000 annually. Theodore Jacques, head of Prohibition enforcement in New Orleans, estimated

15 Item, January 21, 1923, Magazine sec., p. 1, August 9, 1925, p. 2.

that, if a smuggler equipped two boats a month, each making one round trip carrying 300 cases, he could import 6,000 cases over a ten-month period. For these 6,000 cases the bootlegger paid $35 a case for delivery to New Orleans, which, coupled with payments for storage, spotters, hauling, and miscellaneous service, came to a total of $213,500. The same liquor was then sold for $85 a case, or $510,000, giving the smuggler a substantial profit of $296,500 for ten months' work. Another true case involved a liquor runner who conducted a select trade in Scotch whiskey. The smuggler made regular trips between Belize, British Honduras and New Orleans, carrying 2,000 cases of Scotch whiskey each time. If he sold the whiskey for a minimum of $65 a case, he doubled the amount of his investment each trip; the profit for each voyage averaged around $65,000.17

Ships docking at the port of New Orleans often carried illegal liquor, much of it ingeniously concealed on board the vessel. Bottles of liquor were found everywhere by customs officials: in bunkers, in crow's nests, under steel floors, down in after-peaks and fore-peaks, in forecastles, in washrooms, near portholes, anywhere aboard ship.18 The caches could be large or small. Some sailors, seeing a quick way to make a profit, attempted to smuggle a few bottles off the ship hidden on their persons. Others were after a larger profit. When a Japanese steamship docked in New Orleans in 1921, a search by customs officials revealed 1,500 quarts of high-grade liquor; the


18 _Item_, March 20, 1920, sec. 2, p. 3.
chief steward admitted ownership of the spirits, which he intended to sell for a sizeable return on his investment. Customs officials watched the docks but sometimes smugglers brazenly brought liquor across the wharves in the early morning hours. Prohibition agents suspected that at night tugs operating on the river helped unload liquor shipments from ships entering the port. The amount of liquor seized by customs officials was not insignificant. Records show that as of March 1921, 16,000 bottles had been confiscated since Prohibition had gone into effect, their value conservatively estimated at nearly $300,000.  

Much of the imported liquor reaching New Orleans went on to other destinations. Some was shipped to Chicago, St. Louis, Kansas City, and other cities in the Mississippi Valley. Some was also transported to Texas and other neighboring states. The liquor shipments were made by boat, car, and rail, although the largest cargoes usually went by rail. They were disguised as canned tomatoes or corn, molasses, soda fountain syrup, and large drums of house paint. Sometimes liquor was hidden under other items, like eggs or oyster shell. One ring shipped its liquor in big casks camouflaged as molasses. As a final touch they dripped molasses along the outside of the casks and used a regular brand name to hide the contents.


Several of these inland smuggling ventures operated on a large scale. One large operation made use of Pullman conductors and porters to transport liquor by rail between New Orleans and Chicago. The liquor was first brought into the city by West Indian fishermen and then was carried on board the train by the porters in steel, cushion-lined cases, each holding a dozen bottles. During this ring's peak period, before it was discovered and broken up in 1922, 300 cases of liquor were transported north every week. It brought its participants a total of $750,000 to $1,000,000. Another New Orleans ring, aided by connections in St. Louis, supplied that city and other Midwestern metropolises with thousands of cases of imported Scotch, bourbon, and rye. Much of it, camouflaged as drums of house paint, was transported north by barges and freight cars. The minimum retail value of the liquor shipped by the New Orleans-St. Louis operation was estimated at nearly $5,000,000. When the operation was discovered in 1925, a New Orleans attorney was implicated and charged with conspiring with several St. Louis bootleggers to bring illegal liquor into that city.

Some of the liquor imported into New Orleans was even smuggled to Al Capone's successful bootleg operation in Chicago. Two carloads of liquor registered to a fruit shipping concern in Kenner, a small town just outside New Orleans, were shipped to Chicago, where they were

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delivered to the address of a speakeasy run by Al Brown, one of Capone's aliases. Later Prohibition raids on Capone's headquarters linked the shipping of liquor between New Orleans and the Windy City.23

New Orleans liquor smuggling produced some colorful and successful figures. Among the most colorful was Mark Boasberg, better known as Jack Sheehan. Sheehan was known as the "Coconut King," a reference to his claim in the local press that a submarine chaser and other vessels he had purchased were to be used strictly for importing coconuts from the Bahamas. Sheehan operated the Suburban Gardens, a roadhouse just across the parish line in Jefferson which served as a center for gambling, dancing, and drinking by many New Orleanians. Very few people put much stock in Sheehan's claim that he was involved in the coconut trade; particularly skeptical were New Orleans Prohibition agents. In late December 1921, Prohibition officials learned that Sheehan had received two boatloads of liquor which had been brought up the Mississippi River and unloaded near his residence. On New Year's Eve agents led by Director Hugh Larre and armed with a search warrant raided Sheehan's place. Sheehan, asserting that he had purchased the liquor before Prohibition became law, obtained a temporary injunction blocking its immediate removal. However, customs officials intervened and removed the liquor under a warrant citing smuggling charges. Moving vans carried Sheehan's stock to the Customhouse, where it was stored. Altogether, liquor valued at between $80,000 and $150,000 was seized. While under indictment by a grand

23 Item, April 10, 1925, p. 6; Times-Picayune, December 23, 1924, p. 13.
jury on smuggling charges, Sheehan filed a motion to quash the indictment, which was granted by Federal Judge Rufus Foster in June 1922. Charging that the terms of the search warrant were faulty, the judge ordered Sheehan's liquor returned. As a result, the government was placed in the embarrassing position of having to hire five motor trucks to return 4,000 quarts of liquor and champagne it had seized six months earlier to Jack Sheehan. It was reported that Sheehan gave a party for a number of friends that same evening and "a good time was had by all." What particularly enraged the agents was their belief that Sheehan was still selling liquor; trucks came and went from his residence, apparently delivering liquor to customers in the city.  

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For the remainder of the 1920s Sheehan continued to evade the efforts of Prohibition agents to catch him in bootlegging activities. In 1925 the government charged him with heading a conspiracy to smuggle thousands of cases of liquor from Havana into New Orleans. The captain of the British power sloop *Panama* told federal officials, following the seizure of his vessel by the Coast Guard, that he had made a number of trips between Havana and New Orleans delivering liquor for Sheehan. In his statement the captain testified that he met Sheehan in Havana several times, that Sheehan was the one who purchased

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24 Hugh Larré to Prohibition Director, January 19, 1922, File No. 23 (Department of Justice Records, Record Group 60, National Archives); Department of Justice Records cited are all located in the National Archives; *Item*, January 3, 1922, p. 1, January 20, 1922, p. 1; Report, E. P. Gueymard to Prohibition Office, Undated but probably July or August 1922, File No. 23 (Department of Justice Records); *Ibid.*, Louis H. Burns to Rush L. Holland, January 23, 1923; *Times-Picayune*, December 23, 1921, p. 1, January 1, 1922, p. 1, January 4, 1922, p. 1, June 8, 1922, p. 1, June 9, 1922, p. 23, June 10, 1922, p. 10.
and outfitted the Panama, that Sheehan sent boats out from shore to
pick up the liquor off the coast near Breton Island, and that Sheehan
paid him upon delivery of the shipments. Despite the testimony of
the captain and his crew, the government was never able to obtain
enough evidence to take the case to court. No evidence of the liquor
cargo smuggled into New Orleans was ever produced, and without the
physical evidence the government had no case. Sheehan, careful to
cover his involvement in the Panama episode, managed to escape prospe-
cution. In fact, Sheehan never spent a day in jail during the entire
decade. In 1929 he pleaded guilty to several liquor law violations,
but received only a suspended sentence. After Prohibition was re-
pealed, Sheehan's Suburban Gardens continued to prosper as a gambling
establishment well into the 1930s.25

Many New Orleans liquor smugglers prospered during the Twenties,
but the government did achieve some success in breaking up several
large-scale operations. The most spectacular success by Prohibition
agents came in August 1925, when federal forces smashed the Patterson-
Battistella liquor ring, the largest operation in the city and one of
the largest in the United States. Alonzo Patterson, one of the most
powerful liquor smugglers in New Orleans, and his partner, Andrew
Battistella, attempted to smuggle thousands of cases of liquor from

25A. F. Scharff to Don A. Stone, May 27, 1924, File No. 23
(Department of Justice Records); Healy Interview, August 10, 1978;
Louis H. Burns to Assistant Attorney General Mabel Walker Willebrandt,
June 16, 1924, File No. 23-74-21 (Department of Justice Records);
Ibid., Louis H. Burns to Attorney General, August 8, 1924, File No.
23; Ibid., Statement of Captain Emile Fremont, May 25, 1924, File No.
23-74; States, February 7, 1929, p. 1; Times-Picayune, February 26,
Havana into the Crescent City during the period from May to August 1925. This operation ended when Prohibition agents, beginning on August 11, conducted a series of massive liquor raids in New Orleans, St. Bernard Parish, and all along the Gulf Coast. Involving over 200 agents from every area of the country, the raids were described by the *Item* as the "biggest prohibition drive in the United States."

Ten thousand cases of liquor valued at $1,000,000 were seized in the day-long series of raids.26

A prime reason for the success of the government operation was that local Prohibition agents had infiltrated the smuggling ring. Patrick Needham, a twenty-seven-year-old member of O. D. Jackson's force, by working undercover learned the details of the operation. Emphasizing his poor pay as a government agent, Needham met with both Patterson and Battistella, who offered money for information which would guarantee the protection of their liquor shipments. Over the course of the summer a total of $15,560 in bribes was paid to Needham and Joe Thomas, another agent. The largest bribe was for $10,000, to be delivered to O. D. Jackson in return for transferring a Coast Guard vessel so that a liquor schooner could safely unload its cargo.27

Patterson and Battistella were arrested during the August raids and charged with bribery. When their trial began in December 1925, Needham was the star government witness. He told of being present at


Patterson's plush North Carrollton Avenue home, where most of the money changed hands. Here he heard Patterson make arrangements to have liquor shipped from Honduras and to send Battistella to Havana to obtain liquor. Needham told of a number of instances where he shifted Prohibition agents off certain roads so that smuggled liquor could reach the city undetected. In addition, Needham testified that he arranged a meeting between Patterson and Walter Cohen, the black Republican Comptroller of Customs in New Orleans. At that meeting, held in Patterson's home, Cohen agreed to consider shifting the movements of the customs boat Rita to allow Patterson the opportunity to bring in his liquor shipment. Patterson had instructed Needham to tell Cohen that he would give the comptroller $1,000 to have the Rita's movements changed. The boat was later shifted from its position monitoring the Industrial Canal just before Patterson's shipment passed through. Needham further testified that some of the liquor was brought into New Orleans in small boats via the New Basin Canal. He helped unload several shipments near the Tenth Precinct police station; from there the liquor was moved to Canal Street through a cemetery. Several New Orleans policemen served as lookouts while the shipments were being unloaded. In the August raids over 1,500 quarts of liquor were found in Patterson's home, where it was being stored temporarily awaiting final distribution to his customers.  

Needham's testimony led to the conviction of Patterson and

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Battistella, both of whom received prison terms for their role in heading the conspiracy. But the indictments did not end there. Altogether, over thirty people were indicted as a result of the August raids. Among those charged were Cohen, Henry Dedeaux, the acting supervisor of customs, Sheriff L. A. Mereaux of St. Bernard Parish, three St. Bernard deputies, Lyall Shiel, former enforcement officer under O. D. Jackson, a New Orleans police captain, and two New Orleans policemen. Needham was the key witness at many of the trials. For instance, his testimony showed collusion between Sheriff Meraux and his deputies and the Patterson-Battistella operation. He provided testimony that Meraux and the others were receiving money for conveying liquor safely through St. Bernard Parish. Not all of those indicted were convicted. Sheriff Meraux was never brought to trial because of insufficient evidence, although one official later described him as being "derelict in his duties" and called his actions "morally reprehensible." Two of his deputies were acquitted by a jury after being tried for their role in the operation. While the prosecutions were less than completely successful, the August raids did break up what Treasury officials described as "one of the largest liquor conspiracies as yet uncovered in this country."
The irony of the breakup of the largest smuggling ring in New Orleans was that it eventually led to the dismissal of the man largely responsible for the success of the raids, Patrick Needham. Purposely kept in the dark about Needham's role by O. D. Jackson until the raids were over, many people in New Orleans initially regarded him as a crooked agent. One paper, referring to Needham's testimony in the Cohen case, felt that the agent had overstepped the guidelines of his undercover role. The States believed that it would "be a miscarriage of justice for any man, white or negro, to be convicted and forced into felon's stripes on the supported testimony of a witness who acknowledges he enacts the role of a crook, grafter, Judas and double-crosser even if his excuse is that he is serving the government's cause ..." On September 20, 1927, Needham was dismissed from the force. In a signed statement at the time of his release he blamed his dismissal on the influence of Walter Cohen, who resented Needham's testimony against him in the liquor conspiracy case. The Times-Picayune noted it was the first time "political interference" had been directly brought to bear upon Prohibition enforcement in New Orleans.

If smuggling was a lucrative profession, there was always the danger of violence. There were clashes between the bootleggers them-

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32 Editorial, States, December 21, 1925, p. 6.

selves as rival groups vied for control of the market. One of the most brutal bootleg murders in New Orleans occurred in April 1922, when Frankie Russell, an ex-pugilist and police character, and Michael Walsh, his partner in crime, were shot dead in what proved to be a conflict between rival bootleggers. Arthur Masson and Philip Gehlbach, both of whom were also involved in liquor running, were tried for the murders. Each group had stolen liquor from the other's shipments, thus precipitating a tense situation which led to the final shootout. Masson and Gehlbach were acquitted in the murder trial, primarily because Russell and Walsh had held them up first and they fired only in self-defense. Masson remained a notorious bootlegger throughout the rest of the Twenties but he managed to avoid going to prison on any of the numerous charges against him. When Prohibition ended Masson turned to another area of crime, drugs, where he was active when he died as he had lived, violently.\(^{34}\)

The most shocking smuggling murders of the 1920s occurred on April 17, 1925, with the killing of two St. Bernard deputy sheriffs at the Violet bridge. Sheriff Albert Estopinal of St. Bernard Parish, learning that a liquor shipment was to be convoyed through the area, stationed three deputies at the Violet bridge in the hope of intercepting the caravan. At about 5:00 on the morning of April 17 deputies stopped the first truck in the convoy. However, at that instant a

Ford touring car swerved from behind the truck, and one of the men in the car fired several shotgun blasts at the deputies. When the firing was over, Deputies Joseph Estopinal, the sheriff's brother, and August Esteves lay dead, their bodies disfigured by buckshot.  

Judge Leander Perez immediately convened the St. Bernard Parish grand jury, which indicted a number of suspects. The leading suspect was Gus Tomes, an ex-prize fighter with a lengthy police record in New Orleans, who was identified by several witnesses as the one who fired the fatal shots. Tomes was tried and sentenced to life imprisonment when a jury found him guilty. He was spared the death penalty because the jury believed his story that he thought the men who stopped the liquor truck were hijackers. As it turned out, Tomes was the only person convicted of the murders. The next defendant was found innocent, and no further individuals were ever brought to trial for the crime. One of the men indicted by the grand jury was J. Claude Meraux, who was implicated as an accessory after the fact. Meraux, former Tulane football star, aviator, prominent lawyer, and secretary of the Lake Borgne Levee Board, was the brother of Dr. L. A. Meraux, leader of one of the two major political factions in the parish. He was accused of helping Tomes escape capture immediately after the killings. Meraux fled the parish shortly before the indictments were handed down, claiming he feared the methods employed by local enforcement officials. He later turned himself in to St. Bernard authorities in July. However, Meraux never did stand trial on the indictment, and

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Footnotes:

35 Item, April 17, 1923, p. 1; Jeansonne, Leander Perez, p. 23; Times-Picayune, April 18, 1923, p. 1.
it was eventually dropped about one year later. 36

The lack of convictions in the murder cases must be seen in the light of St. Bernard politics. Sheriff Albert Estopinal headed a political faction that was allied with the Old Regulars in New Orleans. Dr. L. A. Meraux headed another faction that supported the New Regulars. Judge Perez, a member of the Meraux faction, frustrated District Attorney Philip Livaudais' attempts at gaining convictions in the cases. He ordered the trials held so quickly that Livaudais was unable to gather sufficient evidence. As a result the district attorney was forced to drop the remaining indictments. In addition, after the cases were dropped, Perez had Livaudais and Estopinal indicted for using "third degree" methods on suspects arrested for the April murders. Though these indictments were quickly quashed, the political squabbling continued between the two factions and came to a head in 1924. Sheriff Estopinal, who had served two terms, was defeated by Dr. L. A. Meraux in the January 1924, election for sheriff. 37 Later that same year J. Claude Meraux ran for district judge against District Attorney Livaudais. Meraux's opponents brought up his role following the murder of the deputies, feeling that if he were elected "they ought to finish the good work by getting Dutch Gardner [Tomes' alias] pardoned and making him chief deputy sheriff


37 Item, January 18, 1924, p. 2; Jeanonne, Leander Perez, pp. 24, 30; Times-Picayune, July 26, 1923, p. 4, November 11, 1923, p. 1, November 18, 1923, sec. 1-B, p. 10, November 28, 1923, p. 3.
and crier of the court in St. Bernard Parish, as the atmosphere would then be more congenial and homelike."

Meraux's less than reputable conduct following the killings did not hurt him in the campaign. He won the election by a two-to-one margin, joining his brother in ousting the Estopinal faction from power. The campaign charges against Meraux proved prophetic. In October 1928, Gus Tomes was granted a full pardon by the state parole board. Judge J. Claude Meraux cast the deciding vote recommending Tomes' release.39

Smuggled liquor provided one source of liquor in New Orleans. A second source was moonshine, liquor produced illegally by stills in New Orleans homes, buildings, and in outlying areas of the parish. Moonshine included hard liquor, or "over-night" whiskey, as well as home brew, beer or wine manufactured in the residence, and sometimes sold to local customers. Imported liquor was the major source of supply for the city of New Orleans during the early Twenties, but the quantity of moonshine being produced increased steadily until by the late Twenties it was the leading source of liquor in the city.40

Moonshine could be made using an inexpensive still which produced a few gallons, or in a huge distillery that occupied several floors of a building and produced hundreds of gallons. Many New Orleans families made home brew, both to drink themselves and to sell to supplement


40*Times-Picayune,* December 30, 1928, p. 8.
their income. 41

Recipes for making "the finest oldtime beer in your home," as well as ingredients like malt and hops, were readily available. Although Prohibition officials frequently tried to stop the sale of beer-making outfits, use of the equipment was widespread. Shortly after Prohibition went into effect, in May 1920, government officials in New Orleans charged that more than 10,000 persons were technically guilty of violating the Eighteenth Amendment because they had bought beer-making outfits from a local concern, the Tropical Food Products Company, located on St. Charles Avenue. Prohibition agents concentrated their efforts upon the suppliers; the small still owner producing beer for his own use was generally not bothered. 42 But even if the agents were successful in cutting off the supply of this apparatus, an enterprising person could still improvise and tap the open market for parts to make his own still.

More important than the small local still was the illicit distillery, designed to produce great quantities of illegal liquor. These larger stills, some of them having a capacity of up to 500 gallons, were located in sheds, basements, and in buildings that looked from the outside like residences. Sometimes the whiskey-producing plant occupied the upper floors of a building in which the ground floor served as the headquarters for a legitimate business, such as a grocery store or other small concern. Periodically during the Twenties

41 Dempsey Interview, June 27, 1978.

Prohibition agents in New Orleans raided liquor operations capable of producing hundreds and even thousands of gallons of liquor per week. In 1921 agents found a complete whiskey distillery on the second floor of a building on Decatur Street. Altogether, they confiscated nine stills, two 500-gallon cisterns filled with mash, a quantity of bottles, labels, corks, and several books containing recipes for making liquor. The operation was elaborately equipped with an electric alarm system and trap doors. Denying any knowledge of the liquor operation, the owner of the grocery on the ground floor claimed that he rented the upper floors of the building to a man involved in the "perfumery" manufacturing business. Another raid on a house on St. Philip Street yielded a complete plant and 3,000 quarts of illegal liquor. The value of the operation was estimated at $50,000.43

New Orleans bootleggers were continually devising new ways to elude Prohibition agents and still supply their customers. It is estimated that in the early Twenties there were 200 bootleggers in New Orleans doing an annual business of $5,000,000. Their methods were legion. One competitor operated through a small store in the downtown area. A customer drove his car in front of the store, went inside, purchased his liquor and paid for it. Meanwhile his car was driven away and returned with his liquor in the back seat. Sometimes the bootlegger set up a traveling bar system, in which an automobile cruised the downtown area dispensing drinks at fifty cents a

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shot. By nature bootleggers were a suspicious lot and took elaborate precautions to make sure they sold to the right people. In one downtown building a person went up to the second floor, where a wall panel slid out revealing a large elevator, operated by hand. The buyer then took the elevator down several flights of stairs, getting off in a large room where part of the floor slid back to disclose a basement full of expensive liquors. Many large retail bootleggers in New Orleans also had their own "fingermen" working at the entrance to their places of business. If these individuals did not already know the Prohibition agents on sight, they frequented the federal building to spot the agents as they entered their offices. Bootleggers even had their own insurance policies. Some were covered through a Bootlegger Underwriting Company to which they paid a premium. The company was financed by a major figure in bootlegging circles. In return for his premium, the bootlegger received the services of a lawyer if he got in trouble, payment of his bond, court costs, half his fine if he was convicted, and money to support his loved ones if he was sentenced to jail.

Retail bootlegging in New Orleans could be extremely lucrative. One retailer who had 200 regular customers, lived in a pleasant, middle-class section of the city, while his office was in a rooming house in another section of town. There on a table he spread out a sampling of his wares—twenty-five different types of liquor. His

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annual income was $60,000, and he was welcomed into the homes of "bankers, lawyers, brokers, capitalists, manufacturers, in fact the big men of all classes." But not all bootleggers lived in luxury. A few went bankrupt and could not pay their fines when they were convicted. In New Orleans in 1927 the government issued 214 certificates to bankrupt bootleggers. This allowed a bootlegger, if he swore he was without funds, to be released after serving a thirty-day jail sentence. However, bootlegging generally paid off handsomely for the average operator. Light fines and minimal jail sentences failed to dissuade enterprising entrepreneurs from entering the profession.

There were plenty of places in New Orleans which sold the bootlegger's product. Once war-time prohibition came to New Orleans in 1919 the corner saloon disappeared. It was replaced by those creations of the Volstead Act—the soft drink stand and the speakeasy. The name soft drink stand was something of a misnomer. Nothing was soft about the contents of the beverages served there. A typical soft drink stand was a simple operation that served mostly home brew and some hard liquor. It was the poor man's speakeasy, and the drinks served there were inferior to those poured at more exclusive establishments. More impressive than the soft drink stand was the speakeasy that generally catered to a more select clientele and served a better quality of liquor. Soft drink stands and speakeasies were located all

46 *New York Times*, September 18, 1921, p. 18.

47 *Item*, April 8, 1928, p. 9.

over the city.  

Speakeasies operated on many different levels. There were exclusive speakeasies that catered to a prominent clientele. One such establishment was the Transportation Club, run by an ex-Prohibition agent and located on Common Street in the heart of the business district. To gain admittance to the club, the customer had to have a key which fit the street door. Once inside he went up a flight of stairs under the watchful eyes of the proprietor who looked through a peephole in the upstairs door to prevent the entrance of any unwanted ex-colleagues. Other less elaborate speakeasies in office buildings downtown catered to ordinary business employees. There were even bootleg establishments directly across from police headquarters. The story was told about a man coming out of the Criminal Courts Building who had a hip flask, a trademark of the Prohibition era. Walking down the steps the man slipped and fell. As the liquid ran down his leg he cried, "God! I hope it's blood!"  

Restaurants, cafes, roadhouses, and nightclubs in New Orleans furnished liquor to their customers. At first some exclusive restaurants provided liquor only in their private dining rooms. By the mid-Twenties, however, liquor was served in the open. In some restaurants and roadhouses liquor was served in demi-tasses, the small cups in which New Orleanians took their coffee. Many of the city's most exclusive restaurants and nightclubs were subject to periodic

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49 Healy Interview, August 10, 1978.

50 Item, July 22, 1927, p. 1; Ogden Interview, July 18, 1978.

51 Ogden Interview, July 18, 1978.
raids by Prohibition agents who had purchased liquor and obtained a search warrant. These included Delmonico's, a refined eating establishment on St. Charles Avenue; the Cadillac Café, a famous night spot on Rampart and Conti Streets; and the Hotsy Totsy Club, an elegant dance and supper club on Common and Dryades Streets. In 1924 agents raided the Boston Club, one of the city's oldest and most exclusive social clubs, which had a membership of about 400, among them many of the city's leading business and professional people. One hundred bottles of liquor were seized in the raid.\textsuperscript{52}

New Orleans speakeasies went to elaborate lengths to prevent or delay the entrance of Prohibition agents. One speakeasy, the Bat, catered to businessmen in the downtown area and had a 2,000 pound steel door that was activated whenever agents approached. Another speakeasy had three barred doors, one with heavy locks. A lookout was posted to signal the bartenders that a raid was imminent so that by the time agents broke down the doors with their axes, they could only sniff the fumes of liquor already poured down the drain. As Prohibition enforcement became more vigorous many restaurants and speakeasies moved their stocks of liquor to a nearby place for storage, keeping on the premises only a minimal amount, and disposing of it quickly whenever a raid occurred. Restaurants especially used nearby buildings for caching their liquor. In one restaurant when a customer wanted a drink with his meal the waiter went to the storage area and

brought him one. Customers at another restaurant were served from a pint flask, which an employee carried in his pocket. If the establishment were raided, the employee would run out and destroy the evidence. Another establishment even provided curb service for its customers. A person drove up, honked his horn, and the bartender brought him a mixed drink. Some places decided to put their stocks in safes as a precautionary measure. As a result agents began carrying sledgehammers to gain access to the liquor cache.\(^{53}\) However, the prize for ingenuity in storing liquor went to city newspaper reporters. They cooled their beer by placing it at the feet of the corpses at the morgue, where there was always room for a half dozen bottles. The electrical refrigeration system in the morgue kept their beer at the perfect temperature.\(^{54}\)

If keeping their liquor in a safe place was important to New Orleanians, so too was the cost of their drinks. The price of a drink of liquor ranged from ten to twenty-five cents at some of the sleazier soft drink stands to one dollar at the most exclusive places. Generally, the price of a drink sold over the counter was forty to fifty cents. Liquor prices during the Twenties, however, fluctuated with supply and demand. If the supply were plentiful, the price was low. If Prohibition agents succeeded in making good liquor scarce, the price was high. For example, in July 1923, a case of good


\(^{54}\) Ogden Interview, July 18, 1978.
imported whiskey sold for $45; two months earlier that same whiskey had sold for $65 a case due to a tighter market. Moonshine and home brew were the cheapest beverages in both price and quality; imported liquor and good bonded whiskey were the best and the highest priced. During the mid-Twenties moonshine sold for $1.50 to $2 a quart, good bourbon and rye $12 a bottle, quality Scotch $9 a quart, and imported champagne $15 a quart. Whiskey issued under a doctor's prescription, which was excellent bonded liquor, sold for $3.50 to $4.00 a pint. The trend during the Twenties was that as imported liquor grew scarcer owing to the vigilance of the Coast Guard and the Customs Service, the quality of liquor declined, and people depended more and more on the suspect overnight products. Also, bootleggers were not above using a little ingenuity in fooling a gullible public. Fake government stamps and labels were used to disguise ordinary moonshine as choice liquor. Liquor made in the city often bore the label King George or another select imported brand, and was sold at a considerably higher price than the overnight merchandise.

New Orleanians faced real dangers if they drank the overnight liquor. Much of the moonshine was literally hazardous to a person's health and potentially even fatal. Several persons died in New Orleans during the Twenties as a result of drinking poisonous liquor. The imported brands were prepared according to scientifically correct procedures and posed little health threat. But much of the overnight


56 States, October 16, 1921, p. 1, April 19, 1924, p. 1.
liquor was prepared by entrepreneurs interested mainly in making a
dishonest dollar and not in maintaining proper distillation procedures.
Stills made exclusively of copper were relatively safe for producing
liquor. However, stills which contained connections or coils that
were made of cheaper metals, like lead or zinc, produced deadly
poisons. Poisons such as wood alcohol and sulphuric acid were some-
times added to give liquor tone and taste but then not completely
filtered out in the distillation process. Another deadly poison,
fusel oil, a substance with a pungent, unpleasant smell, was found
in many insufficiently distilled liquors.57

A major danger stemmed from the unsanitary conditions under which
some liquor was made. Prohibition raids turned up casks of liquor
containing dead spiders, roaches, mice, and, in one instance, a cat.
A New Orleans policeman during the Twenties remembers raiding a place
that produced home brew beer. As the policemen poured out the barrels,
they found dead rats that had drowned in the beer.58 Undoubtedly
many New Orleanians drank beer or moonshine which had at one time had
all sorts of dead animals mixed in with the liquor. Several Prohibition
agents, including Patrick Needham, became violently ill after pur-
chasing drinks in New Orleans soft drink stands. Federal chemists
warned New Orleanians not to drink the cheap overnight liquor that was
readily available. At times the problem of poison liquor became acute.

57Ibid., February 1, 1923, p. 1, February 2, 1923, p. 1; Times-

58Hartman Interview, July 6, 1978; Item, February 1, 1923, p. 1;
States, August 28, 1929, p. 1.
W. T. Day, Prohibition divisional chief for the Gulf area, estimated in February 1923, that over 40 per cent of the liquor seized by his agents contained some amount of potentially harmful ingredients. 59

A third source of liquor in New Orleans was industrial alcohol, a product used mainly by businesses and made legitimately during Prohibition under close governmental supervision. New Orleans was the largest center for the manufacture of industrial alcohol in the United States; in 1921 the city produced nearly 30,000,000 gallons annually, one-third of America's total production. Most of the alcohol manufacturing plants were located on the west bank in such towns as Gretna, Westwego, and Harvey. Although industrial alcohol was a much smaller source of illegal liquor than smuggled beverages or moonshine, it did present a problem for federal authorities, particularly in the early Twenties. One gallon of industrial alcohol, when watered down, colored and purged of impurities, could yield three gallons of liquor. 60 Thus the plants and warehouses near New Orleans presented a tempting target to bootleg thieves constantly searching for a cheap source of supply.

The most ambitious alcohol theft in the New Orleans area occurred in March 1921. A group of thieves, apparently with advance warning from one of the plant's night watchmen, came across the river on a barge and stole over fifty barrels of high proof alcohol from

59 States, February 1, 1923, p. 1; Times-Picayune, February 1, 1923, p. 1, February 2, 1923, p. 3.

the Kentucky Distillery in Westwego. A tug transported the alcohol to a farm near Harahan, another west bank town, where it was stored. When watered down, the alcohol had a potential bootleg value of over $100,000. Federal agents tracked the alcohol to the farm and recovered the stolen merchandise. Eleven men involved in the theft were found guilty in federal court of violations of the Volstead Act and received sentences of from one to two years in prison. Other elaborate attempts were made at stealing industrial alcohol. One group of thieves stole several thousand gallons of alcohol from a railroad car, while another group at a distillery in Algiers siphoned off industrial alcohol for sale to buyers in several Southern states and as far north as New Jersey.

Some bootleggers who could not steal their private supplies of alcohol produced their own. In September 1926, Prohibition agents raided what proved to be the largest alcohol distillery discovered in New Orleans. The giant plant, occupying three floors of a four-story building, contained nine large vats of mash feeding several enormous boilers. It was located in the heart of the business district only a block and a half from Prohibition headquarters in the Customhouse, and was estimated to have a capacity of over 2,000 gallons a week, enough alcohol to make over 16,000 quarts of bootleg liquor. An alarm system and artificial ventilation capable of carrying fumes high above the

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61 Item, March 5, 1921, p. 2; April 16, 1921, p. 2; Times-Picayune, March 5, 1921, p. 2; March 13, 1921, p. 1; March 14, 1921, p. 1.

62 Times-Picayune, July 13, 1921, p. 20; June 8, 1924, p. 4.
building had made the operation hard to detect. 63

Illegal beer provided a fourth source of problems for Prohibition agents in New Orleans. This was beer illegally produced in New Orleans' major breweries, not to be confused with the home-brewed beer manufactured by many local residents. Once the Volstead Act became law New Orleans breweries were not allowed to manufacture beer with an alcoholic content of more than one half of one per cent. But they were allowed to produce and market beer with a lesser alcoholic content known as "near-beer." Although the production of near-beer never reached the pre-Prohibition levels of regular beer, it still created trouble for enforcement officials. The problem arose because it was impossible to produce legal beer without first making the illegal product. It was up to Prohibition agents to make sure breweries were not marketing illegal beer or supplying alcohol to their customers with which they could "spike" the weaker legal brew. 64

Discovering that local breweries were selling illegal beer to city soft drink stands and speakeasies, the government retaliated in a dramatic series of raids. In June 1921, thirty Prohibition agents raided six major breweries, confiscating thousands of cases of beer worth $35,000. They took charge of all the buildings, machinery, vats, trucks, and automobiles owned by the companies. Property seized was valued at close to $500,000, and hundreds of employees were temporarily out of work. Standard, Dixie, American, Columbia,

63 Ibid., September 11, 1926, p. 1.

64 Merz, Dry Decade, pp. 66-67; Sinclair, Era of Excess, p. 205.
National, and Union breweries were raided. A few days after the raids a settlement was reached between federal officials and attorneys representing the breweries. As a result the breweries agreed to pay a tax penalty to the government in excess of $100,000.65

In July 1921, United States District Court Judge Rufus Foster issued an injunction which implemented the terms of the settlement between the federal government and the breweries. It stated that the companies were allowed to reopen provided they produced only legal beer. If they failed to comply, they would be cited for contempt. Any future violation of the injunction and the delinquent company would be closed permanently. Judge Foster's ruling was cited as being the first issued in the United States specifically restraining a brewery from violating the Prohibition law. Not all the breweries, however, abided by the injunction. In the massive raid of August 1925, the agents' first objectives were the Standard and Union breweries. The properties of both were temporarily seized by the government, and three Standard officers were indicted for offering over $500 in bribes to Prohibition agents to allow the company to manufacture illegal beer. After deliberating only fifteen minutes a jury found the men guilty and each was sentenced to two years in prison. The president of the Union Brewery was also tried and convicted of bribing enforcement agents.66 After the 1925 federal

crackdown there were few incidents of brewery officials being tried for violations of the Prohibition statute.

The fifth and least important source of illegal liquor in New Orleans was the unauthorized obtaining of liquor reserved for medicinal purposes. With the Prohibition forces constantly undermanned, the opportunity was always there for doctors and druggists to make illegal profits from the sale of prescription liquor. Doctors were allowed legally to prescribe liquor for their patients but the amount was closely monitored by Prohibition officials. Physicians were issued booklets of prescription blanks in amounts of 100 every ninety days, regardless of the size of the doctor's practice. At the end of each quarter the doctor returned his stubs to the Prohibition office. If a doctor prescribed more than a pint of whiskey or a quart of wine to one patient within a ten-day period he was subject to a fine for violating the Volstead Act. For more serious violations the government had the power to revoke a physician's permit to prescribe medicinal liquor. As an example, in April 1925, the local Prohibition office in New Orleans charged a number of doctors with issuing prescriptions in bad faith. According to the government, the doctors had not even made an effort to examine their patients. Druggists also supplied liquor upon prescription. They received their supply from one of the local wholesalers still legally distributing liquor. Sometimes the druggist watered down his product to make his supply go further and to make a greater profit. The customer thus received

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inferior liquor at a high price. In one instance during the late Twenties government agents for the first time raided a drugstore holding a permit for selling liquor. Agents charged the druggist with selling liquor openly and his store with "acting virtually as a speakeasy."

In an attempt to dry up the sources of illegal liquor in New Orleans Prohibition agents conducted periodic raids against establishments serving beverages in violation of the law. Before a raid was conducted agents working undercover made "buys" of illegal liquor and then obtained a search warrant for the place where it was sold. Establishments where illegal liquor was purchased were added to a list of locations to be raided. Raids occurred at least several times a month, with the number of targets raided depending upon the intensity of the operation. Generally, the raids came in clusters, with at least five to ten establishments being raided in a single night. Peak times of Prohibition activity frequently coincided with the holiday revelry of the Fourth of July, Mardi Gras, and New Year's Eve. Heavy periods of raiding also occurred when a new Prohibition administrator took over in New Orleans or there was a major reorganization at the national level. New administrators, eager to show their zeal in the war to keep America dry, always intensified raiding activity.

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69 Jackson, "Prohibition in New Orleans," p. 268; Examination of issues of the Item, States, and Times-Picayune for the years 1920-1929.
The largest series of raids in the city's history occurred in August 1925, with over 200 agents from all areas of the country involved. In these raids the agents formed into squads, which then fanned out to cover every area of the city. Usually, however, the raiding was on a much smaller scale as local agents concentrated on visiting key establishments which repeatedly violated the law. Sometimes national headquarters sent its top agents to New Orleans to help, as was the case in November 1923, when Izzy Einstein, the Prohibition era's master of disguise, arrived in the city. Einstein, variously disguised as a longshoreman, a businessman, and a traveling salesman, visited over fifty different places where he purchased liquor during his short stay in New Orleans. 70 Conducting his own poll of American cities to see in which one he was able to purchase a drink the quickest, Izzy nominated New Orleans for first place. Less than a minute after he arrived in the city Einstein asked a taxi driver where he could obtain a drink. The driver promptly displayed a bottle which he offered to sell. 71

Upon entering a place, agents attempted to keep a low profile while searching for the establishment's liquor supply. This was not always easy to do because agents were sometimes forced to use axes or other means to gain entry. Many times agents were forced to move quickly to prevent the proprietor or one of his employees from destroying the evidence. Government enforcement officials also faced

the hostility of patrons and a lack of cooperation from local police. One incident in July 1924, suggests the problems involved. Mack Overpeck, Divisional Chief of the New Orleans Prohibition force, and three of his agents were arrested by police when they attempted to raid Felix Tranchina's fashionable 'Spanish Fort' restaurant. There were differing versions as to what actually happened. The press charged that the raiders entered by leaping through windows and crashing down the doors to the crowded establishment. Patrons were reported to have cheered as the agents were taken to jail. According to the official police report, no liquor was found in the restaurant. Overpeck, however, told a different tale. He said that guests were pouring and drinking liquor when his agents broke in. When the agents attempted to conduct an orderly search and to seize liquor as evidence, the patrons rushed his men and took the bottles away from them. New Orleans police then interfered and took the agents to jail. Prohibition officials threatened to press charges against the patrolmen involved for interfering with federal agents. Charges of disturbing the peace filed against the agents were dropped and the men were quickly released.72 This incident, resolved without further conflict, illustrated the growing tension between federal and local officials.

Any liquor confiscated by Prohibition agents in New Orleans was usually stored in the Customhouse, although most home brew was destroyed on the spot, with just enough seized to be used as evidence in court. When a person was convicted, the liquor seized automatically

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became the property of the federal government. The government sometimes sold the confiscated property at auction to those businesses, like wholesale and retail drug houses and hospitals, that used and were licensed to buy liquor for medicinal purposes. If the liquor was not of sufficient quality for their needs, it was destroyed. Imported liquor, however, could not be destroyed without an authorization from a federal judge. On occasion, if the government acted illegally, as in the case of Jack Sheehan, the liquor was returned to its original owner.

During the early Twenties liquor seized in federal raids disappeared from government storerooms owing to lax security procedures. In December 1922, several hundred bottles of imported liquor were taken from a storeroom adjoining the office of the United States marshal in the Postoffice Building. Six guards were suspended following this disappearance, but were later reinstated. The liquor was subsequently found in the attic hidden under some floorboards. A year and a half earlier, a federal grand jury had investigated the problem of liquor theft from the local Prohibition storeroom. In its report the grand jury found indications of systematic thefts of liquor by federal agents, but not enough evidence to indict individual members of the force. Calling the thefts "a matter of public scandal," the grand jury criticized the local Prohibition office for being


"loosely and inefficiently conducted." Citing an example of liquor ordered returned to a woman whose home had been raided, the jury noted that the original contents of the bottles had been removed and replaced with grape juice and other ingredients. It declared that the amount of the thefts was "disgracefully large" and it called for the implementation of procedures designed to provide security against future losses.\textsuperscript{75} Evidently the grand jury report tightened security methods, for after the early Twenties the press reported fewer thefts from federal storage facilities.

The value of the liquor and property seized during federal raids in New Orleans ran into millions of dollars. For the year 1922 agents seized liquor, trucks, automobiles, and smuggling vessels totalling more than $500,000. Statistics for the Twenties are incomplete, but figures for the first year and a half of O. D. Jackson's term as Prohibition administrator, from May 1923, to December 1924, show that the government conducted more than 1,000 raids. In those raids agents confiscated more than 30,000 gallons of distilled liquor and over 50,000 gallons of wine, worth over $700,000. A total of 400 stills were seized and destroyed; twelve boats and 136 automobiles and trucks were taken by federal agents. The amount of liquor and property confiscated surpassed $1,000,000.\textsuperscript{76}

In addition to liquor raids, the most effective weapon in the

\textsuperscript{75}Report, United States Grand Jury for the Eastern District of Louisiana, New Orleans Division, to Henry Mooney, May 12, 1921, File No. 23 (Department of Justice Records).

\textsuperscript{76}States, December 26, 1924, p. 1; Times-Picayune, January 1, 1923, p. 5, December 7, 1924, p. 9.
government's Prohibition arsenal was its use of the padlock procedure. Applying the padlock provisions of the Volstead Act, the United States attorney in New Orleans obtained injunctions in federal court closing certain places as public nuisances, establishments guilty of multiple violations of the Prohibition law. Basing each case on evidence provided by local Prohibition agents, the government petitioned the court to grant its request for an injunction which stipulated that if the owner of the establishment did not agree to comply fully with the law, his place of business was ordered closed for a period of one year. He could not reopen until the judge was satisfied with his efforts at compliance; the padlock would then be removed and the place was allowed to resume operation.

New Orleans soft drink stands, restaurants, and cafes used all their resources in resisting government efforts to apply the padlock law. In what proved to be a test case, the proprietors of seven prominent establishments, including the Little Club and the Moulin Rouge, fought the government all the way to the court of appeals, which upheld a district court decision closing the places as common nuisances. In February 1925, United States marshals served the first padlock orders in the city closing the offenders, three of which were still doing business. From the mid-Twenties on the United States attorney moved vigorously to apply the padlock provision in New Orleans. The campaign was most effective in the years 1925 and 1926. By March 1926, fifty establishments throughout the city bore the sign

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"Closed by United States Marshal for Violation of the Prohibition Act." Holiday visitors to New Orleans in December 1926, found eighty-six cabarets and nightclubs under federal padlock and forty-four more under bond as a guarantee not to sell liquor. Some of the city's most celebrated institutions—the Old Absinthe House, a landmark in New Orleans for over a hundred years, and the Ace, formerly the Bat, a notorious speakeasy—at one time were under federal padlock. According to government figures for 1927, New Orleans had more cabarets and nightclubs under padlock than any other major city in the country.78

Federal District Court in New Orleans handled the bulk of the padlock suits and other Prohibition cases brought by the government. Generally, a first offense resulted in a fine or suspended jail sentence. Multiple offenses resulted in higher fines and prison sentences. Fines reached as high as $500-$1,000 for multiple or serious violations, but this was rare; normally fines ranged from a low of $5 up to $100-$200. Most first offenders who pleaded guilty got off with a fine of $50. Prison sentences were generally limited to from thirty to sixty days, but could reach several years for more serious offenses, such as smuggling or hijacking. Federal judges in New Orleans also imposed harsher sentences upon those who pleaded not guilty and were convicted. Those pleading guilty and throwing themselves upon the mercy of the court received lesser sentences. Judge Rufus Foster of the Federal District Court during the early Twenties stated that the great majority of Prohibition arrests were for mere

possession or transportation of liquor, and for these he usually assessed a $50 fine for a guilty plea. A first offense for selling liquor resulted in a fine of $100, which Foster felt was not a light punishment since most of the persons fined were not wealthy individuals. Prohibition penalties lacked teeth until Congress passed the Jones Act in 1929, which provided for a maximum penalty of five years in jail and a fine of $10,000 for first offenders. In New Orleans, however, the more severe penalties were applied only to the most flagrant violators. Sentencing in federal court did not change very much following passage of the Jones Act, although the New Orleans court now had the real threat of imposing stiffer penalties upon Volstead offenders.79

By far the greatest number of convictions under the Prohibition law resulted from guilty pleas. In the four years from 1920 through 1923 there were only seventy trials by jury for Prohibition violations in New Orleans, with fifty-nine of them resulting in acquittals. Most offenders pleaded guilty, realizing that a fine, and probably a small one, would be their only punishment. Jail sentences were in the distinct minority. Many bootleggers preferred to pay the fine, which they considered a cost of doing business, and return to their normal operation. In a memorandum Louis Burns, the United States attorney in New Orleans, was critical of the federal court. He felt that in many cases, particularly those involving multiple offenders, sentences should have been heavier. Burns noted that often the previous

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79 Item, April 12, 1929, p. 1, June 18, 1929, p. 1; Sinclair, Era of Excess, p. 192; States, March 6, 1923, p. 1.
offenses of multiple violators were not taken into account when passing sentence.

The persons convicted or pleading guilty to Prohibition violations in New Orleans were a diverse lot, ranging in age from a fourteen-year-old boy to a ninety-five year-old man. Many were of foreign birth. Prohibition agents estimated that over half of those involved in bootlegging offenses were illegal aliens, and there were moves to have them deported. In one instance when the judge learned that a man who pleaded guilty to operating a still had been in the country only ten days, he instructed the district attorney to notify the immigration authorities. Some violators became instant celebrities.

Gertrude Lythgoe, the so-called "Queen of the Bootleggers," turned state's evidence and testified at a sensational liquor-smuggling trial in New Orleans during the mid-Twenties. Prohibition cases were not without their humor. Facing the federal judge, one man admitted he was guilty of making wine. But, he insisted, his doctor had advised him to drink it because he suffered from tuberculosis. The district attorney pointed out that the accused was found to be in possession of 144 gallons of wine. "Too much medicine," stated the judge, and fined him $100.

In New Orleans, as in the rest of the nation, Prohibition cases

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80. Louis H. Burns to Rush L. Holland, May 5, 1924, File 23 (Department of Justice Records).


clogged the court calendar. As the decade wore on, more and more
cases were pending, putting a tremendous burden on the United States
attorney and the federal judges. Most of the criminal cases occupying
the federal court calendar were Prohibition cases. Figures compiled
by the United States attorney's office for the fiscal year ending June
30, 1927, showed that of a total of 1,214 criminal cases decided, 1,088
were the result of Prohibition raids. During the same year, of 1,109
criminal cases begun, 998 involved violations of the Prohibition law.83
Something obviously had to be done about the growing backlog of cases.
The expedient answer for New Orleans and the rest of the nation was
court sessions known as "bargain days" that involved whirlwind court
settings in which great numbers of violators pleaded guilty in return
for reduced fines. March 1926, marked the beginning of bargain days
in New Orleans. In September 1925, there were 1,367 Prohibition cases
pending. By the time bargain days ended in the latter part of March
there were fewer than 100 cases remaining. From January to April 1926,
fining totalling $187,700 were collected from 935 defendants. During
the month of March 631 Prohibition cases were disposed of, primarily
through guilty pleas. On the day of March 11, 131 offenders were dis-
pensed with by the court; over $21,000 in fines were collected. By
the end of May the federal court docket was in the best shape it had
been since the Volstead Act went into effect.84 Bargain days continued
to be a feature of the New Orleans court calendar during the remainder

83 Ibid., July 17, 1927, p. 1.
84 Ibid., April 4, 1926, p. 2; Times-Picayune, March 12, 1926,
of the Twenties.

Federal Prohibition officials were less than satisfied with the prosecution of Volstead Act violators in New Orleans. E. C. Yellowley, Chief of General Prohibition Agents, in a report to Robert A. Haynes, the Prohibition Commissioner, detailed some of the problems involved. Yellowley criticized the actions of the United States Commissioner in New Orleans, who made the final decision if there was sufficient evidence to issue an affidavit against a Prohibition violator. Yellowley noted that the commissioner often paroled an offender before he could be questioned fully by federal agents and before an affidavit could be filed against the individual. The commissioner's action made it considerably harder to locate a violator once the government was ready to charge him. Judge Foster was also singled out by Yellowley. Noting that the general talk among Prohibition suspects was that "the Judge is easy," Yellowley remarked that it was easier to pay the fine imposed by the court than it had been to pay for a liquor license before Prohibition went into effect. In addition, federal officials were sometimes critical of Louis Burns, the United States attorney in New Orleans during the early Twenties. The national office felt that Burns had mishandled a number of Prohibition cases. In a memorandum Mabel Walker Willebrandt, Assistant Attorney General in charge of Prohibition enforcement, commented upon her displeasure with Burns: "Frankly, either thru incompetence or something every possibly good case is hoodooed when you send it to

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85Report, E. C. Yellowley to Robert A. Haynes, March 5, 1924, File 23 (Department of Justice Records).
New Orleans. Burns is a smooth proposition. . . ." 86 Things were further complicated by public clashes over procedure between Burns and O. D. Jackson, head of the local enforcement unit. 87 Relations later improved between the United States attorney and the national Prohibition office, but these periodic conflicts did not make the task of federal enforcement any easier.

Similarly, federal officials were not satisfied with local enforcement of the state Prohibition act. United States Attorney Burns felt that there appeared to be some tacit understanding between officials in New Orleans that no real effort was made to enforce the Hood Act: "Spasmodically the police make raids on soft drink stands or illicit manufactories, but few seem to be prosecuted. No examination of the State Court dockets has been made, but it is believed that for all practical purposes the law is disregarded." 88 Relations between local Prohibition officials and city police were also tenuous. Police sometimes cooperated in federal enforcement raids, but generally their efforts at arresting violators of the Hood Act were clearly secondary to gambling or prostitution crusades. In one instance in April 1922, the strained relations between New Orleans police and local Prohibition agents came to the fore. Three Prohibition agents

86 Memorandum by Mabel Walker Willebrandt, August 10, 1924, File No. 23 (Department of Justice Records); Ibid., Memorandum, B. M. Coon to Assistant Attorney General Mabel Walker Willebrandt, September 21, 1925.

87 Louis H. Burns to Attorney General, July 16, 1923, File No. 23 (Department of Justice Records).

88 Ibid., Louis H. Burns to Attorney General, probably Mabel Walker Willebrandt, April 21, 1924.
were arrested by city police and charged with assault with dangerous weapons. They had been watching for liquor smugglers and stopped a car driven by a New Orleans police captain in civilian clothes. Suspecting that the car contained liquor, they covered the occupants with their guns. Once the agents realized their mistake, they apologized to the captain and the other passengers and the vehicle continued on its way.  

Superintendent of Police Guy Molony was incensed at the treatment his officer had received and ordered the agents arrested, even threatening to "shoot off the running board" any Prohibition agent attempting to stop his police automobile. There was a conflict between federal and city officials as to whether the agents should be tried in federal or city court. The men were eventually tried in New Orleans criminal court, found not guilty, and released. But before dismissing the charges the judge criticized the agents for stopping motorists with weapons drawn, feeling this was extremely dangerous.  

It was clear that the agents' actions were not deliberate, but the incident heightened the tension between New Orleans police and Prohibition authorities.

An incident that occurred during Arthur O'Keefe's administration involving Tom Hill, the clerk of the city council, and Thomas Healy,

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89. Ibid., W. T. Day to E. C. Yellowley, April 14, 1922.

90. Ibid., Harry Daugherty to U. S. Attorney, New Orleans, April 26, 1922; Ibid., L. P. Bryant, Jr., to Attorney General, April 15, 1922, File No. 23, No. 3041; States, April 15, 1922, p. 1; April 14, 1922, p. 1; Times-Picayune, April 20, 1922, p. 6; April 21, 1922, p. 5; W. T. Day to E. C. Yellowley, April 14, 1922, File No. 23 (Department of Justice Records).
the superintendent of police, showed how the Old Regular machine was sometimes selective in the places it ordered raided by police. Tom Hill was a patron of the Little Club, a place run by Tony Denapolis that sold whiskey and wine. Hill accrued a bill of $400 or $500 but refused to pay it. Without informing Superintendent Healy Hill then also got the police captain in that district to raid Denapolis' club. Denapolis went to Healy "raising hell" about the police raid. Healy then telephoned Mayor O'Keefe and made it quite clear that the clerk of the city council was not running the police department. Hill, said Healy, was not using the police department to get free liquor in New Orleans. He told O'Keefe that if this ever happened again, he would put Hill in jail.91

Besides its cool relationship with city authorities, there were other reasons for the government's lack of success in enforcing Prohibition in New Orleans. Many problems originated with the agents themselves. They were poorly paid, making between $1,200 and $2,000 a year in 1920, and still only $2,300 by 1930. Their low pay, which was less than that of many garbage collectors, made them susceptible to bribes for looking the other way when a liquor shipment entered the city or when an establishment was raided. Furthermore, poor pay was not likely to attract the highest qualified candidates into Prohibition work. Prohibition agents were also exempt from the federal civil service until the late Twenties, when competitive examinations finally went into effect. When these tests were first administered in January 1928, 52 per cent of the force attached to the New Orleans office

91 Healy Interview, August 10, 1978.
failed them.\footnote{Sinclair, \textit{Era of Excess}, p. 184.}

Largely because of the poor pay and lack of standards, the caliber of agents varied. Some, like Patrick Needham, were dedicated public servants who did their best with the meager resources available. Others just went through the motions, and still others realized the hopeless nature of their task. One FBI agent in New Orleans, when that organization became involved in Prohibition enforcement, resigned because he felt enforcing liquor laws was not the moral thing for the government to do.\footnote{Healy Interview, August 10, 1978.}

Besides being poorly qualified, the New Orleans force was constantly undermanned. Theodore Jacques, federal enforcement officer in New Orleans, resigned in 1921 complaining about "trying to catch 10,000—yes, there are that many—liquor law violators with about ten men."\footnote{\textit{States}, October 16, 1921, sec. 2, p. 1.} There was also a great deal of turnover in the force, reflecting the national trend. Agents were dismissed for insubordination and incompetence. Politics always played a role; Patrick Needham, their most capable agent, was dismissed because of political pressure. Other agents who quit or were dismissed from the force sometimes turned up on the other side of the law as bootleggers. One agent, Lyall Shiel, arrested in the 1925 government raids, had been a former enforcement chief. The most significant thing about the New Orleans Prohibition force was that it was still occasionally effective, given
all the obstacles working against it.

New Orleanians had never been in favor of the Prohibition Amendment and, as the Twenties ended, they began to voice their disapproval much more vigorously. By 1932 organized business groups such as the Cotton Exchange, the Sugar Exchange, and the Board of Trade clamored in favor of repeal. Raids were still made by Prohibition agents and gun battles were still fought by rival bootleggers, but the climate was changing. In 1932 Louisiana voters passed a constitutional amendment repealing state Prohibition laws. Though the amendment was later declared unconstitutional, its overwhelming approval foreshadowed events to come. On March 24, 1933, the Louisiana legislature repealed the Hood Act, and in New Orleans and the rest of the state the sale of beer became legal at noon on April 13. This came after the Volstead Act had been amended following Franklin Roosevelt's inauguration, making beer legal again nationally and ending thirteen years of dry rule. There was a noisy celebration in New Orleans as 300 brewery trucks drove through the crowded streets bringing local citizens 1,000,000 gallons of local brew. Eight months later, on December 5, 1933, the Twenty-first Amendment was ratified, repealing Prohibition. New Orleanians could now legally consume their favorite brand of hard liquor.

Without question Prohibition was a failure in New Orleans. During the Twenties the city remained one of the wettest in the country. Anyone who wanted a drink and could pay for it could always find one. Smuggling brought a fine selection of imported liquor into New Orleans,

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although after the mid-Twenties the Coast Guard was effective in slowing down the amount of imported beverages reaching the Crescent City. In the latter part of the decade the quality of liquor declined as New Orleanians were forced to depend more upon the locally brewed product. Large operations dominated the New Orleans smuggling scene, although none of them gained control of a major portion of the bootleg market, as Al Capone did in Chicago. There were violent bootleg killings, but none of them could be traced to any type of organized criminal activity. The bootleg market in New Orleans was shared by both large and small operators.

Prohibition agents attempted to enforce the Volstead Act in New Orleans, but it was a losing battle. Only a small portion of the violators were caught and prosecuted. As late as 1927 Assistant Attorney General Mabel Walker Willebrandt estimated that 90 per cent of the Prohibition violators in New Orleans were never caught or prosecuted by enforcement officials. The real reason for the failure of Prohibition in New Orleans was the attitude of its citizens. The great majority disapproved of the government's attempt at legislating morality and were determined to continue their drinking just as they had before the law went into effect. A prominent New Orleanian summed up the attitude of most people:

Now remember this: if New Orleans had voted dry, the situation would be different. But neither of those things did the State or city do. And then along came these Volstead laws that branded a doctor as a criminal if he prescribed more than so much alcohol for a sick, perhaps dying man or woman, that gave the most law abiding citizen to understand

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Ibid., p. 281.
that he was beyond the pale of civilization if he drank a glass of harmless red wine or quenched his thirst with a glass of good beer, or drank the health of a friend in a sparkling tumbler of champagne. I don't believe the majority of our people ever intended that any such puritanical law as that should control in this country. And so New Orleans has just kept on being New Orleans.\footnote{\textit{New York Times}, November 12, 1922, sec. IV, p. 3.}
CHAPTER IV

THE FREE STATE OF NEW ORLEANS:
GAMBLING IN THE CRESCENT CITY

New Orleanians adopted a tolerant attitude toward the pleasures of illegal gambling. In 1920 in New Orleans a wide variety of gambling games and devices waited to take a person's money. For those interested in placing a bet on the horses, one could do so legally with the bookies at the Fair Grounds racetrack, or illegally with one of the hundreds of small handbook operators whose headquarters consisted of a chair and table in the soft drink stands, pool-rooms, chartered clubs, groceries, and barbershops throughout the city. If the lottery was more one's game, there were numerous policy operations in which a person bet on picking the correct series of numbers in each daily drawing. Hundreds of chartered "social" clubs dotted the city, where members could legally play poker or illegally place a bet with their local bookie. Slot machines were available in many speakeasies and soft drink stands for those interested in feeding coins into the one-armed bandits. Blacks played the lottery as well as "kotch," a card game on which they bet ten or fifteen cents a hand. All these different forms of gambling were tolerated by Martin Behrman and the Old Regular organization. As long as the operators of these illegal activities contributed to the Choctaw organization's coffers at election time, they were allowed to do business as usual. If they failed to contribute, the police moved in and raided their operations.
Across the parish line in Jefferson and St. Bernard, gambling was even more visible. The gambling operations in these two parishes, particularly Jefferson, were on a much larger scale than those in New Orleans. Full-scale casinos, like Ballard's and Southport, offered roulette, faro, and other games for the enjoyment of their customers. Law enforcement officials in both parishes generally looked the other way; establishments operated at full capacity most of the time. Many New Orleanians drove the required few miles to drink and gamble in luxurious surroundings. Whether in New Orleans proper or in Jefferson or St. Bernard, residents of the city found plenty of ways to satisfy their gambling appetite.

Throughout the decade, the leading form of gambling in New Orleans was betting on the horses at the Fair Grounds, the only track in the city, located near City Park. Betting was legal at the track and illegal, but tolerated, by the Behrman machine away from the course itself. There were close ties between the New Orleans Ring and the Business Men's Racing Association, which ran the betting operation at the Fair Grounds. One of its directors, A. B. Letellier of the Letellier Paper Company, was a close associate of Martin Behrman. Another member, Placide Frigerio, the track superintendent, also had close ties to the mayor. Frigerio, a known gambler and bookmaker, was described by one newspaper as the king of the Royal Street hand-book operators. A third director, Arturo Del'Orto, was an associate of Dominick Tortorich, a Baronne Street gambler and prize fight promoter. It was also charged that during the Parker-Stubbs election contest in early 1920 machine employees were hired by the racetrack
at "princely" wages. In return, they did very little work around the track; their main task was doing political campaign work for the Ring in the city's wards.\(^1\)

In a speech delivered in New Orleans the newly-elected governor John M. Parker attacked the Ring's influence over racing in the city: "If racing is to be saved as a clean decent sport for New Orleans it must be cleansed of Behrmanized politics and cut loose from underworld alliances."\(^2\) Denouncing the "politicalization" and "degradation" of racing in New Orleans because of the Ring's control over the Business Men's Racing Association, Governor-Elect Parker stated that he was bitterly opposed to racing as it was then conducted in the Crescent City. Parker's opposition brought at least a cosmetic reorganization of the Business Men's Racing Association in an attempt to put an end to public criticism. John Dymond, Jr., a state legislator and a member of the board of administrators of the Tulane Educational Fund, was elected president of the association. Dymond promised a thorough reorganization of the association, an end to handbooks, and a separation of racing from politics. What finally emerged was considerably less than Governor Parker had expected. The Business Men's Racing Association did become less politicized and gamblers like Placide Frigerio were removed from their posts.\(^3\) But the reorganization effort was

\(^1\) Item, February 1, 1920, p. 1; States, January 31, 1920, p. 1, February 1, 1920, p. 10; Times-Picayune, February 1, 1920, p. 1.

\(^2\) Times-Picayune, February 1, 1920, p. 1.

never really intended to solve the problem. Handbooks continued to
operate throughout the city, and off-track betting did a booming
business throughout the Twenties. Racing in New Orleans did not
really become much more "clean and law-abiding," as Governor Parker
had wished.

When Andrew McShane took office as mayor in December 1920, his
District Attorney, Robert Marr, moved against the system of betting
conducted by the Business Men's Racing Association. Under this system,
bookmakers at the Fair Grounds paid $115 a day to the association for
the privilege of legally conducting business. Business consisted of
a method in use throughout the country at that time called "oral
betting." Under this method, in the betting enclosure beneath the
grandstand bookmakers furnished small slips of paper or cards for the
convenience of bettors. On the cards the bettor wrote the name of
the horse, the order in which he predicted the animal would finish,
and the odds, which were furnished orally by the bookie. After writing
his name on the paper, the bettor handed it and his bet to the
"oralizer," the term by which the track bookies became known. If he
won, the bettor then looked up the "oralizer" after the race, signed
his name, and collected his payoff.4

District Attorney Marr was convinced that the oral betting system
violated the Locke Law of 1908, a state law prohibiting the use of any
"device" to aid or encourage betting on the races. Marr broadly

4Harry Chafetz, Play the Devil: A History of Gambling in the
United States from 1492 to 1955 (New York: Clarkson N. Potter,
interpreted the word "device" to apply to the card furnished by the
"oralizer." Acting upon information gathered by Superintendent of
Police Guy Molony, at the beginning of the race meeting in January
1921, Marr filed bills of information against the officers and direc-
tors of the Business Men's Racing Association and thirty-eight
"oralizers." Attorneys for the association and the "oralizers"
fought the matter in court for nearly a year, and the racing season
came and went with the method of betting continuing as before.
Finally, in December 1921, the state supreme court dissolved an
earlier civil district court injunction barring District Attorney
Marr from pressing criminal charges against the parties involved. 

Once again, in January 1922, Marr filed charges against nine
directors and ninety "oralizers" and cashiers before he was stopped
by the state attorney general, who agreed with the arguments of at-
torneys representing the association that this number was more than
sufficient to test the validity of the Locke Law. Initially, four
"oralizers," including Jack Sheehan, were brought to trial in New
Orleans criminal court as a test case. They were found guilty of
violating the Locke Law, and each was sentenced to serve seven months
in the parish prison, and also pay a fine of $400. The verdict was
appealed to the state supreme court, which in May 1922, ruled that
the oral betting system in use at the Fair Grounds did not constitute
a "device" within the meaning of the Locke Law. It accepted the

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5 Item, December 31, 1920, p. 1, October 4, 1921, p. 1, December
10, 1921, p. 1; Times-Picayune, December 30, 1920, p. 1, January 1,
bookmakers' argument that the word "device" applied only to mechanical methods like the pari-mutuel system of betting. As a result the sentences against the four "oralizers" were overturned and about 100 similar cases brought by District Attorney Marr were dropped.6

From this time on, until pari-mutuel machines were introduced in the late Twenties, oral betting in New Orleans remained free from interference by city officials. Reluctantly, District Attorney Marr was forced to discontinue his prosecutions. In fact, for a brief period after the court's ruling, Marr stated that if oral betting were legal at the track, it was also legal outside the enclosure as well. Thus he refused to prosecute handbook operators for following the same method away from the track. Marr's pronouncement created quite a furor. Superintendent Molony stated that the police would continue to make handbook arrests, whether the persons arrested were prosecuted or not. Marr later softened his stand, but he still felt inadequate laws made it very difficult to secure a handbook conviction in New Orleans.7

One reason District Attorney Marr was so concerned about the situation at the Fair Grounds was the enormous sums of money taken in at the track. It was estimated that in the year 1926 New Orleanians wagered roughly $25,000,000 on gambling activities, principally on


horse and dog races. Activities at the Fair Grounds alone brought in about $13,000,000 in bets. Several million dollars more was taken in by city handbook operators in off-track wagers. With all this money at stake, to begin and to maintain a bookmaking operation at the Fair Grounds was an expensive proposition. One estimate placed the amount of capital needed to begin operations at $7,500, and even this amount was not a guarantee against loss of the initial investment. The bigger operators at the track sometimes had to be prepared to lose thousands of dollars if their fortunes suddenly changed for the worse. In 1924 individual daily operating expenses for each bookie were figured at $300, a total of $30,000 for the entire winter meeting. A first-rate bookie also had to hire one or two men whose sole job was to move around the betting ring and keep him posted on fluctuations in the odds. These individuals usually made from $15 to $25 a day for their efforts.

The money collected from the bookies by the racing association helped make up the deficit between the paid attendance and track expenses. For example, in 1924 it was estimated that the average income from paid attendance came to less than $5,000 a day, while average daily expenditures came to $7,200. This difference was made up by the "oralizers," who paid $150 a day for the privilege of doing business. During the fifty-four days of that winter meeting, nearly $300,000 in operating fees was paid into the Business Men's Racing Association's

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Away from the track enclosure, hundreds of handbooks operated illegally to cover the bets of a gambling-happy public. It is hard to come up with a precise figure on the number of handbooks operating in New Orleans during the Twenties, but certainly their number was in the hundreds, and if one counts the agents working for the large operators, the figure rises into the thousands. One estimate placed the total number of operating handbooks, including small residential operators as well as agents, at 5,000. This was undoubtedly high; a more conservative estimate ranged from several hundred to 1,000. Handbook operations were located throughout the city, in both downtown and residential areas, but they were most heavily concentrated in the downtown and business sections of New Orleans. Streets such as St. Charles, Royal, Common, Gravier, and Iberville beckoned the customer with the cry of betting on the races. One could walk from Poydras to Canal Street and hear them calling the races in not less than a dozen handbook places along the way.

There were many different types of handbooks. The smallest handbook was the single operator who maintained no office, and served a limited clientele, usually calling at their homes or places of business, taking their bets, and settling the previous day's transactions. Their customers were usually limited to small bettors, who wagered mainly

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9 Ibid., March 20, 1924, p. 7.
11 George W. Healy, Jr., Interview, August 10, 1978; Times-Picayune, July 17, 1925, p. 3.
$1 or $2 at a time. Other small handbook operators did business in soft drink stands, speakeasies, chartered clubs, groceries, cigar stores, and barbershops throughout the city. A table and chair in a back room served as their office. Handbook operators were usually allowed to do business rent-free because they served as a welcome attraction, bringing new customers into these places. Small operators needed very little capital to maintain their business. If they had a bad day and failed to cover all their bets, they skipped town without paying off. Next on the handbook scale were the medium-size operators who maintained one, two, or three telephones for handling bets. The largest handbook operators were those who subscribed to the major wire services, and frequently ran a string of smaller operators, whom they furnished with working capital. These larger handbook operations also maintained a battery of telephones to handle larger bets from their wealthier clientele.  

Between the racetrack and the handbook stood the poolroom. Calling the place a poolroom or pool hall was misleading, because little pool was actually played there since betting on the races was the main preoccupation of its patrons. A poolroom usually consisted of a room furnished with a blackboard, telephone, telegraph, ticker tape, chairs, slips of paper, and racing forms with the latest betting information. Wire services provided the names of horses scratched and where the odds stood a half hour before each race. Customers bet either in person, via telephone, or through runners working for the

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operation. Roughly ten to fifteen minutes before the start of the race, a final summary of the betting odds at the track came over the wire, and a new wave of betting continued until an employee yelled post-time. Poolrooms in the city paid anywhere from $15 a week to $20 a day for racing results, depending upon the type of service provided.\(^{13}\)

A typical pool hall in New Orleans was "Johnny" Abrams' place on the second floor of a building on the corner of Royal and Iberville Streets in the French Quarter. The building housed the "Union Bankers' Club," which was supposedly a social club licensed by the city. In reality the club was a front for Abrams' pool hall operation. Most of the poolrooms in New Orleans received club charters from the city administration. These charters allowed the clubs to conduct friendly card games like poker, but no betting or banked card games—games in which the house participated—were permitted. However, these provisions were rarely enforced, and betting flourished. Abrams' poolroom contained a lookout at the foot of the stairs to scrutinize suspicious intruders. Once the patron entered the room itself, he was first struck by the appearance of an ordinary pool hall. But this impression was quickly dispelled, as he noticed very few people playing pool. Some were playing cards, but most of them were eying the large bulletin board that furnished the latest odds on the races. If your horse came in a winner, you collected your money from a cashier in a caged enclosure, who paid off at the prevailing track odds at post-

Another establishment which served as a front for handbook operations in New Orleans was the chartered club. These clubs were chartered by the city to operate friendly card games, like poker, which were to be limited to registered members. In reality, however, chartered clubs served as blinds for illegal gambling. Handbooks, lotteries, and banked card games were allowed to operate on the premises, often with non-members participating. A skilled gambler often headed the operations of many of these clubs. Chartered clubs ranged in size from large establishments located in the business district to small places where penny-ante games were held in the back rooms of local grocery stores and pool halls. Some clubs operated without a city charter, but paid weekly "protection" installments to the local policeman on the beat, who allowed them to conduct their business unmolested. Other establishments were clubs in name only. They operated on their own without paying a license fee or protection money. Sometimes they did have the protection of local bootleggers, who steered prospective customers to their club.15

In 1926 there were 390 chartered "social" clubs in the city. They were most prevalent in the area from Rampart Street east to the Mississippi, and from Howard Avenue on the south to Esplanade Avenue on the north. Of these 390 clubs, roughly a third—126—had been


visited by the police, who made arrests either for operating without a license, membership violations, having liquor on the premises, or for loitering. The police periodically moved against the chartered clubs when they saw evidence that the clubs were permitting illegal gambling. In July 1928, Superintendent Thomas Healy accused many of the leading clubs of serving as fronts for gambling operations. He ordered them to shut down their games or face being raided by the police. Among the places closed temporarily were the Crescent Billiard Hall, the Como, and the Bee, all on St. Charles Avenue, the Hub, on University Place, and the Elite on Baronne Street. Initially, Healy's efforts proved effective until one of the clubs obtained a civil court injunction allowing it to reopen for business, providing it did not permit any illegal gambling games.\(^1\) Police often threatened to revoke a club's charter if it was operating illegally, but this was rarely done. The Commission Council was the final authority, and it generally failed to act. For most offenses the proprietors of the chartered clubs were only subjected to a small fine, which did not cause them to discontinue operations. Chartered clubs were a tradition in New Orleans well before the Twenties, and they continued to operate successfully in the city throughout the decade.

Most of the gambling in New Orleans was conducted by small handbook operations. Many small operators when arrested had only a few dollars in bets seized as evidence. For a select few, though, the

rewards were much higher. Jack Sheehan prospered both as a handbook gambler as well as a bootlegger. In addition to operating as a handbook at the Fair Grounds track, Sheehan ran a gambling casino at his Suburban Gardens just across the parish line in Jefferson. There he provided dining and dancing facilities for his patrons, as well as roulette, faro, and other games of chance. Sheehan had led a colorful life as a gambler. In his early career he started one day with $100,000 in cash only to leave the betting enclosure that same evening completely broke. Another time he raised a $15 stake to $78,000 a few days later.17

One of the most prosperous New Orleans handbook operators was Fred Cook. Cook, who died in 1926, was the proprietor of the Alhambra Baths, also known as the Alhambra Athletic and Social Club, located on Gravier Street. The Baths, which definitely did not offer steam-room facilities to its customers, was raided periodically by the police because it housed one of the largest handbook operations in the city. A well-known sportsman, Cook began his career as a small-time handbook operator in St. Louis. He came to New Orleans late in his career and opened the Alhambra Baths in the early Twenties. The property, which he purchased for $20,000, was valued at ten times that amount at the time of his death.18

The king of New Orleans handbook gamblers was Oakley Harris, an aristocrat who grew up on a plantation in northern Alabama. He came

18Item, January 4, 1921, p. 10; Times-Picayune, March 25, 1926, p. 7.
to New Orleans in 1913 and shortly thereafter managed the Crescent Billiard Hall, located at the corner of Canal Street and St. Charles Avenue, the leading gambling operation in the city during the Twenties. Betting on the races flourished at the Crescent, but Harris' establishment also offered roulette and dice games for its customers. The Crescent was raided periodically by the police, but rarely did it shut down operations for very long. There were rumors that Harris prospered through the payment of protection money. In addition to the Crescent, he operated out of his home on Canal Street, which he elaborately equipped with all sorts of protective devices. In one instance, city police, while raiding his home, encountered barricaded doors, barbed wire, and two German Shepherd dogs.

Harris was the epitome of the gentleman gambler. While he made hundreds of thousands of dollars, he gave much of it to charity. For example, a family about to be evicted found their back rent paid, and fifty to 100 indigent men daily received food at the Crescent Billiard Hall. There was no bet too large for Oakley Harris, and it was said he would bet on anything. He won close to $50,000 by correctly predicting the outcome of the Dempsey-Tunney fight. Harris' fondness for good-looking women ultimately proved his undoing. He died on March 11, 1928, shortly after being shot by Sara Kellaway, his common-law wife. The motive was jealousy; Sara felt Harris was paying

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19 Healy Interview, August 10, 1978; Item, December 1, 1925, p. 1; March 13, 1928, p. 8; May 6, 1928, p. 12; Times-Picayune, March 12, 1928, p. 1.

too much attention to another woman. She was later acquitted of Harris' murder on the grounds of justifiable homicide in a sensational trial that was given full coverage in the press. Oakley Harris' wealth can be measured by his estate after his death, which was valued at $500,000, with over $100,000 in cash in various bank accounts, and over $200,000 in stocks. Harris' property alone sold at auction for nearly $400,000.21

Rivaling handbook betting in popularity was another widespread gambling institution in New Orleans—the lottery. This was not the famous Louisiana lottery, which flourished during Reconstruction and ended operations in the 1890s, but a form of the modern policy or numbers game. In the lottery a player picked a series of numbers to be chosen during each daily drawing. Individual plays ran from as little as five cents up to $25 for each bet. A person could buy a first prize ticket as well as second and third place ones. If he won all three numbers, he collected a payoff of $27 on a thirty cent bet.22 Generally, the amounts bet were less than fifty cents and often only five to ten cents, sums so small that the poorer classes could afford to play. Superintendent Guy Molony summed up the situation: "The lottery in New Orleans is a cheap game, a piker's game, with enormous profits."23 The lottery appealed to individuals of all ages, young as


well as old: "Many old women with small income play these lotteries. The clientele is various and numerous." Particularly, the lottery appealed to poor whites and to blacks, who saw a chance for a substantial profit on just a five-cent purchase. However, the odds of winning were remote. Estimates of the odds against winning ran all the way from 3,000 to one to as much as 10,000 to one. Everything was in favor of the lottery operator.

Lottery locations were scattered throughout the city. Shops were set up in residences, soft drink stands, groceries, and other places of business. Daily drawings were held in back rooms all over New Orleans. There were many different lottery "companies" or individual promoters—the Cuban lottery, the Mexican lottery, and the Spanish lottery. Other names included the "Original Big Eagle Lottery," the "Little Eagle Lottery," the "Louisiana Eagle" lottery, and the "Original Orleans" lottery. One writer estimated that more than a dozen lotteries operated in New Orleans during the Twenties, and some estimates place the number much higher. Hundreds of vendors sold lottery plays, making a profit of twenty-five cents from every dollar they collected. Some vendors made as much as $100 a day in profits, and even the poorest averaged $10 a day. But the sellers were small-fry compared to the big operators. The total number of daily lottery plays


plays was conservatively put at 10,000, resulting in total profits for the major operators of $15,000 to $20,000 a day. There is evidence that four families—Mills, Laporte, Dominguez, and Fauria—controlled the lion's share of lottery revenues in the city. New Orleans was divided into four sections, and each family took revenues from its own area. Lotteries were illegal in New Orleans, but police attempts to end the drawings were largely ineffective. Police raids led to the arrest of many vendors, but rarely of major operators. The vendor usually got off lightly, paying only a $10 to $15 fine. In many instances, the case might not even come to trial because of delays owing to legal technicalities.27

Slot machines also had a wide appeal to New Orleanians. First devised by Charles Fey in San Francisco in 1895, slot machines were doing a booming business in New Orleans by the Twenties.28 Requiring only small change, like a nickel or a quarter, the machines were a permanent source of addiction for many persons. They were everywhere; one writer found them to be "as numerous as cold drink stands, drug stores, joints of all kinds, restaurants, transfer boats across the river, garages, gas stations, small corner groceries and almost anywhere that small change is used."29

A slightly different version of the original slot machine appeared


in New Orleans and the rest of the country in the Twenties. It was known as a "mint-vending" machine, and its sole function was to enable its owner to get around local anti-gambling laws. "Mint-vending" machines furnished a mint candy each time a coin was inserted and paid off in slugs which could be replayed or redeemed for cash. Slot machine operators claimed that these machines were not gambling devices, since they did furnish something of value for each coin placed in the slot.  

In early 1924 the slot machine situation in New Orleans reached a crisis for city officials. At the beginning of the year over 600 slot machines were on the counters of cigar stores, soft drink stands, and other places in the business district. The situation in New Orleans followed a familiar national pattern. Once an operator of the "mint-vending" machines selected a city to set up his devices, he attempted legally to tie the hands of city officials for as long as possible. In the meantime he made as much profit as he could before being forced to move to a new location. Prospective proprietors were approached about putting slot machines in their establishments. They were told by the operator that the devices were quite legal, and, if they allowed them to be placed in their store or bar, they would receive a percentage of the earnings from each machine, roughly about 50 per cent. The proprietor was then asked to sign a contract giving the operator the exclusive right to put slot machines in his place of business.

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As the legal battle in the courts reached its conclusion, it proved to be a profitable time for New Orleans slot machine operators. For the four month period from December 1923, to April 1924, when there was an average of 500 machines operating, those in select locations were taking in $80 to $125 a day. Even if these figures are too high and each machine cleared an average of only $5 a day, this came to about $280,000 for the four-month period. While this was going on, the original supplier contracted with new operators, eager to make a profit. They paid the supplier $5 a week in advance for the right to operate under the protection of his temporary injunction prohibiting raiding by the police. Some who arrived refused to go along with the terms of this agreement, and attempted to set up their own machines without paying for protection. These individuals were known as "slot machine bootleggers." Their arrival foreshadowed the rise of a worse danger--the slot machine "pirate"--whose machines made no pretense to legality. They were strictly rigged devices designed to part the customer from his money as quickly as possible.\[32\]

City officials moved quickly to meet the slot machine menace. Mayor Andrew McShane, who had received many complaints about the operation of slot machines, asked the city attorney what could be done to rid New Orleans of this "evil." The situation was complicated by the fact that the slot machine interests obtained injunctions in civil district court temporarily restraining Superintendent of Police Molony from seizing their devices. This was effective initially, but District Attorney Marr took up the crusade and ordered special

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\[32\] Ibid.
deputies assigned to his office to confiscate the machines. There were charges that protection money was paid to someone in the district attorney's office to aid the slot machine interests, but an Orleans Parish grand jury investigation found no basis for the allegations. In April 1924, Superintendent Molony defied the court injunction and launched city-wide raids on the slot machine operation. The raids were successful. One hundred machines were seized by the police, and most of the others were hidden by the operators once the raids began. A bit of doggerel described Molony's efforts:

Takes mo'n an injunction t' step in between
W'en Sky-Blue Molony sees a slot machine
Don' tell him how long
He's gotta wait
W'en he spot the slots,
'At boy don' hesitate.

Eventually, the New Orleans slot machine case reached the Louisiana Supreme Court, which ruled that the machines were gambling devices. Clearing Superintendent Molony of contempt charges, the court ruled that he could not be held in contempt for enforcing the law against illegal slot machines. A second slot machine invasion, in May 1924, ended in the same result. Judge Rufus Foster in Federal District Court ruled that the new machines were mechanically the same as the old ones, and refused to grant an injunction against the police.

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34 States, April 18, 1924, p. 1.
Despite this triumph, New Orleans continued to be plagued by recurring problems with new slot machine invasions. Periodic police cleanups in response to public pressure resulted in temporary relief but no lasting solution; slot machines remained in operation for the remainder of the Twenties.\footnote{Times-Picayune, May 1, 1924, p. 1, May 23, 1924, p. 1, February 24, 1926, p. 12, November 10, 1926, p. 1, November 18, 1927, p. 1, April 11, 1928, p. 1.}

Dice or craps were also a part of the New Orleans gambling scene. Many of the larger establishments, like Oakley Harris' Crescent Billiard Hall, had several dice tables for their patrons. On the street there were frequent smaller games. For example, the \textit{Item} on May 23, 1929, with tongue in cheek reported the arrest of Arthur Baptiste and Charles White, "both highly colored in person and attire." They were charged with being dangerous and suspicious characters, "dangerous to colored crap-shooters, and suspicious to Patrolman Anthony Foret."

The pair, described as wearing "fawn-colored suits, their red and green shirts, their gleaming shoes and jewelry. . . .," were searched and in their pockets police found forty-eight pairs of dice, all of which could be thrown without turning up a number seven.\footnote{Item, May 23, 1929, p. 26.} In addition, blacks played "kotch," a card game, for ten or fifteen cents a hand. Often in the back of a soft drink establishment police found a number of blacks seated around a "kotch" table.\footnote{Hartman Interview, July 6, 1978; Thomas Healy to Arthur J. O’Keefe, October 29, 1926, Police Department File, Carton 2, Arthur O’Keefe Collection, City Archives, New Orleans Public Library.} Dice, the lottery,
and "kotch" were probably the three most popular gambling games among the black population of New Orleans.

Not everyone felt that all this gambling activity was a good thing for New Orleans. Business groups, in particular, voiced their disapproval of racetrack gambling and other games of chance. One of the first groups to speak out was the Young Men's Business Club, a relatively new organization of about 150 businessmen founded in late 1919. It demanded that existing laws dealing with racetrack gambling be effectively enforced, particularly those relating to the handbook "evil." The organization further urged the passage of laws prohibiting the publication and circulation of racing information, such as odds sheets, form charts, and other material. More business groups took similar positions, among them the Kiwanis, Rotary, and the Association of Commerce, a coalition of local business interests. Some of these groups were unalterably opposed to any type of racetrack gambling. 38

The critical element in business opposition to gambling was concern about its impact upon the city's economy. Gambling was viewed as detrimental to the economic well-being of the community; it was siphoning off money from legitimate business interests. W. S. Bender, chairman of the anti-gambling committee of the Association of Commerce, summed it up best: "The licentiousness which exists in our city is sapping the life blood of business." 39 In addition to being detrimental to the economic interests of the community, business

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groups felt gambling served as a breeding ground for crime. It brought "an army of thugs, pickpockets, thieves and immoral women" into the city. 40

Other groups also opposed illegal gambling. Parent-teacher associations went on record in opposition to racetrack gambling in New Orleans. They were particularly worried about reports of gambling among schoolchildren, and the possible effect this had upon the morals of the city's youth. 41 Religious groups issued a statement through the New Orleans Ministerial Union citing the reasons for their opposition to racetrack gambling: "Gambling is the university of crime, undermining the morals of youth, leading to fraud and dishonesty and often it leads to suicide and murder." Organized religion also saw gambling as a sinister influence upon the politics and law-making bodies of the city. 42 Citizens of the French Quarter bemoaned the growing influence of gambling in that historical section of New Orleans. They protested against the increasing number of poolrooms and gambling houses, assailing them as "festering sores" which detracted from the intrinsic beauty of the area. 43

Responding to this public pressure, New Orleans' newspapers took the offensive against illegal gambling. Chief among their targets was the growing handbook problem. However, the press often vehemently

40 Item, May 17, 1922, p. 1.
41 Ibid., May 26, 1922, p. 1.
42 Times-Picayune, June 12, 1928, p. 17.
43 Ibid., August 20, 1924, p. 15.
disagreed on how to resolve the situation. The Item, for instance, was constantly arguing that the only way to do away with handbook operators was to outlaw the transmission of what it termed racing "Dope"—any information containing betting odds, form charts, tips, etc.—sent by telegraph, telephone, or published in the newspapers. It called for state legislation prohibiting publication of gambling information. Editor Marshall Ballard also felt state legislation was needed to tighten up a weak handbook law, which virtually forced a policeman to catch a bookie in the act of taking bets in order to have any chance of a conviction. Noting the increasing futility of handbook arrests, the Item saw police energies being wasted when they could be used in much more useful pursuits. The paper chided its afternoon contemporary, the Times-Picayune, for failing to support the Item's position against publication of racing information, pointing out that: "There would be no handbooks but for The Picayune." According to the Item, new legislation, rather than increased police activity, was the best answer to the handbook problem.

The Times-Picayune reacted furiously to the Item's charges. It criticized the Item for its "superior virtue" on the racing "dope" issue. Accusing its rival of being hypocritical, the Times-Picayune noted that the Item was the only city paper to publish a racing information sheet under its own banner. It pointed out that the Item was the only local paper to sell telegraphic reports of racing results to a racetrack "dope sheet." Branding the Item's solution to

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the handbook problem as superficial, the *Times-Picayune* felt the only lasting answer was a federal anti-racing information law. Until such a law was passed, it was ridiculous for a state law-making body to forbid local newspapers to publish betting information when the same data still came flooding in from out-of-state sources. As long as gambling was permitted under state law, it was ludicrous to deprive state newspapers of the right to print information available elsewhere. The *Times-Picayune* also fervently disagreed with the *Item's* stand that the police stop vigorously pursuing handbook operators because convictions were too hard to obtain, and there was too much danger of individual corruption. Viewing this idea as "vicious" and "asinine," the *Times-Picayune* argued that even a weak law must be enforced or the handbook problem would continue to spread. Critical of what it labeled the "handbook crusade farces" staged by the police in response to a demand by local racetrack gamblers that they be protected from off-track betting, the *Times-Picayune* felt that these were at best a temporary response to public protest.\(^{45}\) Constant vigilance was the key, and the city's current laws were adequate to handle the problem if they were enforced effectively: "By existing laws or ordinances, or both, the handbook parasites, the petty lottery pests, the slot machine, and punch board gambling kindergartens for infants and the gambling dives openly conducted throughout the town can be reached

and suppressed."

Pressure from the public and press forced each succeeding city administration at least to make the effort to move against all forms of illegal gambling. As a result, a pattern emerged that remained fairly constant throughout the Twenties. Each new administration ordered an initial police crackdown on handbooks and lotteries. The new superintendent of police sought to show the public that he was not soft on the gambling problem. After the initial surge, periodic raids were conducted whenever there was an increase in public pressure. But while handbooks might be forced to shut down for a few days, they were always able to resume operations. Rarely was a handbook or a lottery permanently put out of business, or if it was there was always another to take its place. It was an inevitable cycle—public or press outcry, police response, temporary shutdown, and later reopening for business.

Behrman's administration was the most tolerant regarding gambling in New Orleans. There is even some evidence—although it comes from an anti-Behrman source, the Item—that the Choctaw organization received payoffs from gambling elements at election time. This served as protection money, allowing a place to continue to operate as long as the Ring remained in power. In one instance Johnny Abrams, proprietor of the infamous poolroom on Iberville Street, was visibly upset. He had paid $1,500 as a contribution to the Old Regular campaign against John M. Parker in 1920. Abrams was particularly incensed when, following the election, police raided his place and temporarily revoked

his club charter. During the Behrman-McShane contest the Item also charged that New Orleans policemen were stationed in Oakley Harris' Crescent Billiard Hall, making it clear that Harris was receiving police protection. 47

Reformer Andrew McShane vowed to change all this. In his inaugural address in December 1920, McShane promised "to improve the condition of this city regarding gambling and murderous thugs and detestible lotteries." His Superintendent of Police, Guy Molony, regarded gambling places as "a menace to any community--invariably they are the hangouts of criminals." 48 Initially, Molony began strong. New Orleans police made more handbook and poolroom arrests in the first two months of McShane's term than in the previous two years of Behrman's administration. Sometimes Molony himself, dissatisfied with the efforts of his precinct captains, led a raid against a series of troublesome handbook operators and lottery shops. Occasionally officers and patrolmen were transferred and the force re-organized if Molony felt they were not doing enough to enforce the city's gambling laws. 49 Captain Theodore Ray, directing a police gambling raid, even made the extreme statement that he intended "to place a policeman at the door of every handbook shop and every time a bet is made, a raid will follow." 50 The police, lacking the manpower


48 Inaugural Address of Mayor Andrew McShane, December 6, 1920, (Typed Copy), Commission Council Meetings, City Archives, New Orleans Public Library; Times-Picayune, March 29, 1921, p. 4.

49 Times-Picayune, February 10, 1921, p. 4, August 9, 1924, p. 1.

for such a massive operation, could never undertake such a drastic step. Despite Molony's best efforts, illegal gambling remained a problem in New Orleans.

Once Behrman returned to power in 1925, the new superintendent, Thomas Healy, continued the gambling raids of his predecessor, but was faced with many of the same obstacles. On occasion publicity was the policeman's worst enemy. In 1927 Commissioner of Public Safety Paul Habans wrote a letter to Superintendent Healy naming twenty-one places in the city where race betting was going on. News of this leaked out, and by the time Healy acted his men could find no traces of gambling in these establishments. The places eased up on their activities until the police crusade was over, then continued operations just as they had before. As the decade wore on, demands by business groups to eliminate gambling grew stronger. Frustrated by inadequate laws and police inability to control the situation, Superintendent Healy reacted bitterly to an Association of Commerce demand that gambling in New Orleans be wiped out within ten days: "What do they want me to do? Do they want me to shoot all gamblers as fast as we arrest them. All we can do is make arrests. If we raid a chartered club and put the gamblers in jail, they are either paroled or give bond at once and they open up again under their charter, either at the same place or elsewhere. We raid them again and they open up again. Their charter protects them. This raiding keeps on forever with no definite results."52

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52 States, July 20, 1928, p. 2.
Superintendent Healy's statement hit at the heart of the problem; the city's laws were inadequate for dealing with the gambling situation. While there were hundreds of handbook arrests during the Twenties, there were few convictions. Convictions were especially rare in the early Twenties because state law did not make possession of horse race betting material *prima facie* evidence of guilt. Police were faced with the almost impossible task of finding enough evidence to convict. To obtain a conviction the state had to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that the persons charged took two or more bets on a horse race. One or more persons had to testify that they actually saw two or more bets being made. Since the police rarely caught a bookie in the act of taking bets, chances of conviction were rare. In addition, for a brief period there was a lack of decisive prosecution of handbook cases by District Attorney Robert Marr. Marr argued that if it was not wrong to make book at the racetrack, then it was not wrong to take bets outside the track enclosure. The result was that almost as fast as handbook arrests were made by the police, the charges were dismissed by the district attorney. Marr later changed his mind, but his initial action set back the cause of combatting illegal handbook gambling.\textsuperscript{53}

Statistics for the early Twenties clearly show the lack of gambling convictions. In 1922 there were 245 cases of running a handbook with only three convictions; in 1923 there were 181 cases with only two convictions. Lottery cases fared somewhat better. Out of

nearly 800 cases in these two years about 200 resulted in convictions. The great bulk of the handbook and lottery cases for these years never even reached the trial stage. Most were dismissed by the district attorney before going to trial. In fact, District Attorney Marr brought few cases into court. From January 1, 1924, until the end of September of that year, the police arrested 431 handbook operators; of this number fewer than fifty had been tried by September. Although later in the Twenties handbook convictions were obtained on circumstantial evidence or on evidence of betting materials alone, most handbook or lottery shop operators could feel fairly safe. Conviction rates were low, and even if a person were convicted the fine imposed was usually less than $100. One of the heaviest sentences imposed—upon a repeated offender—was a fine of $350 or six months in jail. But this was an extreme case. Most bookies were out on bail and operating again in a few hours. Few exhibited any fear of being shut down by police, knowing their closing would only be temporary. A bookmaker's clerk best summed up the situation: "I been hearing about closing down gambling in New Orleans for the last 20 years. Take it from me, it's all bunk. Sometimes we close for a few days during some agitation like last Fall. But it don't last long. Pretty soon we're open again."

The New Orleans Commission Council was equally ineffective in dealing with illegal gambling. Pressure on the Council to do something

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54 Ibid., June 19, 1924, p. 6, September 27, 1924, p. 1, February 16, 1929, p. 9.

55 Item, April 20, 1928, p. 1.
about the gambling problem came to a head in December 1926. Representatives of various civic groups appeared before the Council protesting widespread gambling in the city, and in particular its possible impact upon the morals of young children. Among the organizations represented were the Presidents' Cooperative Club, an organization consisting of fifty-three parent-teacher groups, and the Fourteenth Ward Civic Improvement Association. Responding to this public pressure, the Commission Council, for the first time in its history, resolved itself into a vice commission to investigate the gambling situation. The motion creating the commission, introduced by Mayor Arthur O'Keefe, gave the commission power to summon witnesses, and called for anyone with information about gambling to furnish it to the council.56

Meeting on the crisp winter evening of January 11, 1927, before a packed council chamber, the initial session of the Commission Council investigation got underway. A wide range of individuals, including gamblers, men of influence, politicians, and crusaders Jean and Kate Gordon, attended the initial session. In a meeting which lasted several hours nearly twenty witnesses were questioned by the mayor, the commissioners, and the city attorney. It quickly became apparent that the hearing was a complete waste of time, and little was learned which was not already common knowledge. Gamblers Jack Sheehan and John Abrams were called as witnesses. They denied any knowledge of gambling or invoked their constitutional protection when questioned

about handbook gambling at the chartered clubs in the city. Police
Captain George Reyer testified that he suspected many of the social
clubs served as fronts for bookmaking operations. Superintendent
Healy, noting in his testimony that many of the chartered clubs had
been operating for years, spoke of the difficulty of making handbook
arrests. He pointed out that to completely put a lid on the handbook
situation would require stationing three or four men in each estab-
lishment and keeping them there on a full-time basis.57

The final session of the gambling hearings, on January 17, was
even less productive than the initial one. It quickly bogged down
during testimony by J. C. Hay, a representative of the Southern Bell
Telephone Company in New Orleans, concerning the number of telephones
installed in the city's chartered clubs. Obviously trying to deter-
mine the precise number of telephones used to relay racing informa-
tion, the Council learned little from Hay. He was reluctant to
divulge the names of customers who requested that the company not
publish their listing. Hay also claimed no special knowledge as to
what use these persons made of their telephones, particularly regarding
betting information. Once Hay had finished, the remainder of the
session was taken up attempting to get to the bottom of a news leak
of a letter sent by Commissioner Habans to Superintendent Healy con-
taining a list of gambling places that Habans wanted raided. Reporters

57 Item, January 12, 1927, p. 1; Report of the City Council
Investigation of Vice and Gambling in New Orleans, I, January 11,
1927, City Archives, New Orleans Public Library, pp. 38-49, 59-68,
from the States, the Item, and the Times-Picayune were called in to testify about their role in obtaining the list. Political boss John Sullivan emphatically denied being shown the letter by Habans' secretary prior to its publication in the newspapers. Who actually leaked the information was never satisfactorily determined before the investigation finally adjourned.58

Viewed as a whole, the Commission Council investigation produced little of substance, aside from temporarily satisfying public clamor. Both New Orleans' leading newspapers were disappointed in the proceedings. Chiding the commission on its inquiry into the leak of the list of gambling houses, the Item felt there was little harm in the letter being published. It noted that many of the establishments on the list had already been raided by the police. Feeling that by and large the hearings had been "tame" and "disappointingly barren," the Times-Picayune was not impressed by the testimony of the witnesses. Like many observers, it was of the opinion that a number of the witnesses either knew very little about the gambling situation, or, more than likely, deliberately withheld information from the commissioners.59

As it turned out, the hearing proved to be the only gambling investigation conducted by city officials during the Twenties. There


were, however, continued public demands for new investigations by the Council. In 1928 the anti-gambling committee of the Association of Commerce charged that illegal gambling was flourishing in New Orleans with the cooperation of local police. An Orleans Parish grand jury recommended that the city conduct a more thorough and searching probe into the illegal gambling situation. Commissioner Habans favored such a probe but the other members of the Council opposed the move. They felt that renewed police activity had greatly reduced the gambling problem, and that any further investigation was unnecessary. So the situation remained for the rest of the decade. Police raids continued to harass gambling establishments but failed to eliminate the problem, which city officials were content to tolerate.

If illegal gambling seemed to be tolerated in New Orleans, in Jefferson and St. Bernard parishes it operated virtually wide open, and on a much larger scale than in the Crescent City. While the major portion of New Orleans gambling consisted of small handbook operations, in the two adjoining parishes large-scale gambling establishments, complete with numerous slot machines and dice and roulette tables, dominated the action. Much of their business came from wealthy New Orleanians, who drove across the parish line to frequent the gambling tables.

There were varying types of gambling places in Jefferson Parish. The most exclusive were the deluxe places located just across the parish line. Typical of these places was the Beverly Gardens.

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60 Item, July 11, 1928, p. 1, August 6, 1928, p. 1, August 7, 1928, p. 1, August 21, 1928, p. 1; Times-Picayune, August 22, 1928, p. 3.
Located on Metairie Road, a large electric sign marked the entrance to the resort. Every evening, but particularly on weekends, the Gardens’ driveway was packed with expensive automobiles. Once a customer entered the building, suave attendants catered to his every whim. A young white girl checked his hat and a black porter served water. Liquor was readily available to quench the patron’s thirst.

At the Beverly Gardens no pretense to secrecy was made. Roulette, dice, and bird cage games operated out in the open just inside the front entrance. The beautifully decorated gambling equipment was among the finest available. In addition to gambling, the Beverly Gardens also offered its customers the opportunity to take a turn on its highly polished dance floor. This was not unusual in the fancier places, for although most people came to gamble, a number brought their wives for a gala evening of dancing as well.

Often New Orleans reporters visited these gambling establishments undercover to do a first person story. One reporter, for example, arrived with his wife at Jack Sheehan’s Suburban Gardens, another Jefferson Parish resort, for a leisurely evening of gambling and dancing. They were at the dice tables when Prohibition agents raided the place. The agents recognized the reporter and, always seeking publicity, wanted him to do a story about their raid. Seeing Sheehan’s aides "getting their knives out to cut my throat," the reporter made the agents accompany him to his car and drive part of the way back to New Orleans for protection.


Places such as the Beverly Gardens, Tranchina's, the Club Forest, and Southport catered to an exclusive clientele. Even the employees of these places prospered. One man who worked as a cashier at Southport, a club located just inside Jefferson Parish, related that he never knew what a depression was like. When the Great Depression hit Louisiana and the rest of the country in the late Twenties and early Thirties, he and his wife could still afford to go shopping on Canal Street. When they pulled out a ten or twenty dollar bill to pay for an item, the bill was rubbed, felt, and held up to the light before it was accepted. 63

A few hundred yards down the road from the Beverly Gardens was the Victory Inn, where the clientele was not quite so large or so select. Secrecy was, however, more important, as a customer had to have a card to enter or be recognized by the lookout at the door. Less elaborate than its competitor, the Victory Inn's decor showed the wear and tear of longer use. Also catering to a wider public than the exclusive places were the gambling establishments of Bucktown, the Jefferson parish resort located on the shores of Lake Pontchartrain. The most ostentatious of its establishments was the Pontchartrain Club, which operated an extensive gambling room, crowded with people occupying the dice and roulette tables. 64

Equally open were the gambling establishments of St. Bernard

63Lutz, Ernest William, Jr., Family History Project, 1973, Folder 74, Box 2, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge.

Parish. Their popularity is testified to by estimates of from 5,000 to 8,000 nightly visitors at the gambling haunts throughout the area. This figure increased to 10,000 on special nights, weekends, and holidays. The leading gambling places in St. Bernard included the Arabi Club, the Jai-Alai Fronton, the St. Bernard Club, and the St. Claude Inn. Probably the most patronized place in the parish was the Arabi Club. Upon entering the club the patron found himself in a long room crowded with hundreds of people. Many different types of games, among them dice and roulette, were offered for his pleasure. Across the street from the Arabi was the Jai-Alai Fronton, with its garish movie-set architecture. Besides betting on the fast-paced sport of jai alai, the Fronton provided complete gambling facilities. It also had a direct wire service to racetracks in the Northeast, which furnished betting odds and racing information. A customer sat in comfortable, roomy surroundings as he watched the large bulletin board or listened to the loud-speakers furnish betting data.65

In the elegant tradition of the Beverly Gardens was the St. Bernard Country Club. One reporter described the professional gamblers of this establishment as having the "manners of the 'grand messieurs' of ancient days." Those not interested in the high stakes games at the club could always find action in the rows of slot machines available for their pleasure. The fourth house, and the one which served as the gambling spot for the poorer classes, was the St. Claude Inn. It was built in the late Twenties on a site directly

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65 Item, Metropolitan sec., June 24, 1928, p. 3; Times-Picayune, July 25, 1928, p. 1.
across from the spot where the Green Mill Inn, another gambling establishment, was destroyed by fire.66

The most popular gambling game in St. Bernard, mainly because it was the cheapest to play, was keno. A keno card could be purchased for just ten cents, with the winner receiving a $45 payoff. Keno became known as the "family game," because entire families visited the clubs for an evening at the tables. A large percentage of the players were women and children. Often an entire room was devoted to keno, with chairs available for as many as 500 persons. Next in popularity to keno were the dice tables. Here the stakes could be as low as fifty cents or as high as $1,000. The larger shooters were usually professional gamblers, with the smaller players betting considerably less. Roulette was the quickest way to lose one's money. Chips were as cheap as ten cents, and a customer's cash could quickly evaporate. Few of the games were honest, but the patrons did not seem to mind. Most paid little heed to whether the games were "fixed" or "crooked."67

If the major gambling houses in Jefferson and St. Bernard were not to the customer's liking, most of the soft drink stands in the area furnished slot machines for taking his money. Racing enthusiasts could bet on their favorite horse at the Jefferson Park racetrack, the only other track in the area besides the Fair Grounds. As in New Orleans, betting was legal at the track but illegal away from the track.

67 Ibid., Metropolitan sec., June 24, 1928, p. 3.
enclosure. For much of the Twenties Jefferson Parish also served as
the area distribution center for racing information from the major
wire service in Chicago. New Orleans bookies and poolrooms paid as
high as $1,000 a day for the service of receiving the betting line
and racing results as soon as they were flashed across the wire. The
amount paid for these services depended upon the speed of the service
wanted.68

In both Jefferson and St. Bernard parishes the sheriff was the
key law enforcement official. Illegal gambling could not have
flourished in these areas without, at the very least, his tacit ap-
proval. Both parishes had a long tradition of wide open gambling
tolerated by law enforcement officials. Gambling thrived in the "Free
State of Jefferson," as the parish was often called, during the first
two decades of the twentieth century under the rule of Sheriff Louis
H. Marrero. Marrero dominated parish affairs during this period, but
in 1920 he was defeated in his bid for reelection by J. B. Dauenhauer,
a close associate who had served as tax assessor during Marrero's
regime. Dauenhauer, who had been elected with John M. Parker's reform
support, proclaimed a new era in parish affairs, stating that the
"free state of Jefferson has returned to the United States." Sheriff
Dauenhauer served until 1928, when he was succeeded by Frank Clancy,
who at thirty-five was the youngest sheriff ever elected in Jefferson.
Clancy, continuing the Marrero tradition, remained in power for several
decades and was still in office at the time of the Kefauver Crime

68 Ibid., May 11, 1920, p. 1; Times-Picayune, April 20, 1920,
p. 1.
Commission hearings in the mid-1950s.69

St. Bernard also had a long tradition of large-scale gambling tolerated by parish officials. For most of the Twenties major political power in the parish was in the hands of Sheriff L. A. Meraux, a wealthy country doctor who turned to politics as a career. A member of the New Regular political faction, Meraux was elected sheriff in 1924. He had earlier supported John K. Parker in his successful bid for governor in 1920. Like a benevolent despot, Meraux dominated St. Bernard Parish affairs from 1924 until his death in 1938.70

There is a great deal of evidence to show that law enforcement officials in both Jefferson and St. Bernard willingly tolerated illegal gambling. As in New Orleans, raids were conducted periodically, but the gambling establishments always managed to reopen after the raids were over. Places shut down temporarily in response to public pressure but eventually resumed operations. Even state efforts failed to root out gambling. In 1915 Governor Luther Hall sent in National Guard troops in an effort to break up gambling in Jefferson Parish. Soldiers built bonfires fed by the fuel of slot machines and roulette wheels.71 Later, in 1928 and 1929, Governor Huey Long conducted even greater gambling raids, again using National Guard troops. In each case, the gambling houses ceased operations temporarily and later

69Healy Interview, August 10, 1978; Item, June 1, 1920, p. 1, Metropolitan sec., June 24, 1928, p. 3; Times-Picayune, October 8, 1921, p. 1.

70Glen Jeansonne, Leander Perez, pp. 21-22.

reopened even stronger than before the raids began.

The sheriffs of Jefferson and St. Bernard always claimed that they enforced the gambling laws to the fullest, and they often denied any personal knowledge of widespread gambling operations. Yet Sheriff Meraux resided only three blocks from probably the largest gambling house in the parish. When a former St. Bernard parish deputy sheriff was accused of assault, sheriff-elect Meraux testified as a character witness at his trial. Meraux admitted he knew the man operated a house of prostitution and an illegal lottery, but he still considered him a man of good character. Whenever gambling houses in Jefferson and St. Bernard reopened following a raid the sheriffs of these parishes were conveniently out of town or unavailable for comment. Frequently, they had "gone fishing." A Times-Picayune correspondent sarcastically replied that the easiest way to solve the gambling problem was the "construction at state or parish expense of fishing ponds in front of each of the gambling dives." This would allow the officers to get their recreation and still keep an eye on the gambling situation. One reporter believed that Sheriffs Meraux and Clancy were getting part of the gambling receipts in return for allowing the games to continue. He noted that Clancy in his testimony before the Kefauver hearings acknowledged that his income was three or four times his sheriff's salary. Clancy claimed that he acquired the money by betting on the horses and that he always won.

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72 Item, May 5, 1924, p. 9; Times-Picayune, June 6, 1926, p. 1.

73 Healy Interview, August 10, 1978; Editorial, Times-Picayune, September 18, 1928, p. 8.
Governor Parker entered office determined to put an end to illegal gambling in Jefferson Parish. For Parker ending gambling was a moral issue: "Gambling dens in New Orleans and Jefferson parish have been the cause of untold misery to innocent women and children; have ruined the future of many a fine boy and the life of many a good man." Buoyed by Sheriff Dauenhauer's declaration to put the gambling places in Jefferson Parish out of business, Parker gave Dauenhauer his full support: "I am going to back Mr. Dauenhauer up in his efforts to break up the joints, and I expect him to put them out of commission. If he does not I will.""74

It quickly became apparent, however, that things had not really changed in Jefferson. The focus of attention was the old Ballard and Ballard gambling house, located just across the Orleans parish line. Early in 1921 Ballard's had apparently resumed gambling operations under the new name of the Metairie Country Club. Parker summoned Dauenhauer to warn him against permitting gambling to reopen there. Dauenhauer visited the place and found only legal private poker games being conducted. Finally, in March 1921, other Jefferson officials took matters into their own hands. Led by Parish Attorney Conrad Buchler, State Senator Allen Johnness, and Mayor Charles Gelbke of Gretna, they raided the Metairie Country Club and confiscated a great deal of gambling equipment, including roulette tables and betting chips. These same citizens brought an action in Jefferson district


court to close the Metairie Country Club for one year, but the judge in the case dismissed their request for an injunction. 76

The battle against illegal gambling in Jefferson was only beginning, but other parish groups continued to deny there was a problem. A Jefferson Parish grand jury investigated the gambling situation and indicted Fred Miller, the proprietor of the Metairie Country Club. However, it denied widespread gambling existed in the parish and indicted Meigs O. Frost, a New Orleans newspaper reporter, who had testified as a state witness in the injunction trial. 77 In effect, the grand jury was indicting for gambling violations the man who had first provided testimony about illegal gambling. The Times-Picayune could not believe it. It doubted the accuracy of the grand jury report and argued that: "Throughout the state, and wherever men and women dwell who know 'the free state of Jefferson' either through personal contact with its dives or by its notorious reputation, this solemn affirmation of its immaculateness and absolute freedom from the vice of gambling will win, we are sure the tribute of grins and guffaws." 78 It was further charged by the New Orleans press that two members of the grand jury had criminal charges pending against them at the time that they were conducting the investigation, one for bigamy

76 Draft of a Statement by John M. Parker on Gambling in Jefferson Parish, undated but probably 1921, Folder 24-p, Box 24, John M. Parker Papers, Southwestern Archives and Manuscripts Collection, University of Southwestern Louisiana, Lafayette, La.; Times-Picayune, March 14, 1921, p. 1, March 22, 1921, p. 1, March 27, 1921, p. 1.

77 Times-Picayune, June 21, 1921, p. 5.

78 Ibid., June 22, 1921, p. 2.
and the other for wife desertion. 79

Faced with this hostile atmosphere in the parish courts and an unsympathetic grand jury, opponents of gambling in Jefferson Parish took their case to the state legislature. Senator Johnness introduced a resolution, which passed both houses, calling for an investigation of Sheriff Dauenhauer's conduct in office. A special House committee was formed and, beginning on October 6, 1921, held a total of seventeen meetings and heard a total of sixty-six witnesses. Key figures worked for both sides. As Assistant Attorney General, ex-governor Luther Hall served as counsel for the state of Louisiana in the investigation and former governor Jared Sanders represented Dauenhauer. 80

The state of Louisiana attempted to show that gambling and lawlessness existed under Dauenhauer's regime. While conditions under Dauenhauer had improved, the state felt that he was responsible for allowing gambling to continue in Jefferson Parish. Governor Parker was called as the state's first witness. He told of the many complaints he had received of gambling in Jefferson and of his conviction that Dauenhauer was not enforcing the law effectively. Meigs Frost testified that he had visited the Metairie Country Club and found an elaborate gambling establishment in operation. Additional witnesses corroborated Frost's account of gambling at Ballard's. Sheriff Dauenhauer was the only witness to take the stand in his own defense.

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79 Ibid., June 22, 1921, p. 2.

80 Ibid., September 21, 1921, p. 1, September 22, 1921, p. 12, September 24, 1921, p. 1, October 7, 1921, p. 1, November 17, 1921, p. 10.
He asserted that conditions in Jefferson Parish had improved dramatically since he took office in 1920, noting that all fifty-two open gambling places had shut down a few days before he became sheriff. Dauenhauer testified that he had made three visits to the Country Club and at no time found evidence of illegal gambling. The House committee findings exonerated Dauenhauer of any deliberate involvement in allowing gambling to continue. While they found that the parish gambling laws were being violated, they noted that law enforcement had improved under the sheriff. 81

Outraged citizens made further attempts, throughout the Twenties, to eliminate gambling in Jefferson and St. Bernard. Virtually all of them failed. In 1927 the newly created village of Metairie attempted to pass an ordinance outlawing gambling within the municipality. This action was stymied by the local courts, however, who granted a request by Thomas Rescia, the owner of the Beverly Gardens gambling house, for a temporary injunction blocking any action by Metairie officials against his resort. The city countered by filing suit against the Beverly Gardens to have the place declared a public nuisance and to close it for a one-year period. A few days later the court battle ended when a local judge dismissed the city's suit after an agreement by both parties to drop their court actions, thus allowing gambling to continue. 82 There is no direct evidence of judges

81 Ibid., October 7, 1921, p. 6, October 12, 1921, p. 3, October 13, 1921, p. 27, October 17, 1921, p. 8, November 10, 1921, p. 27, November 17, 1921, p. 10.

in Jefferson Parish being paid by gambling interests, but in this case the judge's actions were inordinately friendly toward illegal gambling.

Other Jefferson Parish groups had no doubts that local officials were receiving payoffs from gambling interests. In a February 1928, sermon the Reverend J. Walter Haggard, pastor of the Metairie Presbyterian church, charged Sheriff Dauenhauer and District Attorney John E. Fleury with receiving money from local gambling places in return for allowing them to continue operations. Citizens groups also complained about a deliberate lack of cooperation from local officials. J. J. Conway of the Seventh Ward Civic Improvement League accused the parish district attorney of sitting on gambling affidavits against Tranchina's and Beverly Gardens: "There is not one sworn official of Jefferson parish who is properly exercising his power. Deputy sheriffs and marshals are placed in these gambling houses to see that no row is caused."83 When gambling cases did make it to court, the state's case was often weak. In one 1928 case four gambling house operators were found not guilty because the state called only one witness, a deputy sheriff, and he testified he saw no evidence of gambling.84 This remained the pattern during the Twenties. Officials either tolerated or openly benefited from the situation in the two parishes.

Although the 1921 investigation of gambling in Jefferson Parish yielded little of substance, members of the state legislature made

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83 Item, February 20, 1928, p. 1; Times-Picayune, February 11, 1928, p. 5.

84 Times-Picayune, April 5, 1928, p. 1.
other attempts during the decade to end illegal gambling in New Orleans and Jefferson. Bills were introduced whose sole objectives were to clean up racing in New Orleans and purge it of unlawful elements. Measures ranged from those which merely outlawed the dissemination of racing information—odds, form charts, etc.—to those making it unlawful even to place a wager or bet upon the outcome of a horse race. These were state bills, but their clear intent was to correct suspected evils rural legislators associated with racetrack gambling in New Orleans.

The decision by the state supreme court in May 1922, upholding the legality of oral betting at the New Orleans racetrack touched off the most intense legislative battle of the 1920s on the question of racing in Louisiana. Opponents of racing felt the court's decision effectively nullified the Locke Law of 1908 and allowed bookmaking operations to flourish at the Fair Grounds. Their fears resulted in the introduction of a number of anti-racing bills. Throughout the entire sixty-day legislative session debate over anti-racing bills virtually blocked consideration of other important legislative business.85

The debate over anti-racing laws focused on a measure introduced by Senator Robert B. Butler of Terrebonne Parish which was designed to prohibit both oral and machine betting. Civic and reform groups in New Orleans supported the Butler bill. The Young Men's Business Club took a strong anti-gambling stand in a public hearing before a

Senate committee. District Attorney Robert Marr testified in support of the bill, as did the Reverend W. G. Harry of New Orleans who stated that the "greatest curse of the city of New Orleans has been the abominable influence of racing." However, virtually all the members of New Orleans' senatorial delegation opposed the bill. Only one, Senator Fred A. Earhart, took a firm anti-gambling stand when the bill was first introduced. Despite the powerful lobbying efforts of the pro-racing forces, the Butler bill passed the Senate by a vote of 22-18. Of New Orleans' eight state senators, only one, Earhart, voted for the bill's final passage; the remaining seven opposed the measure. Several New Orleans senators, including William F. Durr and J. T. Prowell, spoke out against the bill. They felt it definitely discriminated against New Orleans and Jefferson when compared to other areas of the state.

The battle over the Butler bill then shifted to the House, where the fight over the measure had its lighter moments. One began when Governor Parker informed the legislature of a telegram sent from Baton Rouge to New Orleans stating that if the receiver would send $500, the sender would see to it that the Butler bill was effectively killed. It turned out that the telegram was sent by one H. A. Nesbit, a traveling salesman for a beer company, to certain soft drink stand

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operators in New Orleans. Apologizing to the House, Nesbit informed
them that he had sent the telegram as a joke. But the House members
were not amused. Nesbit was reprimanded, and the brief furor re-
sulted in the issuance of a statement critical of the press, whom
many indignant legislators blamed for releasing the telegram pre-
maturely. 88

It was in the House that the real fight over the Butler bill
began. Both sides kept up the pressure. Racing lobbyists button-
holed legislators seeking their vote against the measure. A special
train carrying a delegation of New Orleans businessmen arrived to
put pressure upon their local representatives for the measure. One
hundred twenty-five New Orleans men and women, representing every
conceivable civic organization, came to Baton Rouge to push for the
bill's passage. The House Ways and Means Committee, by an 8-7
margin, voted an unfavorable report on the bill, but the minority,
denouncing racetrack gambling as a "stench in the nostrils of the
manhood and womanhood of Louisiana," submitted its own report.
Viewing the issue in moral terms, the bill's supporters saw gambling
as evil, and called upon the House to rid the state of the "horde of
gamblers, crooked owners of horses, thieves, [and] pickpockets" that
congregated around the tracks. 89

Opponents of the Butler bill used a series of parliamentary
maneuvers to delay passage of the measure. An amendment by


89 \textit{Ibid.}, June 9, 1922, p. 1, June 10, 1922, p. 1, June 11, 1922,
Representative S. E. Tobin of Natchitoches requiring that the bill be submitted to a vote in each parish before it went into effect was tacked on by a vote of 57-51. The Tobin local-option amendment was eventually removed from the bill, but the hard fight to defeat the proposal weakened the Butler bill's chances as the legislative session drew to a close. As the final confrontation neared, frayed tempers began to flare. One reporter noted that during debate nearly all the members were on their feet seeking recognition and yelling "like wild Indians at a war dance."90 A clogged calendar, helped along by opponents' maneuvers, delayed a vote on final passage of the bill until the last day of the session. On July 6, 1922, the Butler bill went down to defeat. It received a majority of the votes cast (51-50), but this was still nine votes short of the sixty required for passage, which was a majority of the House membership. Absenteeism proved critical, particularly to proponents of the bill, as fourteen members failed to appear for the final vote. Of the New Orleans delegation, only five voted for the bill; eighteen were opposed and one was absent.91

The Butler bill marked the high tide of state efforts to enact anti-gambling legislation. Many other anti-gambling measures were introduced during the Twenties, but none came so close to passing.


Most of the gambling bills were tabled or were withdrawn before they got very far through the legislative process. The great majority of New Orleans' delegation remained solidly opposed to anti-gambling measures. It voted overwhelmingly against any bills which prohibited betting on the races or outlawed the printing and distribution of racing information. As a general rule the Ring members voted as a bloc against anti-racing bills. For example, when Senator Delos Johnson of Washington Parish introduced a bill prohibiting distribution of racing information, two of its most active opponents were Senators Charles Byrne of the Third Ward and Conrad Meyer of the Seventeenth Ward, both staunch members of the Behrman organization. Some New Orleans legislators, like Rudolph J. Weinmann, consistently introduced and voted in favor of anti-racing measures. But these men were a definite minority. At the most only four or five reform members consistently supported anti-gambling legislation. The consistent opposition of the New Orleans delegation was a definite factor in the failure of any really substantive state gambling legislation to be adopted.

Governmental efforts to end gambling in the New Orleans area reached a climax with the actions of Huey Long. In late 1928 and early 1929, Governor Long ordered the National Guard to conduct a series of raids against gambling establishments in St. Bernard and Jefferson. Local officials had continued to tolerate wide-open gambling and, despite protests from residents, Long's predecessors,

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Henry Fuqua and Oramel Simpson, failed to use the power of the state government to move against the problem. When Long took office early in 1928, anti-gambling protests reached a fever pitch. Civic groups in New Orleans, led by the Association of Commerce, appealed to the governor to halt gambling in St. Bernard and Jefferson. Initially, Long was reluctant to comply, believing that New Orleans should put its own house in order before calling for action against other parishes: "Let New Orleans come into court with clean hands and I will give all my resources and back the city to the limit in suppressing gambling." But when St. Bernard officials still ignored his order to put an end to illegal gambling, Long acted vigorously.

Early on the morning of August 12, 1928, Long ordered the state militia into St. Bernard. Forty-seven National Guardsmen raided the Jai-Alai Fronton and the Arabi Club. The appearance of armed troops created a brief panic among the patrons, who were questioned and then released. Only one shot was fired during the raid, and that by an anxious lookout at one of the places. Approximately $7,500 worth of gambling equipment, including faro tables and slot machines, was confiscated by the guardsmen, who then smashed it with axes and sledgehammers and burned it at the local barracks. Over $6,000 in cash was taken from the tables during the raid and placed in the state treasury. Long's raid was the first in St. Bernard since one ordered by Governor Luther Hall in 1915.


The St. Bernard raids were followed by equally swift action in
Jefferson. On November 12 a force of forty National Guardsmen, under
the command of Adjutant General Ray H. Fleming, raided the Beverly
Gardens and Fagot's grocery. At both places customers in evening
clothes were detained and later released. Roughly $20,000 in cash
as well as $3,000 worth of gambling equipment was seized. Dice, faro,
and roulette tables, as well as slot machines and gambling chips,
were destroyed by the Guard shortly after the raid. 95

Culminating Long's efforts at suppressing gambling in Jefferson
and St. Bernard were the largest raids of all in February 1929. In
two separate operations, National Guardsmen struck key places in both
parishes, including Rudy O'Dwyer's Original Southport Club, Tranchina's,
Altogether approximately $10,000 in currency and more than $20,000
worth of ornately furnished gambling equipment was seized. Seven big
army trucks were loaded with material, which was later set ablaze by
the guardsmen. This time, however, the places appeared to have been
tipped off in advance because few people were actually found gambling
when the soldiers struck. Those standing around the tables were
detained briefly, searched, and then released. 96

There are a number of views regarding Long's motives in ordering
the raids. General Fleming believed that Long was sincere in his
desire to put an end to wide-open gambling. The reason Long did not

95Ibid., November 12, 1928, p. 1, November 13, 1928, p. 3.

order the Guard into New Orleans, Fleming felt, was that the gambling there was on a much smaller scale and less out in the open. Others felt that Long ordered the raids just to prove to the people and the authorities in Jefferson and St. Bernard that he was the boss. Long wanted to obtain L. A. Meraux's and Frank Clancy's support, and he thought that a firm anti-gambling crackdown would get their attention. It showed them that he could act vigorously if they did not follow his wishes. Other observers saw Long ordering the raids solely for publicity. He knew his actions would impress his Baptist supporters in north Louisiana, giving him the reputation of taking a strong stand against the evils of gambling. T. Harry Williams, in his biography, gives yet another reason for Long's actions. While he felt Long was sincere in wanting to end gambling in these areas, Williams notes that for Huey the raids served as a convenient way of breaking his ineffective alliance in New Orleans with Colonel Robert Ewing, the publisher of the **States**. Ewing's purple reaction, when he was not consulted prior to the raids, gave Long the excuse he needed to make a complete break.97

New Orleans' newspapers approved of the initial raids, hoping, as the **Times-Picayune** stated, that Long would follow through on his promise to keep the gambling places in Jefferson and St. Bernard closed as long as he was governor. The **States** felt Long "had no alternative" ordering troops into St. Bernard; he had not exceeded

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his authority as governor and the public fully supported his actions.  

The situation changed radically following the February 1929, raids, particularly as far as the States was concerned. Embittered by his growing break with Long, Ewing let his rage color his paper's coverage of the raids. In bold black type Ewing in his editorials lashed out at Long, accusing him of illegally ordering the search of patrons found in the gambling establishments. Ewing was particularly concerned about the well-being of the women involved, stating that some of them had been "stripped to the skin" during the searches.

The Colonel printed an interview with one of the women, who, he said, had suffered unspeakable indignities while being searched. As it turned out, the next day another New Orleans paper identified the woman involved as the wife of a gambler and printed a photo of her it said came from the police files. Ewing's charges about the searching of women proved to be a complete fabrication. Women had been searched, but always by other women, and they had never been forced to remove all their clothes.

Taking advantage of Ewing being caught in an untruth, Long reacted vigorously to the publisher's charges, linking the newspaper owner with gambling interests in New Orleans: "Colonel Ewing has made free use of the New Orleans States, both by glaring front page headlines and editorial columns, to protect the gambling interests which have

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flouted the law about the city of New Orleans, and with crooked games, fleeced the people of millions of dollars." He suggested that Ewing resign as Democratic national committeeman "or else give up his effort to shield murderers and habitués of the rogues' gallery."\(^{100}\)

Barely able to suppress his rage, Ewing labeled Long the "Prince of Ingrates," and the "Knight of the Double Cross." Replying to Long's challenge, Ewing offered to give up his post if the governor would also resign. Seeking to regain the offensive, no charge was too lurid for Ewing. He attempted to turn Long's attendance at a studio party in New Orleans given by the president of the Association of Commerce into a drunken revelry, in which an inebriated Huey made his final decision to go ahead with the raids.\(^{101}\) Long would not dignify Ewing's charges with a comment. Instead, he stated that he was only acting in the public interest in raiding gambling houses. He was sure he could "stand the abuse and billingsgate of the crooked gambling interests and their newspaper and political defenders," so long as he had the support of the great majority of the public.\(^{102}\)

Aside from Ewing's sensational charges, other state officials questioned Long's use of National Guard troops without first obtaining search warrants or declaring martial law. Following the November raids, Attorney General Percy Saint issued an opinion that

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\(^{100}\) *Times-Picayune*, February 17, 1929, pp. 1, 12.


\(^{102}\) *Times-Picayune*, February 21, 1929, p. 8.
the governor's failure to proclaim martial law before sending in state soldiers made the gambling raids illegal. Long paid no attention to Saint's opinion, stating that he would never abide by "any opinion of the attorney-general protecting the gambling interests." He would continue to make use of the National Guard to suppress illegal gambling "in New Orleans or elsewhere." But opponents of Long's actions would not let the charge rest. It was made one of the preliminary articles of impeachment brought against Long by members of the legislature in April 1929. Long was charged with causing the militia to make raids and destroy property without due process of law. The governor in a speech defended his conduct in ordering the raids: "The Times-Picayune asked me to close the gambling houses. The Item, the States, the Association of Commerce, the churches asked me to close them. Well, I had so little sense that I thought they wanted them closed, and I closed them tighter than a drum. And now they are trying to impeach me." In the end the charge was voted down in the House by a vote of 55-43. Long's power to use the militia in gambling raids was upheld.

While Long's raids provided a sensational climax to efforts to suppress illegal gambling during the Twenties, they also accurately reflected the problems involved in trying to eradicate any illegal industry which the majority of the people wanted. Long's raids

103 Ibid., November 17, 1928, p. 1.
104 Ibid., April 12, 1929, p. 1, April 17, 1929, p. 6.
105 Ibid., April 21, 1929, p. 14, April 26, 1929, pp. 1, 3.
resulted in the destruction of thousands of dollars worth of gambling equipment and the temporary shutdown of gambling in Jefferson and St. Bernard. But they were at best only a stop-gap solution. Attorney General Saint assisted in the prosecution of the proprietors of the gambling establishments, but these charges were dismissed in district court. Attempts at closing the places for a period of one year also ended in failure. Ultimately, not a single conviction was obtained as a result of the raids. But the ineffectiveness of the raids can be most graphically seen in the fact that the places reopened for business a few months later. By October 1929, things had returned to normal in Jefferson and St. Bernard. Like the police raids in New Orleans, Long's raids were a response to a public outcry which were never intended to solve the problem. After the public clamor died down, gambling operations resumed, as they had always done before.

With regard to illegal gambling, things had not changed much in New Orleans and the surrounding area by the end of the decade. Handbooks and lotteries still flourished in the Crescent City. Police raids could do no more than temporarily shut down some gambling houses. Across the parish line, in Jefferson and St. Bernard, wide-open gambling continued under the tolerant eyes of local officials. All efforts at state legislation ended in failure, and even Huey Long's highly publicized raids did not accomplish a great deal. As with Prohibition, if New Orleanians wanted to gamble on the horses or
play the roulette wheel, the means to do so were always available. Most citizens of New Orleans were content with the situation as it was and gambling continued to prosper. For the gambler during the Twenties New Orleans remained a good-time town.
CHAPTER V
SOILED DOVES: THE ROLE OF THE
PROSTITUTE IN NEW ORLEANS

Prostitution has been defined as the "granting of nonmarital sexual access, established by mutual agreement of the woman, her client, and/or her employer, for remuneration which provides part or all of her livelihood."\(^1\) This definition succinctly evokes the function of the world's oldest profession, and nowhere in the United States in the 1920s has it ever been practiced more extensively than in the city of New Orleans. Prostitution had always prospered in the Crescent City ever since the first ladies of the evening arrived in the eighteenth century. It reached its height during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with the emergence of Storyville, the city's famous red-light district, which was closed by the Navy Department in 1917.

Despite the closing of Storyville, prostitution flourished in New Orleans in 1920 and for the remainder of the decade. Press, business, and reform efforts were ineffective in stamping it out. Different city administrations made half-hearted attempts to prosecute violations of the moral code, but such efforts failed. In fact, New Orleans' political machine used the prostitutes for its own purposes. The Old Regulars tolerated prostitution in return for payoffs and control of the girls' votes on election day. Never ones to be

strict in the area of morality, most New Orleanians were content to allow prostitution to continue. It filled a definite need for many people, and the great majority of New Orleanians saw no reason to suppress it.

The demise of Storyville in late 1917 meant only that prostitution flourished in other areas. There had always been prostitution in certain sections of the city even while the district prospered, but Storyville's closing accelerated its growth elsewhere. Many of the women shifted operations into the French Quarter, which remained the center of prostitution in the city during the Twenties. After World War I a large number of prostitutes moved out of the old district into the Quarter and did a brisk business on the streets nearer the Mississippi.  

Prostitution in the French Quarter was concentrated particularly on streets such as Bienville, Conti, Dauphine, and St. Louis and on nearby thoroughfares such as North Rampart, Julia, and Tulane Avenue. By the end of the decade black prostitution flourished in the area of Rampart Street, from Basin Street west to Claiborne Avenue. Also by the late Twenties and early Thirties the areas with the greatest concentration of prostitutes had their own distinctive names, like "Tango Belt" and "Shuttertown." "Tango Belt" encompassed the area of the French Quarter, deriving its name from the many fancy nightspots

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such as the Cadillac on Conti and North Rampart, and the Orchard on Conti and Burgundy, which gave the section its unique flavor. Right next to "Tango Belt" was "Shuttertown," located in the same area where the old restricted district had been in its hey-day. The boundaries of what had been Storyville and the French Quarter overlapped in places, but were not precisely the same. "Shuttertown" referred to the blinds on the doors of the houses where the prostitutes plied their trade. It continued to thrive as a center of prostitution into the Thirties before a housing project was built on that site during Franklin Roosevelt's Administration.³

There were still many houses of prostitution in New Orleans in the 1920s, but gone were the days of the opulent houses which had dominated the scene during the peak period of Storyville. The houses that remained were furnished more simply than were the ostentatious mansions of Lulu White and Countess Willie Piazza, two of the district's most notorious madams. A much more common sight during this period were residences known as "cribs." Cribs were rows of one-story, one-room frame buildings, sometimes only shacks, which opened directly onto the street. Many had no front porches, with the door and windows opening directly onto the sidewalk, making it easy for the occupant to solicit anyone who happened to pass by. The cribs were spartan structures, containing few conveniences, and the women who occupied them were there only during business hours. Rent for these places in the early Twenties ranged from $10 to $20 a month,

but some women occupied them only after dark, paying $3 or $4 a night for that privilege. 

Aside from working in the regular houses and the cribs, prostitutes worked out of the many soft drink stands throughout the city. In many instances these places were nothing more than "blinds" for prostitutes or were run by women who operated houses of prostitution. They served liquid refreshments as a cover for the place's real operation. By having such a business a prostitute avoided being arrested for soliciting on the street, while having a convenient place for meeting potential customers. The business also served as a supplemental source of income; it helped meet expenses whenever regular trade was slow. 

Within their different places of operation prostitutes solicited customers in a number of ways. For example, on St. Louis Street in the French Quarter several women usually appeared at the doors and windows at the same time so potential customers could assess the wares each had to offer. Nearby on Dauphine Street the local madam solicited at her window; if a customer appeared interested she called one of her girls. Race had something to do with the different methods. White prostitutes almost invariably remained inside their places of business, using their wiles to persuade a customer to come inside. On 

[Footnotes]
5 P'Pool, "Commercialized Amusements in New Orleans," p. 81; States, August 8, 1928, p. 2.
the other hand, blacks were bolder. They frequently worked the sidewalk outside their houses whenever the police were not around. Both races, though, had similar working hours. Generally, the hours from 7:00 P.M. and after were the peak time when the professional streetwalkers were out in force. Normal hours for solicitation in the area of Dauphine Street, however, began as early as 3:00 P.M. and lasted until midnight or later.6

Many of the figures who dominated prostitution activities in Storyville continued to make occasional headlines during the Twenties. The most famous of these figures was Tom Anderson, the most powerful single individual in the district. Known as the "Mayor of Storyville," Anderson served as the political boss of the area. A key member of the Behrman organization, in 1904 Anderson was elected to represent the Fourth Ward in the Louisiana legislature, a post he held until 1920. Anderson's Arlington Annex saloon on Basin and Iberville was the hub of night-life in Storyville. From this location Anderson controlled vice activities in the district.7

In February 1920, Anderson, by then an old but still active man, went on trial in federal district court on charges of aiding and abetting prostitution at his cabaret on North Rampart Street. Specifically, Anderson was charged with "knowingly conducting an immoral resort within ten miles of a military camp" during World War I. To

6 Item, January 26, 1921, p. 1; P'Pool, "Commercialized Amusements in New Orleans, pp. 86-87.

prove its case the government had to establish that prostitutes, with both his knowledge and consent, frequented Anderson's establishment to ply their trade. 8

The prosecution began its case by calling a New Orleans policeman detailed to the cabaret. He testified that Anderson instructed him to arrest only those women that the officer received complaints about for robbing a man, being drunk, or starting a fight. Swearing that he never saw anyone propositioned for "immoral purposes" by any of these women, the patrolman stated forcefully that if he had he would have arrested them. A press account of the trial noted that this remark "brought considerable laughter from the audience."

Prosecution testimony did establish that many of the frequent visitors to Anderson's place were prostitutes, and a number of them had been active during the boom times of the district. 9 It also showed rather forcefully that women did use the establishment for soliciting men. One witness noted that "Every once in a while, some woman would get up, go to the cashier's desk, have a little conversation, and go out, and a man would follow them." 10

Tom Anderson then took the stand in his own defense. While testifying that he had been involved in the "restaurant business" in that section of the city for a number of years, and admitting that

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some of the "indecent" women frequented his establishment, he emphasized that they came into his place only to have a meal. Vigorously denying being a party to any prostitution, Anderson declared that he "was never aware of any women visiting my place for immoral purposes."

A number of character witnesses backed up his testimony, giving the impression that they had never seen any soliciting at Anderson's place.  

Anderson's trial ended in deadlock, with the jury failing to reach a verdict. The vote was believed to be seven in favor of acquittal to five in favor of conviction. Anderson was set free and a new trial was never held. New Orleans' newspapermen, who had given front-page coverage to the trial, were not pleased with the final outcome. Refusing to believe Anderson's testimony that he did not know many of the women frequenting his saloon were prostitutes seeking customers, the Times-Picayune sarcastically proclaimed:

> For Anderson must surely be of those who determinedly see no evil, hear no evil and believe no evil. A very passion for the narrow path of circumspect behavior must have moved him all these stormy months and years of public misunderstanding, a passion so absorbing that he could not comprehend the perverseness of poor, weak mortals who wandered their erring ways even within the pure precincts of his own establishment.

Anderson's trial marked the last time he was ever publicly associated

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with prostitution. He died ten years later on December 10, 1931, leaving an estate valued at $120,000.\textsuperscript{14}

Some of Storyville's famous madams, such as Lulu White and Willie Piazza, also popped into the news during the Twenties. Lulu White, for example, was arrested by police in 1921 during a cleanup of the old restricted district. Law officers paid a call on Lulu's so-called "rooming house" on Bienville Street, and charged her with operating an immoral house. Unlike Lulu, most madams of Storyville faded from the scene, never quite regaining their former glory. Those who did operate during the 1920s made considerable profits, but they could not match the flamboyance of those of the Storyville era. A few, however, did try to uphold the earlier standards. One madam of an opulently furnished house just off Conti Street often wore jewelry valued conservatively at $5,000. The typical madam of the Twenties, however, did better than her girls, but not that much better. Most achieved less notoriety than their Storyville counterparts, although the press still covered their illegal activities. A number, like Melba Merrill for example, were constantly in trouble with the police for operating disorderly houses, another contemporary term used to describe houses of prostitution.\textsuperscript{15}

Despite their problems with the law, the madams of the Twenties and early Thirties did adhere to strict rules in operating their

\textsuperscript{14} Rose, Storyville, p. 47.

houses. Sometimes these rules appeared strange to the ordinary observer. One reporter related a story that took place in the early Thirties in the "Tenderloin," the area that had been the old restricted district and which had maintained an active prostitution trade throughout the Twenties. The story is still apt because it could just as easily have occurred ten years earlier. Two reporters from the Times-Picayune visited a house of prostitution on Dauphine Street in the heart of the "Tenderloin." They were propositioned by the girls, who quickly lost interest once they discovered the men did not have any money. Drinking their beer and watching the girls lead their customers upstairs, one of the reporters asked the madam why the jazz combo was not there. A look of utter surprise passed over the madam's face as she quickly replied, "Well, of course not, Mr. Boyle, don't you know that this is Good Friday!" According to the madam, no loud music was allowed on holy days, but it was still business as usual for the prostitutes.  

There were several types of prostitutes, some more successful in their profession than others. Prostitutes in the better places were usually under the efficient control of a competent madam. They received regular medical care and were generally healthier and prettier than the average prostitute. Their clientele was of a higher caliber than that served by the ordinary crib, and was frequently brought in during the late Twenties by taxi drivers paid to serve as runners for the madams. In addition, the prostitutes in the better places were protected from arrest through monthly payments to the local patrolmen.

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16 Ogden Interview, July 18, 1978.
In this same category of the better prostitute were the hostesses in some of the more exclusive nightclubs. A third member of this category were the more sophisticated "call-girls," who frequently came from good families and served as companions for businessmen visiting the Crescent City. These were not paid prostitutes who worked for a madam but women kept on reserve by businessmen who treated them with style and paid all their expenses.\(^{17}\)

Below the better sort of ladies of the evening was the largest category—the average prostitute. These women were a varied lot. Some were prostitutes who operated out of the city's soft drink stands. Some often served as "call-girls" for customers rounded up with the cooperation of a local hotel bellhop. Many of the girls at the sleazier dance halls also made extra money through prostitution. Some waitresses, too, served as part-time prostitutes, as did girls stranded in the city by road-show engagements that failed. This last group was temporarily forced into the profession in order to make a living. Most of the ordinary prostitutes, however, operated out of the hundreds of cribs in the city, usually charging a dollar or sometimes as little as fifty cents if business were slow.\(^{18}\)

One idea that needs to be dispelled is the romantic notion of the glamorous prostitute surrounded by luxury and growing rich off her profession. This was rarely the case. Most of the prostitutes were young girls from a poor background with little formal education.

\(^{17}\)P'Pool, "Commercialized Amusements in New Orleans," pp. 82, 87-88.

\(^{18}\)Ibid., pp. 81-83, 85.
One reporter described them as "dumb dirty girls who find it easier to pretend that they are in love with somebody than to stand on their feet in Woolworth's as a clerk all day." Life for the average prostitute was far from romantic, as this contemporary description attests:

Prostitution in the French Quarter after World War I was devoid of the faintest hint of glamour. Competition was keen, so labor was cheap; there were hundreds of women who were glad to let a man into their house, for two dollars, many who would accept a dollar, and some who would even take fifty cents when business was bad or on a rainy Monday night. Strangers in the city compared it all with the worst districts of Marseilles, of Honolulu, of Singapore. Women stood naked in doorways, behind drawn blinds, or sat in windows, calling out to passing men. Some of them stood on the sidewalks in kimonos, which they would flash open now and then to display their bodies. A few would even seize a man as he went by and try to argue him into doing business.

The above description graphically illustrates the extent to which prostitution flourished in New Orleans during the Twenties. More detailed evidence is offered in the report of two investigators from the United States Interdepartmental Social Hygiene Board, which was published in the local press in January 1921. This survey, which was ignored by the city government, gave the addresses of 163 open houses of prostitution and, in many cases, the number of inhabitants in each, their names, and the prices they charged. During their visits to these houses the two men saw a total of sixty-eight white prostitutes and 178 blacks. For the entire investigation, which included visits

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19 Ogden Interview, July 18, 1978.

The report particularly emphasized what it termed the "negro question," which it labeled the "worst in the history of New Orleans." It noted that some of the houses in the city were occupied by octa-rooms, who frequently ran their places at a lower profit margin than did the white establishments. Many did a good business among "loose white men" as well as blacks. According to the investigators, the major reason for the large number of black prostitutes was that law enforcement efforts were directed mainly at whites. Blacks were allowed more freedom to solicit on the streets. Lastly, in regard to Storyville, the investigators noted that while the district itself may have been officially closed for several years, it was, in effect, still operating. Prostitution in that area of the city continued to flourish, often with the cooperation of local police, who sometimes moved around the corner if they saw that a customer was hesitant about approaching a house while they were still in the neighborhood.

Conditions in the late Twenties paralleled those described in the investigative report. In 1927 a local grand jury found vice on some of New Orleans' major streets--Baronne, Carondelet, Union, Girod, and Julia--to be "very bad and getting worse." It advised the city administration to take steps to remedy the situation. This report was backed up by a survey of vice conditions conducted by representatives

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21 Item, January 26, 1921, p. 1; Times-Picayune, January 27, 1921, p. 5.

22 Item, January 26, 1921, p. 1; Times-Picayune, January 27, 1921, p. 5.
of the National Social Hygiene Association, who reported that New Orleans was still a "wide-open" town in the late Twenties despite the closing of the restricted district. Lastly, a study of prostitution conditions in fifty-eight American cities published in the *Journal of Social Hygiene* rated conditions in New Orleans as Bad on a scale of Good-Fair-Poor-Bad. The city had certainly made little improvement in this area over the course of the decade in the eyes of social hygienists.

A major reason for the success of prostitution during this period, aside from the conducive social climate, was the apparent tolerance of the dominant political organizations. This was particularly true in the case of the Old Regulars, the city's dominant political machine. There is considerable evidence of political payoffs to the Old Regular organization by prostitutes in order to stay in business. A reporter detailed how one system of payoffs worked. During this period Francis Maestri, the father of future mayor Robert Maestri, and two of his brothers ran a furniture company that sold furniture to prostitutes who wanted to begin operations in the city. While a piece of furniture might be worth only about $20, these men would charge the girl $100 for it. This amount was to be paid off in installments of $10 a week, and if the girl failed to make her payments, the police arrested her for prostitution. The operation eventually grew to the point that a prostitute might pay not only the furniture man but also the policeman and the landlord of the building.

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where she solicited business.24 With an estimated income of $100 a month and payments under this system of a minimum of $50, many girls were using half or more of their earnings to meet business expenses, not counting additional expenditures for food, clothing and other necessities.

As long as the girls made their payoffs, the Old Regular organization took care of them. It had its own "fixers," members of the organization whose sole job at police headquarters and in the recorders' courts, where most of the prostitution cases were heard, was to get the machine's women released as quickly as possible. One such politician was Johnny Fahey, a partner in a "hard-to-pin-down" operation called Rickafor and Fahey. Fahey had the reputation of being the man to see if a girl were picked up by the police. Another "fixer" was a man named Sam Abramson, better known as "Jew Sam."

When one of his girls was in trouble but had been paying off properly, Abramson went down to the recorders' court and secured her release.25

Often the Old Regular organization also had a man who lived inside the houses of prostitution. He was not a pimp but a trusted member of the political machine. Sam Abramson fulfilled such a function. Abramson lived in the house with the girls he looked out for. He held the voting certificates of all the girls who had lived at the house, living or dead. Whether some of the girls had moved away or

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25Interview with George W. Healy, Jr., August 10, 1978; Ogden Interview, July 18, 1978.
were deceased, Abramson still delivered their votes to the Ring organization on election day. A reporter remembered that Abramson's delivery of votes first came to his attention when he heard rumors of forty people voting from a vacant lot. In addition to getting the girls out of trouble, Abramson did little favors to keep the women happy, even occasionally walking their dogs for them.  

Particularly during the last days of Martin Behrman's term in 1920, evidence of payoffs came to light in the press. Several madams told reporters that they were not worried about being raided because they had already paid for police protection. One house visited by Times-Picayune reporters during the Behrman-McShane contest in 1920 was "Dolly" Rea's, which was located above "Jack's Place" on Iberville Street. "Dolly" told the reporters that she was not unduly disturbed about being arrested since she had already made her payment to the organization. In another instance, in October 1918, a police captain asked for permission to raid a house on Toulouse Street, permission which was granted almost two years later. Even then it was shortly back in business. A caller on the telephone who inquired about its status was told, "There are plenty of girls here. Everything is all right. Come on down!"  

Prostitutes in New Orleans sometimes avoided arrest because of police corruption. With his low salary, the man on the beat was often tempted to take a little extra money each month in return for allowing

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26 Ogden Interview, July 18, 1978.

a house or individual to do business. Although police leadership under Molony, Healy, and Ray was for the most part honest and capable, the temptation for the average patrolman to accept graft was real, and it sometimes came to light during personal tours of high prostitution areas by the superintendents. On one such tour of the Fourth Precinct, the old restricted district in July 1922, Superintendent Guy Molony discovered black women openly soliciting men of both races, and white women conducting business in establishments throughout the area—right under the noses of the local police. Molony also visited a number of nightclubs in the "Tango Belt," including the Cadillac and the Orchard, where he noticed large numbers of prostitutes. Along Canal Street Molony observed women accosting men as policemen looked on without taking action. 28

On a tour in 1923 Molony was struck by the "laxity" of policemen in enforcing the prostitution laws. One city detective was suspended following Molony's tour when he, while supposedly on duty, was found in the house of Emily Vicknair, a notorious madam, on Royal Street. The detective was charged with gross neglect of duty. Superintendent Thomas Healy, who succeeded Molony, ran into the same problems. During a personal inspection Healy noted that he observed violations of the city's prostitution laws in almost every doorway in the area of Iberville Street, near Liberty and Franklin Streets. As a result one sergeant and four patrolmen were suspended on charges of gross negligence. Shortly thereafter, Captain Theodore Ray of the Third Precinct informed Superintendent Healy that he had arrested three prostitutes

28 Ibid., July 12, 1922, p. 2.
on Dumaine Street, near Conti. He also pointed out that the patrolman in the area, unlike other city patrolmen who had specific instructions not to allow prostitutes to stand by the blinds and solicit customers, was at the corner just three doors away when Ray entered the house in question. The patrolman not only failed to investigate what was going on; he was still on the corner when Ray came out of the house with the women. Ray recommended that the patrolman be suspended and it is likely that Healy followed his recommendation.29

Disgusted with the ineffectiveness of police, civic groups worked to stop the spread of prostitution in New Orleans. Business organizations saw the worsening situation affecting the economic condition of the city. Both the Kiwanis and Lions Clubs, whose members represented a broad spectrum of the professional and commercial leadership of the city, passed resolutions calling upon the mayor and the council to look into the extent of commercialized vice in New Orleans and to take all the steps necessary to eliminate the problem. Part of the text of the Kiwanis resolution noted the "appalling vice conditions in New Orleans, consisting chiefly of the practice of widespread prostitution, particularly in and around the old restricted district bounded by Canal, St. Louis, Claiborne, and Basin streets."30

During the course of its debate on the resolution, the Kiwanians rejected a proposed amendment recommending that the Commission Council


30 Item, August 24, 1927, p. 6.
consider re-establishing the restricted district. The amendment's proponent, Guy V. W. Lyman, argued that this would be more effective in dealing with prostitution than existing local laws. Lyman believed that nothing could be done to completely eliminate the problem, drawing the analogy that "it is just as impossible to stop prostitution as it would be to dam the Mississippi river at the foot of Canal street." However, the club failed to appreciate Lyman's analogy; it quickly rejected his amendment.31

Other local groups complained about houses of prostitution operating near the city's public schools. In 1923 Commissioner of Public Safety Stanley Ray issued a statement that the full weight of the police department was to be used to eliminate prostitution activities near educational facilities. Ray added that the police were particularly concerned about conditions near a girls' school on Franklin Street, which school officials felt needed to be "cleaned up." Further investigation showed that the school officials' fears were exaggerated and that conditions were not as bad as originally thought. The house in question had been raided twice but recently had been under lengthy police observation. A police report showed no new evidence of violations at that address.32

Local women's groups also sought solutions to the city's prostitution problem. In March 1921, two members of the Advisory Club, which included members of a number of women's groups, submitted a

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31 Times-Picayune, August 24, 1927, p. 6.

plan to the mayor and city commissioners. Seeking to eliminate prostitution and control the spread of venereal disease, the women felt it was necessary for the city to become more firmly involved in looking after the welfare of the average prostitute. New Orleans must provide for the "physical treatment, moral rehabilitation, educational, and industrial training of all women coming under the jurisdiction of the court." The Advisory Club recommended that the city administration set up a "Women's Training School," which all convicted prostitutes must attend for varying periods, depending upon their original sentences. During their stay the women were to be kept separate from the other inmates. Psychiatric, diagnostic, and educational facilities would be provided to help rehabilitate the prostitutes and find employment for them once they were ready to leave the school. The Advisory Club plan was referred by the council to the commissioner of public safety, who felt it had many outstanding features but several drawbacks. Action setting up such a school required approval by the state legislature, budgetary changes, and departmental adjustments before it could be implemented. In the end, nothing was done. The council postponed action and never set up a "Women's Training School."  

Despite this setback, reformers remained adamant in their opposition to any attempt calling for a revival of the restricted district. A suggestion by Harold Newman, former commissioner of public safety under Martin Behrman, that the red-light district be

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March 1, 9, 1921, Official Minutes, Commission Council, January 1919-May 1925, City Archives, New Orleans Public Library.
re-established met vehement opposition from reform groups. Many religious bodies passed resolutions bitterly opposing Newman's proposal. Jean Gordon, a frequent spokeswoman for reform causes, attacked Newman's record as commissioner of public safety, charging that prostitution had spread all over the city during his term in office. Rising to unusual heights of oratory, Miss Gordon forcefully made the reformers' case:

that no man or set of men shall dare to re-establish the restricted district—that there is a quiet, irresistible force of reputable men and women in this community who will rise overnight and show the advocates of that shame of all shames, a restricted district, that that handmaiden of corrupt politicians, police graft, rent profiteers and degraded womanhood had gone forever from our midst, and unless our citizenry has become so overwhelmingly degenerate, will never be re-established.

The reformers' voice prevailed. Mayor McShane and the other members of the council unanimously opposed restoration of the restricted district. Newman's recommendation was the last serious suggestion to establish a legalized red-light district in New Orleans during the Twenties.

The New Orleans press was also concerned about prostitution, particularly during election campaigns. It was during elections that conditions previously ignored by the press seemed to come to the fore. Chief among their targets were Martin Behrman and the Old Regular

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34 *Times-Picayune*, July 22, 1922, p. 1; July 24, 1922, p. 3.


organization. Behrman was blamed for trying to preserve the restricted
district and to expand vice in general in New Orleans. During the
Parker-Stubbs campaign in 1920 the Times-Picayune accused the Ring
of openly allowing prostitution in the city. It noted the case of
one notorious madam whose place was known to the authorities for more
than a year before it was closed down. Accentuating its argument
with purple prose the paper pointed out that: "That woman, under
cover of official toleration, defamed and slandered New Orleans and
New Orleans womanhood, and plied her trade of corrupting New Orleans' manhood. She and her pander advertised their wares with an infamous slander--and did business under Ring Rule."  

In the Behrman-McShane contest later in 1920 prostitution re-
mained a dominant issue in the press. Behrman's association with Tom
Anderson came under attack. The Choctaw leader was accused of passing
local ordinances which favored Anderson at the expense of his com-
petitors. Candidate for district attorney Robert Marr felt that
Behrman's actions "gave encouragement and a free hand to one of the
most notorious and worst debaucher[s] of morals in America." Reform
groups also used the press to publicize the prostitution question.
At a meeting of the Women's Campaign Committee of the Orleans Demo-
cratic Association it was suggested that the campaign slogan be
"McShane and a clean city versus Behrman and redlights." Jean Gordon
saw the issue as one of "Decency versus Vice" and emphasized Behrman's

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opposition to attempts to eliminate prostitution in New Orleans. The Times-Picayune lastly noted that New Orleans received the lowest rating from the federal government for all cities in its category in relation to agencies designed to help clean up social conditions like prostitution. This certainly gave the general public the impression that vice was rampant under Behrman's administration.

Except during election campaigns, prostitution was generally ignored as a political issue and only occasionally did it receive editorial treatment in the New Orleans press. The city's major newspapers did oppose ex-Commissioner of Public Safety Newman's proposal to revive the red-light district, the Times-Picayune describing the old district as a "running sore, spreading demoralization and infection," and opposing a return to those conditions. Agreeing with its counterpart that such a move was "neither desirable nor possible," the States admitted that prostitution had now spread to residential areas. However, it believed the solution lay in more rigid law enforcement rather than in a return to a previous era. Part of the problem, according to the States, was a need for a better public understanding of the vice question. It noted that city vice laws discriminated against the woman, who was the only one arraigned in a prostitution case. Women were the only ones who paid a penalty, while the men involved were allowed to go free. Until this inequity in the law was rectified, the States saw no immediate solution to the prosti-
Numerous complaints about prostitution flooded police headquarters. Many of them came in letters from average citizens to the mayor, who forwarded them to the superintendent for action. One correspondent called Mayor Behrman's attention to several "lewd women" who rented a house on Dumaine Street and were "accosting men openly" on the sidewalk. In another letter a group of citizens wrote Superintendent Healy requesting the immediate removal of one Sophie Lewis and her daughter Fatima, who were charged with running a disorderly house on Governor Nicholls Street. A police investigation found the citizens' complaints to be completely justified and a vacate order was issued against Mrs. Lewis by the Mayor. A third letter detailed the complaints of officials of the Federal Loan Bank on St. Charles Avenue and St. Joseph Street, who complained of white prostitutes going around half-clothed and luring men into their houses which were directly behind the bank offices. Bank officials, who told of being accosted numerous times by these women, pointed out that it was impossible to walk past their houses without being approached. As a result police arrested two women on charges of operating an immoral house and took four other well-known prostitutes into custody.


41 A. Smithy to the Mayor, November 22, 1925, Police Department File, Carton 2 (Martin Behrman Collection, 1925-1926), City Archives, New Orleans Public Library; Ibid., Group of Citizens to Thomas Healy, October 14, 1925, Thomas Healy to Martin Behrman, October 22, 1925 (Behrman Collection); David Jackson to Thomas Healy, September 30, 1926, Police Department File, Carton 2 (O'Keefe Collection).
New Orleans' police were faced with the thankless task of dealing with the prostitution problem in the city. Periodic vice raids in which squads of police descended upon a high prostitution area and visited numerous disorderly houses were a constant feature of law enforcement during the Twenties. Each of the superintendents during the decade—Molony, Healy, and Ray—ordered periodic "clean-ups" in which hundreds of prostitutes were taken into custody. Over the course of several days squads of police raided areas such as the "Tango Belt" and the old "Tenderloin" arresting all the prostitutes they could find.

These police raids were often in response to public clamor. For example, in 1927 a report made at the meeting of the local chapter of the National Social Hygiene Association charging widespread prostitution in New Orleans generated a quick response from the police. A raiding squad under the command of Captain of Detectives George Reyer arrested more than 150 women in just one night during a sweep through the First Precinct, which contained the city's business district, running from Canal Street to Howard Avenue, and the Third Precinct, which included the area below Canal Street. Numerous patrol wagons delivered load after load of prostitutes to the precinct stations. During the next few days a total of several hundred prostitutes were arrested. 42

The police adopted different strategies in conducting prostitution arrests. Sometimes a squad of detectives assisted local

patrolmen in raiding a given area. During the course of one such raid a detective was assigned to walk along the streets where high incidences of prostitution were reported. Each time that he was solicited he wrote down the numbers of the houses involved. These numbers were then given to the raiding squad that later swept through the neighborhood. The evidence obtained by the decoy detective was later used to obtain convictions in court. Another method employed by police was to station uniformed patrolmen outside houses of prostitution or nightclubs frequented by prostitutes. They were under orders to arrest any women found soliciting or any "undesirables" who entered without an escort. The name of any man attempting to enter a suspected house of prostitution was noted by the policeman stationed at the door.  

Often policemen wore civilian clothes to obtain evidence against streetwalkers and their panderers. Working undercover gave them a better chance of catching a prostitute in the act of soliciting a potential customer, which was the only sure way of obtaining a conviction. In one instance a policeman acted as a member of a minstrel show to gain entrance into a house in the French Quarter. Such stealth was necessary because prostitutes were "tricky," and frequently had their own "stooges" to warn them when a police raid might occur. A new wrinkle also marked police enforcement policies during the Twenties. Policewomen were sworn in for the first time to take up assignments in the nightclubs and dance halls throughout the city.

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43 Item, June 18, 1926, p. 1; Times-Picayune, June 30, 1921, p. 1, April 12, 1924, p. 3, July 14, 1928, p. 2.
They were stationed in these places to watch out for any "indecent" behavior.\footnote{Charles Hartman, Interview, July 6, 1978; \textit{States}, July 22, 1921, p. 3, November 12, 1926, p. 1.}

Prostitution arrests increased yearly throughout the decade, particularly in the early Twenties. In the years 1920-1923 arrests for prostitution rose from 578 to 2,790 a year, and arrests for operating an immoral house rose from 38 to 159 annually. But while arrest statistics painted a bright picture, the reality was quite different. Numerous arrests were made by the police but there were few convictions. This was particularly true in arrests for operating an immoral house. In 1922 there were 122 such cases, with only four convictions; in the following year out of 140 cases only fourteen persons were convicted. Some prostitutes were arrested over 100 times in several years, but they were either released or had to pay only a small fine on the rare occasions when they were convicted.\footnote{\textit{Times-Picayune}, June 19, 1924, p. 6, October 1, 1924, p. 1, May 1, 1925, p. 1.} In most cases the girls were back on the street within hours after their arrest.

A major reason for the lack of prostitution convictions were inadequate laws, which made it difficult to obtain a guilty verdict. The most effective city ordinance against prostitution was passed in October 1917, and went into effect with the closing of the restricted district. It made it unlawful for any person to keep or conduct a house of prostitution or assignation in any part of the city. Under
this ordinance the mayor had the power to issue a five-day vacate order upon the occupants if it was established by the police that they were operating a house of prostitution. If the persons occupying the house did not leave by the end of the five-day period, the mayor could then order the place closed by stationing a policeman on the premises. Another provision of the same ordinance forbade public prostitutes and "notoriously lewd women" from accosting anyone walking the city streets.46

The five-day law was weak in several areas. For one thing, its penalties were not sufficiently severe. Conviction for a first offense resulted in only a $25 fine, with no additional option for imposing a jail sentence. An assistant city attorney noted that such a low fine did little good because most of the prostitutes had more than enough money to pay or knew someone who paid the fine for them. He felt that the fine should be increased to a maximum of $100 and that provision for a jail sentence of not more than sixty days be made. Another problem with the five-day vacate ordinance was that it forced the current occupant to move out but did not prevent other persons from moving in and doing business in the same location. Under this law it was also difficult for police to obtain enough evidence for a conviction. In order to have a solid case a person had to testify that he actually saw the commission of the offense as charged. It was rare that a policeman could take the stand and give evidence

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46 Police Department File, Carton 2 (Behrman Collection); Behrman's correspondence contains the complete text of the ordinance. Roland B. Howell to Andrew J. McShane, September 13, 1924, File C, No. 2, McShane Correspondence, City Archives, New Orleans Public Library.
that he observed a prostitute in the act of soliciting a customer. Part of the problem in obtaining convictions did lie with the police. Some policemen made numerous prostitution arrests just to give the impression that they were constantly on the alert against vice, so many of their cases came to court without the evidence necessary to obtain a conviction. A number were dismissed or never came to trial. One estimate is that in six out of ten cases the evidence was insufficient to convict. The police also were not always sure exactly how much evidence was needed to establish a solid case. Sometimes it depended upon the latest ruling on the law by the city attorney, a ruling that often severely restricted a policeman's freedom in gathering evidence. For example, in 1927 the city attorney declared that police could not arrest known "women of the underworld" if they were observed talking to a man on the street or if they were found standing in the doorway attempting to gain the attention of passers-by. According to the new ruling a woman could not be arrested unless she was creating a disturbance or was caught in the act of accosting a man, which was considerably more restrictive. All of these difficulties were aggravated by the average patrolman's susceptibility to criminal influences, his low salary making him susceptible to bribes when it came time to enforce the law.

47 Roland B. Howell to Andrew J. McShane, October 8, 1924, File C, No. 2, McShane Correspondence; Times-Picayune, June 17, 1924, p. 12, July 4, 1924, p. 1, August 9, 1928, p. 1.

48 Roland B. Howell to Andrew J. McShane, October 8, 1924, File C, No. 2, McShane Correspondence; Times-Picayune, August 28, 1927, p. 1.
Another stumbling block to obtaining prostitution convictions was the city's recorders, who heard all the misdemeanor prostitution cases. These people were not trained criminal court judges, nor were they lawyers or experts in interpreting the law. Many were political appointees of the Old Regular organization. While an assistant city attorney found most of the recorders to be "efficient" and "honest," sometimes they were uncertain regarding the amount of evidence necessary to convict. Prosecutions were occasionally frustrated due to a lack of knowledge or faulty interpretation of the evidence by the recorder. On other occasions prostitution cases were overturned upon appeal in New Orleans Criminal Court for failure to apply the law correctly.49

Besides the five-day vacate order, other laws applied to prostitution-related offenses. A state law containing more severe penalties was passed in 1918 known as the Injunction and Abatement Act. Under its provisions any building in which prostitution was conducted could be declared a public nuisance. If the owner were found guilty of maintaining a public nuisance, an order of abatement was entered in the case, closing the building for any type of use for a period of one year. This was a civil rather than a criminal procedure, and could be used independently of the five-day vacate ordinance. The Injunction and Abatement Act was used sporadically by city officials,

49Affidavit of Testimony in the Case of the City of New Orleans vs. Melba Merrill Et. Al., August 22, 1924, Document No. 24861, Criminal Court Records, Criminal Court Building, New Orleans; Ogden Interview, July 18, 1978; Roland B. Howell to Andrew J. McShane, October 8, 1924, File C, No. 2, McShane Correspondence.
until declared unconstitutional later in the decade.50

Two other laws applied in prostitution cases. One was a state
law passed in 1912 which defined a disorderly house as, among other
things, a place where prostitution was conducted, and provided
penalties for violations. The second law was a local city ordinance
allowing police to charge a person with having no visible means of
support if she was observed attempting to lure a stranger into a
house of prostitution. Police could more easily convict a prostitute
on a vagrancy charge, than under the standard five-day statute. In
1926 Superintendent Healy directed policemen to charge prostitutes
with disorderly conduct. The penalties under this law were the same
as under the five-day ordinance, but conviction was much easier. A
prostitute could be convicted of disorderly conduct without the
patrolman having to prove that she was actually in the act of ac-
costing someone.51

Each city administration was concerned about the courts' handling
of the prostitution problem. During the latter part of his admini-
stration Mayor Andrew McShane called a conference of the city re-
corders, the commissioner of public safety, and the city attorney
concerning undue delays in cases involving violations of the moral
code. Mayor McShane also spent a considerable amount of time observing

50 Roland B. Howell to Andrew J. McShane, August 20, 1924,
File C, No. 2, McShane Correspondence; Times-Picayune, March 8,
1927, p. 1.

51 Roland B. Howell to Andrew J. McShane, September 13, 1924,
File C, No. 2, McShane Correspondence; Times-Picayune, July 5, 1926,
p. 2.
conditions in the recorders' courts to see what could be done to alleviate the problem. As a result of the conference an assistant city attorney was assigned exclusively to the recorders' courts and criminal district court to assist in prosecuting all prostitution violations and to examine all phases of the law relating to moral code offenses.  

In a detailed correspondence between McShane and the assistant city attorney assigned to the appropriate courts, the official advised the mayor to press for suits under the Injunction and Abatement Act as well as the five-day vacate notice. He argued against the idea that the city prostitution laws were full of loopholes, pointing out that the five-day vacate ordinance and the vagrancy law gave the police "ample powers to effectively minimize prostitution." The attorney noted that to enforce fully the prostitution laws there had to be a cooperative effort between the city attorney, charged with enforcing city law, and the district attorney, who had responsibility for enforcing state laws. Lastly, the official did not think prostitution could ever be completely eliminated in New Orleans, but he believed that better cooperation between the city attorney, the recorders, and the police would be a definite step toward achieving that goal.  

52 Roland B. Howell to Andrew J. McShane, August 20, 1924, File C, No. 2, McShane Correspondence; Times-Picayune, August 16, 1924, p. 1, August 19, 1924, p. 3.

53 Roland B. Howell to Andrew J. McShane, August 20, 1924, October 8, 1924, File C, No. 2, McShane Correspondence.
But the prostitution problem still remained when Martin Behrman took office again in 1925. Behrman was determined to stop the open accosting of individuals in the "Tango Belt," the area bounded by Canal Street, St. Louis, North Basin, and Dauphine Streets. This section of the city was now the scene not only of widespread street solicitation, but also of propositions from doorways, windows, and even automobiles. The Choctaw leader initiated the largest vice drive ever attempted in New Orleans until that time, calling upon 150 women to vacate their present living quarters within five days or find them closed by order of the city. This was the largest single application of the five-day ordinance in the city's history. Behrman's correspondence contains numerous copies of five-day ordinances signed in the mayor's own hand. Not all of them could be served, however, because some of the ladies in question were no longer at their current addresses and could not be found. Many undoubtedly moved or left the city to avoid receiving the order.\textsuperscript{54}

Again, Behrman's action proved to be a temporary solution. After the initial drive was over, things quickly returned to normal.

Problems in enforcing the city's prostitution laws reached a peak in 1928 during Arthur O'Keefe's administration in the trial before the Commission Council of Night Recorder Paul J. LeBlanc. The charges against LeBlanc were brought by Captain Theodore Ray, commander of the Third Precinct, following LeBlanc's citing one of his

\textsuperscript{54}Item, June 4, 1925, p. 1; Notices to Vacate Issued to Leona Mannint and Peggy Mabery, October 29, 1925, Police Department File, Carton 2 (Behrman Collection). File contains a number of vacate notices signed by Behrman; \textit{Times-Picayune}, June 5, 1925, p. 1.
patrolmen for contempt. Ray specifically charged LeBlanc with obstructing police vice crusades by refusing to find prostitutes guilty of moral code violations when police presented the proper evidence. In addition, he accused LeBlanc of abusing his parole power by paroling women within ten or fifteen minutes after they arrived in his court and sometimes even before they arrived. Ray also charged LeBlanc with associating with one Angelo "Happy" Russo, the common-law husband of Dora Russo, who allegedly operated two disorderly houses in the Third Precinct. LeBlanc denounced Ray's charges, arguing that in the great majority of cases involving moral code violations the evidence presented by police did not warrant a conviction or even probable cause for arrest. 55

Ray's charges against LeBlanc were heard by the Commission Council beginning on July 12, 1928. During the six-day trial evidence focused on two key charges—LeBlanc's abuse of his parole power and the suspected influence in his court of an undesirable character like Angelo Russo. Ray testified that he issued specific instructions to his men to arrest well-known prostitutes and streetwalkers in his precinct and complained that LeBlanc paroled these women even before they arrived as prisoners, action definitely detrimental to law enforcement. Ray also noted that LeBlanc sometimes convened his court at irregular hours, which caused some of his patrolmen to lose time away from their beats. Anticipating LeBlanc's defense, he stated he had no personal animus toward Recorder LeBlanc but only wanted to stamp out

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prostitution in his precinct. 56

Further testimony backed up Ray's charge of LeBlanc's abuse of the parole power. It was noted that Mitzie Lewis, a known prostitute involved in the earlier contempt case, had been arrested 117 times since the fall of 1926, with only two or three convictions in LeBlanc's court. The police clerk at the Third Precinct testified that women arrested for prostitution were paroled, on the average, within fifteen minutes after being booked; an hour or two between arrest and release was unusual. Other testimony by several patrolmen noted that Angelo Russo attended the night court sessions and could always be found around the recorder's bench. Russo was also seen entering and leaving a known house of prostitution, but testimony was contradictory on his influence over LeBlanc. One witness swore he never saw him interfere with court business, while another patrolman said that he saw Russo have a conversation with LeBlanc just prior to the release of two women. 57

The defense also scored some points. During his testimony the patrolman sentenced by LeBlanc for contempt insisted that he had not been sarcastic in his appearance before the recorder. But he remained stubborn in his refusal to answer directly the same question he had been asked by LeBlanc as to whether the women he arrested had stopped


to accost anyone. The patrolman's stubbornness gave the impression that his contempt citation was justified. LeBlanc's attorney also attempted to show, with some success, that Captain Ray operated under his own interpretation of the prostitution laws. Ray, the defense charged, was either unaware of recent interpretations of the law by the city attorney or ignored them to suit his own purposes. These defense allegations did some damage to the credibility of Ray's testimony. LeBlanc's defense further pointed out that the reason Russo was so frequently in the judge's company was that he was employed as the Recorder's personal masseur. LeBlanc had suffered a heart attack in the past year and required constant massaging of his arm and side. 58

Despite the evidence against LeBlanc, the Commission Council's final verdict in the case was surprisingly mild. Night Recorder LeBlanc was reinstated following a reprimand and an order that he improve the conditions in his court. While the Council did not feel that there was enough evidence to warrant LeBlanc's removal, it was critical of his association with Angelo Russo, even though it found Russo's presence did not interfere with the administration of justice. In its report the Council noted that evidence during the trial showed that "there has been entirely too much laxity in the granting of paroles . . .," not only in LeBlanc's court but in the other recorders' courts as well. The Council's ruling attacked general conditions in those courts and stated that it wanted improvements: "We shall expect

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58 Ibid., 103-04, 141-47, 153, 159-60, 300; Times-Picayune, July 17, 1928, p. 1.
the recorders in the future to exercise considerable [sic] more discretion than they have in the past in the paroling of prostitutes, streetwalkers, and their consorts." The final report praised Captain Ray for his efforts to eliminate prostitution and stated that it hoped that the recorders would not interfere with police enforcement of the prostitution laws.  

New Orleans' newspapers supported the verdict in the trial. Noting that the Council had criticized certain aspects of the recorders' courts, the Times-Picayune felt there were lessons to be learned from the final report: if efficient and honest administration of justice were the end result, then the Council will "earn the respect of the community and the fear of the law violator."

Prostitution flourished in New Orleans at the end of the decade and into the 1930s. A magazine writer in the early Thirties reported that prostitutes were still doing a thriving business in the Crescent City. Within a dozen-block area near the center of the city women continued to solicit men, mainly in the cribs, which were as numerous as twenty to thirty per block in this section. The Depression hit the prostitutes of New Orleans hard, and prices were low. But they persevered. The individual prostitute in her crib still struggled to make a living, as she had done almost since the founding of the city.


61 Marquis Childs, "New Orleans is a Wicked City," *Vanity Fair* (November 1934), 72.
As with Prohibition and gambling, prostitution prospered in the Crescent City during the Twenties because New Orleans was, in the words of one individual, not a "Puritanical City." Many New Orleanians liked to gamble, drink bootleg liquor, and savor the joys of the flesh. A large proportion of the city's inhabitants regarded these things as "necessary evils" and this was certainly true of prostitution. As long as the citizens were happy with the situation as it was, the police received little cooperation from the average person in gathering evidence to make a case under already weak laws. Reformers could continually expose vice, but as long as the average New Orleanian was content the political machine tolerated these activities. Besides, it was collecting payoffs which kept its coffers full during the election campaigns. Since the majority of people saw no reason to change, the machine saw no reason to change. As in the past, the soiled doves of the world's oldest profession continued to huddle in the doorways or sally forth on the sidewalks of the Crescent City.

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62 Roland B. Howell to Andrew J. McShane, October 8, 1924, File C, No. 2, McShane Correspondence.
CHAPTER VI
"MUGGLES," "INCHY," AND "MUD":
ILLEGAL DRUGS IN NEW ORLEANS

The selling and using of illegal drugs played a definite role in the New Orleans criminal scene during the 1920s. New Orleans, in the words of federal officials, was one of the two leading drug smuggling centers in the United States. It served as a conduit for drugs to other areas of the country, particularly major cities in the Mississippi Valley. The war against drugs, like the efforts to prohibit the sale and manufacture of illegal liquor, was primarily a federal problem. Federal narcotics agents and customs officials, with the cooperation of local police, battled with an undermanned force to stop the flow of illegal drugs. In New Orleans the drug problem was not considered as important as liquor or gambling by the great majority of its citizens, but it was present and did play a part in the criminal history of the Crescent City during this period.

The availability of illegal drugs in New Orleans did not originate in the Twenties. Opium and morphine had been readily available to New Orleanians in the nineteenth century. These two drugs, as well as cocaine, were easily accessible to customers walking the streets of Storyville. In fact, cocaine was sold in the restricted district under such patent medicine labels as Crown or Dr. Gray's Powders. Opium dens flourished in the early twentieth century, particularly in the city's Chinatown along Tulane Avenue and South Rampart Street. Marijuana was first used in the city around 1910 and the drug grew in
popularity during the next decade.¹

Three drugs—morphine, opium, and cocaine—dominated the illicit market in New Orleans during the Twenties. The leader in popularity, by far, was morphine. First isolated in the early nineteenth century, morphine was the major active ingredient derived from opium, about 10 per cent of which could be separated to form the morphine solution. A powerful painkiller, morphine came into its own in the second half of the nineteenth century with the advent of the hypodermic needle, which allowed the desperate addict to inject the substance directly into his veins.² Smuggled into New Orleans in vials, bottles, tubes, cans, and even tablets, the traffic in morphine posed a continuous problem for federal authorities.

Although replaced by morphine as the leading drug during this period, opium still had its followers. Made from the dried juice of the opium poppy, opium had a history stretching over thousands of years. The drug could be taken orally, by hypodermic, or—the most popular way—by "smoking." To smoke the drug raw opium was mixed with water and heated to a boil, then placed in a bamboo smoking pipe, whose vapors were inhaled by the user. Smoking opium had a long


history in China and the technique became popular in the United States following the wave of Chinese immigration to this country after 1850.

Like its derivative, morphine, opium was a potent narcotic—an addictive drug—and a depressant.3

Known to New Orleans "junkers"—a contemporary term for addicts which evolved into the modern-day "junkies"—as "mud" or "M," opium had been the predominant drug of nineteenth-century America. At that time narcotic drugs were obtained from drugstores with little difficulty and without a prescription. Drugstores even catered to the addict by selling cheaply all sorts of patent medicines which contained substantial amounts of opium or its derivatives. These included paregoric, laudanum, and such brand names as Winslow's Soothing Syrup, Godfrey's Cordial, and McMunn's Elixir of Opium. Many so-called "quack" medical cures also contained considerable amounts of the drug. These "cures" continued to be sold openly until passage of the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906, which marked the first time the federal government required manufacturers to label the amount of each ingredient contained in products.4 With the passage of this act the use of opium in many patent medicines was discontinued.

The third drug which had a strong appeal to New Orleanians in the Twenties was cocaine. A white crystalline powder obtained from


the leaves of the South American coca plant from which it derives its name, cocaine had a long and colorful history. The Spanish explorer, Francisco Pizarro, found coca leaves used extensively by the Incas of Peru in the sixteenth century. Impressed by the euphoria produced by chewing the coca leaf, the Incas used the plant as a royal emblem and as a sign of divinity. First isolated as a drug in the late 1850s, by the last quarter of the nineteenth century Americans became increasingly aware of cocaine's potency. Americans were especially fond of one product, Mariani's Coca Wine, which was produced by steeping coca leaves in the wine liquid. Cocaine was also a main ingredient in Coca-Cola; it remained an active component of the soft drink until 1903. Doctors too saw cocaine as a cure for any number of ailments. A Rockford, Illinois, physician believed the drug provided "a new cure for the opium habit," while in Kentucky one of his colleagues touted it as a certain cure for alcoholism.5

Called "inchy" by New Orleans users, cocaine could be injected, but the most common way of taking the drug was by sniffing through the nose. Snorting cocaine produced an instant "high" for the user and persistent use could cause severe delusions. Cocaine differed in several ways from other so-called "hard drugs" such as morphine, opium, and heroin. Unlike these drugs cocaine was an extremely powerful stimulant of the central nervous system. Rather than making

an addict depressed, it picked up his spirits to a new euphoria. In addition, it is a mistake to think of cocaine addiction in the same sense as that of the other "hard drugs." The drug is not addicting in the compulsive sense, and even a heavy cocaine user does not suffer the painful withdrawal symptoms usually experienced by the opiate user. But to say that the drug is not at all addicting is misleading as well. Withdrawal from cocaine use can lead to profound depression, for which the only cure in the user's mind is still more of the drug. Psychosis can even result while a person is using cocaine. While it is not without its dangers, it is wrong to classify cocaine as a narcotic. It is certainly much less addictive than the opiates (opium, morphine, and heroin). As one authority has pointed out, the opiates "are so completely different from such substances as marijuana and cocaine that they cannot intelligently be discussed together with them..."  

Two other drugs—marijuana and heroin—figured in a smaller way in the criminal history of New Orleans during this period. First cultivated in the Orient, marijuana, whose name came from the Spanish or Portuguese word for intoxicant, was prepared by drying the leaves, stalks, and tops of the cannabis plant, better known as hemp. Hashish, a much more potent form of the drug, was made from the dried...
resin of the same plant. Known by numerous names in New Orleans
drug parlance including "muggles," "Mary Warner," "mari," "moota,"
and "Mexican hashish," marijuana had been available in the United
States in the nineteenth century but on a very limited basis. It was
not until the 1920s that marijuana first came into general use in
America, largely as a result of the passage of the Prohibition Amend-
ment. Prohibition drove up the price of alcoholic beverages and made
them more difficult to obtain, opening up the market for marijuana
as an alternative to hard liquor.8

Like cocaine marijuana cannot be classified as a "hard drug."
It is not addictive like morphine or opium, and its users do not
experience harsh withdrawal symptoms when deprived of it. The most
common form of marijuana use was packing the leaves inside paper to
form a cigarette or "joint." Marijuana smoking became increasingly
popular among New Orleans youth during the Twenties, causing great
consternation among worried parents and civic leaders. However,
despite its growing popularity, marijuana remained somewhat of a
novelty during the decade; its popularity was building but failed to
approach its eventual widespread use during the 1960s and 1970s.9

The final drug which emerged in New Orleans at this time was
heroin. Derived by a simple chemical process in the last quarter

8Brecher, et. al., Licit and Illicit Drugs, pp. 396, 409-10; New Orleans Morning Tribune, October 18, 1926, p. 1 (hereinafter cited as Morning Tribune); Ray, Drugs, Society, and Human Behavior, pp. 254, 260; Siragusa, Trail of the Poppy, pp. 231-32.

9Brecher, et. al., Licit and Illicit Drugs, pp. 396, 409, 411-12.
of the nineteenth century, heroin was a form of morphine and a member of the opiate family. Like morphine and opium it was extremely addictive, and, when dissolved in water, was injected into the addict's bloodstream. Though it was beginning to replace morphine as the leading narcotic drug, during the Twenties heroin was still considerably less popular. It was smuggled into New Orleans but mentioned only infrequently in the press. Morphine, opium, and cocaine occupied a much more prominent role among the city's drug users.

By 1920 shipments of morphine, opium, cocaine and heroin could not be imported legally into the United States without first being registered with the federal government. Since the passage of the Harrison Act of 1914, the major federal narcotics statute, anyone caught smuggling these drugs in illegally was subject to arrest and prosecution. Virtually all these drugs entering New Orleans were smuggled in illegally. It is estimated that less than 10 per cent of the city's morphine, cocaine, and heroin was manufactured locally or legally imported; the rest was smuggled in, mainly by ship. Drugs came into New Orleans from many different parts of the world. Opium originated in the Orient, where it was purchased cheaply in raw form, transported to Europe, refined into morphine or heroin, smuggled aboard ship, and finally unloaded in the United States. Most of the morphine and heroin entering New Orleans originated in Europe, where countries such as Germany, England, Italy, and Spain were the leading suppliers. If drugs such as opium, morphine, and cocaine did not

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Ibid., p. 52; Musto, American Disease, p. ix; Siragusa, Trail of the Poppy, p. 229.
come directly by ship from Europe, they were smuggled in from Cuba or Mexico. Cuba served as a major center for smuggling European drugs into New Orleans. Cocaine came principally from South America, while most of the marijuana came from Havana, as well as Mexican ports like Tampico and Vera Cruz. Some marijuana reached the city from Texas after first being smuggled across the Mexican border. 11

New Orleans was a perfect place for drug smugglers to conduct operations. With its main harbor located only 100 miles from the mouth of the Mississippi, the port was reached by passing along acres of thinly-populated delta and swamp, making it easy for ships carrying contraband drugs to enter the harbor undetected. Also the port of New Orleans had fourteen miles of docks on both sides of the Mississippi, where ships could surreptitiously discharge their cargo. Federal forces were unable to cover such a wide area. In 1925 the Customs Service in New Orleans, charged with preventing illegal drugs from entering the city, had a total of sixty men, divided into three shifts, each working eight hours daily. At any one time the government had a maximum of twenty men to cover fourteen miles of docks plus the passes from the mouth of the Mississippi to the city. 12

Customs officials were assisted by a small force of federal narcotics agents, but the major responsibility for stopping smugglers before


they docked rested with these authorities.

The great majority of illegal drugs entering the port of New Orleans came by ship. Steamers from all the major ports of Europe, Cuba, and Mexico carried contraband into the Crescent City. Ships were ideally designed for smuggling large quantities of drugs. For one thing, once on board tremendous quantities of morphine, cocaine, or opium were successfully concealed within a relatively small space. On large vessels there were literally hundreds of places where illegal drugs could be safely hidden. Cargoes of up to 100 pounds could be stored without arousing suspicion.\(^{13}\)

Once at their destination, there were a number of ways of getting the drugs from the ship to the dealer. Sometimes the vessel did not even have to dock. If the liquor business were slow, smugglers along Rum Row in the Gulf branched out into narcotics. Vessels in the liquor fleet anchored at a safe distance in the Gulf of Mexico and waited for smaller, speedier boats from shore to come out and pick up their drug cargo. Using the numerous bayous and inlets along the coast the drugs were then smuggled the rest of the way into the city. By the mid-Twenties many of the ships along Rum Row, particularly those from Cuba, carried a cargo of drugs as a hedge against hard times in the liquor market.\(^{14}\)

Generally, however, ships carrying illegal drugs docked at the port itself. From there it was easy for smaller boats to draw

\(^{13}\)Ibid., December 27, 1924, p. 1.

alongside and receive the cargo. Smugglers on board the main ship only had to drop a line to their confederates in the smaller vessel. Once a ship was docked it was a simple matter for smugglers to make good use of the wee hours of the morning to transfer thousands of grains of illegal morphine or cocaine through a porthole to their companions below. Occasionally, a second boat was not needed. A small package could be thrown to a trusted associate who happened to walk by the dock at a precise time. Since numerous drifters and laborers frequented the waterfront area a man walking by the ship did not arouse suspicion. 15

Frequently the New Orleans wholesaler or drug dealer had "connections" on board the vessels coming into port. Seamen who worked for minimal wages were drawn to smuggling by the lure of the quick profits to be made. Usually these were men of good standing aboard ship who did not use drugs themselves. The New Orleans dealer cultivated these contacts. He furnished them money to purchase drugs when their steamer entered a foreign port and to conceal their cargo somewhere on the ship until they reached their final destination. It was the smuggler's responsibility to get the drugs safely past wary customs officials and narcotics agents. First he went ashore to meet with the dealer to arrange the time and place of delivery. Once this was agreed upon the seaman made a second trip ashore with the drugs concealed about his person. Sometimes the sailor operated on his own. He smuggled the drugs in himself and sold them to

whichever dealer came up with the highest bid, hoping to get a higher offer than his fellow competitor working for a particular individual.  

Smugglers were ingenious in coming up with new ways to conceal their merchandise. Many foreign sailors wore trusses to hide substantial amounts of morphine or cocaine from sharp-eyed customs officials. In other instances large amounts of opium were discovered among loads of cigarettes. One end of each of the cigarettes had been sliced off and repacked to hide the drug. A newspaper account noted that drugs had been found in such wide-ranging places as:

within the interior of gutted chickens, in automobile tires, in walking canes, in fruits that have been emptied, in sardine and salmon cans, in cold cream, and vasoline tins, in the slitted rims of hats, in trousers and countless other ways. Women's hair, anybody's eardrums, suitcases, handbags, are other means of transport.

In the city local drug peddlers were equally adept at hiding their wares. Drugs were concealed on their persons inside neckties, collars, stockings, and belts. Empty candy and cigar boxes provided additional places for concealing their product. Opium peddlers in New Orleans pasted a bit of the drug on a card and casually passed it on to their customers. One black shoestand operator peddled opium at the corner of South Rampart and Canal Streets; while the addict stopped to have his shoes shined the operator slipped a card containing

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17 Ibid., August 21, 1923, p. 1, August 9, 1925, p. 1.

18 Item, July 24, 1921, Magazine sec., p. 2.
opium into his trouser cuff or other convenient spot. Even addicts under lock and key were not without their ways of having drugs smuggled to them. A letter mailed to an inmate of New Orleans Parish Prison contained morphine placed under the stamps on the front of the envelope. Guards became suspicious when they noticed the envelope had far more postage than needed. When the stamps were pulled back, morphine flowed out. Jailers at the prison also found opium, morphine, and cocaine contained in bananas, apples, oranges, milk, bread, and fish brought by relatives of the inmates.\footnote{Ibid.}

The major reason for the risks taken in smuggling drugs was the tremendous profits involved. One estimate placed the amount of money spent by drug addicts in New Orleans at $5,000,000 annually. A shipment of 100 ounces of morphine, cocaine, or heroin, which was considered a substantial amount, was valued at about $50,000 at street prices. This same shipment cost the smuggler only about $500 when purchased in Germany or from $600 to $800 in Spain. The largest shipment of illicit drugs discovered in New Orleans occurred in 1923 when customs inspectors seized morphine and gum opium valued at more than $100,000 on the bootleg market. Most of the contraband was found concealed behind pictures in a passenger's stateroom aboard a German steamer that had just docked in the harbor.\footnote{Ibid.} Many other shipments involving thousands of dollars worth of drugs were seized in New Orleans during the Twenties. Customs and narcotics agents did their...
best, but most shipments of illegal drugs entered the city undetected.

Drug prices varied from year to year depending upon supply and demand, but the New Orleans retailer often made a 1,000 per cent profit on his original investment. For example, an ounce of morphine sold in Cuba for $8. This same ounce was bought by the wholesaler for $20, giving the smuggler more than a 100 per cent profit. But this was small-time in comparison to the profits of the retailer. He bought the ounce for $30 to $40 and sold it in "decks," little capsules that contained enough of the drug to give an individual addict a good "shot." Each "deck" contained a few grains of the drug, and an ounce of morphine sold in "decks" could sometimes bring a final return of almost $500.21

The retailer or peddler was so successful because he cut or diluted the pure drug to make it go further. By breaking the pure drug down into smaller amounts he greatly increased his profits. This was also true of the marijuana dealer. Marijuana smuggled into the city was sold by the large wholesaler to the retailer in kilo lots, the equivalent of 2.2 pounds. A kilo of marijuana cost the retailer from $35 to $50, but he could convert it into more than 3,000 cigarettes. He then sold the cigarettes at two for a quarter, giving him a profit ten times his original investment.22

Besides serving as a major smuggling center for illegal drugs


22 Morning Tribune, October 26, 1926, p. 1; States, January 8, 1922, sec. 2, p. 1.
entering the United States, New Orleans was a key distribution point for transporting these drugs to other areas. The Crescent City served as the leading drug distribution center in the South, funneling substantial quantities of illegal substances to other cities in the Mississippi Valley. Drugs smuggled into New Orleans continued on to cities such as Baton Rouge, Shreveport, Dallas, Oklahoma City, Little Rock, Jackson, Atlanta, Memphis, St. Louis, Chicago, and Kansas City. Sometimes drugs which entered the United States through the port of New York were shipped to New Orleans, where they were then distributed throughout the South and other sections of the country. New Orleans gained quite a reputation as a distribution center, one renowned expert in illegal drug traffic graphically referring to the city as the "hypodermic needle feeding the Middle West with illicit drugs."  

Groups or individuals headquartered in the French Quarter led these wide-ranging drug operations. Some supplied drugs to many of the larger cities in Texas, Arkansas, Tennessee, Alabama, and other nearby states. Another group of local "dope runners" engaged in transporting drugs from New Orleans to the oil fields of north Louisiana and Arkansas. In a third instance a Cleveland doctor told the press that marijuana smuggled from New Orleans had found its way to that city on Lake Erie and was being smoked in one of the area's exclusive men's clubs.

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Various methods were used to distribute the drugs smuggled into the Crescent City. Frequently dealers from cities in the Midwest came to New Orleans to purchase drugs, with deals made in places ranging from the back rooms of sleazy saloons to the elegant suites of the best hotels. For example, in 1926 the New Orleans press reported the arrest of one Dr. S. C. Frost, operator of a sanitorium in Memphis, Tennessee, who apparently headed a drug operation between that city and New Orleans, making automobile trips back and forth to pick up morphine. Some of the largest operators, however, did not come to the city in person, but sent couriers who picked up the drugs and delivered them to their employers. At other times groups in New Orleans did a brisk mail-order drug business with cities in the Mississippi Valley. In one case in 1929 narcotics agents arrested a man found mailing morphine and cocaine from New Orleans to cities in Texas, Georgia, and Tennessee. Also hundreds of transients passing through the city made arrangements with the local peddlers to mail them drugs. In this way drugs from New Orleans reached many rural areas outside the major cities.  

No one group dominated the drug trade in New Orleans, but there were several "rings," each of which controlled a portion of the total business. Three principal "rings" operated in New Orleans during the Twenties. The first and most exclusive was the Jewish ring. Operating mainly out of the commercial and uptown sections of the city, the Jewish ring peddled drugs to wealthy customers who could afford

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the best. Generally dealing on the wholesale level, this ring also handled many large drug shipments to other cities. Second in importance to the Jews was the Spanish ring, which included Cubans, Mexicans, and other Latin Americans. Working out of the area around the French Market, the Spanish ring dealt mainly in smaller shipments, which they sold grain by grain to local addicts. Their major rivals and the third local ring were the Italians, who operated a few blocks closer to Canal Street. Both the Spaniards and the Italians confined their operations exclusively to the retail level. Neither of these groups made serious attempts to break into the Jewish wholesale market.

Virtually all the drug peddlers in the city were members of one of these three rings. Most were born outside of the United States, one estimate putting this number as high as 90 per cent. According to narcotics officials, quite a few of the peddlers were in the city illegally, operating under false passports. The accepted belief that the Chinese dominated the drug-peddling trade did not hold true in New Orleans. By 1920 Chinese involvement was clearly behind the Jews, Spaniards, and Italians. Dealing exclusively in opium, which accounted for only a small part of the market, the Chinese trailed these other groups in involvement in the drug business. Morphine dominated the current peddling market and the other rings essentially controlled its distribution.27

26 Item, August 24, 1929, p. 1; States, August 25, 1929, p. 1; Times-Picayune, August 24, 1929, p. 1.

Drug peddlers in New Orleans did business in all parts of the city, but the French Quarter served as the center for their operations. The Quarter was the place most of the city's addicts congregated seeking a "fix." In fact, a reporter on several occasions noticed a peddler injecting a shot of morphine into the arm of an addict hidden in a lot directly across from the courthouse building on Royal Street in the Quarter. Another favorite meeting place for both pusher and addict was at the corner of Gasquet Street and Elks' Place. In the late Twenties the area around the Beauregard Square district of North Rampart Street served as a haven for drug peddlers. Known as the "Beauregard Square Gang," these peddlers dealt in morphine and other drugs. The Chinatown area on Tulane Avenue and South Rampart Street was still a principal source of opium. Federal officials raided opium dens in this area, finding lamps, pipes, and other smoking equipment, along with quantities of the drug.28

Addicts obtained drugs from peddlers in a number of different places. There were a number of boarding houses or "hotels" in the lower section of New Orleans which catered to the drug trade. An addict entered the establishment, rented a room, and stayed until he obtained his drugs. One example of this type of rooming house was a place in downtown New Orleans run by a foreigner. The drug addict paid the proprietor twenty-five cents for a room. He then entered the

building through a shop next door and paid an additional fee to obtain his order. Drug peddlers frequented this "hotel," always ready to provide drugs. Most of these establishments made little pretense about furnishings. Rooms were often filthy, with straw beds or rickety cots. The product, not the surroundings, was the main concern. A specific example of the business done at some of these places came in a 1923 raid upon a rooming house and clubroom on Decatur Street in the Quarter. Seven men were arrested and drugs with a street value of over $36,000 were seized by federal authorities. Officials suspected that the place served as a central "clearing house" for drugs in the New Orleans area.  

Other places in New Orleans served as centers for obtaining illegal drugs. Along with hard liquor, morphine, marijuana and other drugs were readily available at soft drink stands throughout the city. In one instance undercover narcotics agents purchased fifty ounces of morphine from a soft drink stand operator on St. Louis Street. Marijuana was available in soft drink stands, dance halls, and poolrooms. Girls in French Quarter dance halls offered "Mary Warner" cigarettes to their customers. Peddlers in the soft drink stands and poolrooms were sometimes connected with these establishments and at other times operated on their own. Marijuana peddlers also frequented the area near the city's docks, doing business with black stevedores and Latin Americans unloading fruit boats in the harbor.  

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29 *Item*, July 24, 1921, Magazine sec., p. 2; *Times-Picayune*, June 8, 1923, p. 2.

one of these seedy characters, describing him as a "typical product of the underworld. He wore no coat or tie. His cap hung low over one ear and the bill was broken. He talked from a corner of his mouth and his unsteady, shifting eyes, were continually engaged in 'eyeing' the person he happened to be talking to from head to foot. He seemed to be always on the lookout for a 'cop.'"31

Estimates of the number of drug addicts in the United States at this time have generally proved to be unreliable. Probably the most reasonable estimate was published by the United States Public Health Service in 1924. Made by Drs. Lawrence Kolb and A. G. DuMez, it placed the number of addicts nationwide in 1914 at around 215,000. In June 1919, a special committee appointed by the Secretary of the Treasury published data on the number of addicts in each of the forty-eight states. According to committee figures, Louisiana ranked third nationwide with an estimated total of 17,620 addicts. New Orleans' figures varied. The most reliable estimate of the number of addicts in the city in 1920 ranged from 2,000 to 5,000. Another estimate of persons dealing in or using narcotic drugs placed the number at about 2 per cent of the total population, or about 8,000 persons.32

Taking drugs was an expensive habit to maintain. A drug addict in New Orleans used an estimated eight grains of morphine or cocaine

31Morning Tribune, October 21, 1926, p. 1.

per day and paid an average of $1 a grain to the peddler. Another estimate described heavy users needing up to fifty grains per day. Such daily expenses inevitably forced many addicts into a life of crime. Faced with spending a minimum of $10 to $20 a day to satisfy his habit, the addict had to steal the equivalent of $100 to $200 worth of merchandise to meet this demand. Panic often set in during periods when drugs became scarce and hard to obtain at any price. In one case in the mid-Twenties prices on some drugs went up more than 300 per cent. Addicts were then forced into adopting desperate measures to compensate for the lack of drugs. One addict ripped a piece from his prison blanket, burned it, cooked the ashes with water, and injected it with a hypodermic. Another boiled his own necktie and injected the resulting dye into his veins. Overdose was also a definite possibility. A reporter estimated that eighteen addicts were found dead from a drug overdose in New Orleans during the year 1923. Most of the deaths occurred in the Quarter and in a section of the city appropriately nicknamed "Needle Alley," described as a "grim little backwater in what was the negro section of the restricted district."33

Addicts in New Orleans came from all walks of life. In one case police arrested two black women whose clientele included wealthy, fashionably-dressed ladies who drove expensive limousines to the place where they sought their morphine and cocaine. They entered the residence to stay and take dope or sometimes just made a drug purchase

and left. Most addicts, however, were not so affluent. Many struggled unsuccessfully to come up with the money to maintain their habit. A number of these "drug fiends," as they were unfairly characterized by the newspapers, lived in smelly, filthy rooms in cheap hotels or rooming houses. Beds at some of these places rented for as little as ten cents a night. There the addict shot up and lay on a dirty mattress until he recovered from the effects of the drug. If he did not have the money for another fix, he just lay there fighting the tremors of withdrawal symptoms.34

The average addict was portrayed in the harshest language by several of the city's newspapers, which often had little sympathy for his predicament. One paper described the addicts in the bleakest terms:

They can be seen skulking along the narrowest and darkest of the city's by-ways, mere shadows of humanity, cheeks blanched and sunken, fingers long, yellow and bony—gradually yielding up their lives. The enslaved wretch will cast his solitary dollar to the vendor of opium or morphine to stay the gnawing pangs of the unquenchable craving for the drug.35

Several peddlers profited most from the misery of New Orleans drug addicts. One man who received a great deal of notoriety during the early 1920s was Edward "Eddie" Sebastian. Labeled by the press somewhat extravagantly as "one of the kings of the South's underworld drug traffic," Sebastian led a charmed life. Formerly a waiter in a


restaurant, he entered the drug trade shortly after the outbreak of World War I and by 1920 became one of the city's leading retailers. Sebastian amassed a tidy fortune, including several automobiles and a handsome house in an uptown residential area. He also managed to escape the clutches of the law. Arrested several times for drug violations, Sebastian avoided conviction one time through a mistrial and a second as a result of a hung jury. In March 1920, he was arrested while carrying a substantial amount of morphine and cocaine. Despite official testimony that Sebastian had the drugs in his possession, he again escaped conviction, winning an acquittal in federal court. Apparently the jury believed his rather dubious testimony that he was an addict and the drugs were solely for his personal use.\footnote{Item, March 23, 1920, p. 1, November 30, 1920, p. 10, December 1, 1920, p. 1; \textit{Times-Picayune}, March 23, 1920, p. 1, October 15, 1920, p. 15.} After that escape Sebastian completely vanished from public view. He was not mentioned in the New Orleans newspapers for the remainder of the decade.

Another successful drug entrepreneur was Alge Howell, known as the "king of New Orleans dope peddlers." Operating from an elegantly furnished apartment on North Rampart Street, Howell maintained a successful business during the early Twenties. He sold hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of illegal drugs and it was said that he supplied more than 500 local addicts with their daily shot. Howell, however, was less fortunate than Eddie Sebastian. Convicted in 1923 of possessing and selling drugs in violation of the Harrison narcotics law, Howell's drug career ended when he received a one-year sentence.
in Atlanta federal prison.  

Howell's counterpart among New Orleans' black community was Napoleon "Toodlums" Taylor. Taylor headed a major dope ring in New Orleans and was a powerful man in the black underworld. He avoided the law for a long time mainly by never dealing directly with any of his customers, preferring instead to send a messenger with the drugs. When the messenger was paid, he had the money changed to avoid marked bills, took out his commission, and returned the rest to Taylor. Dealing in drugs paid off handsomely for "Toodlums." Reputed to be worth more than $500,000, he owned a number of gambling resorts, several disorderly houses, and three or four expensive automobiles. A pillar of black society, Taylor was also a church deacon and belonged to several black clubs and lodges. When he was finally arrested by federal officials in December 1926, Taylor had managed to escape prosecution for at least a decade.  

While Sebastian, Howell, and Taylor represented the elite of New Orleans' drug peddlers, the city's drug culture had its more sordid side, particularly if one of the participants happened to double-cross the other. This was true in the case of Angelo Pavone, a minor wholesale drug dealer, whose body was found covered by weeds alongside a ditch in a remote area of the city. Pavone had been shot twice, once in the neck and a second time over the heart. The discovery of

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38 Item, December 6, 1926, p. 9; States, December 6, 1926, p. 2.
imitation morphine tablets in his room and reports that he had sold a chalk substitute for the real drug led police to theorize that Pavone had been "taken for a ride" by other drug peddlers he had swindled. In addition, police reported that Pavone frequently "squealed" on fellow pushers "to save his own hide," which no doubt contributed to his ultimate fate.\(^39\)

Violence was also a hazard for federal narcotics agents. While investigating the Pavone case, Agent Clarence Moore was shot and critically wounded as he and another colleague attempted to arrest two suspects after making a drug buy on the corner of Esplanade Avenue and Bourbon Street. The two suspects, members of a local drug ring, had just sold a quantity of morphine to the agents when Moore was shot.\(^40\) For a time it appeared Moore's wounds might be fatal, but he eventually recovered. Moore's shooting is important not only as an illustration of drug-related violence, but also because one of the men arrested for the crime was Sylvestro "Silver Dollar Sam" Carollo. Carollo, a major figure in liquor smuggling and narcotics during the late Twenties and early Thirties, has been named by a number of authorities as the leader of the Mafia in New Orleans prior to World War II. During this period Carollo was one of a number of people vying for control of the city's liquor and drug markets. Carollo was never actually tried for the shooting of Agent Moore, but he was later

\(^{39}\) Item, August 22, 1929, p. 1; Times-Picayune, August 15, 1929, p. 6.

\(^{40}\) Item, August 22, 1929, p. 1; Times-Picayune, August 23, 1929, p. 1.
convicted and sent to prison on other drug-related charges. 41

Marijuana, too, figured in New Orleans criminal violence. Harold Normandale, the city's leading bank robber and petty criminal, was reported to be a regular user of the drug. One reporter was present on many occasions when Normandale was arrested and claimed that the "Prince of Paroles" always appeared to be high on the drug. Marijuana also figured in one of the most heinous crimes of the decade in New Orleans. This was the savage ax-murder in April 1929, of Mrs. Anna Flink and her fourteen-year-old son, Henry, at their small grocery store in the Gentilly section of the city. A twenty-two-year-old black man, Julius Roberts, given the nickname "Doo-Doom" by the press, was arrested, tried, and found guilty of committing the murders. In his confession Roberts stated that he had smoked three marijuana cigarettes just prior to the killings. 42 Whether the marijuana actually caused him to commit the murders is debatable, but the New Orleans press decried Roberts' use of the drug. The Times-Picayune felt Roberts' smoking marijuana made him unaware of his subsequent actions: "What 'muggles' cigarettes did to inflame the negro they will do, in the same or other lines, for others who fall under the fascination of this Mexican hasheesh that drives conscience and foresight from its victims and renders any crime, however abhorrent, not


merely possible but actually probable...  

Despite the far more serious dangers resulting from the use of morphine, opium, or heroin, marijuana achieved greater notoriety among both the public and the press in New Orleans during the Twenties. In highly sensational exposés reporters exaggerated both the drug's use and its potential effects. The public came to fear the drug, particularly because of its supposed impact upon the city's youth. Press reports detailed the drug's widespread use among school-age children. According to one child welfare worker at least 200 school-age boys smoked marijuana. Reporters for the Item noted that the drug was being sold near many of the city's public schools. Children not more than twelve years old were reported seen trying marijuana. According to one attendance officer told the press: "We fear the use of this drug is a serious blow to the morals of the young in the community. It is a poison that stultifies the brain of the young and can lead to paranoia." Smoking marijuana was also prevalent among youths who avoided school. One study estimated that 10 per cent of the city's newsboys used the drug.  

What particularly worried anxious parents was the apparent easy
availability of the drug. Reporters doing a story on marijuana interviewed more than sixty children, most of whom came from the poorer areas of the city. The great majority related that they had no problem obtaining marijuana cigarettes, and they knew exactly where to buy them. A key factor in the widespread use of marijuana was its price. Peddlers usually sold marijuana cigarettes at two for a quarter, bringing them within the range of schoolboys saving their lunch money. This accessibility disturbed a number of local women's groups. In 1924 Mrs. Emma Bell Stanton told a meeting of the New Orleans Federation of Clubs that marijuana was being sold in drugstores and candy stores throughout the city. She was particularly shocked to find that young girls were experimenting with the drug while joyriding in the family automobile at night.\(^{47}\)

Marijuana's newness on the scene sometimes led to wild exaggerations about its potential dangers. One reporter for the Item described the effect of smoking a marijuana cigarette: "To have your blood rush through your temples with the speed of a mill-race; your heart throbbing like an engine rift of its governor; to feel yourself slipping down into the very vortex of DEATH; to know that you barely escaped the coroner..." The article argued that smoking marijuana could have very serious, perhaps fatal, consequences: "The life or at least the sanity of a confirmed user is said to be only one year."\(^{48}\)

Members of the pharmaceutical profession also exaggerated the drug's

\(^{47}\)Morning Tribune, October 20, 1926, pp. 1, 7, October 22, 1926, p. 1; Times-Picayune, November 25, 1924, p. 17.

\(^{48}\)Item, March 23, 1924, Magazine sec., p. 3.
effects. A statement by an author in the Pharmacopoeia of the American Drug Manufacturers Association commented on smoking marijuana: "If its use is persisted in it leads to indigestion, wasting of the body, cough, melancholy, impotence, and dropsy. After a time its votary becomes an outcast from society, and his career terminates in crime, insanity and idiocy." 49

Other groups overemphasized marijuana's potency and the false assumption that its use always led to harder drugs. Findings by professors at Tulane medical school showed that marijuana was as powerful as hasheesh, a much more dangerous drug. Federal authorities echoed these sentiments and argued that marijuana use led eventually to addiction to more harmful drugs such as opium. A federal grand jury in the late Twenties viewed marijuana smoking as an "evil" equivalent to injecting morphine. 50 Government narcotics agents linked the drug and crime, charging that marijuana produces "vivid hallucinations and paralyzes the higher brain centers, causing the user sometimes to run amuck and kill or wound without the slightest provocation." The Times-Picayune charged that marijuana infected the city's youth with a "recklessness unrivalled by other 'dope'," making it much easier for young people to unwittingly commit a crime. A local judge agreed, noting that several youthful offenders stated the drug helped build up their nerve to commit robberies or other criminal acts. 51

49 States, June 3, 1923, p. 1.


51 Ibid., March 15, 1929, p. 1; Times-Picayune, May 29, 1922, p. 20.
Not all observations on the effects of marijuana were quite so negative, however. An article in the Morning Tribune discussed the sensations produced by smoking the drug. The reporters found the primary effect of smoking marijuana to be one of "dreamy intoxication of an extremely agreeable kind." It stimulated the user and gave the recipient the impression of increased strength. Heavy use of the drug resulted in a slowing of the heart beat and respiration. While the drug's early symptoms were highly pleasurable, the paper warned against excessive use, which might lead to general ill health and mental illness. 52

The New Orleans press campaign against the use of marijuana reached its climax in October 1926, in a series of highly sensational exposés in the Morning Tribune, which had begun publication less than two years earlier as the Item's attempt to cut the circulation of the city's leading daily, the Times-Picayune. Of the city's four major newspapers, the Morning Tribune was the leading exponent of yellow journalism. This series of disclosures marked the first national coverage of the marijuana issue. In daily articles over a two-week period Morning Tribune reporters focused on all aspects of the marijuana question. 53 Initially linking the drug and crime, the paper began with a broad statement of its conclusions:

52 Morning Tribune, October 27, 1926, p. 1.

Marijuana is one of the chief industries of the New Orleans underworld. Scores seem to make their living by selling cigarettes drugged with it to thousands who smoke them. Crimes have been attributed by police to its influence on youthful gangsters. Its use is spreading among children. They have little or no difficulty getting it—if they have the price. 54

According to the Morning Tribune reporters, marijuana was readily available in New Orleans; one could purchase it "with almost the same ease that one can buy a sandwich." Those who smoked the drug were not restricted to one particular age or social group. They included "scarlet women" as well as "society belles," working men as well as schoolboys. The drug was purchased by reporters from operators of poolrooms, cabarets, restaurants, and saloons, petty criminals, vagrants, and sailors on ships who docked in the port. Reporters estimated that thousands of kilos of marijuana were smuggled annually into New Orleans. Wholesalers established warehouses for the drug throughout the city, where the marijuana remained until it was ready for distribution to the retailers, who in turn sold it to their customers. 55

Although they exaggerated the city's marijuana problem, the newspaper exposes did result in a growing interest in local marijuana laws. During the Twenties marijuana offenses were not covered by the Harrison Act, the principal federal enforcement statute. Federal authorities were unable to arrest and prosecute marijuana peddlers or users. This left primary jurisdiction in marijuana cases to state

54 Morning Tribune, October 18, 1926, p. 1.
and local officials. The major state law was a 1924 statute setting fines of not less than $50 or more than $1,000 and imprisonment in the parish jail for up to six months for possession of marijuana. Backing this law was a less severe city ordinance providing for a $25 fine and thirty days in jail for anyone found selling marijuana or having it in his possession within the New Orleans city limits. There is little evidence that either of these laws was vigorously enforced prior to the publication of the newspaper articles. However, largely as a result of the press outcry, in 1927 the Louisiana legislature reviewed the issue and passed a new marijuana law, which provided for a maximum fine of $500 or six months imprisonment or both for possession or sale of the drug.56

Local police moved to quiet public fears of a marijuana problem. Just prior to the newspaper articles of October 1926, Superintendent Thomas Healy ordered his force to crack down on this aspect of the city's drug culture. In one night of raiding approximately 100 underworld dives, soft drink stands, nightclubs, groceries, and private residences were raided by policemen seeking marijuana peddlers and smokers. More than 150 persons were arrested including derelicts, veteran criminals, ladies of the evening, sailors, and youths.57 But this type of raid, as with most of the others, proved to be only a temporary solution of the problem. Smoking remained a problem for


57 Item, October 17, 1926, p. 1.
law enforcement authorities into the 1930s, and as late as 1936 W. B. Graham, State Narcotics Investigator, estimated that 60 per cent of the crimes in New Orleans were committed by marijuana users. Also in the Thirties a new problem emerged; marijuana began to be grown locally. By 1930 a crop of marijuana with a value of $35,000 to $50,000 was found growing near the city, and in 1936 state police destroyed another $40,000 crop in the swamps west of Lake Maurepas, about twenty-five miles from New Orleans. 58

All the sensational newspaper disclosures and increased police raids give an exaggerated picture of the marijuana situation in New Orleans. Marijuana smoking in the Crescent City was not particularly widespread and certainly not as common as it would become several decades later. As late as 1930 there were only thirty marijuana convictions for the entire state of Louisiana, most of which probably came in New Orleans. In 1931 even Treasury officials indicated that the newspaper accounts of marijuana usage in New Orleans were likely to be exaggerated. 59 During the Twenties marijuana usage was clearly secondary to that of all other illegal drugs—morphine, opium, and cocaine.

Charged with enforcing the federal drug laws was the Narcotic Division of the Treasury Department. Originally organized following

58 New Orleans Morning Tribune for June 25, 1936, pp. 1, 3, found in W. B. Graham Papers, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Louisiana State University; Walton, Marihuana, pp. 31-32.

59 Brecher, et. al., Licit and Illicit Drugs, p. 412; Walton, Marihuana, pp. 31-32.
passage of the Harrison Act of 1914, the Division initially came under the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Internal Revenue. In 1920, following the creation of the Prohibition Unit within the Bureau, the Narcotic Division became one of its main branches. It remained under the Unit's supervision until 1927 when the Unit became the Prohibition Bureau. The Narcotic Division operated as a part of the Prohibition Bureau until 1930 when Congress finally took the action necessary to create a separate Bureau of Narcotics within the Treasury Department. 60

The man in charge of the Narcotic Division during the 1920s was Levi G. Nutt, a former official of the Alcohol Tax Division of the Bureau of Internal Revenue. Nutt headed a total force of 270 agents stationed in various cities throughout the country. 61 A small unit of the Narcotic Division worked in New Orleans. There are no figures available on the number of federal agents stationed in the city during the Twenties, but it was probably less than ten. Drug enforcement on the federal level remained clearly secondary to Prohibition enforcement. The Customs Service did furnish valuable assistance to the agents in confiscating contraband drugs, but the primary responsibility for enforcing the Harrison Act remained with the Narcotic Division.

There were several problems that hampered federal enforcement of the drug laws in New Orleans. For one thing, the local force was hampered by frequent changes in top personnel. Unlike O. D. Jackson's

60 Laurence F. Schmeckebier, The Bureau of Prohibition, pp. 3, 138; Musto, American Disease, pp. 146-47.

61 Musto, American Disease, pp. 183-84.
stable tenure as head of the Prohibition force, almost yearly changes in high-level local narcotics posts weakened the Division's enforcement efforts. The agent heading the New Orleans field force rarely lasted more than a year before he was replaced or transferred to another position. Also, there were differences over priorities between local narcotics agents and their superiors in the Prohibition Bureau. In one instance W. T. Truxton, the chief narcotics agent in New Orleans, wrote a letter to the Commissioner of Internal Revenue in Washington, charging that when he took over in October 1920, he found a "condition of affairs scarcely equalled in any other city of the United States insofar as flagrant and open violations of the Harrison anti-narcotic law are concerned." Complaining about the lack of arrests by members of the federal force in New Orleans, Truxton requested a Justice Department investigation of the conduct of local agents. Truxton's letter resulted largely from a clash of views between the agent and his immediate superior, David Gates, head of the Southwest Prohibition District.

Conditions in local narcotics enforcement did improve as the decade wore on. In the late Twenties New Orleans became the headquarters for a Gulf zone investigating unit whose primary concern was to crack down on the amount of drug smuggling through the Gulf ports. Largely the result of a meeting between Nutt and O. D. Jackson, this reorganization of the narcotics force brought a degree of stability to drug enforcement efforts. Another key to improved enforcement

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62 Times-Picayune, April 7, 1921, p. 1.
63 Ibid., June 12, 1927, p. 3.
was the strong cooperation narcotics officials received from local police. Unlike police relations with the Prohibition forces, which were often stormy, cooperation between New Orleans police and federal narcotics agents was generally good. In fact, on several occasions federal officials praised the assistance received on the local level. The constantly undermanned federal force welcomed any assistance it received, and police superintendents during the Twenties normally assigned two of their top detectives to work closely with local agents. Frequently city police cooperated with federal forces in making joint raids. In one such raid in 1922 police and local agents moved against a photographic studio on North Claiborne, where they arrested three drug peddlers and confiscated $20,000 worth of opium and cocaine. Despite occasional differences, narcotics-police cooperation remained effective during the decade.

The major federal drug law in effect during the Twenties, and the one which remained the basic statute until as recently as ten years ago, was the Harrison Act of 1914. Named for Representative Francis Burton Harrison of New York, an aristocratic Tammany Democrat who guided the bill through Congress, the Harrison Act was signed on December 14, 1914, by President Woodrow Wilson. Never intended to be a prohibition measure, the act was primarily aimed at regulating and controlling the nation's drug traffic. For the first time dealers and distributors of narcotic drugs--opium, cocaine, and their derivatives--had to register annually with the Treasury Department's Bureau

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64 States, August 5, 1921, p. 8, July 23, 1922, p. 6, January 16, 1925, p. 11, August 8, 1926, sec. 4, p. 1.
of Internal Revenue, which enforced the law. An excise tax of one cent per ounce of opium, morphine, and other drugs had to be paid to the government. Stamps signifying that the tax had been paid appeared on the container in which the drug first entered the domestic market at either the import or manufacturing stage. Under the Harrison Act it was against the law to purchase, sell, or distribute drugs except in these stamped packages. Drugs such as morphine or opium could not be delivered except upon a written order received on special forms distributed by the Treasury Department.

More importantly, the Harrison Act required anyone involved in handling narcotic drugs—importers, manufacturers, wholesalers, druggists, doctors, dentists, and others—to register with the Treasury Department and pay an occupational tax. Each person who registered had to keep records of all their drug transactions and make these records available when requested by law enforcement officials. The act contained no direct reference to drug addicts. It did not make addiction a crime and it did not forbid doctors from prescribing drugs for users. All the law required was that the drugs the addict obtained come from a doctor properly registered with the government and that the transaction be a matter of public knowledge.

The maximum penalty for violation of the original Harrison law was five years, raised to ten years with the passage of the Narcotic

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65 Congressional Record, LII, 97-99, 63rd Cong., 3rd sess. (December 10, 1914), contains the final amended text of the bill; King, Drug Hang-Up, p. 21; Musto, American Disease, pp. 54, 61; Ray, Drugs, Society, and Human Behavior, p. 19.

66 King, Drug Hang-Up, pp. 21-22; Lindesmith, Addict and the Law, pp. 4-5.
Drugs Import and Export Act of 1922. This act, which also included a maximum fine of $5,000, was specifically aimed at curbing the increased smuggling of illegal drugs. A final Congressional measure passed in 1924 prohibited the importing of opium for the manufacture of heroin. Both of these laws strengthened the Harrison Act and provided for stiffer penalties for drug violations.

The importance of the Harrison Act lay not so much in its original provisions but in how those provisions were interpreted by the courts and by federal enforcement officials. Several Supreme Court decisions played a definite role in contributing to the rise of illegal drug addiction. In 1916 the court in *U.S. v. Jin Fuey Hoy* upheld government regulations which stated that only properly registered persons such as doctors, dentists, and veterinarians could legally dispense drugs. This decision in effect forced an addict to go to a physician as his only legal source of drugs. Two more Supreme Court decisions severely limited the addict's ability to obtain drugs legally. In *Webb et. al. v. U.S.* (1919) the court stated that it was illegal for a doctor to prescribe narcotic drugs solely for maintaining an addict's use and comfort; in effect, a physician could not administer drugs simply to prevent an addict from experiencing withdrawal symptoms. The final blow came in 1922 when the court ruled in *U.S. v. Behrman* that even prescribing narcotic drugs for an addict as part of a cure program was illegal if the doses were so large as to clearly indicate that the drugs were intended to satisfy the user's

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habit. Although the court later moderated its ruling on this point in *Linder v. U.S.* (1925), the damage was already done. Federal officials implemented the first ruling but were slow to follow the second one.

Official enforcement policy was shaped by these Supreme Court decisions. Implicit in the court rulings was the belief that addiction was not a disease and thus not susceptible to treatment by a physician. The best solution to the drug addiction problem, according to the government, was punishment rather than medical help. Law enforcement officials interpreted the Harrison Act in such a way that a physician was no longer able to prescribe narcotic drugs to an addict to maintain his habit. If a doctor did so he could be arrested, and some physicians were sent to jail as a result. A number who managed to avoid conviction still had their careers severely damaged by resulting publicity. Some doctors gave the government ample grounds for action by abusing their privilege to write prescriptions. In New Orleans in 1920 federal officials arrested Dr. A. J. Montz, a well-known physician in the lower section of the city, and accused him of conspiracy to violate the Harrison Act through the wholesale issuing of prescriptions to drug addicts. The government charged that from July 1919, to July 1920, Montz

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issued 2,403 prescriptions for morphine to his patients. Montz was tried in federal court but was freed when the jury was unable to reach a verdict. 69

Though this was an extreme case of abuse, in fact what happened during the early Twenties was that doctors, fearful of arrest, refused to prescribe narcotic drugs for addict patients. As a result the drug user's last legitimate means of satisfying his habit were removed. He had only two choices—to stop using the drug or purchase it illegally from a dealer at a price thirty to fifty times higher than before. The addict was now forced into criminal activity to help pay for his illegal drugs. 70

By 1920 federal authorities took a hard-line approach to the drug problem, which was rapidly escalating with the emergence of a burgeoning illegal market. One narcotics head in New Orleans saw addicts as the "scum of the earth," persons beneath contempt who deserved little public sympathy. This attitude by government officials and the sensationalism of many newspaper writers, who frequently referred to addicts as "dope fiends," influenced the public mind on the drug issue. With officials, physicians, and the press telling them that drugs were associated with insanity and with crime, many people began to believe it. According to popular belief drugs were associated with foreigners and the lower classes, and many middle-class Americans began to worry that they might be affected

69 Brecher, et. al., Licit and Illicit Drugs, pp. 49-50; King, Drug Hang-Up, pp. 43, 46; Lindesmith, Addict and the Law, p. 7; States, August 10, 1920, p. 1, October 20, 1921, p. 1, October 22, 1921, p. 1.

70 Ray, Drugs, Society, and Human Behavior, p. 191.
also. Thus by the early 1920s the public's attitude toward drug addicts had shifted. One author described the change:

... the addict was no longer seen as a victim of drugs, an unfortunate with no place to turn and deserving of society's sympathy and help. He became instead a base, vile, degenerate who was weak and self-indulgent, who contaminated all he came in contact with and who deserved nothing short of condemnation and society's moral outrage and legal sanction. The law enforcement approach was accepted as the only workable solution to the problem of addiction.

The harshness of federal law enforcement can best be seen in the Narcotic Division's opposition to the drug clinics which sprang up in many areas of the country right after World War I. Altogether about forty of these clinics were set up from 1919 to 1923 to help deal with the nation's growing number of drug addicts. They were never intended as a final cure for addiction, but rather as an alternative approach to prevent the addict from being exploited by drug peddlers. In the clinic the addict temporarily received drugs but was expected to submit voluntarily to a withdrawal program and make an attempt at rehabilitation. Begun with federal blessings, the clinics later became targets of federal wrath.

Three drug clinics were set up in Louisiana in the spring of 1919— at Shreveport, Alexandria, and New Orleans. Legislative action

71 Musto, American Disease, p. 65; States, November 14, 1920, sec. 3, p. 1.


73 Lindesmith, Addict and the Law, pp. 139-42; Musto, American Disease, p. 151.
created the clinics, placed under the jurisdiction of the State Board of Health, headed by Dr. Oscar Dowling. The New Orleans clinic, located on Exchange Place and Conti Street, was operated by Dr. Marion W. Swords. Swords began by dispensing drugs to a few addicts each day in March 1919, and within a matter of weeks that number had increased to several hundred. Attempting to prevent addicts from purchasing drugs illegally at substantially higher prices, Dr. Swords sought to get them established upon a reduced dose program and keep them comfortable until permanent institutional care could be found.  

However, almost from the very beginning, the New Orleans clinic encountered opposition. Charles H. Patterson, general secretary of the Charity Organization Society, a social welfare group, blamed the clinic's policy of furnishing drugs cheaply for attracting a large number of additional addicts to the city. Patterson labeled the drug dispensary a "dumping ground for addicts." Levi Nutt, after a visit in November 1920, to inspect the clinic, recommended that the place be closed. Nutt charged that the clinic was only satisfying the addicts' craving for drugs. John H. Kramer, Prohibition Commissioner and Nutt's immediate superior, agreed. It was Kramer's belief that the clinic was merely keeping addicts comfortable—a violation of the Harrison Act—rather than providing a lasting cure. Henry Mooney, the United States Attorney in New Orleans, was also firmly opposed to the clinic, declaring that, if the Louisiana State Board of Health did not order the clinic closed, federal officials in New Orleans would take

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74 Musto, American Disease, pp. 163-65; States, November 15, 1920, p. 1.
the action necessary to end its operations.\textsuperscript{75}

Federal narcotics officials did all they could to present evidence against the clinic to Governor Parker, Dr. Dowling, and other members of the State Board. W. T. Truxton, the agent in charge in New Orleans, conducted an investigation which found that of the 223 addicts registered at the clinic in December 1921, 81 had criminal records, including a number with drug violations. Several addicts were prostitutes and some had given false names to obtain drugs. Close examination of Truxton's investigation shows that he intentionally slanted the information that he presented to the Board. There was very little evidence in Truxton's report of the faulty dispensing of drugs and, while a number of addicts did have criminal records, this had nothing to do with the question as to whether addicted criminals were still entitled to treatment. The States felt the "wild" charges of abuse made by the federal government against the clinic were unsubstantiated. While some violations may have occurred in legally distributing drugs, the States argued that it would be the "rankest injustice" to close the clinic. Rather than harass the clinic, the paper suggested that the government should support the city's efforts. But the States' plea fell on deaf ears. Faced with determined police and federal opposition the State Board ordered the New Orleans clinic closed in March 1921, exactly two years after it

was first opened. 76

With the failure of the New Orleans clinic others in the city searched for an answer to the growing problem of drug addiction. In 1924 reporter Hermann B. Deutsch wrote a series of articles in the Item attempting to win public sympathy for some kind of treatment for the drug addict. Deutsch suggested that the New Orleans clinic failed largely because addicts were not satisfied with the minimum dosage and that the operation attracted too many new addicts to the city seeking drugs. Arguing that addicts were not "dope fiends," Deutsch still believed the best cure for drug addiction was the "iron cure," which in drug parlance meant kicking the habit gradually in a prison cell. Since the thought of going to prison terrified many addicts, Deutsch suggested the endowment of a state hospital where addicts could receive institutional treatment. He supported a proposed law under which proven addicts would receive a short prison term for a first offense, just long enough to "kick their habit." Multiple offenders under this same law would receive longer sentences. Deutsch also saw a direct relationship between drug addiction and crime, and he favored penalties forbidding the use, sale, or possession of marijuana. 77 Deutsch's views on drug addiction were more progressive than those of most federal officials, but the idea of a state hospital to treat addicts never became a reality during the Twenties. Most

76 Editorial, States, February 16, 1921, p. 6; Musto, American Disease, pp. 166-67.

addicts were still sent to prison as the best cure for their drug habit.

While the plight of the addict was a serious matter, federal narcotics agents in New Orleans were more concerned with smugglers of large quantities of drugs. As with Prohibition, their most effective weapon was the drug raid. Often made with police cooperation, raids against the city's most important drug traffickers were a frequent occurrence during the Twenties. Usually they were preceded by painstaking undercover work as agents sought to make a drug "buy" in order to obtain sufficient evidence for a conviction. This was followed by the raid itself, in which agents seized large quantities of morphine or cocaine and arrested key individuals involved. Raids were conducted all over the city but most frequently in the French Quarter, where the majority of the city's drug business was transacted. Agents also struck at ships docked in the harbor after receiving a tip or making a purchase from a seaman trying to sell his contraband cargo.

Sometimes federal drug raids involved months of planning and undercover work before the final arrest was made. In 1928 one large raid conducted by a squad of narcotics agents and deputy United States marshals resulted in the arrest of more than twenty "underworld characters," suspected of being major dealers in morphine and cocaine. The raid was the result of two months of preparation by agents assigned to New Orleans from other areas and involved at least one drug purchase from each of the persons arrested. In another case a woman agent was used to thwart the drug operators. Working undercover, the
operative penetrated a group of drug peddlers who frequented a pool-
room on Howard Avenue and were believed to be furnishing drugs to
public school children. She purchased at least two "decks" of cocaine
from one of the peddlers involved.\textsuperscript{78}

If agents were unsuccessful in stemming the flow of narcotics
traffic, it was not for want of trying. Estimates of the value of
the drugs seized by the government for the first half of the Twenties--
the only ones available--reveal some impressive results. In 1920 in
New Orleans about $100,000 worth of cocaine and morphine was seized
and more than 200 drug arrests were made. During the eleven-month
tenure of W. G. Cunningham, chief narcotic agent for Louisiana, from
June 1921 to May 1922, agents in New Orleans seized illegal drugs
valued at $300,000 at government prices and arrested approximately
290 peddlers and addicts. The figures kept escalating. From 1923 to
1925 the local office confiscated more than $1,000,000 worth of contra-
band drugs. Despite these impressive figures, however, the under-
manned narcotics force was only able to scratch the surface of the
problem. One newspaper estimated that government agents were able to
intercept and confiscate only about one per cent of the contraband
drugs smuggled into the city.\textsuperscript{79} Even if this estimate were conserva-
tive, it is clear that the vast majority of drugs made it into New
Orleans undetected.


2, p. 1, July 12, 1925, p. 5; \textit{Times-Picayune}, May 26, 1922, p. 4.
Most of those arrested for violations of the Harrison Act faced trial in federal court. Statistics are fragmentary but it appears that due to the smaller number of cases and more vigorous prosecution, the conviction rate for narcotics violations was much higher than that for Prohibition offenses. Of the 290 drug peddlers and addicts arrested from June 1921 to May 1922, 225 received sentences in federal prison. Also on January 1, 1926, there were approximately 150 narcotics cases on the federal court calendar. By June the number had been reduced to 28. During the six-month period a total of 170 cases, counting new ones, were decided by the court. Of this number 50 went to a jury, and out of this group 33 resulted in convictions. Sixty-one people pleaded guilty, ten cases were dismissed, and eighteen were nol-prossed. These fragmentary statistics indicate that better than half of the cases resulted in guilty verdicts.\(^{80}\)

There were problems, however. In the early Twenties there rose a backlog of narcotics cases as Prohibition arrests clogged the court calendar. Although narcotics cases never amounted to more than a fraction of the number of Prohibition cases, the result of the overcrowded calendar was that many narcotics cases languished as judges give first priority to liquor arrests. Some of the cases disposed of during the 1926 court session were at least five or six years old. A number of convictions were lost as drug cases became untriable due to an inability to locate witnesses several years after the individual's

\(^{80}\) States, June 13, 1926, p. 12; Times-Picayune, May 26, 1922, p. 4.
arrest.\textsuperscript{81} Once the Prohibition "bargain days" relieved some of the court congestion, narcotics cases reached trial more speedily.

The harshest sentences for drug offenses were reserved for those found guilty of smuggling or possession of large quantities of illegal drugs. Federal judges generally took a dim view of drug smuggling and sentences ranged from a minimum of one year to as much as five years in federal prison. Fines of up to $10,000 were imposed in addition to the prison term. New Orleans judges were not reluctant to hand down stiff sentences. A seaman convicted of smuggling one ounce of morphine was sentenced to serve three years in the federal prison in Atlanta. In another case a man found guilty of violating the Narcotic Import and Export Law received a five-year sentence and a $5,000 fine. Marijuana offenses were subject to state law, where the penalties were less harsh. A peddler found guilty of possessing a large amount of the drug received a $500 fine and a sentence of six months in the parish jail. Another man arrested for merely having marijuana cigarettes in his possession was sentenced to serve sixty days in jail and pay a fine of $50.\textsuperscript{82}

Local drug addicts were sent to prison to try to cure their drug dependence. In 1920 of the more than 40 persons who pleaded guilty to being drug addicts, 22 were sent to Atlanta. Some judges did worry about sending addicts seeking a cure to the same place as convicted


\textsuperscript{82} Item, June 20, 1926, p. 4, November 15, 1926, p. 1; States, April 2, 1928, p. 1; Times-Picayune, February 9, 1927, p. 13, November 9, 1927, p. 1.
felons. Judge Rufus Foster of the Federal District Court in New Orleans felt addicts should receive some penalty calling for temporary service in an institution where their dependency would be reduced gradually until they were cured. But few such institutions existed in the 1920s, so federal judges had little alternative but to prescribe the "iron cure."

Despite determined federal enforcement efforts and stiff sentences imposed by federal judges, the smuggling and use of illegal drugs continued to be a serious problem in New Orleans as the decade ended. As was the case with Prohibition, an understaffed narcotics force seized only a fraction of the illegal drugs entering the city. Drug smuggling thrived into the Thirties and New Orleans remained a major port for distributing narcotic drugs throughout the South and Midwest. In the early Thirties, with the repeal of Prohibition, organized crime branched into illegal drug traffic. Men like Sylvestro Carollo and the young Carlos Marcello, who was later to dominate organized crime in New Orleans after World War II, made lucrative profits supplying narcotics to the city's addicts. By the late Thirties Marcello was emerging as one of the city's largest wholesalers.

As the Twenties ended, the drug picture in New Orleans was changing. Morphine began to be replaced by heroin as the dominant drug; cocaine remained a major illegal drug while the popularity of

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opium declined still more. Marijuana, on the other hand, became more common, although the decades of its major use were still ahead. The supply of illegal drugs, while changing, remained readily available. If an addict wanted to satisfy his habit, wholesalers and peddlers were eager to provide for his needs. Along with liquor, gambling, and prostitution, drugs remained an active part of the criminal scene in the Crescent City.
CHAPTER VII
THE MYTH OF THE MAFIA:
ORGANIZED CRIME IN NEW ORLEANS

Criminal activity involving liquor, gambling, prostitution, and drugs, as it occurred in New Orleans during the 1920s, is usually associated in the public mind with the term "organized crime." For many persons "organized crime" is symbolized by the "Mafia," a secret criminal organization dominated by Italians and which was believed to control the flow of illegal goods and services. In popular American folklore the terms "Mafia" and "organized crime" have become synonymous. This image has been reinforced in the public mind by events such as the Kefauver Organized Crime Committee Hearings of 1950-1951 and the sensational Congressional testimony of Joseph Valachi, an underworld informer, in 1963. Both of these events painted the picture of a monolithic national criminal organization known as the "Mafia" or "Cosa Nostra."¹ These developments in turn have led to a series of public misconceptions about American crime in the twentieth century: that it has always been organized; that it has always been controlled by the "Mafia"; and that Italians have always played the leading role in American crime from 1900 to the present.

To understand the reasons for these public misconceptions, it is essential to define the terms "organized crime" and "Mafia." The

term "organized crime" originated in the Twenties with the rise of Prohibition. It referred to a group of individuals with a cohesive leadership and social structure who controlled the market for certain illegal goods and services—liquor, gambling, prostitution, and narcotics—that were much in demand by particular segments of the population. Also known as syndicates, these criminal groups sought to obtain a monopoly of these services in a particular area and to strengthen their position through "protection" from local law enforcement officials.²

Much older than the comparatively recent "organized crime" syndicates, the "Mafia" initially was not a criminal organization. It developed several hundred years ago in southern Italy, particularly Sicily, as a social organization whose members—the mafiosi—were recruited by local landlords to provide protection during periods when the legitimate government of the area was ineffective. In the early nineteenth century the "Mafia" frequently served as the only source of stability in the Sicilian social system. By the 1860s, however, the "Mafia" had become a loose network of criminal bands engaged in such activities as cattle rustling, extortion, and kidnaping. The members of these bands, who distrusted local authority, took the oath of omertà, the code of silence which bound them to settle disputes within the group and offer no help to government

Killing were avenged by the vendetta, which bound members to seek revenge upon the guilty parties.

As large numbers of Italians came to the United States in the latter part of the nineteenth century, many Americans began to worry that members of the Mafia and their criminal practices were also coming. Most Italian immigrants settled in the cities, forming their own enclaves or "Little Italies." By 1900 it was estimated that more than 50 per cent of the Italians entering the United States were settling in large metropolitan areas. New Orleans served as a leading port of entry for the newcomers. In 1910 Italians made up a greater percentage of the local population than in any other city in the country. The Crescent City in 1890 had around 25,000 Italians, about one-tenth of the city's residents. It was from this segment of the population that New Orleanians first saw the emergence of a Mafia threatening the city's well-being.

The incident which confirmed the fears of many New Orleanians and which led to the beginning of America's belief in a Mafia crime conspiracy was the murder of New Orleans Police Superintendent David C. Hennessy on the evening of October 15, 1890. Brutally gunned down a short distance from his home, Hennessy was an extremely popular superintendent who just prior to his death had been investigating

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criminal activities in New Orleans' Sicilian community. Though Hennessy's killers were never found, his dying declaration, "Dagoes," focused suspicion upon the city's Italian quarter. At the time of Hennessy's death two powerful groups of Italian stevedores, the Matrangas and the Provenzanos, named for their rival bosses, were vying for control of the business of unloading ships on the New Orleans docks, particularly those involved in the city's lucrative fruit trade with Latin America. Their conflict was in reality a struggle for economic supremacy between rival labor groups, but it was used by leading New Orleanians to promote the idea of a Mafia conspiracy. In fact both the Matrangas and the Provenzanos contributed to the idea of a conspiracy by charging the others with being members of a local Mafia group, variously known as the "Stilettos" and the "Stoppaglieri Society." These charges were used by local authorities to build their case in support of a Mafia in New Orleans.

Eleven local Italians were brought to trial for the Hennessy killing. Of the eleven, the charges against two were dismissed because of lack of evidence, six were found not guilty, and three enjoyed a hung jury. The jury's decision outraged the great majority of New Orleanians, who blamed the Italian community for the crime.

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As a result, on March 14, 1891, the day following the verdict, an advertisement appeared in the city's newspapers calling for a mass meeting of citizens to redress the verdicts in the Hennessy case. It was signed by a who's who of the city's leading citizens, including William S. Parkerson, a close associate of Mayor Joseph A. Shakspeare, and John M. Parker, a young politician destined to become governor of the state. Following the appearance of the advertisement a mob of between six and eight thousand people assembled, and, led by Parkerson, marched to the Parish Prison, where the eleven Italians, including the six found innocent, were being held. By the time the mob reached the prison gates, its numbers had increased considerably, estimated at somewhere between twelve and twenty thousand citizens. Storming the jail as the police looked on, the mob, bent on vengeance, exacted a terrible toll. A total of eleven Italians, some of whom had not been tried at all, were beaten and brutally shot to death inside the prison by the mob. Two Italians were hanged, their bodies then blasted by bullets as they swung from a lamppost and a nearby tree.  

It was clear from their actions that the mob was out to kill any Italians involved in the trial. Of the eleven Italians killed, three had been found not guilty of Hennessy's murder, including Joseph Macheca, a prominent merchant and an influential member of the Italian

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community, three had a mistrial declared in the same case, and five had been arrested for the murder but their case had not yet come to trial. The Mafia incident attracted attention to New Orleans, much of it favorable, from all sections of the country. Fifty per cent of the nation's major newspapers endorsed the slaughter of the Italians in New Orleans, while most of the newspapers that disapproved did so only because of their opposition to mob action and not because of their disapproval of the anti-Italian motives of the citizens. The Mafia incident did result in a crisis in American-Italian relations and a brief threat of war as the Italian government expressed its anger at the brutal murders of its countrymen. Ultimately, though, not a single person was tried for the killing of the Italians, despite the fact that the leaders of the mob were well known. In fact, several months later a local grand jury issued a report blaming Hennessy's death on secret organizations such as the Mafia and approving the resulting mob violence, stating that it was "general and spontaneous in character as truly indicating an uprising of the masses."  

The Mafia incident in New Orleans in 1891 was particularly important because it marked the beginning of the belief that Sicilians had established the Mafia in the United States. Many people at the time believed that an Italian secret criminal society was responsible for Hennessy's death and was now threatening to destroy the very fabric of American society. A number of authors from that time down

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7Gambino, Vendetta, pp. 89-97, 107-08, 116-28; Iorizzo and Mondello, Italian-Americans, p. 68; Persico, "Vendetta in New Orleans," p. 72.
to the present have failed to review the evidence carefully and instead have accepted the contemporary explanation of a Mafia without further questioning. Writers such as Herbert Asbury, *The French Quarter* (1936) and Joy Jackson, *New Orleans in the Gilded Age* (1969), felt the evidence against the accused men was conclusive and failed to probe more deeply. The most recent account of the New Orleans incident which accepts the contemporary version of a Mafia conspiracy is David Leon Chandler's *Brothers In Blood* (1975), which not only promotes the notion of a Mafia conspiracy in the Hennessy case, but even sees the organization beginning in New Orleans considerably earlier than the 1890s.

Chandler argues that the American Mafia originated in New Orleans in the late 1860s under the leadership of Joseph Macheca, the same prosperous merchant who was killed by the mob in 1891. Later on during the 1880s Chandler sees the New Orleans Mafia splitting into two factions, the Matrangas and the Provenzanos, under Macheca's overall control. According to Chandler, the Matranga Mafia faction was responsible for the murder of Chief Hennessy. He further charges that the prosecutor and the judge in the trial of the Italians may have been influenced to withhold key evidence to protect the Matranga faction. Chandler feels that the grand jury report on the Hennessy murder showed the strength of the Mafia in New Orleans. The report

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noted ninety-four murders, beginning in 1869, which were committed by the Mafia, and also listed New Orleanians who were believed to be members of this criminal organization. Chandler believes the 1891 lynchings did not diminish the Mafia's power in New Orleans; he argues instead that the organization's influence continued to remain strong. As an example he cites the later role of Charles Matranga, leader of one of the warring factions, who continued to head the Mafia in New Orleans until 1922.  

More recent accounts of the Mafia incident have strongly questioned Chandler's contention of a powerful Mafia in New Orleans during this period. One of the best discussions is found in Humbert Nelli's *The Business of Crime* (1976). In his examination of the role of the Mafia, Nelli criticizes Chandler's view that large numbers of criminals immigrated from Sicily to help form the New Orleans society. Nelli notes that some Italian Mafia members did come to New Orleans, but not in large numbers. He also points out that the criminals who arrived in the Crescent City were mainly petty thugs and not bosses. The great majority of Italian immigrants were not members of the Mafia at all but peasants seeking new economic opportunities in America.  

Nelli does not discount the fact that criminal activity was widespread among the Sicilians and South Italians in New Orleans during the 1880s and 1890s, but he denies that these activities can be attributed solely to the Mafia. More likely, he believes, these

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crimes were by petty Italian criminals against members of their own nationality. Nelli also doubts that murders involving Italians during the 1880s and early 1890s were Mafia-inspired. He sees the killings as the results of vendettas, personal quarrels, and, in a few cases, the work of organized gangs. But Nelli doubts that these murders were part of a pattern of Mafia killings. He notes that the Italian criminal gangs active during this period lacked two major traits attributed to the Sicilian Mafia: they did not closely adhere to the code of silence, and they failed to win the support of the majority of the local Italian community.\(^\text{12}\)

Nelli next discusses the Hennessy case itself. The charges of membership in the Mafia leveled against the Matrangas, he points out, came from a highly suspect source, the Provenzanos. According to Nelli, even if these charges were true, none of the evidence provided by the Provenzanos directly implicated the Matrangas in the illegal extortion activities of the "Stilettos" and the "Stopaglieri Society." He also notes that groups such as the Provenzanos and the Matrangas, by cooperating with the authorities, were certainly not acting secretly as members of the Mafia normally did. Nelli criticizes the New Orleans police, blaming them for failing to explore alternative theories regarding the murder and preferring instead to assume that their chief was killed by members of the Matanga group.\(^\text{13}\)

In regard to the Mafia incident itself, Nelli notes that four of

\[^\text{12}\text{Ibid., pp. 32-34, 37.}\]

\[^\text{13}\text{Ibid., pp. 42-43, 60-61.}\]
the Italians killed by the mob following the jury verdicts had not been convicted of any role in the murder. Nelli goes on to elaborate that Charles Matranga escaped death from the mob and, contrary to Chandler's belief, did nothing in his subsequent career to connect him with the Mafia or any illegal organization. Lastly, Nelli states that up to 1891 Italian crime in New Orleans had been directed only against other Italians, not against persons outside the community itself. He is convinced that even if Hennessy were killed by the Matrangas, which he doubts, the murder was part of a conflict between two Italian groups and not part of an effort by the Mafia to gain control of New Orleans.14

Other recent works offer alternative explanations of the 1891 incident which seem much more plausible than Chandler's account. In his 1975 work, The Mafia Mystique, Dwight C. Smith, Jr., points out that the willingness of the citizens of New Orleans to believe that a local Mafia group was responsible for the Hennessy murder outweighed any attempt on any official's part to look objectively at the evidence. Bits of evidence supporting the theory of a Mafia conspiracy were accepted without question, while evidence damaging to it was ignored. Smith offers the alternative hypothesis that the Hennessy killing ultimately resulted in a vendetta against Italians in New Orleans. A large and extremely vocal majority of New Orleanians wanted to avenge Hennessy's murder by killing Italians, whom they blamed for the crime. Smith feels that, given the mood of the

14 Ibid., pp. 64-66.
community, the resulting mob action was inevitable. He also notes that if other issues, such as fear of economic competition, were the real reasons for the lynchings, the Mafia served as a convenient scapegoat for the mob's actions. Smith adds that after the mob had exacted its revenge for Hennessy's murder, concern about the Mafia quickly vanished as a public issue. It was as if the threat of a criminal conspiracy had been used solely to avenge Hennessy's murder, whether or not the right persons were brought to justice. 15

The most recent and detailed account of the New Orleans incident is Richard Gambino's Vendetta, published in 1977. Gambino is especially critical of Chandler for relying exclusively upon the accounts of those responsible for the lynchings without questioning their validity or informing the reader of the biased nature of their contents. He also cites Chandler's reliance upon the dubious testimony of the Provenzanos implicating their rivals, the Matrangas, in the crime. Gambino feels that the real reason for the creation of the myth of a Mafia conspiracy following the Hennessy murder was to camouflage an effort by leading members of New Orleans' business and political community to destroy the growing economic power of the Italians in the city. Blaming the Mafia served as a convenient way to undercut the economic control of men such as Joseph Macheca. Gambino notes that there is no evidence of a powerful Mafia organization in New Orleans in 1891. Instead, evidence of such a conspiracy was invented to heighten citizens' fears. Gambino believes that the

affair has become particularly important because it planted seeds of
the stereotype of the Italian-American as a criminal and gave rise
to the belief that Italians founded organized criminal activity in the
United States. As Gambino summed it up:

In regard to Italian Americans, the New Orleans lynching was at once both a means of limiting their position, participation, and possibilities in the American community at the time, and one of the first major stimuli of the stereotype of inherently criminal Italian-American culture, a common defamation which still limits the ethnic group's position, participation, and possibilities in today's America.

Although the New Orleans Mafia incident gave rise to public belief in a conspiratorial Italian criminal organization, preying upon innocent citizens, the anti-Italian hysteria died down temporarily. But it quickly resumed once again in the early years of the twentieth century with the outbreak of Black Hand crime. "La Mano Nera" or Black Hand was the term used to describe crimes, usually involving extortion, committed within the "Little Italies" of American cities. "La Mano Nera" used threats contained in notes sent through the mail, often bearing the inky imprint of a hand, to extort money from its victims. If the note were ignored, the consequences were usually violent, including the kidnapping of a member of the family (particularly a child), the bombing of the victim's property, or the murder of the victim or a member of his family.

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17 Ibid., p. x.

Beginning in New York City in 1903, Black Hand crime reached its height in the period prior to World War I, although it continued in isolated instances into the 1920s. There were organized Black Hand gangs, specializing in extortion, but generally this type of crime was the work of individual extortionists or small groups. Choosing their victims without regard to economic status, Black Handers almost always limited their operations to the Italian section of the city.

Scholarly research indicates that the Black Hand was not in any sense a highly organized group of individuals and that it had no connection with the Mafia in Sicily, or the Camorra, another Italian criminal organization, in Naples. Examination of numerous Black Hand letters also reveals that Black Hand crime was strictly an American phenomenon, confined solely to the Italian areas of major cities.¹⁹

As in other large American cities in the first decade of the twentieth century, New Orleans had its share of Black Hand crime. The most brutal act associated with the Black Hand in New Orleans was the 1907 kidnapping and murder of seven-year-old Walter Lamana, the son of an undertaker. This vicious slaying aroused the Italian community to cooperate more fully with the police and, as a result, Black Hand violence was considerably reduced.²⁰ Occasionally, however, the Black


Hand resurfaced in the Twenties, though only in isolated instances and never in its pre-war strength.

Several instances of Black Hand activity occurred during the 1920s. For example, in February 1920 a bomb exploded underneath the steps of the residence of Peter Cuccia, an Italian grocer, although Cuccia and his family were not hurt, and the bomb did not do a great deal of damage. Newspapers attributed the bombing to the Black Hand because Cuccia had received two letters threatening him and his family if he did not "come across" with $1,000. The letters were signed "Societe Vendetta." Even in the late Twenties, a suspected Black Hand threat occurred. A note written in Italian was sent to one B. Salerno, a peddler by trade. The message stated that Salerno was to bring $2,000 to a certain location or his house would be dynamited. Salerno was given police protection and no harm came to him or his property. 21

Sometimes the New Orleans newspapers and local writers sensationalized the Black Hand threat, even linking it to the Mafia. In November 1921, the States reported the shooting death of one John Venezia, a prosperous grocer, noting the distinct possibility that this was a Black Hand crime. Venezia was shot as he prepared to mount his truck in front of an address on St. Philip Street, the residence of one S. Corollo, a fruit and produce merchant. Although one cannot be certain, S. Corollo might have been Sam Carollo, the reputed head of the Mafia in New Orleans during this period. The

States, pointing out the police theory that Venezia had been killed by "camorristi," noted that the victim was shot on St. Philip Street in the same area where three suspected vendetta murders had occurred in the previous eight years. Linking the St. Philip Street location to a series of suspected Mafia killings, the paper further noted that this was the same area where the Lamana kidnapping took place fourteen years before. The Third Police Precinct section in fact, where all this crime had occurred, had been the scene of seventeen possible vendetta-type slayings in the previous fifteen years.  

A local New Orleans historian, John Smith Kendall, in a 1939 article luridly titled "Blood on the Banquette," further speculated on the Venezia killing. Incorrectly listing Venezia's first name as Joe and putting the date of the shooting in 1922, Kendall labeled the shooting a Mafia murder. He noted that the Venezia killing had taken place within an area of St. Philip near Decatur Street, known among newspapermen as the "Circle of Death" because of the number of murders that had occurred there. Kendall commented that the region around St. Philip and nearby Chartres Street had also been the site of violence, with seventeen vendetta-style murders occurring in that area from 1913 to 1927. But Kendall went even further. He linked the Lamana killing, a series of brutal "Axe Murders," and a number of other slayings from the turn of the century to the 1920s as part of a Mafia conspiracy. These killings may have been vendettas, which

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were an all too frequent occurrence within the Italian community, but they were certainly not the work of a powerful Mafia conspiracy.

In other cases Black Hand crimes were frequently confused in the press with simple physical threats. For example, in April 1920 Judge Leander Perez of the District Court in St. Bernard, later to become the famous political boss of Plaquemines Parish, received a letter threatening him with bodily harm if he did not stop an investigation of political corruption in the parish. The letter was signed "black-hand." In another case a letter was received by the district attorney's office in New Orleans in April 1922, shortly after the Frankie Russell bootleg killing, which threatened Arthur Masson, a bootlegger being held in connection with the murder, with death by stabbing if he were released. To make its point the letter was amateurishly illustrated by "pictures of a black hand, a bleeding heart pierced by a dirk, and a skull and cross bones." Police believed the letter, which called Masson a "dirty skunk," was the work of Russell's close associates. The Item sensationally headlined the note as a "Mafia" letter, citing a passage: "So you can take this as a warning from good Italian friends of Frankie--. . ."24 According to the newspaper, since Italians were suspected in this instance, the Mafia must also be behind these threats.

It was sensational coverage such as that by the Item which reinforced public fears of an Italian crime conspiracy, even though Black Hand crime was not related in any way to a powerful Mafia.

24 Item, April 26, 1922, p. 1; States, April 23, 1920, p. 1.
However, people reading the lurid headlines tended to forget that the Italians themselves were reporting these crimes and seeking to stamp them out. Few persons also noted that Black Hand crime in New Orleans and other cities was no more organized than crime in other sections of town or crime among other ethnic groups. Even a New Orleans policeman, who was on the force during the period when the Black Hand was active, associated this type of crime with the Mafia. Though he noted that Black Hand crime was confined to Italians, he still felt that the terms Black Hand and Mafia were synonymous.25

Although Black Hand entrepreneurs continued to operate into the Twenties, this particular crime had largely died out by the outbreak of World War I. Authorities cite several reasons for the decline of Black Hand activities. First, the slowing down of immigration after 1914 and the beginning of war-time hostilities drastically reduced the number of ready victims in the Italian areas. Second, federal enforcement of new laws, that prohibited use of the mails to defraud, forced Black Hand operators into delivering by hand their extortion demands, substantially increasing their risks of being caught. But the major reason for the end of Black Hand activity was passage of the Eighteenth Amendment. Many Italian Black Hand practitioners saw the illegal liquor market as more lucrative.26


While Prohibition provided many Italians with a new, illegal source of profits and a way up the economic ladder, it also led to the rise of organized criminal syndicates, which dominated the American bootleg market. Italians initially did not dominate the local bootleg syndicates, at least during the Twenties. Instead the Irish, and then the Jews, exercised a large share of control over these activities. Italians were gaining influence but did not really achieve ascendancy in syndicate crime until the Thirties. Though the trend in American crime during the Twenties was away from cut-throat individual competition and toward greater consolidation, the image of the individual "gangster" or "racketeer" like Al Capone was the predominant one in the public mind. The Mafia still existed but public use of the term declined until after World War II, when it was revived with renewed vigor during the Kefauver hearings linking the Mafia and organized or syndicated crime.\(^\text{27}\)

There were exceptions to the trend toward consolidation of Italian control over liquor smuggling and other illegal goods and services, and New Orleans was such a case. As noted earlier, no group or individual gained control of organized criminal activities in New Orleans during the Twenties. Italians like Sylvestro ("Silver Dollar Sam") Carollo vied with Irish, Jewish, Creole, and native American criminals for a piece of the Crescent City's liquor, gambling, and narcotics operations. There were several reasons for this. In New Orleans during this period criminal organizations remained weak and

and ineffective. They were subject to control through the city's powerful political machine and paid graft to the local organization to maintain their business. If the criminals failed to pay, the police cracked down on their activities. In addition, lack of public concern created a situation where widespread illegal activities flourished largely free of strong social criticism. True to their history, New Orleanians willingly tolerated vice, and reform efforts made little headway in stopping these activities. Thus the various immigrant groups had to compete with native operations for a share of the illegal market in these services.  

Despite this evidence of a wide-open criminal scene in New Orleans, some authors still argue that the Mafia remained powerful in the Crescent City during the Twenties. Again David Chandler, in *Brothers in Blood*, states that Charles Matranga, who escaped the mob in 1891, held power over the New Orleans Mafia until 1922, when he retired, naming Sam Carollo as his successor. Chandler sees Carollo as the real power in the New Orleans underworld during the decade and through the pre-World War II period. According to Chandler, Carollo worked his way up the Matranga organization to become supervisor of the group's French Market operations. Once Matranga retired, Carollo branched out into bootlegging, bought a fleet of trawlers, and soon was averaging $600,000 a year in the illegal liquor business. Chandler points out that by 1929 Carollo and the Mafia dominated liquor smuggling in the South and even sold spirits to cities as far away as Kansas City and Detroit. He sees Carollo as moving to

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consolidate his control over the liquor market, being responsible for the murder of one of his leading competitors, William Bailey. Bailey, described by Chandler as the "bootleg king of New Orleans," was gunned down a few days after Christmas in 1930. Carollo was suspected by police of taking part in the Bailey murder but was never prosecuted.  

To illustrate his point about Carollo's power, Chandler relates a story about a supposed visit by Al Capone to New Orleans in 1929. Capone had let Carollo know that he was going to be stopping in the Crescent City and "Silver Dollar Sam" was at the train station to meet him. As Capone stepped onto the platform with his bodyguards at his side to greet Carollo, several New Orleans policemen appeared next to the Mafia boss. Carollo spoke only a short sentence, "You're not welcome," and at that point the policemen grabbed Capone's bodyguards and broke their fingers. Capone abruptly withdrew his hand, which he had extended in friendship, turned around, and got back on the train.  

Chandler does not elaborate on the reasons for Carollo's actions, and he cites no documentary evidence for the meeting.

It is clear from an examination of the sources, however, that Chandler exaggerates Carollo's and the Mafia's importance in New Orleans crime, particularly during the Twenties. For one thing, the local newspapers rarely mention Carollo as a significant factor in major crime during this period. Carollo was first arrested and sent to federal prison in 1923 for two years for stealing eighty-six drums

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of alcohol. But, aside from this incident and the Moore shooting, he is not mentioned any more during the decade. Also there is little evidence to support Chandler's contention that Carollo was a major force in local bootlegging operations, at least during the Twenties. Lastly, there is no proof that Carollo's New Orleans Mafia was a powerful criminal organization at this time and, aside from Chandler's allegations, no evidence that Al Capone ever visited New Orleans during this period. The New Orleans newspapers did note a brief visit to the Crescent City in late January 1928, by men they identified as two of Capone's brothers. After being repeatedly arrested as "dangerous and suspicious characters" by the inhospitable New Orleans police, the two brothers fled the city. However, there is no mention in any source of a visit by Capone himself to New Orleans or that Carollo exercised such control over the local police department. Any visit by Capone would certainly have drawn the attention of local police as well as the press. The only other mention of Capone and Carollo in the New Orleans press came in December 1930, after the Bailey killing. One theory held that Carollo was Capone's liquor agent in New Orleans but local officials discounted it.

Carollo did emerge as a powerful figure in the New Orleans underworld during the 1930s and 1940s, but even then he did not exercise control over the market for illegal goods and services. He was only

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32 Ibid., December 30, 1930, p. 1.
one of a number of criminals involved in bootlegging, drugs, and gambling operations. During the Thirties particularly, Carollo was in almost constant trouble with the law. Arrested a number of times, he somehow managed to escape conviction altogether or to serve less than the required sentence. Carollo had earlier been arrested as one of the men responsible for the Moore shooting, although he was never tried for the actual crime. Instead, in 1931 Carollo was convicted of conspiracy to violate the Harrison Narcotics Act and served a little over two years of a three-year sentence. Carollo was also implicated in the serious wounding of fellow bootlegger Hayes Penton and in the death of his rival William Bailey. The murder charge in the Bailey killing was never pressed, although Carollo did receive an eight to fifteen-year sentence in the Penton shooting. However, Carollo got out of jail after serving only a short portion of the sentence, receiving a pardon from Governor O. K. Allen. This pardon, it was later charged, was due to Carollo's political influence. But Carollo's freedom did not last long. In 1936 in federal court he and a companion received a five-year sentence for narcotics violations.33

Finally in 1947, after prolonged efforts, the government deported Carollo as an undesirable alien. The local Mafia boss was later caught sneaking into the country in 1950 and deported a second time

the following year. Carollo then remained out of the country until 1970, when as an old man of seventy-four, he slipped into New Orleans for the final time. In February 1970 the States-Item reported the reputed Mafia leader was seriously ill in the Touro Infirmary. An attempt was made to deport Carollo once again, but he remained in New Orleans until he died of a heart attack on July 26, 1970.34

Humbert Nelli sees Carollo as the New Orleans example of a new breed of Italian criminals, whom he labels the "Americanizers," men who were born in Italy but came to America at an early age. Carollo was only two years old when he and his Sicilian parents arrived in New Orleans in 1898. As one of the "Americanizers," Carollo and other new-generation Italian criminals looked down upon the old-style mafiosi. They grew up in an American environment and adopted American ideas of crime rather than the traditional ways of their homeland.35 When opportunities opened in Prohibition and narcotics, men like Carollo seized their chance to advance in the criminal underworld.

Before looking at the more recent crime situation in New Orleans after Carollo's deportation, it is necessary to examine the myth of Italian criminality in the Twenties. While Italians in general and the Mafia in particular were blamed for a large portion of New Orleans crime, there is little evidence to suggest that immigrant groups,


especially Italians, committed a greater amount of crime in proportion to their numbers than native-born Americans. In fact, there is evidence that, in some cases, they committed fewer crimes than their American counterparts. For example, the National Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement, better known as the Wickersham Commission, formed by President Herbert Hoover to examine the role of crime in American society, published its findings in a series of volumes in 1931. One of these volumes dealt with "Crime and the Foreign Born," and New Orleans was one of the cities examined.

In a study entitled "Crime and the Foreign Born: New Orleans," Jesse F. Steiner, a professor in the school of Social Work at Tulane University, delineated his findings. Steiner noted that, according to the 1920 census, 6.7 per cent of New Orleans' population was foreign born and 17.9 per cent were the children of immigrants. Both of these groups totalled 95,275 persons. The largest immigrant group was the Italians, who comprised about two per cent of the local citizenry. Steiner also pointed out the Italians' public reputation for criminality, and how they, along with blacks, were constantly blamed for any widespread outbreak of crime.36

Although Steiner's study, which was largely limited to a one-year period (1928) due to a lack of police arrest figures, cannot be regarded as definitive, it is still revealing in its conclusions about New Orleans criminal activity. Steiner found it particularly significant that arrests of foreign-born whites comprised only between

one and two per cent of total city arrests, while these groups made up almost seven per cent of the population. In regard to the 2,940 felonies committed in New Orleans in 1928, Steiner reported that only 34 of these were committed by foreign-born criminals. Italians ranked first in felony arrests among the foreign born, being charged with 26 per cent of felony arrests involving the foreign-born, a little bit below their estimated total, since they comprised 29.4 per cent of the total foreign population.37

Steiner also examined New Orleans homicide statistics for the years 1925 to 1929. He pointed out that of the total number of city homicides, only two per cent were committed by the foreign-born population. Italians again ranked first among the foreign born in terms of homicides committed, being responsible for 36.3 per cent of the homicides charged against the foreign born. In this case they slightly exceeded their percentage of the foreign-born population. Although no figures were available on the role of children of immigrants, it is clear from Steiner's study that the foreign born, and certainly Italians, were not responsible for many of the crimes committed in the Crescent City. Compared to other groups, like blacks, whose members committed many more homicides in proportion to their number, Italians played a relatively small role in the New Orleans criminal scene during the Twenties.38

It was not until the 1950s that an Italian syndicate, headed by Carlos Marcello, who came into prominence in the years after Carollo

37 Ibid., pp. 335-36, 338.

38 Ibid., pp. 341-42, 344.
was deported, absorbed many local groups and emerged at the head of organized criminal activities in New Orleans. Marcello, born Calogero Minacore on February 6, 1910, in Tunis, North Africa, came to the United States with his family when he was only eight months old. The son of Sicilian parents, Marcello never became a citizen and has successfully fought deportation efforts down to the present. Known as "The Little Man" because of his small stature, Marcello had his first brush with the law in 1929, when he was nineteen. In November of that year he was arrested along with his father and brother as accessories in the robbery of an Algiers bank. The charges were dismissed, but a few months later, in May 1930, Marcello received a nine to fourteen-year sentence for assault and robbery. He served five years of this sentence before being paroled and then pardoned by Governor O. K. Allen.39

By the late Thirties Marcello emerged as a major drug dealer in New Orleans, using his Algiers bar as a center of operations. In 1936 the Times-Picayune described Marcello as one of the city's leading narcotics wholesalers. Several times during the late Thirties he was convicted of violations of the marijuana laws. After serving time for these offenses, Marcello branched out into other areas of organized crime. Marcello operated slot machines for former New York syndicate boss Frank Costello when he moved his operation to New

Orleans in the mid-Thirties, and later served as Costello's partner in running the Beverly Club, a thriving gambling establishment in Jefferson Parish which opened at the end of World War II. Marcello's growing relationship with Costello strengthened his political contacts and boosted his crime career. In 1946, when an unfavorable city administration in New Orleans cut into his slot machine business, Marcello took over the wire service reporting of horse racing results to local bookies and, for $160,000, bought the Southport gambling casino in Jefferson Parish. Along with his growing criminal activities Marcello also adopted a new tactic used by modern leaders of organized crime—branching out into legitimate businesses and using them as fronts for illegal operations. Marcello, for example, moved into real estate, food processing plants, shrimping fleets, and other financial interests to give the public the impression that he was a legitimate businessman.

By the late 1950s Marcello, from his expensive residence in suburban Metairie, controlled a vast array of organized criminal activities in the New Orleans area, including wire services, handbook operations, gambling establishments, houses of prostitution, and slot machines. In testimony before a Senate subcommittee, reformer Aaron Kohn, Managing Director of the New Orleans Metropolitan Crime Commission, labeled Marcello the "most powerful, influential, and sinister racketeer boss in Louisiana." Humbert Nelli stated that all the evidence indicates that Marcello's Italian syndicate is much stronger.

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than anything that had existed previously in the Crescent City. 41

A development related to the rise of organized crime in New Orleans is the question of whether Senator Huey Long aided the rise of criminal activity by inviting syndicate boss Frank Costello to set up a slot machine operation in the area. The charge was first made by Frank Costello himself in testimony before a federal grand jury in New York in September 1939, four years after Long's death. Costello, along with his partner Phillip "Dandy Phil" Kastel, had developed a lucrative slot machine operation in New York with the tacit approval of local politicians. This abruptly ended with the election of Fiorello LaGuardia, a reform mayor, who in 1934 began a vigorous campaign to eliminate the slots by ordering police to confiscate the machines and destroy them. 42 Faced with this reform effort, Costello, seeking a new outlet for his operation, told the grand jury that he "was invited [to New Orleans] by a man called Huey Long." Costello elaborated further:

And [Long] asked me to put our machines there in Louisiana; that he was going to pass some kind of ordinance for the poor, the blind, a certain kind of relief to get a certain percentage, and we would have to pay so much per machine per year. Well, about six or seven weeks later, which would be the later part of 1935, I met Phillip Kastel, which is


Costello contended that Long first broached the subject of bringing the slot machines to New Orleans in early 1935, even coming to New York to meet with Costello and his associates. He specifically stated that Long gave as his reason a desire to obtain $25,000 to $30,000 a year for a fund having something to do with the aged or the blind. Costello also testified that Long required a payment of $30 a year on each slot machine brought into New Orleans. The gangland leader later reiterated his charge against Long before the Kefauver Organized Crime hearings in 1951. Costello noted that shortly after Long's assassination, in September 1935, his associate "Dandy Phil" Kastel, along with his brothers-in-law Dudley and Harold Geigerman, and the young Carlos Marcello set up a slot machine monopoly in the Crescent City.

As it turned out, the Costello slot machine operation proved profitable indeed. With the apparent cooperation of Robert Maestri, the mayor of New Orleans from 1936 to 1946, slot machines of Costello's Louisiana Mint Company, previously known as the Pelican Novelty Company and the Bayou Novelty Company, were "operating openly in bars, restaurants, lunchrooms, and other establishments throughout the city."

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43 Times-Picayune, May 9, 1940, p. 2. During Costello's tax evasion trial in New Orleans in May 1940, excerpts from his New York grand jury testimony were read into the record.

44 Estes Kefauver, Crime in America (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1951), p. 177; Kefauver's work contains excerpts from the committee hearings on Organized Crime; Times-Picayune, May 9, 1940, p. 3.
During this ten-year period the number of slot machines in the city grew to 8,100, producing a total of $32,840,000 in revenue for their owners. Mayor DeLesseps Morrison of New Orleans later correctly testified before the Kefauver committee that Costello, Kastel, and their associates had been indicted in New Orleans in December 1939, on charges of conspiracy to evade payment of more than $500,000 in taxes on an income of $3,000,000 from the slot machines for the year 1936-1937. 45

Costello's charges implicating Huey Long in the New Orleans slot machine operation have been cited by a number of authors in books and magazine articles from 1940 to the present. 46 Most authors have merely repeated the Costello charge, but others have attempted to link Huey Long directly to organized crime. In a second work, The Natural Superiority of Southern Politicians: A Revisionist History (1977), David Leon Chandler states that as early as 1933 Long developed close ties with New York gangland leaders, particularly Frank Costello. He

45 Nelli, Business of Crime, p. 225; Statement of DeLesseps S. Morrison, January 25, 1951, Kefauver Committee Hearings, p. 7; Times-Picayune, May 6, 1940, p. 1, May 16, 1940, p. 3. All six defendants, including Frank Costello, were acquitted on a directed verdict of tax evasion charges.

argues that the two men met and made an agreement at the New Yorker Hotel in New York City by which Costello obtained a franchise to set up casino and slot machine gambling in Louisiana. In return, Long was to receive 10 per cent of the annual gross revenues from Costello's operation. Chandler believes that this money was to be used to help finance Long's future political campaigns.\footnote{David Leon Chandler, The Natural Superiority of Southern Politicians: A Revisionist History (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1977), p. 229.}

Chandler, however, goes beyond the Costello deal and attempts to connect Long with both the Mafia and the Cosa Nostra. His evidence, though, is flimsy. For example, as a link to the Mafia Chandler cites the appearance of Mayor William H. "Big Bill" Thompson of Chicago, a known associate of Johnny Torrio and Al Capone, as the only celebrity guest at Long's 1928 gubernatorial inauguration. Thompson may have had ties with Chicago gangsters, but his appearance in Louisiana does not necessarily implicate Long. A more likely explanation is that Thompson and Long both shared an interest in flood control and this was the reason that he was invited to the ceremony. Chandler also labels New Orleans Mayor Robert Maestri as a "gangland figure."\footnote{Ibid., pp. 229-30; T. Harry Williams, Huey Long, p. 300.} Maestri had close ties to racetrack gambling in New Orleans and was a key financial supporter of Long's but describing him as a "gangster" is clearly excessive. Finally, the most telling criticism of Chandler's work is his lack of documentation. Except for noting Costello's grand jury testimony, he does not cite any additional sources to corroborate his account.
The most devastating rebuttal to Costello's charges against Huey Long is found in T. Harry Williams' biography of the Louisiana senator. Critical of Costello's grand jury testimony, Williams argues that Costello's willingness to implicate Long may have been an attempt to protect other figures who had allowed him into the New Orleans slot machine market at a later date. Williams convincingly points out that for Costello to operate successfully in New Orleans, he had to have a "protection" agreement with the local city government to avoid being raided by police. The year 1935 then becomes crucial because, according to Williams, at this time the New Orleans city government was in the hands of Long's political enemies, the Old Regulars. T. Semmes Walmsley, the current mayor, would never have agreed to Long's arrangement and, more than likely, would have quickly seized any machines Costello tried to set up. Williams cites interviews with Long's associates, who scoff at the idea that the Kingfish would have invited Costello to New Orleans. One associate was firm in his belief that Long would never have met with Costello himself. If he wanted to talk to Costello at all, this source argued, "He would have sent somebody." 49

There is strong circumstantial evidence, however, which seems to point an accusing finger at Long. Humbert Nelli cites circumstantial evidence from Internal Revenue Service files that shortly after Long's death in September 1935, Costello worked out an agreement with Robert Maestri, New Orleans' new mayor, to set up slot machines throughout

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49 Interview, T. Harry Williams with Joe Fisher, Folder 31, Box 3, T. Harry Williams Papers, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Louisiana State University; Williams, Huey Long, pp. 865-66.
the city. It is quite possible that in approving this arrangement Maestri was only confirming what his close political ally, Huey Long, had worked out earlier. One student of Maestri's career subscribes to this same theory—that Maestri was the heir apparent to the slot machine concession negotiated by Long and Costello. Also, in spite of Williams' contentions, by July 1935 the political situation in New Orleans had changed markedly. The Old Regular control of the New Orleans city government was weakening and Long's forces were absorbing it. At this time it would have been quite possible, given Long's growing power, for Costello to set up illegal gambling operations in New Orleans.

It is also illuminating, in light of Long's alleged involvement with Costello, to examine the career of one of Long's associates, New Orleans-born James Brocato, sometimes known as Jimmy Moran. A close friend of Robert Maestri's and once one of Long's bodyguards, Moran has been labeled by Humbert Nelli as one of the city's leading Italian criminals in the pre-World War II period. Nelli describes him as a "well-known local gambler and bootlegger." One newspaper reporter, active during this period, stated that Moran, whom he called "Huey's henchman," kept a close watch over the New Orleans slot machine operation. Moran, he said, had a warehouse on Decatur Street where he supervised the movement of machines to different locations.

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and which also served as a repair shop when machines broke down or needed to be adjusted. At least one of the men interviewed by Williams connects Long and Moran more directly. This source argues that when Long worked out his slot machine deal with Costello, control of the collections operation was given to Moran in recognition of his devotion and his "promotion of whiskey and women for Long." The source noted at least one report that Moran was taking in $50,000 annually from the Costello slot machine organization. Again, although there is no direct evidence of Long's involvement, there seems to be enough evidence to contradict Williams' view that Long was completely innocent of any involvement in the slot machine operation.

Daniel Bell has suggested that Americans want to "believe that there is an Establishment calling the shots in all fields, be it Wall Street, Harvard, the Brain Trust, or, in crime, the Mafia." Recent research by Humbert Nelli, Dwight C. Smith, Jr., and Richard Gambino offers evidence that contradicts this traditional American view. It argues against the existence of a Mafia or national criminal organization. This research also draws a distinction between the Mafia and the modern phenomenon of organized crime. New research indicates that the Mafia which developed in the Italian sections of American cities in the years prior to Prohibition was not nearly as powerful as contemporaries and some later writers believed. It was only with the

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51 George W. Healy, Jr., Interview, August 10, 1978; Interview, T. Harry Williams with Fred Digby, Folder 30, Box 3, Williams Papers; Nelli, Business of Crime, p. 188.

52 Torizzo and Mondello, Italian-Americans, p. 175.
coming of Prohibition that powerful American Mafia organizations emerged.

The role of the Mafia in New Orleans reflected and also differed from these key tenets of the new research. Beginning with the 1891 incident, the Mafia in New Orleans was much less powerful than contemporaries thought, and certainly no threat to the well-being of society. During the Twenties the Mafia under Sam Carollo hardly existed as a significant force in the criminal activities of the city. Even during the Thirties when the national trend in crime was toward consolidation and the elimination of competition, New Orleans criminal leadership remained fragmented. It was not until the emergence of Carlos Marcello in the Fifties, much later than in Chicago and many other large American cities, that one syndicate dominated organized criminal activity in New Orleans. The city's traditional toleration of illegal activities and lack of dynamic criminal leadership had always worked against the emergence of a powerful criminal organization. Given this situation, it is not surprising that for New Orleans during the Twenties, and throughout its history, the Mafia has remained much more of a myth than a reality.
CHAPTER VIII
NEW ORLEANS CRIME DURING THE 1920s:
AN EVALUATION

As the 1920s drew to a close, criminal activity associated with
Prohibition, gambling, prostitution, and drugs continued to thrive in
New Orleans. In each of these areas, usually associated with organ-
ized crime, eager local entrepreneurs sought to satisfy the needs of
willing customers. They were aided by a long-standing sybaritic
tradition which created the social climate for furnishing illegal
goods and services. New Orleanians, tolerant of the social vices,
readily ignored laws which attempted to restrict their access to
these activities. They failed to support the local police, the
authorities charged with enforcing the law in these areas. But, more
importantly, individual New Orleanians who did not drink, gamble,
frequent houses of prostitution, or use drugs, cared little about what
their fellow citizens were doing. They were content to be bystanders
and allow illegal activities to continue in the Crescent City.

This tolerant attitude was reflected in New Orleanians' attitude
toward Prohibition, an experiment doomed from the start. During the
Twenties New Orleans remained one of the wettest cities in America.
Anyone seeking a drink could always find one in the soft drink stands
and speakeasies located throughout the city. If a thirsty soul did
not want to go out, he could manufacture his own brew right in his
residence. In addition to a local source of supply, the city's
location near the mouth of the Mississippi River made it an ideal spot
for smuggling illegal liquor. Throughout the decade New Orleans was one of the leading liquor smuggling centers in the United States; illegal cargoes came up the Mississippi and through the bayous and inlets of Jefferson and St. Bernard parishes. From the Crescent City, much of the beverage cargo flowed north to major cities in the Mississippi Valley. Reflecting a national trend, federal enforcement of the Prohibition laws in New Orleans was ineffective. Always short of manpower and resources, federal agents were confronted with the additional burdens of public disregard for the liquor law and lack of cooperation from local authorities. Numerous raids, resulting in millions of dollars worth of liquor destroyed, failed to put a dent in the city's supply.

Gambling operations during the decade also remained successful in New Orleans. Handbooks, lotteries, and slot machines did a booming business in the poolrooms, chartered clubs, soft drink stands, groceries, and barbershops of the Crescent City. Bets on the horses, as well as every conceivable game of chance, were readily available. The police, handicapped by inadequate laws and the tolerant attitude of the public, were unable to control such activity. But New Orleans gambling was small in comparison to the wide-open operations in Jefferson and St. Bernard parishes, where local officials allowed large-scale casino gambling to flourish. Many New Orleanians frequented the dice and roulette tables at establishments located just across the parish line. Even raids by the National Guard ordered by Governor Huey Long failed to slow down gambling operations in these parishes.
The world's oldest profession was not without its customers in New Orleans. With the closing of Storyville in 1917, a large number of ladies of the evening moved into the French Quarter, which served as a center for prostitution during the Twenties. Gone were the opulent houses of the district, replaced by the more common sight of individual cribs, which offered the same services in much more spartan surroundings. The police made numerous prostitution arrests in response to periodic outbreaks of public indignation, but the problems of obtaining sufficient evidence and the weak penalties provided allowed many girls to go free shortly after they were arrested. By 1929 the average prostitute was beginning to feel the economic squeeze of the Depression. However, although prices dropped, business continued in the "Tango Belts" and "Shuttertowns" of the Crescent City.

Traffic in illegal drugs also escalated during the Twenties. New Orleans emerged as one of the two leading drug smuggling centers in the United States, serving as a convenient port of entry for drugs transported to other locations in the Mississippi Valley. Morphine, cocaine, and opium were the leading drugs, although marijuana was growing rapidly in popularity. Heroin was coming into use and eventually overtook morphine in popularity as the city entered the Depression years. As with Prohibition, the federal government was charged with narcotics enforcement. Lack of manpower again proved to be the biggest handicap as federal narcotics agents, aided by local police, were only able to stop a small fraction of the illegal drug traffic. Although the drug problem continued to be secondary to liquor
and gambling, by the end of the decade it was a growing source of concern for both federal and local officials.

No one individual or group dominated criminal activities in New Orleans. Though there were organized groups that cornered large shares of the market, such as the Patterson-Battistella group in liquor smuggling, the four local families who controlled a majority of the lottery plays, or the Jews, Spaniards, and Italians who directed the drug trade, no one group was able to gain total control of any of these areas. Colorful characters such as Jack Sheehan in liquor smuggling and Oakley Harris in gambling received a lot of press coverage, but neither of them could exercise a consolidating effect upon criminal activity in his respective area. The situation in New Orleans during the Twenties remained fragmented as various groups and individuals vied for control.

This fragmentation was contrary to a national trend. During the Twenties New Orleans crime did not reflect the growing move away from the vicious circle of individual competition and toward consolidation brought about by Prohibition. A good indication of this can be seen in the fact that no all-powerful criminal syndicate emerged in the city. While a Mafia, headed by Sam Carollo, existed within the Italian community, it was only one of a number of criminal groups competing for a portion of the market in liquor, gambling, and drugs. All evidence indicates that the Mafia in New Orleans was not a major force in criminal activities in the Twenties. Unlike its effect in other cities, Prohibition did not mark the emergence of a potent American Mafia in New Orleans. It was only with the rise of Carlos
Marcello in the 1950s that a powerful Italian syndicate began to absorb the other competing criminal factions.

There were two major reasons why criminal organizations in New Orleans remained weak and ineffective for so long. One reason was the control exercised by the political machine, the Old Regulars. Except for a brief period when McShane was in power, the reform opposition had relatively little impact upon the electorate, and the Behrman organization maintained its control over the city government. During the years when the Old Regulars were in power, criminal activity continued, but only with the toleration of local authorities. There is evidence that the machine received payments, particularly from gambling and prostitution, in return for freedom to operate without being raided by the police. If the operator of a house of prostitution or a gambling establishment failed to pay protection to the Ring, his place was invariably raided by New Orleans' finest. In addition, evidence demonstrates that the machine even placed its own men inside the houses of prostitution so it could secure the girls' votes, as well as those of other criminal groups, on election day. Under machine rule illegal criminal activity was allowed as long as violators followed the dictates of the organization. Raids were made as punishment for failure to pay off or in response to public outcry, almost never with the thought of reducing the crime.

A second reason for the weakness of criminal groups in New Orleans was the social climate at that time. New Orleanians had a long tradition of tolerating criminal vices. They valued their daily drink, betting on their favorite horses, and visiting their favorite lady of
the evening. Many local people continued to avail themselves of these activities despite the fact that manufacturing liquor was illegal and that it was against the law to place a bet on the horses away from the track itself. These illegal activities had always been a part of the New Orleans social scene and its citizens were determined that they should continue to remain so. With this ready market already existing, immigrant groups found themselves competing with native entrepreneurs for a share of the liquor or drug market that they found exclusively to themselves in other cities. In New Orleans public tolerance fostered a situation where no single group was strong enough to gain control. As a result, an effective organized crime syndicate did not emerge in the Crescent City until several decades after the Twenties.
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