



African American Organized Crime: A Social History

Rufus Schatzberg, Robert J. Kelly

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While stories of organized crime most often dwell on groups like the Mafia and Chinese Triad or Tongs, African Americans also have a long history of organized crime. Why have scholars and journalists paid so little attention to African American organized crime? What can a history of these criminal networks teach us about the social, political, and economic challenges that face African Americans today? What is specific to African American organized crime, and how do these networks differ from the criminal organizations of other racial and ethnic groups? How can a historical study of African American organized crime enrich our understanding of all criminal activity?

Rufus Schatzberg and Robert Kelly take us through almost a century of African American organized crime. Chapters focus on the numbers gambling that took place in New York City from 1920 to 1940, the criminal groups that operated in ghettos from the 1940s to the 1970s, and the gang activities that began in the 1970s and continues today. While providing a compelling analysis of African American organized crime, the authors also challenge existing stereotypes of African Americans and demonstrate the importance of studying any criminal activity within its historical and social context.

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