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Plaintiff Pro Se

**IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
CENTRAL DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA**

Case Number: 2:26-cv-6009

JONATHAN KENDRICK,

Plaintiff

v.

ROCCO MAGNI, et al

Defendants.

**PLAINTIFF'S NOTICE OF MOTION AND
MOTION FOR LEAVE TO FILE SURREPLY
TO DEFENDANTS ROCCO MAGNI AND
SUSMAN GODFREY LLP'S REPLY IN
SUPPORT OF NOTICE OF MOTION AND
MOTION TO STAY OR DISMISS ACTION AND
FOR FEES PURSUANT TO ANTI-SLAPP
STATUTE AND REQUEST TO CONSIDER
PRIOR TO MOTION TO DISMISS HEARING
PRESENTLY SET FOR AUGUST 28, 2026**

Date: October 28, 2026

Time: 1:30 P.M.

Location: Courtroom 9B

Trial Date: None

NOTICE OF MOTION AND MOTION

PLEASE TAKE NOTICE THAT, on October 28, 2026 at 1:30 p.m., or as soon thereafter as this matter may be heard, in the in the United States District Court for the Central District of California, located at 350 W. 1st Street, Courtroom 9B, Los Angeles, California 90012, Plaintiff Jonathan Kendrick will move for an order granting him leave to file a surreply to Defendants Rocco Magni and Susman Godfrey LLP's Reply in Support of Notice of Motion and Motion to

Stay or Dismiss Action and for Fees Pursuant to Anti-SLAPP Statute. As the Motion to Dismiss Hearing is presently set for August 28, 2026, a month after the first available hearing date on this instant motion to file a surreply, Plaintiff respectfully requests that this honorable Court consider this surreply before August 28, 2026, in the interests of due process and justice generally.

This Motion is made in order to Local Civil Rule 7-10, which states that “[a]bsent prior written order of Court, the opposing party shall not file a response to the reply.” Thus, Plaintiff is seeking an order from the Court granting leave to file this incorporated surreply, which is necessary to correct false and misleading statements and law contained in the Defendants’ Reply in Support of Notice of Motion and Motion to Stay or Dismiss Action and for Fees Pursuant to Anti-SLAPP Statute.

This Motion is based on this Notice of Motion and Motion, them Memorandum of Points and Authorities, and upon such oral and documentary evidence and argument as may be presented at the hearing on this Motion.

As the next available hearing date is October 28, 2026, Plaintiff respectfully requests that the Court consider this Motion on an expedited basis because the hearing on Defendants’ Motion to Dismiss is scheduled for August 28, 2026. Plaintiff respectfully requests that he be permitted leave to file a surreply prior to the August 28, 2026 hearing.

This Motion is made following a conference with opposing counsel which occurred via email on August 19, 2026. Counsel for Defendants indicated via email that they oppose this Motion.

MEMORANDUM OF POINTS AND AUTHORITIES

Plaintiff Jonathan Kendrick (“Mr. Kendrick”) hereby moves the Court for leave to file a surreply Defendants Rocco Magni (“Magni”) and Susman Godfrey LLP’s (“Susman”) Reply. (the “Reply”) in Support of Notice of Motion to Stay or Dismiss Action and for Fees Pursuant to Anti-SLAPP Statute (the “Motion”). While Defendants’ Reply is largely a regurgitation of its initial Motion, it misstates facts, ignores others, and is more than misleading.

First, Defendants counsel, who has also violated those court rules, procedures and proper professional courtesy and etiquette by initially refusing to consent to the deposition of a key material witness Dean Becker (“Mr. Becker”), who has significant health issues and could pass away at any time, using the disingenuous contrived excuse that the parties had not yet conducted a Rule 26 conference, now refuses to participate in one if Mr. Kendrick, who is representing himself pro se, wishes to have more than one non-legal assistant present. This is demonstrable bad faith and obstruction and a not too veiled attempt to run out the clock for the deposition of Mr. Becker, hoping that he will die in the interim. This low class obstructionist approach to professional litigation practice cannot be countenanced any longer.

Second, and to add insult to injury to Mr. Kendrick’s due process and other rights and interests, Defendants’ Reply creates the misimpression, if not subterfuge, that that they are not representing Mafia connected clients. Attached as Exhibit 1 are reports of these Mafia ties and connections including ones that even demonstrate Mafia involvement in the NBA, the home of the Houston Rockets, which the Fertittas own and run. This supports the allegations of the Complaint, notwithstanding that at this stage of the case, with regard to this Court reviewing Defendants’ Rule 12 (b)(6) motion to dismiss, the allegations of the Complaint must be accepted

as true. Notably, Defendants did not file a motion for summary judgment, which would allow the Court to go outside the Complaint after discovery takes place.

Third, it is categorically not true that Mr. Kendrick filed suit for the same claims before and indeed there are no other cases pending in Florida at this time. Prior complaints only contained factual background material about the Fertitta family's historic and Mafia roots, ties and connections. To conclude that the Fertittas do not Mafia ties and connections, as set forth convincingly in the Complaint, is like saying that bears do not live in the woods, an old Southern expression. To reiterate, here is what was pled based on known verifiable facts even before discovery in this case:

It was only after the events set forth in this Complaint occurred, that ABLE EVENTS and MR. KENDRICK learned that the Fertitta family was reported to have mob ties. Incredibly, TILMAN FERTITTA was nevertheless nominated and confirmed to be the U.S. Ambassador to Italy and San Marino. This confirmation regrettably came as no surprise, as the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee did not, even when informed by MR. KENDRICK of the likelihood of mob ties, investigate and looked the other way to likely Mafia connections as result of TILMAN FERTITTA'S huge political contributions lining the pockets of both Republicans and Democrat politicians. TILMAN FERTITTA and his companies have conveniently, strategically, effectively "bribed" both political parties. A simple review of Federal Election Commission records shows this. Comp. ¶ 11.

TILMAN AND PARTRICK FERTITTA are direct blood descendants of the Maceo crime syndicate — the Sicilian-immigrant family that controlled organized crime in Galveston, Texas for 30 years. His grandfather was Sam Maceo's nephew; the Fertitta family inherited the Maceo rackets upon the Maceos' deaths in the 1950s. An extended family member, Frank Fertitta Jr. (Station Casinos), was investigated for mob-connected casino skimming and had a documented business partnership with Carl Wesley Thomas — the man FBI wiretaps caught teaching the Kansas City mob boss how to skim Las Vegas casinos. Comp. ¶ 13.

TILMAN FERTITTA built his empire in the two most historically mob-penetrated industries — restaurants and casinos — and is currently succeeded at an approximate \$7 billion acquisition of Caesars Entertainment that would make him the dominant casino operator in America. He has accumulated multiple New Jersey gaming violations, including personally violating his own license and, most notably, firing his Atlantic City casino's surveillance manager — the primary internal check against cash skimming and fraud. His restaurant empire has faced

repeated class action suits for systematic wage theft across hundreds of locations. In 2021, he agreed to an \$8.6 billion SPAC deal, extracted its value, then walked away — resulting in a \$12.5 million settlement — mirroring the same pattern of fraudulent inducement set forth below. Comp. ¶ 14.

TILMAN FERTITTA’s conduct follows a textbook pay-for-protection pattern and racket: \$1.5 million+ donated to Donald J. Trump, personally hosted fundraisers, co-hosted the inauguration after the 2024 presidential election— and, not coincidentally given his “largesse” was nominated for and received the U.S. ambassadorship to Italy. He now incredibly holds a diplomatic post in the country his family's criminal network originated from. Comp. ¶ 15.

TILMAN FERTITTA’s “political giving” is deliberately bipartisan — a classic hedge that ensures access regardless of who holds power. He donated \$140,000 to Trump and \$5,600 to Biden in the same 2020 election cycle, contributed \$6,600 to Kamala Harris's 2024 presidential campaign while simultaneously pumping \$487,000 into Trump 47 and \$1 million to Trump's inauguration, and has donated heavily to Texas Democrats and Republicans alike at the state level, including over \$1.1 million to Gov. Greg Abbott. Buying access on all sides of the political spectrum is a textbook “insurance” method for ensuring that no government actor — regardless of party — becomes a law enforcement threat. Comp. ¶ 16.

In addition, equally notable and hardly coincidental are his deep financial ties to law enforcement: TILMAN FERTITTA not coincidentally chairs the board of the Houston Police Foundation (HPD), donated \$10 million to build the HPD tactical training center that now also not coincidentally now bears his name, is funding a \$10.5 million firearms training facility also named after him, has pledged \$1 million+ in crime rewards directly to HPD, and has conveniently hosted annual police fundraising galas at his personal residence for over a decade. The cultivation and coopting of law enforcement through naming-rights philanthropy — ensuring that the officers most likely to investigate you are also those most indebted to you — has a long and well-documented history in organized crime. Comp. ¶ 17.

That Tilman Fertitta was nominated, ironically and unfortunately, to be Ambassador to Italy and San Marino, is a testament to his having lined with at least a massive amount of political campaign contributions (check federal Federal Election Commission and state records) the pockets of both Republicans, Democrats, the Houston Police and last but hardly least President Donald Trump. Comp. ¶ 16. It is also no coincidence that he was able to purchase the Houston Rockets with a low bid. Wonder how that works? Thus, contrary to the offensive

statements made by counsel for Defendants that Mr. Kendrick's arguments are "outlandish, bigoted, and paranoid," there is no dispute that the Fertittas have Mafia ties and connections and that Magni and Susman are, in effect, Mafia lawyers, which is not uncommon as discussed below.

Fourth, it is established and well known that the Mafia collects perceived debts with strongarm tactics and threats of bodily injury or death. And the language that was levied against Mr. Kendrick that they were "coming after" Mr. Kendrick "personally" and his "wife and family," Comp. ¶ 41—which Merriam-Webster dictionary defines, "**come after**" as **to chase (someone) : to try to find or capture (someone you want to hurt or punish),**" which is akin **to a threat**"—is Mafia like, particularly when one considers that the threats were not made against the entities which are subject to the arbitration award, but Mr. Kendrick himself personally, and his wife Sally, in addition to their entire family. They were not parties to the arbitration award!

Fifth, when this case proceeds to discovery once the parties get past a Rule 26 conference, which the Court effectively ordered on August 13, 2026 to occur on October 2, 2026, in its Initial Order Setting R26 Scheduling Conference, Plaintiff Kendrick will produce an expert on the modus operandi of how the Mafia seeks to collect perceived debts.

Sixth, as the Mafia takes care of its own, some lawyers of questionable repute, to say the least, are not hesitant to represent them, as they are paid handsomely. To name just a few who historically did so are Roy Cohn (who was the lawyer of Meyer Lansky and later Donald Trump, both in the gambling industry like the Fertittas), Bruce Cutler who represented John Gotti, and Frank Ragano who represented Jimmy Hoffa, and a host of others too long to mention. Rocco Magni and Sussman come from a long line of lawyers who for a hefty payday will "sell their

soul” in this regard. And, there is no bigotry in reaching such a conclusion based on all of the facts and circumstances. Magni of the Sussman law firm, which is known for its rough and tumble practices like others who came before him, logically knows full well who butters his bread. And then logically, one has to ask who Magni, a relative unknown, came to acquire the Fertittas as clients, billionaires in typical Mafia infested industries, if he is not a member of “La Familia.” The bottom line is that he executed typical Mafia threats for his well-paying clients against Mr. Kendrick, his wife and entire family, none of whom were subject to any arbitration award.

For all of these reasons, the Reply of the Defendants is not just misleading, but patently unbelievable, lacking credibility, even if this stage of the case was not at a preliminary pleading stage pursuant to Rule 12 (b)(6). The wool can only be pulled over this Court’s eyes if the Court ignores that was pled based on known facts and thus shies away from allowing the case to proceed to discovery.

Plaintiff Kendrick is more than concerned that this Court has thus far sidestepped his motions to depose Mr. Becker who was not only privy to the threats against Mr. Kendrick, his wife and family, but also privy to Magni threatening ominous demeanor in making them. He and others were also privy to the black SUVs that showed up on Mr. Kendrick’s professional doorstep, only to speed away when company personnel approached them. As set forth in Mr. Becker’s affidavit:

1. I am a Vice Chairman of many RoKit companies.
2. On or about a date in January 2022, during a period where I shared an office with Jonathan Kendrick (“Mr. Kendrick”), I overheard a conversation on speaker phone with Defendant Rocco Magni (“Magni”).
3. During that conversation between Mr. Kendrick and Magni, which I recall vividly given the nature of the conversation, Magni personally threatened Mr. Kendrick, his wife and family if RoKit did not pay an arbitration award in Rocket Ball Let v. Rokit Marketing Inc. Case No. 01-20-001-6852. Magni stated, in a

very hostile and threatening tone and manner, “Unless you pay the money, we will come after you, your wife and family.” Mr. Kendrick advised Magni that he had a claim for fraud against Tillman Fertitta, Rocket Ball Ltd, and Clutch City Sports & Entertainment L.P.

4. Thereafter, a few days later, black SUVs, either Cadillac Escalades or Chevrolet Suburban, appeared ominously in front of RoKit’s business premises. This was observed by me and RoKit employees. When we went out to encounter the SUVs, they sped off at high speeds.

5. I have reason to believe that this was tied to the threats made by Magni to Mr. Kendrick, his wife and family days earlier.

As a result, if this honorable Court feels apprehensive and uncomfortable in ruling against Defendants, and that is a reason why it has not allowed Mr. Becker’s deposition to proceed in a timely fashion given the exigencies, it should step aside and recuse itself and allow this case to be assigned to another jurist. Regardless. Mr. Kendrick respectfully requests a ruling with regard to Mr. Becker’s deposition by Monday, August 24, 2026, to in order that he can be deposed before the hearing on Defendants’ Motion to Dismiss presently set for August 28,, 2026.

Ultimately, the bottom line is that this case must move forward, also for the strong legal reasons set forth in Mr. Kendrick’s Response in Opposition to Motion to Dismiss, as well as discussed below, since Defendants Reply also misstates the law in a number of respects.

This includes Defendants’ claim that the *Noerr-Pennington* and California’s litigation privilege apply to this case because the threat that Defendants would “come after” Mr. Kendrick “plainly refers to civil liability, not violence.” This improperly inserts Defendants’ conjecture and speculation into this case, which is plainly not allowed at the motion to dismiss stage prior to any discovery. “To survive a dismissal motion, a complaint need only satisfy the minimal notice pleading requirements of Rule 8(a)(2)—a short and plain statement of the claim.” *Take-Two Interactive Software, Inc. v. PlayerAuctions, Inc.*, 2026 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 72295, at *4 (C.D. Cal. Mar. 26, 2026). “A court is generally limited to the pleadings and must construe all “factual

allegations set forth in the complaint . . . as true and . . . in the light most favorable" to the plaintiff." *Id.*

The Complaint more than sufficiently pleads the serious nature of the not too veiled threats made by the Defendants in conjunction with the meticulous details about the Fertittas' connections to the Mafia. Comp. ¶¶ 10 - 18. The Complaint alleges that Mr. Kendrick took the Defendants' threats as true, and indeed that "Mr. Kendrick relocated his residence as a direct result of his fear for his and his family's physical safety arising from the threats described above." Comp. ¶ 45.

Mr. Kendrick has also pled the threats made by Defendant Magni during a deposition related to Able Events' Chapter 7 bankruptcy case (No. 2:22-bk-11344-WB (Bankr. C.D. Cal.)). Magni — during an off-the-record break, and outside the scope of any communicative act made in furtherance of the deposition itself — personally threatened Mr. Kendrick using substantively identical language: that they were "coming after" Mr. Kendrick "personally" and his "wife and family." Defendant Magni, in making these statements, smiled in an offensive and threatening way to say that Mr. Kendrick, his wife, and his family would be subject to immediate bodily injury or death. Comp. ¶ 43. This was confirmed on the record afterwards, where Mr. Kendrick described the threats on the record. The transcript reflects, in relevant part (with intervening exchanges among counsel attempting to moderate the colloquy omitted):

Mr. Kendrick: ... you also lied to the Texas court — I think your firm represented it when we tried to sue you for our ROKiT Drinks. And you also obtained documents illegally, and please bear in mind, I want to put this on the record, you threatened me personally.

Mr. Magni: I sent you a demand letter, sir.

Mr. Kendrick: No. If I may finish.

Mr. Kendrick: I forgot my train of thought. You also threatened me personally, which normally I wouldn't take as a threat from a lawyer, but because of your client, I was advised possibly to take

some bodyguards because your client, as you are aware -- no, not funny. I don't. I take personal threats against me and my family very seriously. Rocket News. "Tillman Fertitta's family has deep mob ties. It appears Houston Rockets owner Tillman Fertitta and his family have some deep mob ties and is apparently a fourth generation member of a mafia family." Had I have known that, I would have never done business with a man like that. And, therefore, when you threaten me personally, I took it as a personal threat against my life. That's why I don't trust you at all. I don't trust anything you say, anything you produce. I think I have grounds to show that. So that's all I want to say on that.

Mr. Rothberg: Let the record reflect Mr. Kendrick was reading from a news article that he brought with him.

Mr. Mang: Does anyone want to mark that?

Mr. Kendrick: Can we mark this as an exhibit?

Mr. Magni: Counsel can on redirect.

Mr. Mang: Let's just mark this right now for the record, shall we?

Mr. Rothberg: That's 34 I think.

Mr. Mang: Can we make a copy?

Mr. Kendrick: You can have it. I have lots of copies.

Mr. Mang: The court reporter needs it for the record. So why don't we just hand it to the court reporter for the record, we'll mark it as No. 34, then just set it down.

(Exhibit 34 marked)

Mr. Kendrick: There's no need to smirk.

In conjunction with the affidavit of Dean Becker describing the serious Mafia like threats, Mr. Kendrick has more than sufficiently shown that serious nature of these threats which transcend being routine, which were made by the Defendants, particularly at the preliminary motion to dismiss stage.

Furthermore, it is clear that Mr. Kendrick properly pled RICO claims, as the Complaint establishes all necessary elements. The Complaint sets forth the RICO enterprise as Tilman Fertitta, Patrick Fertitta, Magni, Susman Godfrey, and (as nondefendant participants) the Rockets, Landry's, and other Fertitta-controlled entities through which Tilman Fertitta and Patrick Fertitta conducted business and litigation activity. Comp. ¶ 50. The Complaint sets forth the three predicate acts. Comp. ¶¶ 41 – 44. Finally, the Complaint sets forth the “pattern” of racketeering activity, which occurred between January of 2022 and February of 2024. Comp. ¶¶ 41 – 43.

Finally, with regard to Mr. Kendrick’s claim for intentional infliction of emotional distress, the Defendants’ Mafia threats are continuing and they are causing continuing harm to Mr. Kendrick and his family, as the Complaint alleges that he had to move as a result of these threats, which occurred during the statute of limitations period. Mr. Kendrick also has to have security, and recently, an individual appeared at ROKiT and threatened at gunpoint an employee in the parking lot in a high speed car chase around the lot. This latest incident is under investigation and has been reported to law enforcement. If amendment is necessary in this regard, Mr. Kendrick will seek leave to do so.

WHEREFORE, in sum, Mr. Kendrick respectfully must be granted leave to file a surreply to address the false and misleading statements of fact and law in the Defendants’ Reply which cannot go uncorrected in the interests of justice and fundamental fairness.

Counsel for Defendants do not consent to this motion for leave to file a surreply based on meet and confer communications between Mr. Kendrick and Defendants’ counsel.

Dated: August 20, 2026

Respectfully Submitted,

/s/ Jonathan Kendrick
Jonathan Kendrick

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Plaintiff Pro Se

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I, Jonathan Kendrick, hereby certify that on this day, August 20, 2026, the foregoing document is being served to all counsel of record through the Court's ECF procedures.

/s/ Jonathan Kendrick

CERTIFICATE OF COMPLIANCE WITH WORD COUNT LIMITATIONS

The undersigned Plaintiff certifies that this brief contains 3061 words, which complies with the word limit of L.R. 11-6.1.

/s/ Jonathan Kendrick

CERTIFICATE OF CONFERENCE

The undersigned Plaintiff certifies that he held a conference with counsel for Defendants via email on August 19, 2026 and counsel for Defendants would not consent to leave for Plaintiff to file a surreply.

/s/ Jonathan Kendrick

EXHIBIT 1

Fertitta family history

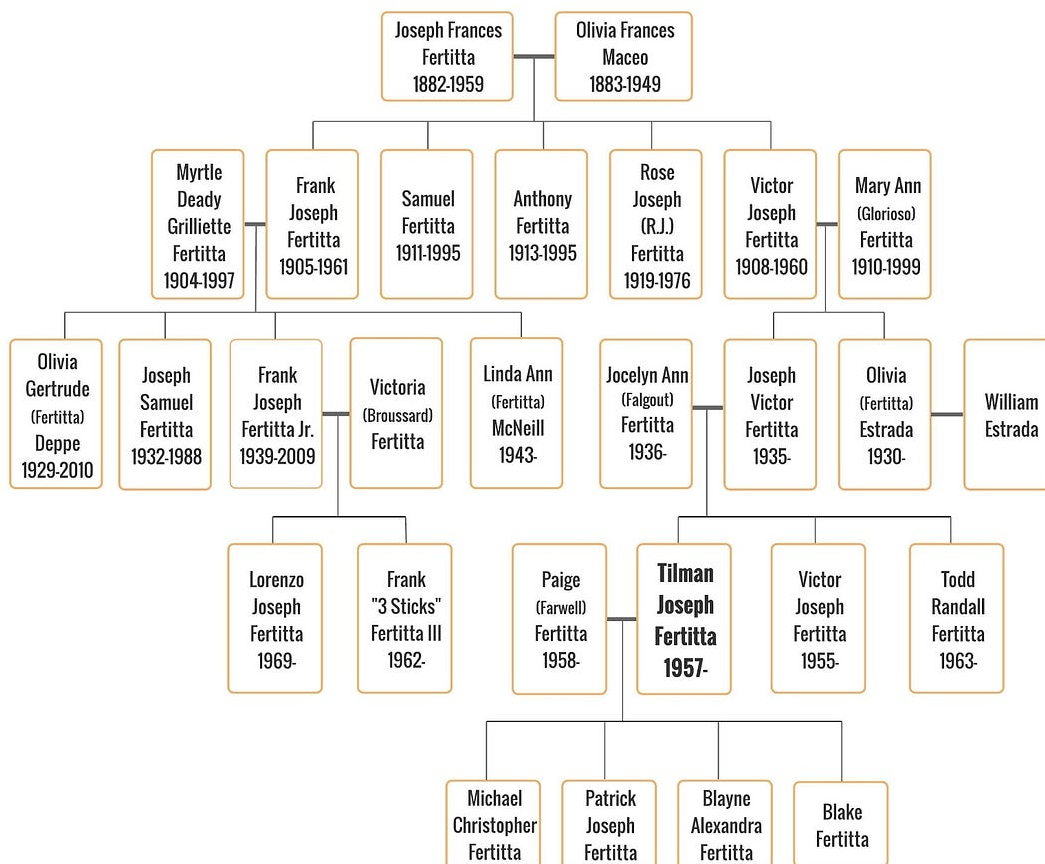
A century of making headlines



HENRY ABBOTT

JUN 18, 2020

BY HENRY ABBOTT



Not too long ago, someone who works in the NBA wondered aloud to me: "Why did the NBA let a fourth-generation member of a mafia family buy the Rockets?"

It seemed like a breathless secret, the kind of thing you could never put in print—not without interviewing FBI agents and the like.

But it turns out I was wrong. It's not even a secret. While I did not encounter anyone who suggested Tilman Fertitta is in the mob presently, his family tree is a tangle of magazine articles, FBI busts, books, wiretaps, even a major Hollywood motion picture about the old days of the mob.

The Fertittas are legendary, woven into the incredible history of Galveston, Texas.

Galveston is a little different. It has a reputation as a barrier island in the Gulf of Mexico, an hour's drive from Houston, where people go to party.

But like Las Vegas, Galveston has a longstanding reputation for lawlessness. The story begins in the 1800s. From [Wikipedia](#): "The United States outlawed the importation of slaves in 1808, but domestic trade flourished ... Between 1816 and 1821, Louis-Michel Aury and Jean Lafitte smuggled slaves into the United States through Galveston Island. Various clans arose to control the various trades that followed slavery: sex, alcohol, gambling."

[Katy Vine wrote a Texas Monthly story about Galveston](#) which includes this background: "Indeed, for more than one hundred years, power on the Island has belonged almost exclusively to members of three families: the Moodys, Kempners, and Sealys, who made their money in cotton and banking, among other ventures, in the late 1800's."

The early 20th century

[Gary Cartwright writes in Texas Monthly](#) about how Tilman Fertitta's family—related to the Maceo family by marriage—came to power:

For thirty years the Maceos ran Galveston—economically, politically, spiritually. Papa Rose and Big Sam were the undisputed dons of the

gang, and their brothers, Vincent and Frank, along with a number of cousins and in-laws, ran various parts of the operation. Gigolo managed the Studio Lounge on the second floor of the Turf Athletic Club, and other family members managed the Balinese Room, the Western Room, the Moulin Rouge, and a variety of Maceo ventures on the Island as well as the mainland part of Galveston County, which they also controlled; motorists driving south from Houston spoke of crossing the “Maceo-Dickinson Line.”

Tilman Fertitta’s grandfather Victor, whose mother was Olivia Maceo, was born in 1908 and went on to own the famed Balinese Club in Galveston.

Galveston’s red-light district may have been the only one in the country that thrived with the blessings of both city hall and the Catholic church. Proportionally, it was probably the largest red-light district in the world, boasting 1 hooker for every 62 citizens. Chicago, by comparison, had a ratio of 1 to 430, Paris 1 to 481, and Shanghai 1 to 130.

What outsiders viewed as corruption, Islanders called business as usual. Walter Johnston, the longtime police commissioner, once bragged that he was on the payroll of 46 whorehouses. Frank L. Biaggne, who was the sheriff of Galveston County from 1933 to 1957, explained to a state investigative committee that the reason he had never raided the Balinese was because it was a private club and he wasn’t a member. Occasionally, the Texas Rangers—in those days, effectively the governor’s private police force—swept down from the mainland and smashed a few slot machines, but not one of the Maceo’s clubs was ever closed for long. The skinny was that the family had close contacts in the governor’s office by which they were warned of approaching trouble. Gambling paraphernalia at the Balinese was designed to convert into billiard and bridge tables so that by the time the Rangers arrived, all they found were some well-dressed patrons playing bridge and sipping soft drinks.

Michael Hardy writing in Texas monthly:

Two branches of his family, the Maceos and the Fertittas, have deep roots in the more colorful side of Galveston history. Two of his great-great-uncles, Sicilian immigrants Salvatore and Rosario Maceo, operated the island's notorious Balinese Room, a nightclub and illegal casino that featured entertainers like Frank Sinatra, Bob Hope, and the Marx Brothers. Fertitta's paternal grandfather and great-uncle helped run the Maceos' casinos.

Robert Draper writing in Texas Monthly:

Yet what the Maceos ran for thirty years was indisputably an organized-crime syndicate. The brothers' slot machines were ubiquitous, and their homemade booze was distilled and bottled in a large Galveston warehouse. They could defy the law because the local lawmen were on their payroll—"Paid them off, every month, in cash," according to 85-year-old Pete Salvato, a close ally of the Maceos who operated casinos in the Galveston County town of Dickinson. "They used the law to chase the competition out of town." Judges and politicians were equally compromised. Additionally, the Maceos owned a number of legitimate local businesses—a fish house, a dairy, a trucking company, a concrete-mixing company—and applied their muscle to ensure that these industries as well remained under their control.

Sometimes it got rough. On April 22, 1933, the Shreveport Journal carried the following Associated Press report (accessed through Newspapers.com):

Lee Hausinger, aviator, slain here Thursday night, has been identified as one of two men who robbed a night club employee of \$900 a few hours before. Chief of Detectives Frank Henry announced that Frank Fertitta, the night club bookkeeper, who was robbed, had identified Hausinger by photographs as one of his assailants. Fertitta made a

statement at the county attorney's office, saying he was held up en route from his home to the club. A murder charge has been filed against Rosario Maceo, brother of the night club manager, in connection with the shooting. Maceo surrendered to officers shortly after it occurred on a Galveston street near the beach.

Gary Cartwright writing in Texas Monthly:

The Maceos maintained law and order with their own squad of vigilantes, known as Rose's Night Riders. Miscreants simply disappeared. While the Maceos were in power, mobsters from other parts of the country were normally wise enough to stay the hell off the Island. On one memorable occasion, when the Al Capone gang sent Frank Nitti to Galveston to inquire about "investing" in the Maceo organization, a Maceo in-law, Anthony Fertitta, personally showed Mr. Nitti the way back to the mainland. There were a number of gangland killings in the thirties—Rose Maceo was suspected of murdering several people, including his first wife and her lover—but no member of the Maceo family was ever convicted of a felony. On the contrary, the Maceos were the first to offer help to the police.

1943

May 29 Weekly Town Talk (Alexandria, Louisiana—accessed on Newspapers.com):

Another case, that against the Fertitta brothers of Leesville, is due to come up Friday. Judge Porterie, in as stern a statement as had been in the courtroom here, pointed out to Sliman that during wartime, the laws of his country must regulate his property and said that his government would not permit him to charge soldiers and their families excessive rents particularly when those soldiers are fighting to protect that property.

1951

Associated Press in the Fort Worth Star-Telegram (as accessed by Newspapers.com):

The Galveston County grand jury Wednesday indicted 19 persons, including seven members of the Maceo family, on charges of running a gambling house. ... The Maceo interests include the famed Balinese Room on the Gulf Coast at Galveston ... The indictments were returned against Joe T. Maceo, Vic A. Maceo, Rose Maceo, Sam J. Maceo, Charles Bernard, W.D. Dennis, Vic J. Fertitta, Anthony Fertitta, Lorainsa Grillette, Frank J. Fertitta, AJ Adams, Frank Maceo ...

1954

Texas Coffee Company formed with Maceos and Fertittas as officers.

1954-57

Gary Cartwright writing in Texas Monthly:

World War II had been over for nearly a decade—and both Rose and Sam were in their graves—before a Galveston County politician dared campaign on a promise to bust up the rackets. The candidate was Jim Simpson, a former FBI agent who now practices law in Texas City. Running for county prosecuting attorney in the 1954 elections, Simpson lost by eight votes. But two years later he put together an undercover operation for Attorney General Will Wilson that eventually gathered enough evidence to close down the Maceo syndicate for good. The coup de grace was administered by a task force of Texas Rangers in June 1957. Most of the old gang had already gone by then anyway. By the early fifties, the dealers and pit bosses who worked for the Maceos had mostly migrated to Las Vegas, as had the high rollers and all the big-name entertainment.

That story then concludes: “The Fertitta family, related to the Maceos by marriage, had assumed control of what remained of the syndicate.”

1960

Frank Fertitta, Jr. goes to Las Vegas, where he will become a casino owner and—details below—part of some events that reportedly inspire the Nicholas Pileggi book and movie “Casino.”

1974

Robert Draper writing in Texas Monthly:

In 1974 the Fertittas relocated to the west Houston suburbs, and Tilman attended Westchester High School, the same one I did. I remember him as a swarthy guy who threw his weight around and didn't settle for anything second-rate. He drove a Mustang convertible, went after the flashiest of girls, and when the football coaches told him he would be playing on the offensive line rather than at running back, he quit the team.



Tilman Fertitta
@TilmanJFertitta

Wisdom from my mom is featured in @ParadeMagazine 's Mother's Day advice feature. #happymothersday2017 #advice #honesty



Mom Always Told Me...

“My mom often reminded me that honesty is truly the best policy, and if you speak the truth you’ll never have to wonder later what you said.”

Tilman J. Fertitta, TV host, *Billion Dollar Buyer*

3:13 AM · May 15, 2017

9 Reposts · 66 Likes

1976

By Steve Weigand, Sacramento Bee, June 9, 2003 (accessed on Newspapers.com) on Frank Fertitta, Jr.:

In 1976, Fertitta scraped together enough to buy a small casino off the Strip with a partner, Carl Thomas. The casino became known as the Bingo Palace and later Palace Station. Both Thomas and Fertitta had other jobs as well. When Thomas was made chief executive officer of four casinos owned by the Argent Corp., he brought Fertitta in to be general manager of one of them, the Fremont.

But Thomas also had other partners. They were Giuseppe Nicoli “Mr. Nick” Civella and Carl “The Cork” Civella, brothers and bosses of the

La Cosa Nostra chapter in Kansas City. In the 1980s, federal prosecutors charged that Thomas, the Civellas and other conspired to “skim” money from the Argent casinos by taking it from the counting rooms before it was on the casinos’ books. ...

One witness who had been fired by Fertitta, former Fremont security chief Harold McBride, testified Fertitta had been involved in the skimming. Fertitta’s name also surfaced in FBI wiretaps of conversations between the Civellas and Thomas.

1983-86

Tilman Fertitta purchases a 3 percent stake in the Rockets.

Michael Hardy in Texas Monthly:

After two desultory years of college, including two semesters at the University of Houston’s Conrad N. Hilton College of Hotel and Restaurant Management, [Tilman] Fertitta dropped out and embarked on an unlikely series of commercial ventures, including a women’s clothing store, a vitamin retailer, a construction company, and—most lucrative of all—an arcade-game distribution business. But he spent freely, and during the economic crash of the eighties, his companies managed to run up more than \$10 million in debt. Twenty-five of his creditors sued him. Thanks to an aggressive team of lawyers led by Steve Scheinthal, who’s now the general counsel of Landry’s, Fertitta was able to restructure his debt without having to declare bankruptcy.

In 1986 he purchased the Louisiana-born brothers Bill and Floyd Landry’s stake in two Houston-area restaurants: Landry’s Seafood Inn and Oyster Bar in Katy and Willie G’s in the Galleria area. After buying out his sole remaining partner the following year, Fertitta launched an aggressive expansion campaign. His two new Landry’s locations in Houston failed, but he had more success farther afield,

opening up profitable outposts in Galveston, Kemah, Corpus Christi, and San Antonio.

1985

March 24, 1994 Louisville Courier-Journal (accessed via newspapers.com) about Frank Fertitta Jr.:

Frank Fertitta Jr., founder of the applicant, Station Casinos Inc., was implicated but never charged during a 1985 criminal trial in a mid-1970s conspiracy to siphon money to mobsters from casinos before it was recorded on the company's books. A dozen reputed organized-crime figures in Chicago; Kansas City, Mo.; Milwaukee; and Cleveland were convicted in federal court in Kansas City. ...

A key figure in the elder Fertitta's past was Carl Wesley Thomas, a casino executive whom investigators credit with teaching the Mafia how to steal money from Las Vegas casinos. Thomas, a close friend and once business partner of Fertitta's, was sentenced in 1983 for stealing from casinos. Until his death last year, Thomas was listed on Nevada's "Black Book" of people banned for life from entering any casino in that state.

An AP story on July 11 1987 Reno Gazette-Journal notes Thomas "ratted" on some of the most fearsome mobsters on the planet, but wouldn't testify about Frank Fertitta. Thomas appealed his appearance in the "Black Book," through an attorney named Richard Wright.

Wright said Thomas refused to answer questions concerning Palace Station owner Frank Fertitta, a former business partner. Thomas, 54, was convicted in Kansas City of conspiring to skim \$280,000 from the Tropicana Hotel in 1978-79. FBI wiretaps caught Thomas instructing the late Kansas City mob boss Carl Civella on how to skim money from the casino. Thomas was sentenced to 15 years in prison but the sentence was reduced to two years after he testified

at a trial at which several Midwest mob bosses were convicted of skimming money from the Stardust.

1991

Tilman Fertitta marries Paige Farwell.

1990s

In the early 1990s Frank Fertitta Jr. stepped down from his family's business, leaving his business to his son—Tilman's third cousin—to run. The Fertitta family applied to open casinos in many states, which prompted many articles re-examining Frank Fertitta Jr.'s brush with the law—for which he was never charged. The Nevada Gaming Commission voted 2-1 against punishing Fertitta in the episode. The outlier vote was retired deputy police chief Jerry Cunningham. John Carlson and Tom Witosky wrote a cover story that appeared in the October 24, 1992 Des Moines Register, which quoted Cunningham:

"I listened to the recordings (wiretaps) and read the transcripts of the trial," said Cunningham. "I knew who and what Carl Thomas was. Carl Thomas admits he stole money for the mob and gave it to his superiors. Frank Fertitta Jr. was a member of the Carl Thomas' crew."

1993

Michael Hardy in Texas Monthly:

To finance further expansion, [Tilman] Fertitta took Landry's public in 1993, raising \$24 million on the stock market, which helped fund a decade-long buying spree: Joe's Crab Shack (1994), the Crab House (1996), Rainforest Cafe (2000), Chart House (2002), and Saltgrass Steakhouse (2002). In 1997 Fertitta bought every restaurant on the Kemah waterfront he didn't already own, erected a Ferris wheel, and rechristened it the Kemah Boardwalk. In 2003 he transformed two former municipal buildings on the banks of Houston's Buffalo Bayou

into the Downtown Aquarium, complete with yet another Ferris wheel and, controversially, a caged group of white tigers.

Tilman Fertitta makes a bid to purchase the Rockets, and falls a few million short of Leslie Alexander's offer.

1997

Robert Draper publishes this in Texas Monthly:

Mob money got him in, mob money bailed him out, they would claim. After all, they'd say, wasn't the arcade business controlled by the Mafia? Didn't his Key Largo partner, cousin Frank, own three casinos in Vegas? And just what did Fertitta intend to do with all that property in Galveston and Kemah, if not make it a haven for gambling thugs? Because you knew, didn't you, about his family ...

"It's the one thing that gets to him," sighs his father, Vic. "Because my son is a control freak, and this is the one thing he can't control." How do you prove the negative? Dean Witter vetted his finances before green-lighting the public offering of Landry's, and the Secret Service all but turned his underwear inside out before letting him host a fundraiser for Clinton last September. I've seen his architect's blueprints for the Kemah development, and the closest thing to a casino that's in the works is a Ferris wheel for kids.

2001

Katy Vine writing in Texas Monthly:

Five years later, in 2001, Fertitta won over enough people around town, including Mayor Quiroga, to push for a special election on increasing the local hotel tax from 13 cents to 15 cents on the dollar. The plan would create funds for the city to build a Fertitta-run convention center to compete with the Moodys'... "That election was not just on the convention center, okay?" Fertitta told me. "More

people turned out for that election than for any mayor's race. That was a vote for change in Galveston."

2003

The Toyota Center opens in Houston, the Fertittas have courtside tickets.

2004

Katy Vine writing in Texas Monthly about Galveston, in an article headlined "Fertittaville":

All told, he's invested \$150 million here ... They worry aloud that his legion of properties is turning Galveston into "Fertittaville," a fear that was only heightened two months ago, when Mayor Roger "Bo" Quiroga proposed changing the name of Fifty-seventh Street to Tilman Fertitta Boulevard. Of even larger concern is what they perceive to be Fertitta's long-term vision. This spring, when Fertitta backed a proposal during the special legislative session to bring video gambling to Texas, there was speculation that he hoped to turn it into a Gulf Coast version of Atlantic City. ...

But his detractors started gaining footing when Fertitta backed video gambling at the special session. They say gambling will bring corruption, and some even point to Fertitta's family history as a warning sign: During the forties and fifties, his great-uncle Anthony Fertitta and his great-great-uncles Sam and Rosario Maceo worked together in the Balinese Room, the most notorious gambling tavern in the state. Asked about his own gambling aspirations, Fertitta said people were blowing them out of proportion. But he didn't deny that he supported some level of gambling on the Island. After all, he explained, how would it be fair for the horse-racing tracks—or the failing greyhound track in nearby LaMarque—to get slot machines and not Galveston? "I'll tell you," he said. "I used to think it wasn't coming. These days I think it's inevitable. Will it be two years, five

years, ten years? You're going to be pulling a slot machine in Galveston, Texas, while we're all still breathing. I can promise you that."

2005

Michael Hardy in Texas Monthly:

In 2005, [Tilman] Fertitta followed his illustrious forebears into the gaming industry by purchasing the then-59-year-old Golden Nugget casino, which had locations in Las Vegas and Laughlin, Nevada. He has since opened new Golden Nugget resorts in Lake Charles, Louisiana; Biloxi, Mississippi; and Atlantic City.

2010

Caleb Melby writing in Forbes:

Since [Tilman Fertitta] took the company private in 2010, Landry's has acquired The Golden Nugget casino in Atlantic City, Oceanaire Seafood Room, Bubba Gump Shrimp Co., Claim Jumpers, Morton's and McCormick & Schmick's, of which he tells Forbes "I had never done a hostile [takeover] before. I wanted to see what it was like ...

"It wasn't painful for me. Was painful for them."

2011

Caleb Melby writing in Forbes:

[Tilman Fertitta] bought the waterfront casino and hotel from bankrupt Trump Entertainment Resorts for \$38 million in February 2011, less than one-tenth a recent offer and \$282 million less than what Trump paid in 1985.

Daniel Fisher writing in Forbes about Frank and Lorenzo Fertitta:

A federal bankruptcy judge has ordered sanctions against Fertitta Enterprises for failing to turn over e-mails from its chief financial officer suggesting the firm might have had a hand in the bankruptcy of sport-drink maker Xyience. The Fertittas, Las Vegas gambling tycoons who also own the Ultimate Fighting Championship franchise, are accused by the trustee of bankrupt Xyience of lending the firm \$12 million at a time of crisis and then using the loan to strip the company's assets from its shareholders. Xyience is a major sponsor of Ultimate Fighting Championship, which the Fertittas bought in 2001 for \$2 million and quickly turned into a cash machine. The energy-drink company was founded by a twice-convicted felon and sales genius named Russell Pike, who raised millions of dollars from Midwest labor unions and other investors who later accused him of fraud. The Fertitta brothers also control Station Casinos, which emerged from bankruptcy in 2009.

2012

Caleb Melby writing in Forbes:

Most of the time [Tilman] Fertitta, the 100% owner of Landry's, wants to gobble up hospitality businesses: specifically, poorly managed, out-of-date and distressed restaurants, hotels, casinos and boardwalks that he can buy on the cheap, often right out of bankruptcy court. Fertitta then cleans house. He fires top executives, closes failing locations, revamps existing ones and moves management to Landry's headquarters in Houston, where he can keep an eye on everyone. "When we buy somebody, we cut the head off," he says. "We keep the operators who are looking—I hate to use this term—they're looking for a leader. We lead very well. And we immediately spend money on them and make them better. Everybody wants to be led.

"Except for me," he adds. "I want to lead." ...

"He is like a private equity investor, but he does it with his own money," says Rich Handler, CEO of the investment bank Jefferies, who helped refinance Landry's debt in 2007 and has become Fertitta's close friend. "He took Landry's private because the public markets weren't going to allow him to invest in the properties as he saw fit. Now he has operated his way to exceptional cash flow that he continuously invests to improve and expand his properties."

Michael Hardy in Texas Monthly:

Taking Landry's private sent Fertitta's net worth soaring. He cracked the Forbes 400 list in 2012 with an estimated fortune of \$1.6 billion, making him the world's first billionaire restaurateur. He now owns a 164-foot yacht, two planes, four helicopters, and an \$18 million, 25,548-square-foot mansion situated on more than five acres of carefully manicured grounds in Houston's River Oaks neighborhood.

2016

Catherine Clifford on CNBC:

To [Tilman] Fertitta, Trump's comments about immigration during the campaign and in his first days in office were designed to satisfy his core voters.

"I don't know that they have been blundered," says Fertitta. "I think that he spoke more rhetoric to fire up his base. But Donald Trump is a smart man and he is not going to just start deporting people. He doesn't want to deport illegal people. I think he makes that clear when you read and really listen to his speeches and what he says." ...

One of his restaurants was raided by immigration officials and employees who were found to be undocumented had to have their employment terminated. But, Fertitta says, those employees either got jobs at local competitors or started collecting food stamps.



Tilman Fertitta
@TilmanJFertitta

Great night at the @LandrysInc company Christmas party at the @AquariumHouston with some of my marketing team.



4:38 AM · Dec 15, 2016

12 Reposts · 149 Likes

2017

Michael Hardy in Texas Monthly:

On Thursday, August 24, [Tilman] Fertitta was on his yacht in Los Angeles's Marina del Rey. He was in town to film an episode of Billion Dollar Buyer, but a severe cold had forced him to cancel shooting for the day. When Brown called him that morning, Fertitta could sense that the Rockets executive had something important to say. Then Brown broke the news: Alexander had chosen Fertitta's \$2.2 billion bid and wanted to move forward to finalize it. "He was very emotional," Brown recalled. "It was one of those days for him and his

family where they realized their lives would change forever. And that was the moment for me when I realized we had the right guy.”

Amazingly enough, Fertitta’s \$2.2 billion wasn’t the highest offer the team received; at least two rivals offered more money, Brown said. In the end, though, Fertitta’s hometown connections, relentlessness, and ability to close the deal quickly proved decisive. ...

A contract was soon signed, but Fertitta still needed to raise \$2.2 billion—no easy feat, even for one of the world’s thousand richest people. Alexander agreed to finance \$275 million of the deal. Fertitta then borrowed \$250 million against the value of the Rockets, the maximum allowed by the NBA, and kicked in \$300 million of his own money, but that still left him \$1.375 billion short. Rather than selling equity in the company, which would have meant giving up full ownership, Fertitta decided to make up that difference by issuing corporate bonds and bank debt. It’s a strategy he’s used time and again since taking Landry’s and the Golden Nugget private, in 2010. “He has a very, very good reputation and track record in the bond market,” said Rich Handler, the CEO of Jefferies, which served as the lead underwriter of the bond sales. “We’ve done a lot of deals with him, and the lenders have made a lot of money.”

Over the course of less than two weeks, more than a hundred institutions bought bonds, including Citibank, Deutsche Bank, Fidelity, and Putnam. He secured the financing he needed, and because he never took on any partners in the deal, the Rockets are all his.



Tilman Fertitta
@TilmanJFertitta

Hope everyone has a great #FathersDay - especially my dad, Vic.
#FathersDayWeekend #dad



3:51 PM · Jun 18, 2017

14 Reposts · 214 Likes

2019



Tilman Fertitta

@TilmanJFertitta

Listen.... @dmoney does NOT speak for the @HoustonRockets . Our presence in Tokyo is all about the promotion of the @NBA internationally and we are NOT a political organization. @espn <https://t.co/yNyQFtwTTi>

3:54 AM · Oct 5, 2019

274 Reposts · 978 Likes



Tilman Fertitta

@TilmanJFertitta

As the proud Chairman of the Houston Police Foundation I'd like to thank all who organized & attended the 12th Annual True Blue Gala hosted at the Fertitta family home last night. It was another spectacular event & a whole lot of fun on the Bayou. @HstnPoliceFndtn

@houstonpolice



4:32 AM · Nov 10, 2019

27 Reposts · 291 Likes

2020

Michael Hardy quoting Tilman Fertitta in Texas Monthly:

If I survive, the country survives. I can tell you this, I'll survive this before the country does. Okay? I'll out-survive the country. Just like I out-survived the banks in 1987, okay? The country will fold before I do. If the country is shut down come October or November, it'll be anarchy in the streets.

The same article, published in March mentions that Fertitta has been talking to politicians like the governor of Texas and the Trump advisor Larry Kudlow (who recently made headlines for evidently denying that racism exists). What does he tell them?

I say they've got to get the virus over with, and quick. ... You know how excited I would be if Trump said on April 12, "Everybody go back to work"?

When it's all over with, you can write an article [saying] that I survived and I didn't get any help from the government.

Of course, not long after that article, Fertitta did seek help from the government—he's [on video asking Donald Trump in person](#) to consider expanding the definition of restaurants that can receive bailouts.

The word is that 2020 has been particularly hard on Fertitta's bottom line. Cash is tight. (Most of the money he used to finance the Rockets purchase came from Citibank, Deutsche Bank, Fidelity, and Putnam.)

Financial stability is the primary thing NBA team governors can offer the league. Which begs re-visiting the question at the beginning of this story: "Why did the NBA let a fourth-generation member of a mafia family buy the Rockets?"

There are a lot of billionaires who would like to own NBA teams. It is curious that in 2017, well into the tenure of the strategic Adam Silver, Fertitta—with the baggage of his family name, a need for profoundly creative financing, and not even the high bid—made it to the front of the line.

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Thank you for reading TrueHoop! Tomorrow: David Thorpe watches overseas basketball to assess how the coronavirus affects gameplay.

BUSINESS

Big Fish

In the eighties Tilman Fertitta's seafood restaurants earned him millions while his hard-nosed business tactics earned him enemies. But these days the Galveston native is winning new respect in his hometown by standing up to the most powerful family on the Island.

By Robert Draper

May 1997



Last year Fertitta hosted a fundraiser for Bill Clinton's campaign.

Bruce Bennett

Tilman Fertitta came home to Galveston last November to deliver the oratorical equivalent of a belly flop in the punch bowl. Speaking to the city's business leaders at a chamber of commerce luncheon, the wealthy 39-year-old Houston-based restaurateur mesmerized them with his cut-the-crap rhetoric. "I've been to forty-four states in the last few years," Fertitta said, adding that as a tourist center, Galveston was "definitely lagging behind all the other areas I've visited. We don't have amusement parks. We don't have golf courses ... Our greatest asset is the beach, but it's also our greatest weakness." The beachfront motels were shabby; their signs were outdated—including, he noted, that of the Holiday Inn, which was owned by his father, Vic, who happened to be in attendance. The audience tittered nervously, as it did when Fertitta brazenly dismissed the Woodlands resort, owned by Galveston patron saint George Mitchell, as a lesser tourist destination "just sitting up there amongst a bunch of trees in north Houston."

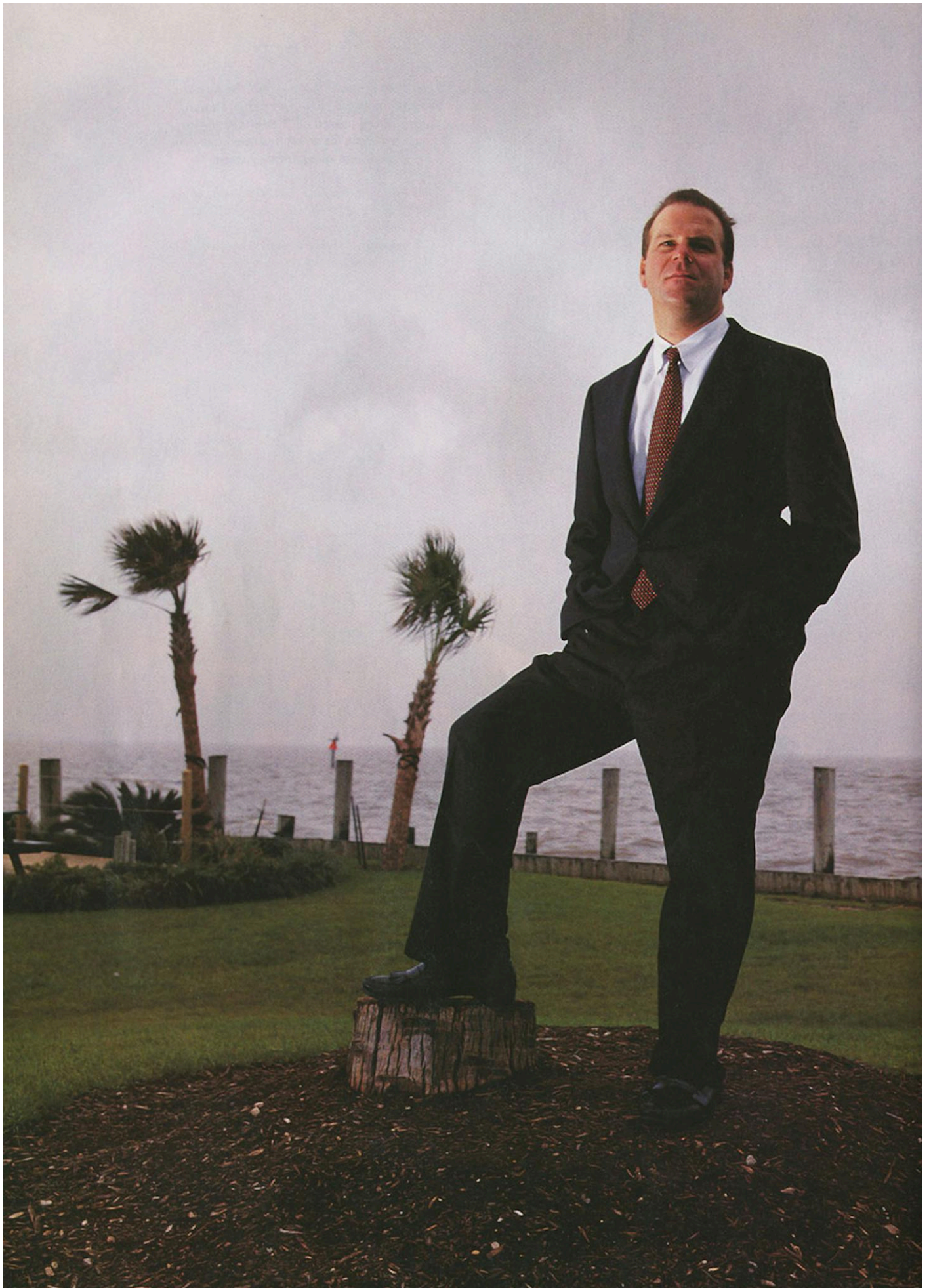
But the CEO of the \$500 million Landry's Seafood Restaurants chain saved his choicest broadsides for that mightiest of Galveston powers, the \$500 million Moody Foundation. Perfectly unbothered that the luncheon was taking place at the Moody Gardens Convention Center, Fertitta belittled the Moody family's civic spirit. "Remember, the foundation *has* to give the money away," he said. Yet the Moodys' latest project wasn't a new park, beachfront restoration, or other needed endeavor. Rather, it involved the construction of a three-hundred-room hotel on the grounds of Moody Gardens and was a venture that was "doing nobody any favors," other than Bobby Moody, whose company, Gal-Tex Hotel Corporation, would profit from managing the hotel. The whole deal reeked of greed—and, for that matter, unfairness, Fertitta insisted. The Moodys' new "nonprofit" hotel, with its tax exemptions and favorable location at Moody Gardens, would cripple the taxpaying hotels, two of which were Fertitta's. "We're sending the wrong message to the rest of the United States," he warned. "You're never going to get major developers in here. We're saying to them, 'Stay out of Galveston.'"

The audience, as one, gulped. "I will not let the Moody Foundation compete unfairly without a fight," Fertitta vowed. He was already suing the Moodys

and the city over the matter, but he didn't intend to stop there. Noting that a U.S. House Ways and Means subcommittee would be investigating tax-exempt organizations, Fertitta promised, "I plan to be right in the middle of it."

The speech was classic Tilman Fertitta, brazen to the point of insolence yet impossible to wave off—and, in the end, rather breathtaking. The audience gave him a standing ovation. Afterward, a chamber member was heard to gush to the speaker, "How do you get your pants on in the morning with those big balls of yours?" Even Fertitta seemed dizzied by his performance. "I've never felt so *right* in all my life," he told his father later.

It was an altogether new sensation for a surviving warrior of the eighties' take-the-money-and-run amorality. During that decade, Tilman Fertitta was known more for his nerve and his artful dodging than for his principles. By the dawn of the nineties he would emerge unscathed with an empire as reflective of his day as insurance and energy were of the Moody and Mitchell era. Now he was a full-blown player, Houston's most dynamic young businessman, a Wall Street darling, and a friend of President Bill Clinton's. But he was nobody's hero, nor would he be, until he came home to Galveston as an avenging angel, where he could be not only rich but right.



His battle with the Moodys over a local hotel development is classic Tillman Fertitta: brazen to the point of insolence but impossible to disregard.

During my ten or so visits with Fertitta, I couldn't help but notice how the electric braggadocio of his monologues would suddenly give way to some blasé slogan that would seek to remind me that I was in the presence of a good guy. "Do the right thing," he would interject. And, "It's nice to be important, but it's more important to be nice." Beneath the gruff, predatory exterior lurks a man who very much wants those around him to think the best of him. Of course, since Fertitta built Landry's into the second-biggest seafood chain in America (after Red Lobster), his life has become cluttered with unctuous suitors who will cut him all manner of slack. Fertitta became identified with the Democratic party not because of his political views, which are generally conservative, but, he says, because "the Democrats embraced me." Clinton's party saw in Fertitta not so much a kindred spirit as a clean-cut young family man who wasn't a personal-injury lawyer. Here was a guy whose image and pocketbook the Democrats could exploit for decades to come. So far, Fertitta hasn't complained. He has been Clinton's guest at the White House four times.

If Fertitta, with his guileless patter and asymmetrical grin, were one of his signature restaurant's marquee signs, it would blare out, "Work In Progress." He is given to exclaiming in wonderment, "I'm so young." But this apparent vulnerability is nothing more than a seductive front. For even as he molds himself into Citizen Fertitta, CEO Fertitta remains a shrewd hustler with business instincts that are chillingly acute. Ever since his days as a junior high school kid selling candy and gum to his classmates at a markup, Fertitta has known his calling. "I can't draw a stick person," he acknowledges. "I can't play a musical instrument. But I've always had a knack for making money."

He was never merely a wage earner, though. Even as a fourteen-year-old kid working the floor of his father's Galveston restaurant, Pier 23, young Tilman could discern what made a business successful. Remembers Vic Fertitta, an affable lug whose voice assumes an almost worshipful tremor when speaking of his middle son: "Tilman would tell me, 'Daddy, the food is taking too long

coming out of the kitchen. It should all come out in eight to twelve minutes.’ One Friday night two waitresses got in a fight. He punched the clock for both of them, fired them, and took over their stations, four tables each. That’s when I knew he was different.”



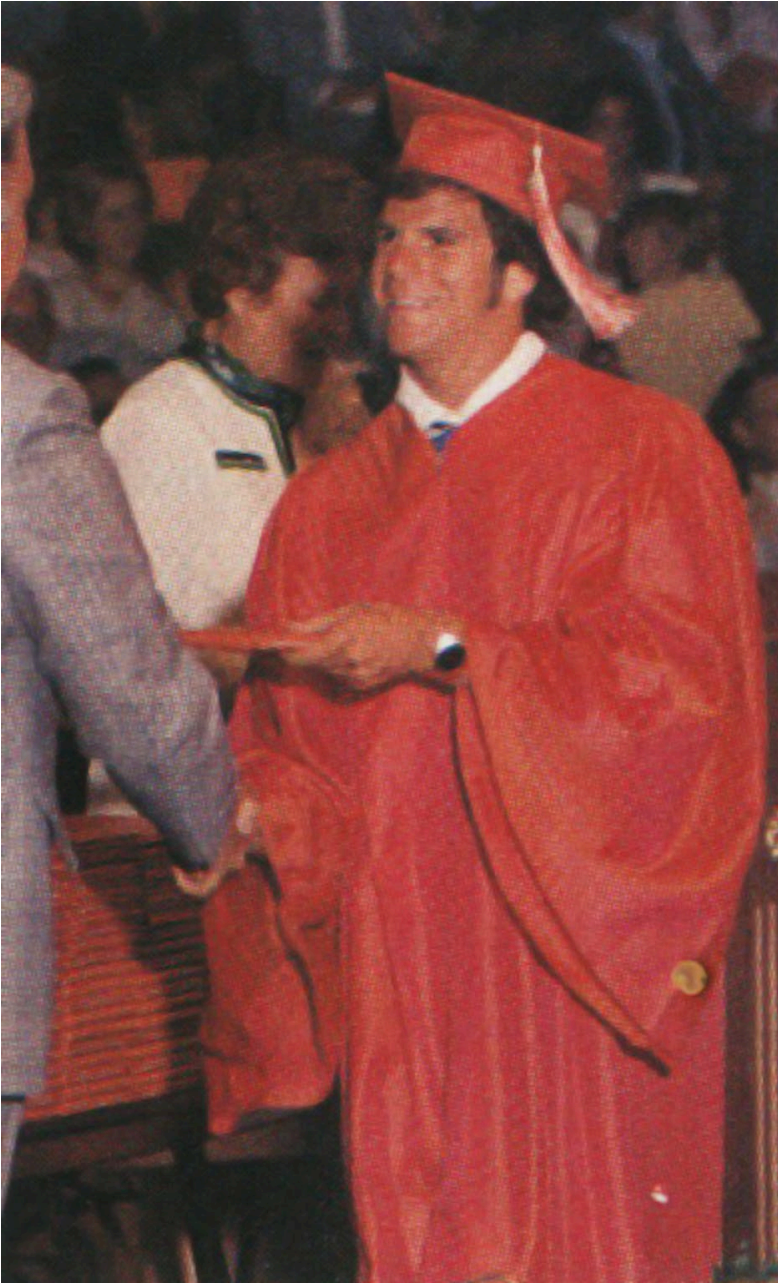
Fertitta’s great-uncle Anthony (left) and grandfather Vic Sr. ran Galveston casinos for the Maceo crime family in the fifties.

In 1974 the Fertittas relocated to the west Houston suburbs, and Tilman attended Westchester High School, the same one I did. I remember him as a swarthy guy who threw his weight around and didn’t settle for anything second-rate. He drove a Mustang convertible, went after the flashiest of girls, and when the football coaches told him he would be playing on the offensive line rather than at running back, he quit the team. School didn’t much interest him, as his grades reflected. On our newspaper staff, he sold ads to neighborhood businesses—drawing a commission for his trouble, naturally—and otherwise sat in the back of the classroom, quietly researching the stock market. Few of us paid him any mind or thought we had any reason to.

(Those who did include Steve Riley, now Fertitta's chief of operations for the Joe's Crab Shack division, and junior high school buddy Richard Ervin, now the vice president of restaurant operations for Landry's.)

After spending two years at college to appease his parents, Fertitta set out to earn his fortune. In 1978, inspired by a cousin's clothing manufacturing business in Dallas, he opened a women's ready-to-wear shop stocked with samples he acquired on the cheap from the Dallas Apparel Mart. Business wasn't bad, but the pace was too slow, the possibilities too narrow. His ambitions wandered next door to a shop run by a couple who distributed Shaklee vitamins. They weren't raking it in, but they didn't see the angle: "The way to sell these vitamins wasn't door-to-door or through distributors, but to open up Shaklee stores," Fertitta recalls. "Back then all you had to do was walk into some new strip center with the first and last months' rent. I opened up Shaklee stores all over Houston for about fifteen to twenty thousand dollars."

It was a small-time gig, but it was not without its rewards. Fertitta learned how to give a sales talk, was provided with a bonus Cadillac from Shaklee for his exemplary hawking, and most important, discovered the next bandwagon. While visiting one of his Shaklee stores, he noticed kids filing into a video arcade to play Pac-Man games. Fertitta ambled into the arcade, squeezed through the gaggle of juveniles, and asked the manager, "Say, how do you go about getting these machines?" He then contacted the manufacturer, put 20 percent down, financed the remainder, and thereafter roamed greater Houston, proposing to place a couple of video games at this hotel or that newsstand and split the pot with the proprietors. By 1983 each of his four hundred or so games was earning him an average of \$200 a week.



Tillman graduated from Houston's Westchester High School but dropped out of college.

The twentyish college dropout was rolling in it, and he flashed it wherever possible. In 1986 Fertitta showed up to our ten-year high school reunion in a limousine. He acquired Rolexes, bought into the Houston Rockets as a limited partner, and threw a budget-busting soirée at his new Memorial-area mansion (in honor of football coach Jack Pardee), which featured a theater and, of course, a video arcade. The house was custom-built, courtesy of Fertitta Construction, the company he had founded in 1982. Like half of Houston, Fertitta was riding Boomtown's real estate wave, poised to fall on his highly leveraged butt. Such was the arrogance of the era that when the

market cratered and Fertitta found himself in a restaurant scribbling his debts on a linen napkin and running out of room after \$10 million, he could manage a laugh and a ticket to Las Vegas. As Fertitta puts it, “My problems were big problems, not little problems. I still drove a Mercedes. I still lived well.”

Three crucial factors converged to deliver him from the tarpit of the eighties and place him in the blissful catbird seat he occupies today. The first was the stay of execution granted to all high rollers when nearly every major bank in Texas failed. Then, when some 25 creditors filed suit against him, Fertitta turned to a cousin’s law firm, Stumpf and Falgout, plucked from the ranks a deceptively soft-faced young attorney named Steven Scheinthal, and assigned him the task of keeping the wolves at bay. Employing the usual host of maneuvers that have endeared the legal profession to so many people, Scheinthal delayed, then denied, then delayed some more before at last negotiating settlements that amounted to a fraction of the original debts. Between the collapse of the Texas banking industry and the heroics of his attorney (who today is a vice president and the general counsel of Landry’s), Fertitta had bought time, and at a discount.

But to emerge free and clear, he needed cash flow. Fertitta had wisely hung on to his video games, but the Pac-Man craze was slowly going the way of the Hula Hoop and the pet rock. That business and a few other piddling revenue streams weren’t going to fill the multimillion-dollar hole Fertitta had dug. Teetering on despair, he considered giving it all up if a certain lender would let him hang on to \$1 million. When the bank had the gall to impose fees that would cut into Fertitta’s remaining million, the kid reached for his cojones, said screw you, and went looking for an unsuspecting savior—who turned out to be Bill and Floyd Landry.

The Landry brothers, along with several running buddies from their hometown of Lafayette, Louisiana, had taken Houston by storm in the late seventies with authentic Cajun restaurants like Willie G’s, near the Galleria, and the first Landry’s, on the far west side of town. But by 1986 the partnership had become frayed by ill feelings, and nearly all of the partners

wanted to sell out. An acquaintance of Bill Landry's named Angelo Dispensa conveyed this information to his cousin, one Tilman Fertitta, who had worked briefly at a Landry's establishment as a college student and knew what kind of business they did. Having just sold his interest in the ill-advised construction of Galveston's Key Largo Hotel to his partner and cousin, Frank Fertitta, for \$589,000, Fertitta had the \$400,000 up-front cash he needed to buy out Bill Landry and most of his cohorts on December 31, 1986. Fertitta told the sole remaining partner, Denis Wilson, "I'm not a restaurant guy. You run the operations, and I'll run the office."

Their partnership proved to be one from hell. According to Wilson, the new president couldn't resist intruding on the operations side and on one occasion came into the kitchen and threw a plate because it didn't have enough butter on it. Fertitta counters that Wilson was a sullen presence who spent much of his time in the office ordering his secretary to bring him cups of coffee. Both concur, however, that near the end of 1987, Fertitta made sure that Wilson knew he intended to buy him out, no matter what it took. Wilson received \$250,000 in cash up front, but it would cost him \$120,000 in legal fees to collect most of the remaining \$600,000. The debt-juggling continued, and Fertitta raced the clock like a man aflame.

In hindsight, he almost made it look easy. Despite pronouncements from food wags that Willie G's would suffer without the Landry touch, Fertitta maintained an annual \$4 million gross while trimming expenses. The cash flow from Willie G's, combined with heavily discounted package loans from the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC), kept his head just above water. Meanwhile, his behind-the-scenes construction genius, Al Jaksa, demonstrated a proficiency at building new restaurants quickly and cheaply. Fertitta's first two Landry's expansions, both in Houston, suffered virtual crib death: One on Westheimer went bankrupt, and one on Shepherd he abandoned in the middle of the night. Hemmed in by a sudden proliferation of restaurants from the local Pappas chain, Fertitta turned away from the Bayou City: He opened locations on the Galveston Seawall, in downtown San Antonio, in Corpus Christi, and on the picturesque waterfront of Kemah, an

overnight sensation that, he now acknowledges, “took us to a whole new level.”

Fertitta began to hit his stride as an operations man. Though today he terms himself a creator, the restaurants he fashioned are the product of a consolidator. He hung on to the names—suing Floyd and Bill Landry when they attempted to open restaurants featuring their last name or the name of their father, Willie G—but nothing else was sacred. He squeezed the Cajun spicing from the dishes (“Cajun food was a fad,” he says), scrubbed away the funky interior of Willie G’s, and starched the waitstaff’s appearance. At Kemah he introduced the first of his neon marquee signs, which bore a suspicious resemblance to the marquee of the Bookstop across the street from the ill-fated Landry’s on Shepherd. The Galveston and Kemah locations taught Fertitta that patrons liked to gaze out at the water while they ate their seafood, a gambit he applied to three of his next four expansions.

What a long, strange trip it was. Tilman Fertitta had blazed and swerved like a heat-seeking missile in a decadelong search for his pot of gold. And here it was, in a middlebrow market of consumers who wouldn’t be caught dead in a Red Lobster but would go gaga over studiously unspectacular seafood served in proximity to bodies of water—like Austin’s Town Lake—that hadn’t yielded an edible fish since the Bronze Age. Ah, but the system worked. In 1991 Fertitta paid a final visit to the FDIC office. He handed over a check for \$2 million and was officially pronounced debt-free. What a country, he must have thought as he strolled out into the light—all zeroed out and nowhere to go but up. Now he could shed his eighties Teflon and dare to believe in a place called Hope.

Is it too late to mention that I like the guy? Forget, for a moment, the trail of tears somewhere back yonder. Texas was civilized by daredevils like Tilman Fertitta who put everything they had on the line and wouldn’t back down. “While people sit around and talk about doing something,” he likes to say, “I go out and do it.” This January he snatched up the entire Kemah waterfront, an enviable acquisition anyone else could’ve done—but didn’t. “I’ve been hearing Houstonians talk about doing a waterfront deal on Buffalo Bayou for

the past thirty years,” Fertitta snickers. “I’m gonna have Kemah finished and looking great while they’re still talking about it.”

But here’s something else. Today Fertitta is a gracious winner, rehiring people he fired years ago, richly rewarding those who hung tough with him, contributing thousands to the University of Houston and the University of Texas Medical Branch’s breast-imaging program, and no longer given to tacky displays of prosperity. His eight-thousand-square-foot Memorial home is pleasant enough. He’s married now, to an attractive and unpretentious woman named Paige, and he says he’s determined not to spoil his two young sons (ages two and four), who have already flown all over America, though never once on a commercial plane.

Since Landry’s first public offering in 1992, the acquisitions of Joe’s Crab Shack in 1994 and the Crab House in 1996 have spread his empire to more than ninety properties in 28 states. Yet despite his feed-the-masses-not-the-classes proclamations, Fertitta has begun to show an interest in memorable dining, recently hiring respected Houston chef Kathy Ruiz to revamp his menus. In late 1995 he acquired from George Mitchell 22 acres of Galveston beachfront—including not only Mitchell’s San Luis Hotel but also the old Key Largo, which his cousin Frank had sold to Mitchell in 1987. Fertitta pumped millions into the sagging San Luis, added the finest landscaping touches the Seawall had seen in decades, and even opened up a first-class steakhouse at the San Luis, about which he declares, “I don’t give a s—t what it costs me. I want to serve the best meat there is.”

Fertitta with the executive staff of Landry’s.

This is the Tilman Fertitta he always wanted to be. One of the good guys. Doesn’t smoke, seldom drinks, and is anti-drug to the point of randomly testing his 12,000 employees. Sees something of himself in Bill Clinton, who “was doing deals in the eighties just like the rest of us—I can’t sit and judge,” but who “really does care about poor people, black people, education.” During one of his private moments with Clinton, Fertitta broke from his

industry and advised the president that an increase in the minimum wage wouldn't lay waste small businesses, and anyway, it was the right thing to do.

It astounds him, then, to learn that so many people seem to think he's so wrong, so nasty, such a jerk. Sure, his management style could be termed thumbs-on, and it's true that at his Kemah and San Antonio locations he accused waiters of throwing out the silverware with the food scraps and dumped the garbage cans onto the kitchen floor to prove his point. But he made a point of tipping the busboys and dishwashers after they cleaned up the mess. And, yes, there he was at the San Luis, personally showing the bellhops how to hold the door open and greet the customer. "I'm a teacher," he says, defending himself. "I'll take you to a different level." Or he'll show you the door, as he did when he summarily fired seventy employees the day after he took over Mitchell's hotel. But their jobs were expendable and that's business, so why hold that against the boss?

And why hold it against Fertitta that, when he first moved a Landry's into Kemah, he signed a lease that instructed the tenant not to open another seafood restaurant within a five-mile radius . . . and then, a few years later, opened a Joe's Crab Shack right next door? Hey, the contract was ambiguously worded! Fertitta wasn't the "tenant," Landry's was! And anyway, the landlord has been placated with a new contract, so why should anyone else complain? The same with Frans Gillebaard, who sold his three Kemah waterfront restaurants to Fertitta in January. He got in excess of \$10 million on the deal. Why should he be offended that Fertitta had a squadron of two dozen employees, including general counsel Scheinthal, descend upon the properties at midnight the day of the closing to make sure that Gillebaard didn't abscond with some of the furniture? That's just good business. Instead of reviling Fertitta for living large in the eighties even as he was jacking around his creditors, why didn't they thank him for adhering to the final settlement terms, unlike other fat cats he could name? Why not emulate him instead of trashing his name all over town, telling every loser on a barstool that Citizen Fertitta was nothing more than a nefarious mobster?

That was what the malcontents always fell back on. Fertitta, with his in-your-face, hot-blooded Italian disposition, had to be a wiseguy. Mob money got him in, mob money bailed him out, they would claim. After all, they'd say, wasn't the arcade business controlled by the Mafia? Didn't his Key Largo partner, cousin Frank, own three casinos in Vegas? And just what did Fertitta intend to do with all that property in Galveston and Kemah, if not make it a haven for gambling thugs? Because you knew, didn't you, about his family . . .

"It's the one thing that gets to him," sighs his father, Vic. "Because my son is a control freak, and this is the one thing he can't control." How do you prove the negative? Dean Witter vetted his finances before green-lighting the public offering of Landry's, and the Secret Service all but turned his underwear inside out before letting him host a fundraiser for Clinton last September. I've seen his architect's blueprints for the Kemah development, and the closest thing to a casino that's in the works is a Ferris wheel for kids. And for what it's worth, his temperament and his last name aside, Tilman Fertitta is about as Italian as Hakeem Olajuwon.

But his great-great-uncles, Palermo emigrants Rose and Sam Maceo, are another matter. Every Galvestonian knows the legend of the Maceo brothers: local barbers who became bootleggers and then in 1926 opened up the Hollywood Dinner Club and later the Balinese Room—complete with air conditioning (a rarity in those days), glorious food, big-time entertainers like Fred Astaire and Guy Lombardo, and a fully loaded casino. Genteel Sam and whip-smart Rose brought a glamorous cachet to the Island, kept out the Chicago mob, discouraged the residents from gambling, donated to charities great and small, and propped up the town's economy—which helps explain why many still view the wide-open era as Galveston's moment of greatest glory.

Yet what the Maceos ran for thirty years was indisputably an organized-crime syndicate. The brothers' slot machines were ubiquitous, and their homemade booze was distilled and bottled in a large Galveston warehouse. They could defy the law because the local lawmen were on their payroll—"Paid them off, every month, in cash," according to 85-year-old Pete

Salvato, a close ally of the Maceos who operated casinos in the Galveston County town of Dickinson. “They used the law to chase the competition out of town.” Judges and politicians were equally compromised. Additionally, the Maceos owned a number of legitimate local businesses—a fish house, a dairy, a trucking company, a concrete-mixing company—and applied their muscle to ensure that these industries as well remained under their control.

The Maceo era came to an end on June 19, 1957, when state attorney general Will Wilson filed civil action against the brothers and their lieutenants—including their nephews Victor and Anthony Fertitta. Six days later Tilman was born.

Fertitta was two when his great-uncle Anthony moved off to Las Vegas, three when his grandfather Victor died. In Houston, that tenuous connection was enough to make him a mafioso. But in Galveston, people took a different view of things. There, the Maceos and Fertittas were public-spirited, instinctively charitable gentlemen whose word was their bond. Not only were they not evildoers, they were everything a hero should be. Which was, in the view of many Islanders, everything a Moody was not.

A historian would be hard-pressed to find another Texas family that has given so much away only to be so hated. The Moodys have been a public relations disaster ever since Colonel Will Moody, Sr., evaluated the Great Storm of 1900 thusly to his son: “The fewer people on the Island, the better the hunting and fishing will be for us.” Unlike the Sealys, who provided the first big bequest for Galveston’s number one employer, the University of Texas Medical Branch; or the Kempners, whose generosity has always been discreet yet profound; or George Mitchell, whose revival of the Strand district was a magnificent labor of love; or for that matter the Maceos—unlike the other Galveston scions, the Colonel’s tribe has always seemed to give begrudgingly, even bitterly, and with the expectation of a payback.

Colonel Moody’s great-grandchildren may be the most roundly despised generation yet. Most notably, Shearn Moody, Jr., was carted off to prison in the late eighties for receiving kickbacks from recipients of questionable Moody Foundation grants (and was pronounced the sleaziest man in Texas

on the cover of this magazine). Shearn is now dead, leaving his brother Bobby to bear the town's scorn. He's an easy target, being almost Garbo-esque in his elusiveness—the better, he says, to avoid the attention of tax assessors and kidnappers. Instead, Moody leaves it up to his lieutenants, attorney Buddy Herz and brother-in-law Doug McLeod, to browbeat local politicians and the media into giving Moody whatever they say he wants. *The Galveston County Daily News* has shown considerable fortitude in speaking its mind, but city officials have continually indulged Moody's wishes—because, as one frustrated ex-official observes, “By and large, a person isn't going to speak up against the people who provide. So the Moodys have pretty much had their way.”

Fertitta and his wife, Paige (left), celebrate Mardi Gras with Galveston patron saint George Mitchell and his wife, Cynthia.

But has that way always come at the expense of Galveston? “At the Moody Foundation, we can give anywhere in the state we want,” Bobby Moody reminded me one afternoon over lunch. “But over the last thirty years, we have committed maybe \$380 million in Galveston.” He pulled out a clipping from that morning's newspaper that discussed the imminent opening of a Texas A&M marine biology school in Galveston—made possible, he informed me, by a \$1.75 million matching grant by the Moody Foundation. The Moodys started putting money into the Strand long before Mitchell got there, he pointed out. And then there was Moody Gardens, which was founded in 1983 to rehabilitate victims of head injuries, such as Bobby's son Russ, but was now one of Galveston's greatest tourist attractions, with a IMAX 3D theater, a rain forest, and soon a NASA space museum and an aquarium. But in the meantime, he reminded me, “The Moody Foundation is building a convention center at Moody Gardens at no cost to the city.”

“But this hotel you're building next to the convention center,” I said, interrupting him. “Leaving aside its merits, isn't Fertitta right that building a hotel that's exempt from federal and ad valorem taxes, has no debt service, gets subsidized by the city, and can offer all those attractions at Moody

Gardens for free— isn't he right that it puts hotels like his at an unfair competitive disadvantage?" Moody dropped his fork softly, folded his hands, and crinkled his left eye in thought. Finally he said, "Well, I don't think Mr. Fertitta is going to have to pay federal income tax either, because I don't think he'll generate a profit on his hotel investment in the first place."

And that was all Bobby Moody had to say on that subject.

Fertitta didn't come home to Galveston and invest \$40 million to be treated like a chump. The guy who was responsible for Vice President Al Gore's visit to the Island and ornamented the Seawall with his gleaming restaurants and his lavish San Luis redesign wasn't going to let Bobby Moody make a mockery of him. When Fertitta learned, just months after buying the San Luis complex from Mitchell for \$16 million, that the Moody Foundation would soon be breaking ground on the "nonprofit" hotel it had originally slated for construction in 2004, he informed the Moody camp of his intention to sue if the plans weren't shelved. They weren't, so he did. On November 14, six days after he filed suit, he railed against the Moodys at the chamber of commerce luncheon held on Moody property. Moody attorney Buddy Herz responded the next day by threatening to pull the family's chamber memberships for permitting such an attack on hallowed grounds. The battle was joined.

Overnight, it seemed, Fertitta became a local hero. The *Daily News'* letters page was crammed with missives by Islanders who saw the Maceo descendant as a giant-killer. Even before the lawsuit, editor-publisher Dolph Tillotson had devoted a special section to the Fertitta-Moody dispute; he recalls, "Buddy Herz argued the case that the Moodys had done wonderful things for Galveston and this would damage relations, so we shouldn't do the stories." Tillotson ran them anyway, siding with Fertitta's concerns in an editorial. Later, George Mitchell expressed his support for Fertitta, creating what Herz publicly termed "an unholy alliance."

In 1995 Fertitta bought the San Luis Hotel from Mitchell and refurbished it.

In the bars and shops of downtown Galveston, people who didn't care much one way or the other about convention centers or hotels nonetheless saw what the controversy symbolized. The big old dog was getting bit, and the Islanders I talked to were loving it. No one, of course, was loving it as much as Tilman Fertitta. Letters were pouring into his office from folks he had never met. They saw him as a fresh voice, an agent for change, as his buddy Clinton would have it. Not that Fertitta wanted to become the little people's standard-bearer on the Island. He had other fish to fry, as it were. "Every morning," he would often tell me, "the Moodys get up, and this is what they think about all day long. And I think about it maybe twenty, thirty minutes a day."

Still, it wasn't a bad way to kill twenty minutes, sitting in the hero's seat. Since the lawsuit had been filed, Moody, Mitchell, and Fertitta—the Big Three in current Galveston parlance—had been negotiating a compromise. At the end of one afternoon, Fertitta discussed the tentative settlement terms with me, lovingly ticking off each concession granted by the Moodys: offering equivalent discounts on attractions to all the other hotels, free transport from the other hotels to the new convention center, changing the name from Moody Gardens Convention Center to Galveston Island Convention Center, on and on, with more fine-tuning to be done.

"They fought us on everything," he said, leaning back behind his desk. "I didn't kick their ass, but I made them compromise for the first time in a hundred years. And these concessions are for everyone, not just me. All the other hotel operators who wouldn't stand up—it's for them too. Anyway," he continued, "once the agreement is finalized, we will do the right thing and we will drop the lawsuit. But they know that this guy is gonna be watching everything they do."

But even Fertitta didn't seem to believe that. Spend the rest of his years monitoring Bobby Moody when he had so much left to do? He had the Kemah waterfront to develop, a pro sports franchise to acquire, maybe even a future in politics. For now, he had 12,000 employees to take to a different level and all those shareholders to appease. Fellow CEOs were enlisting his

support on various legislative issues. Joe Kennedy's people had talked him into hosting a party for the Boston congressman a couple of weeks back. On top of everything else, he'd promised Paige and his two sons a week at their home in the ski resort of Beaver Creek, Colorado, and it would be a miracle if he could sustain two hours on the slopes without a conference call. A guy could grow old doing the right thing.

"I'll tell you the truth," Tilman Fertitta sighed. "We had more fun in the eighties. We laughed a lot easier." He managed a laugh, for nostalgia's sake.



(Move to ...)



Sunday, July 11, 2010

Fertitta Family's Organized Crime History Offers Clues to Current Station Casinos Crisis

Chapter One: The Maceos and Fertittas establish rackets and roots in Texas:

By: Rich Bergeron

CLICK ON THE THUMBNAILS BELOW TO SEE THE IMAGES AT FULL SIZE



Sam and Rosario (Rose) Maceo blossomed from humble Italian-born barbers to booming businessmen overseeing a vast array of organized crime operations from prohibition bootlegging to the gambling boom. It is well documented that back in his day Sam Maceo reported to Carlos Marcello of New Orleans, and for years New Orleans was the highest grossing entity of all the Italian based crime families—more than NY or Chicago.

There is a great writeup about the Maceos and Fertittas early Texas days [in this Texas Ranger Dispatch](#).

Ironically, many folks seem to remember mob rule under Maceo-Fertitta control in Galveston as very safe and secure. The same sort of “Mafia nostalgia” exists in Vegas these days since corporate control has taken the “family” out of many local businesses in more ways than one. I’ve heard of safety in numbers and mob rule, but mob safety? Not even other more well-known territorial Mafia Icons like Al Capone could muscle in on Galveston’s rackets with these guys in charge. Apparently, everything was OK in Galveston as long as the Maceos and Fertittas kept their dirty work hidden in the shadows. They peddled influence with politicians and police, and the public didn’t seem to complain much. It was often the patrons themselves at places like the Balinese Room who helped hide the gambling equipment from the Texas Rangers who would eventually bring gambling to a screeching halt in Galveston. While they lasted, though, many remember those old Texas times as a little slice of Heaven while the rest of the country was in shambles:

For four decades, the Maceos and their partners ruled Galveston and, in the process, reaped a king's ransom in profits. In that time, few people ever made any serious attempts to shut them down. Why would they? People, then as now, get whatever law enforcement they want, and the people of Galveston had no problems with gamblers, bootleggers, or prostitutes. There was a worldwide depression everywhere but in Galveston, where money flowed as freely as the ocean that lapped its shores.

Profits were so huge that northern mobsters were soon attracted. From New York, Albert Anastasia, the lord high executioner of Murder, Inc., delivered inquiries to the brothers. From Chicago, Al Capone sent Frank “the Enforcer” Nitti to query about becoming “partners” with the Maceos. Rose told both politely, but with no room for misunderstanding, “Thanks, but no thanks.”⁹

At one time, twenty-five hundred islanders worked for the Maceo brothers. The two men ran clean games, and crime was virtually unheard of. In Galveston, it was said that no citizens bothered to lock their homes, and it was safe to walk any part of the city at any hour. Papa Rose had his Night Riders patrolling the county to insure it remained safe. It was said that the Maceo’s bookkeeper Sam “Books” Serio often walked without the protection of a bodyguard from the Maceo’s downtown headquarters at the Turf Club⁹ to the bank. He could be carrying a million dollars in cash in his briefcase, and no one ever dared to bother him.¹⁰

The Maceo brothers were very well respected and treated their business customers with the utmost courtesy. They were also experts at hiding their income and their illegal activities. When the heat finally came down on the family enterprise only one bean counter, Sam “Books” Serio, would come forward while every other member of the conspiracy remained silent. Serio reported to authorities in 1951 that the enterprising family outfit took in over \$3.5 million in fiscal year 1950. Three of the family’s bosses were Fertittas at the time: Frank J. Fertitta Sr., Victor J. Fertitta, and Anthony J. Fertitta. 23 indictments came down against the Maceos, Fertittas and many of their other associates this time. But there were no convictions in the long run. The Fertittas and Maceos maintained an iron grip on their illegal gaming enterprises in Galveston until long after both Sam and Rosario Maceo were in their graves. When Texas Rangers finally broke the back of the Texas mob in Galveston, it was a long abandoned Maceo family property that actually proved to be the scene of one of the biggest breaks in the case. In the summer of 1957, Sam Maceo’s Hollywood Supper Club became a slot machine storage area while Texas Rangers squatted in all the local casinos trying to dissuade customers from sticking around while they snooped around for whatever clues they could find to bring down the operation:

Sillavan and a couple of the attorney general's people happened to check on the Hollywood Supper Club, they were stunned. Inside were slot machines, pinball machines, roulette tables, and blackjack tables stacked to the ceiling.³⁰

Pete Rogers and Ed Gooding were working together when two attorney general agents ran up to them exclaiming, "Man, we've found their stash!" Rogers and Gooding took one look themselves and called Captain Klevenhagen in Houston. After listening to what had been found, the captain highballed it to Galveston. As soon as he got there, he and Gooding headed straight for the old Hollywood Supper Club, where they met Ranger Rogers and several men from the attorney general's office.³¹

The agents had literally hit the jackpot: 1.2 million dollars—that is 1957 dollars—in gambling equipment. There were fifteen hundred slot machines and numerous roulette wheels, blackjack tables, and dice tables. Box after box of chips and dice were also found. Many of the chips were of \$100 denominations, with Balinese Room inscribed on them.

The discovery in the Hollywood Supper Club seemed to open Pandora's box. Within a week, the Rangers confiscated more than \$2,000,000 in gambling equipment.³² As Ranger Gooding described in his book, "I remember it all as though it were yesterday. As we stood there looking at the mountain of slot machines, I heard Captain Klevenhagen mutter to himself, 'Man, I don't know what in the world I'll ever do with all this stuff. I wish I had a boat big enough to haul it out in the Gulf, and just dump it'."



The over-ambitious politicians who wanted to publicize the bust actually did haul a bunch of the slot machines into the Gulf of Mexico and dumped them ceremoniously for a bevy of press to snap some opportunistic photos and write glowing stories about the successful operation. Later on the move proved to be a political disaster as not all of the machines sank. The Army Corps of Engineers fumed about the machines fouling their waters. Still, it was the beginning of the end for gambling in Galveston.

Here's a concise history of Sam and Rosario Maceo's reign over Texas rackets:

http://www.bookrags.com/wiki/Sam_and_Rosario_Maceo

Eventually Texas gambling was made obsolete by the blossoming desert flower called Las Vegas, and Mob interests began to focus intently on the area with easy access to massive Teamster loans. Yet, that wasn't the only money going into these shady Vegas Mafia expansion operations. If you want to

go deep into the conspiracy theories and enjoy reading a great deal of spastic, disorganized JFK assassination forum posts, go here:

<http://educationforum.ipbhost.com/index.php?act=Print&client=printer&f=126&t=5892>

<http://www.mail-archive.com/ctrl@listserv.aol.com/msg113059.html>

<http://educationforum.ipbhost.com/lofiversion/index.php/t6339.html>

What Sam and Rosario Maceo were able to do with their sway over the Texas illegal rackets and their shrewd business tactics, the Fertittas have since taken to a whole new level. Old habits never die, especially proven ones. More often than not the old ways simply adapt with the changing times.

It is important to look at the full spectrum of this family and their part in the history of illicit and illegal profiteering in America. When you fully examine the foundation the Fertittas' business empire is built on, you have to wonder how it could ever be possible to completely shake the Mafia influence on the family and its business strategies. Even at this late stage in the game while the latest Fertitta brothers Lorenzo and Frank III are viewed by much of the the public as smart, upstanding businessmen with no more Mob ties, they operate with the kind of overzealous impunity that only “connected guys” can muster. They rule the roost in Vegas with bullish bravado, and their role in the Xyience bankruptcy being tied to the Global Cash Access Holdings skimming scandal reveals the potential for a whole new conspiracy that hasn't yet been fully explored.

And that brings us to the next chapter of the family history: The Vegas pioneering of Frank Fertitta, Jr. and his role in skimming the take at the Fremont Hotel. In the next installment, we'll look at what saved Frank Junior from going to jail with all his buddies when the FBI's “Strawman” investigations ravaged mob rule in Vegas. We'll look at what finally broke Frank Junior and led him to give up control of the family business to his son Frank III (Frankie “Three Sticks”). We'll explore how the Fertitta empire came to pass, built on a one-dollar transaction between friends. We'll trace Frank Junior's steps from his 1960 arrival in Vegas to his present day behind the scenes role as a Fertitta Enterprises and Station Casinos consultant and a major republican party influence peddler. We'll also touch on how the sins of the father wound up setting the stage for the sons becoming ruthless business tycoons. We'll get into how Missouri gaming authorities put Frank Junior under such a microscope that he was forced to forget about doing business there on his own. He signed the business over to Frank III and may have even made his old friend Carl Thomas disappear to prevent him from telling Missouri gaming officials what he knew about Frank Junior's skimming at the Fremont. We'll rehash how Frank Junior's skimming operation is portrayed in the movie Casino and touch on how the Global Cash Access connection represents the possibility of a worldwide skimming enterprise masterminded by the Fertittas and the GCA castoffs who bankrupted Xyience for them.

We will also assess where the Fertittas are at today with [Station Casinos nearing collapse and their](#)

[Vegas piggy bank shattered](#). They may just be down to their last pennies, and bankruptcy appears imminent. The way the news is coming out piecemeal and because the Fertittas seem to be scrambling to screw with their financing arrangement leads me to believe that they are determined to prevent a bankruptcy, but it may not be up to them. If it doesn't come from their own pockets and selling off other major Fertitta Enterprises assets, the rescue package that saves Station Casinos will have to come from someone with even bigger profit margins and deeper pockets.

Unlike the Texas ranger threat that led to the family's Texas exodus (only Tillman Fertitta stuck it out and prospered there) and the deaths in the family that helped along the collapse of the illegal infrastructure there, in Vegas the Fertittas are going to be vanquished by their own insatiable greed and want for more. Their Vegas luck seems to have run out, even though they followed the same principles that allowed their ancestors Sam and Rosario Maceo to die free, wealthy men. If history proves anything however, the Fertittas will not go down with the ship. They will find a way to avoid incrimination, escape accountability, and resurface elsewhere. They will bounce back, and in doing so they just might become even more ruthless and cut-throat than they already are. Regardless of whether or not the ghosts of the Maceo family are still haunting the Fertittas, the new regime can very well be considered gangsters. They may not carry Thompson Machine Guns or make people kiss their rings, but they live and breathe with gangster blood running through their veins. Their minds are pre-programmed with the old-school way of doing things, conditioned by their father's well-worn experience dancing the fine line between legal and illegal business activity. The Mafia's connection like an umbilical cord to the Fertitta family's history can in many ways never be cut. The brothers Fertitta will never be able to outrun their family's reputation.

Though up to this point the Fertitta "family" secret hasn't really burned them much at all, the family's personal financial burn rate is said to be in excess of a hundred million each year even as their company is leveraged with massive debt. Perhaps being so used to having that kind of expendable cash around is what led to the brothers deciding to pocket much of the [\\$350 million senior secured credit facility they acquired for Zuffa, LLC in the summer of 2007](#).

And who could forget Dana White? While the guy doesn't have much of a history at all and his upbringing is a tale of two sides of the country (stints in Maine, Boston, and Vegas), Dana White does seem overly fascinated with the gangster set. In some ways he's like the wanna be gangster errand boy who never got made. Still, he became fast friends with Lorenzo Fertitta in high school at Bishop Gorman in Las Vegas, and he never did forget his South Boston roots, either. [White just spent some time in his old stomping grounds with a couple of guys who aren't afraid to admit their thug life resume](#).

Jimmy Martorano's brother John Martorano confessed to killing 20 people and was only sentenced to 12 years time for the murders, most of which were carried out at the behest of South Boston Crime Lord-turned FBI Informant James "Whitey" Bulger. Patrick Nee helped Whitey with enforcement as well and played a pivotal role in one potential whistleblower's disappearance and death. Suffice it to say Nee drove young John McIntyre to his last appointment with Bulger who tortured, strangled, and shot McIntyre with Stephen "The Rifleman" Flemmi's help. Since McIntyre confessed to helping Bulger with an IRA gun shipment, his tongue was ripped out with a pair of pliers. And these two guys who assisted efforts like that are considered "gentlemen" by Dana White's standards.

The whole Whitey Bulger saga has been front page news for decades, and still today there are ongoing cases involving the principal players, and of course Bulger remains a fugitive. My father was

on the other side of the law fighting against the influence of organized crime in South Boston during Bulger and Flemmi's rise to power, and he came face to face with Whitey himself on a few occasions. Dad has a whole chapter about his organized crime investigations in "Black Mass" and a particularly tragic connection to McIntyre.

And so, there are many parallels and contrasts in the situation I now find myself in. The Fertittas seem to be carrying on the traditions of their fathers and grandfathers and great uncles. Even though I never pursued a career in criminal justice myself, I wound up falling back on the same instincts that made my father a good cop. Like the Fertitta family tree is populated with Mafioso, my family is made up of a high percentage of police officers and government agents. We have a face-off here between the direct offspring of a criminal mastermind and the direct offspring of an honest cop done in by the government's unclean hands. It's just too classic, but at the same time it represents the principle that led me to writing non-fiction rather than flashy novels: Fact is stranger than fiction. I know in the movies the hero usually wins, but reality is much more cruel in situations like this. I just hope in the end my work isn't made meaningless by some yet unforeseen hand of fate, and I hope the Fertitta family history of getting away unscathed is drastically altered. It would be fitting justice if the current economic crisis is what finally puts the spotlight on the corruption involved here, as I truly believe it is people like the Fertittas who have created this crash and burn climate. All we can hope for now is that they'll actually end up paying for the damage they've done.

UP NEXT: FROM BELLBOY TO BUSINESS TYCON: HOW FRANK JUNIOR BUILT THE FERTITTA EMPIRE IN LAS VEGAS AND WHAT HIS SONS HAVE DONE TO PUT THE WHOLE OPERATION IN JEOPARDY

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22nd November 2020

Jewish and Italian Billionaire Mobsters

JEWISH AND ITALIAN BILLIONAIRE MOBSTERS

Rocco Commisso is an Italian-American billionaire worth 5 billion and was born in Calabria. Commisso is on the board of directors for CSPAN. Rocco Commisso is the founder, chairman, and CEO of Mediacom Communications Corporation and he previously worked for the Royal Bank of Canada and Chase Manhattan Bank. The Ndrangheta have very large operations in Canada. The Calabrian mafia boss Cosimo Commisso operated in Toronto. The Commisso crime family are a Ndrangheta clan in Calabria. Their name refers to Commission and they are the Calabrian commission or top council. When a mafia does not pay tributes or take orders from their bosses they use the government to go after them. That is how they maintain control. Rocco Commisso is an agent of the Ruffo di Calabria family a noble family of Calabria where the Ndrangheta and Commisso crime family operate.

Dan Gilbert is the head of the Jewish white collar mafia that specialize in rigging professional sports. Gilbert is worth about 7 billion and owns the Cleveland Cavaliers and he employed LeBron James for about 12 years. Dan Gilbert would bribe referees into not fouling LeBron James for his excessive charging. Dan Gilbert also owns Jack Entertainment which he renamed as Jack to honor Jack Giacalone the head the Detroit Mafia. Jack Entertainment is a casino company with operations in Detroit and Cleveland. The Cleveland crime family and Detroit Mafia have a close alliance and the mafia uses casinos for money laundering and for financing criminals through rigged wins. Probably all slot machines are electronically rigged by gaming companies which are working with the mafia. Dan Gilbert is a Jewish member of the Detroit Mafia which is owned by the Odescalchis of Rome.

Ray Dalio is worth 18 billion as the founder and owner of Bridgewater Associates an investment firm that has 124 billion in managed assets. Ray Dalio changed his name to Dalio from his fathers name Dallolio which derives from the name Dell'Olio which means Of The Oil. Ponte Dell'Olio is a town in Piacenza which has been ruled by the House of Bourbon-Parma. Dalio has a Hebrew origin and means "Yahweh has drawn." The Chigi family are the Princes of Farnese and they manage the Italian Bourbons. The Chigi name derives from the Hebrew word Shigionoth because they really have Babylonian ancestry. The Chigi papal coat of arms has 6 hexagrams on it. The hexagram is a symbol for Zionism. Ray Dalio is an agent of the Bourbon-Parma and Chigi-Albana della Roveres which were Grand Masters of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta and both Prince Carlos of Bourbon-Parma and Prince Carlo of Bourbon-Two Sicilies are Knights of Malta.

Antony Ressler is a Jewish billionaire worth 2 billion and he is a co-founder of Apollo Global Management. Tony Ressler is the brother in law of Leon Black and Ressler was Jesuit educated at the Roman Catholic Georgetown University and he is a cover Knight of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta serving the Massimo family of Rome. Tony Ressler is also a board director of Georgetown University. Apollo Global Management owns Constellis Holdings which owns the former Blackwater mercenary company renamed Academi. Members of Blackwater were involved in murdering civilians in Iraq and investigated for weapons trafficking. Constellis also owns Triple Canopy another mercenary company. Constellis is in contract with the US military. Ressler also founded Ares Management which has over 5 billion in assets. Ares is the name of the Greek deity of war. Tony Ressler may be the most powerful Zionist in the United States due to his connections with paramilitaries and hitmen through Constellis. Tony Ressler is a war criminal and he is a Jewish Jesuit and Knight of Malta serving the Massimos.

Vincent Viola is an Italian-American billionaire worth 2 billion and he co-founded Virtu Financing and is the owner of the Florida Panthers NHL team. Vincent Viola was also knighted by the Italian House of Bourbon-Two Sicilies and is a member of the US military. Viola is from Brooklyn and covertly connected to the Gambino crime syndicate and the Gotti faction. His sons is Travis Viola and his other son John Viola is the United States Delegate for the Sacred Constantinian Order of Saint George a knighthood of the House of Bourbon-Two Sicilies. Vincent Viola and his business associate Anthony Bonomo are also involved in horse racing and they rigged the Kentucky Derby in 2017 and won with their horse. There was 139 million in official bets on the 2017 Kentucky Derby and that does not include illegal bets. The mafia likely made at least tens of

millions on one horse race. The Kentucky Derby is located at the Churchill Downs named after the Spencer-Churchill family who are the owners of the Kentucky Derby property. The Spencer-Churchills are currently business associates of the Massimo family which are also owners of the Gambinos and Gottis. Vincent Viola is works for the Gaetanis which are also co-owners of the Gambinos and Gottis.

Sheldon Adelson is a powerful Zionist criminal in the United States worth 38 billion and he owns and runs Las Vegas Sands Corporation as well as casinos in Singapore. Adelson also owns Israel Hayom newspaper in Israel and the Las Vegas Review-Journal in the United States. Las Vegas was built up by the Italian Mafia which used Jewish mobsters like Frank Rosenthal as managers. Today Las Vegas is run by the Goodman family who have been the Mayors of Las Vegas from 1999 to present with Oscar Goodman and his wife the current Mayor of Vegas Carolyn Goodman. Oscar Goodman was a lawyer for the mafia and worked defending criminals like Frank Rosenthal. Sheldon Adelson is working closely with the Italian Mafia and Jewish Mafia with rigging casinos and laundering criminal profits. Las Vegas Sands Corporation was accused of violating anti-bribery provisions and responded by admitting it violated bookkeeping and accounting provisions. Las Vegas Sands also was fined 47 million for enabling drug traffickers to launder criminal profits through their casinos. The real mafia money launderers work directly with the owners and funnel criminal profits as cash into the casino's banks and then launder them as wins.

Frank Fertitta III is worth over 2 billion and still has shares in the UFC. Frank Fertitta is the CEO of Stations Casinos which has about 20 casinos operating in the United States. The Fertitta family also founded Zuffa which controls the UFC and they sold their majority shares however still retained a portion. They still have command in the UFC which they use for rigging fights for mafia bets and for recruiting mafia enforcers. Deutsche Bank partly owns their Station Casinos and assists them in laundering criminal profits of mafias laundered through casinos then through Deutsche Bank and then into the Bank for International Settlements and private Swiss bank accounts. The Fertitta family originated in Galveston, Texas and married with the Maceo crime family of Galveston. The Fertitta family which are collectively worth around 9 billion are a crime family.

Lorenzo Fertitta is worth over 2 billion with some shares in the UFC. The Fertittas established themselves in Texas and married with the Maceo crime family and they ran bootlegging, gambling, and prostitution rackets in Galveston, Texas. The Fertittas are partly the Maceo crime family and they moved their operations to Las Vegas. They launder criminal profits for mafias and use casinos for criminal financing. They rig the casinos and control who wins. That is how the mafia pays many of their criminal associates. Lorenzo Fertitta has recruited many mafia enforcers through the UFC and they are used for intimidation and extortions. They force other fighters to lose fights for bets and they intimidate other businessmen involved in casinos and the MMA.

Tilman Fertitta is the owner of the Houston Rockets which he uses for rigging NBA games for mafia bets. Tilman Fertitta is worth over 5 billion and owns Landry's. Landry's owns and runs restaurants, hotels, and casinos. Tilman Fertitta is the top boss of the Houston crime family which is a branch of the Galveston crime syndicate. The Fertittas are agents of the Torlonias, Sforza-Cesarinis, and Boncompagni-Ludovisis which are all Roman nobles that are intermarried. The Sforza-Cesarinis are married with the Velasco family that ruled in New Spain around Texas and the recently deceased Prince Nicolo Boncompagni-Ludovisi was married to the Texan Rita Jenrette. The Fertittas in Texas oversee drug trafficking across the Texas border and the Fertittas in Las Vegas are money launderers.

Posted 22nd November 2020 by [IzrealZeus](#)



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The Mafia Connected Family That Connects Dana White, Joe Rogan, and Donald Trump



SAGE O'QUAY

DEC 21, 2024



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In this deep dive, Derrick Broze interviews researcher Brady Nash regarding his work on the history of the Maceo family and Fertitta family based in Galveston, Texas. Brady outlines a history which connects the Galveston mafia, the Ultimate Fighting Championship, Vegas casinos, Dana White, Joe Rogan, and Donald Trump.



The Mafia Connected Family That Connects Dana White, Joe Rogan, and Donald Trump

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The Houston Rockets & The Texas Mob: Owner Tillman Fertitta's Uncles Were Al Capones Of Galveston

👤 Scott Burnstein 🕒 December 19, 2020



Sam Maceo, from left, pianist Carmen Cavallaro and Galveston Mayor Herbie Cartwright.

December 19, 2020 – Texas restaurant mogul and NBA owner Tillman Fertitta's family ran the mafia in Galveston during the first half of the 20th Century. Fertitta, 63, owns the Houston Rockets and is the star of CNBC's Billion-Dollar Buyer reality television show.

His great-great uncles, Sam (The Velvet Glove) Maceo and Rosario (The Iron Glove) Maceo, lorded over the Galveston underworld from Prohibition until the 1950s and built a nationwide reputation for themselves as smart, resourceful and well-connected wiseguys. Fertitta's grandfather, Vic Fertitta, owned one of the Maceos' favorite haunts and along with his brother Anthony, helped manage the Maceo gambling network. Some of his cousins had links to the Kansas City mob.

Galveston was one of the country's premier coastal resort towns and vacation destinations of its day and the Maceos turned the "Island" into a little Las Vegas in Southeast Texas before Las Vegas was even Las Vegas. They were instrumental in the development of the Las Vegas Strip in the 1940s and the birth of the modern gambling and entertainment mecca, too.

Sam was a smooth, politician-type mob figure, building a network of insiders, financiers and loyalists in multiple sectors of the community that rivaled any mafia boss in America at that time. Rosario, sometimes called "Papa Rose," was a little more ruff around the edges and acted as his chief muscle, leading an enforcement unit known as the "Night Riders." The crime syndicate they led controlled gambling, prostitution and drugs in the region and expanding as far as big-city outposts Dallas and Houston.

The Maceo brothers operated out of the Turf Athletic Club. Teaming with veteran Galveston gangland boss Ollie Quinn of the Beach Gang, the Maceos opened-up the Hollywood Dinner Club on the property and then The Balinese Room nearby on a pier overlooking the Gulf of Mexico. Quinn mentored the Maceos in the ways of the mob. The Fertittas were put in charge of The Balinese Club.

The Hollywood Dinner Club was mainly used as a casino, while The Balinese Room became the top entertainment venue in the area, hosting acts like Frank Sinatra, Bob Hope, George Burns and the Marx Brothers, but also contained a casino inside. The

Texas Rangers shut down the Hollywood Dinner Club in 1939. Two years prior, Sam Maceo was busted in a federal narcotics case out of New York City that he beat at trial.

The Maceos took a good chunk of their illicit profits and pumped the dirty cash into clean businesses like investments in oil and real estate. Together, they were two of the first financiers for the Desert Inn hotel, just the fifth resort-style casino to open what became known as The Strip on Las Vegas Boulevard, in the spring of 1950. Monies coming in from the Cleveland and Detroit mafia families was also invested.

Sam Maceo died of cancer in 1951. Papa Rose was felled by heart failure three years later in 1954, having turned over most of the Maceo brothers rackets to the Fertitta family. Anthony Fertitta made a name for himself as an ace lieutenant of the Maceos by personally escorting representatives from Chicago's Al (Scarface) Capone mob off the Island on a scouting trip in the early 1930s.

Tillman Fertitta grew up in Galveston. He began his food empire in the 1980s, founding Landry, Inc., which today owns Morton Steakhouse, Vic & Anthony's Steakhouse (named after his uncle and grandfather), Saltgrass Steakhouse, Del Friscos, McCormick & Schmick's, Mitchell Fish Market and Landry's Seafood chains. In 2005, Fertitta purchased the Golden Nugget hotel and casino chain with outposts in Nevada, New Jersey, Mississippi and Louisiana. He outbid singer and actress Beyonce Knowles, a Houston native, for the Rockets in a 2017 buy.



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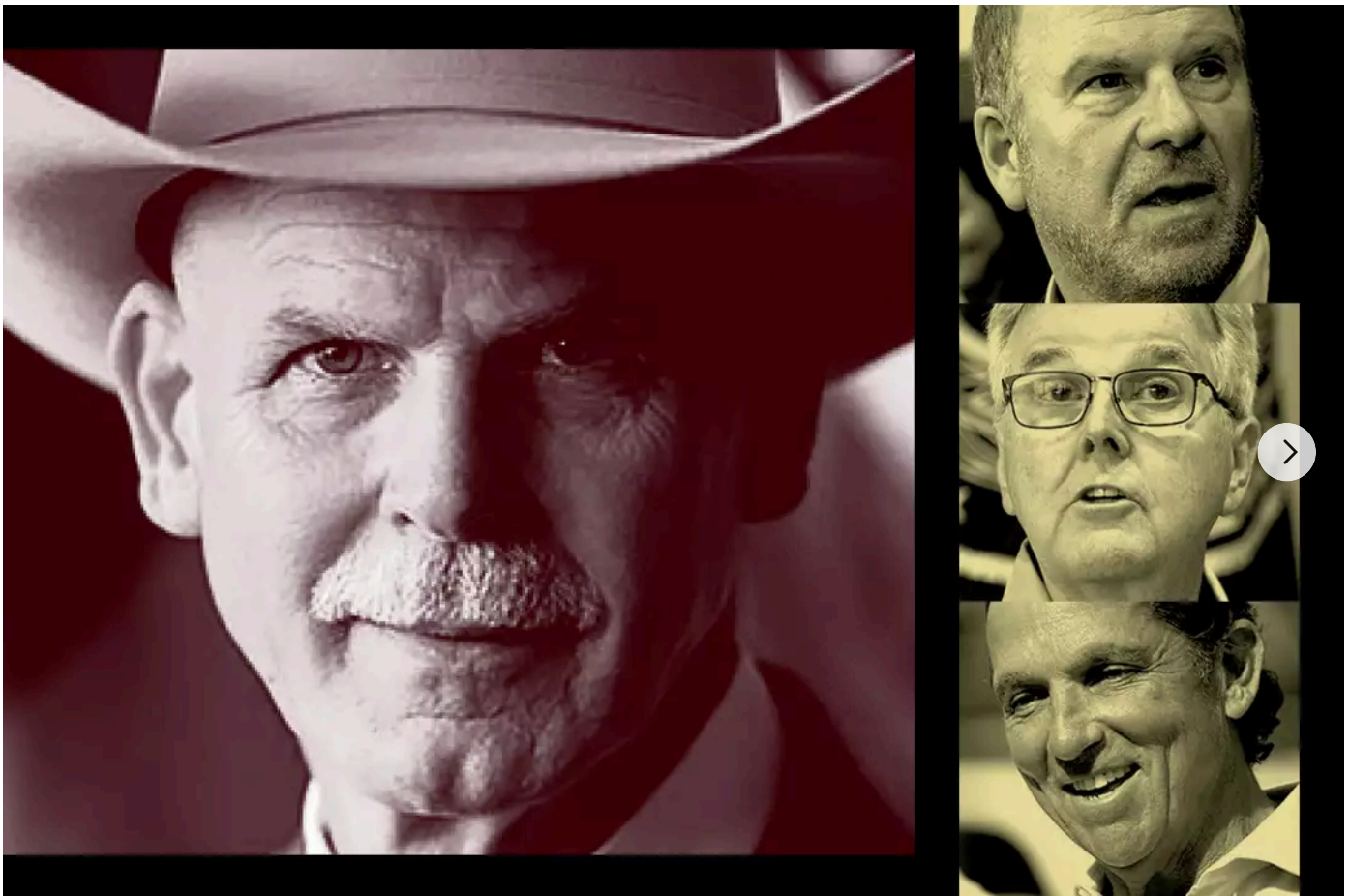
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OPINION // EDITORIALS

Taylor Swift was at Tilman Fertitta's place in NYC. But Galveston pulls him back in. | Thumbs

By **The Editorial Board**, *Opinions from the Houston Chronicle Editorial Board*

Oct 12, 2024



Jimmy Fullen, the Republican nominee for Galveston County sheriff accused of being untruthful about his background, has received financial backing from influential donors such as Rockets owner Tilman Fertitta, Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick and Houston attorney Tony Buzbee.

Thumbs down: Maybe you know Tilman Fertitta only as the Rockets owner, or as the billionaire who battles against the deadening forces of restraint and good taste. (The white tigers' hot tub at his Downtown Aquarium! The \$1,600 hamburger, sparkling with real gold leaf served at his H Bar! The 22,000-square-foot penthouse at his Post Oak Hotel that commands \$125,000 a night, two nights minimum!) But you should also know that Fertitta comes by his swagger naturally: He's a scion of the Fertitta family, who were part of the Maceo Organization, a crime syndicate that ran Galveston from the mid-1920s through 1957 — entrepreneurs whose primary business involved slot machines and bootlegging. Even so, Galveston wasn't exactly a lawless town: The Maceos maintained a cozy relationship with the police, and made sure that violent crime didn't affect civilians. As Gary Cartwright wrote, they "ran a clean game in a clean town, and anybody who didn't like it slept with the fishes." And ah, this week you could hear echoes of those days. The Chronicle reported that Fertitta and other donors are continuing to back Jimmy Fullen, a Galveston sheriff's candidate, even though the state's law enforcement agency has recommended revoking Fullen's license over ethical charges. The candidate's appeal will be heard in January; losing it would mean that he can't hold office. But why let a little thing like that stop anyone? It's fun to read Fertitta's response in your best "Godfather" accent: "For many years, Jimmy Fullen, along with many other local law enforcement officers, has loyally served our family through various security roles at our hotels in Galveston," he said. "Throughout this time, we have come to regard Jimmy as one of the most ethical public servants we've ever had."

Thumbs up: Maybe we should be grateful Fertitta even pays attention to his hometown when he's got a huge success on his hands in New York City. Nabbing a reservation at his Manhattan restaurant, The Corner Store, has been next to impossible since Taylor Swift and Gigi Hadid skipped in for a girl's night out, writes the Houston Chronicle's Amber Elliot. The menu is martini-forward and comfort food chic: adult pizza rolls, disco steak frites, Wagyu french dip and a Samoa cracker soft serve ice cream sundae. Sounds like a smart racket.

Thumbs down: Remember when Twitter helped save lives during disasters? After Hurricane Harvey hit, tweets connected those in need with rescuers and volunteers. We're appalled by how low the once-useful platform, now called X, has sunk since Elon Musk gutted its content moderators and disaster response staff. In the aftermath of Hurricane Helene, X amplified posts that included threats of violence against federal aid workers, lies about FEMA stealing donations and antisemitic attacks against government leaders. Musk is welcome to move his companies to Texas, as he has X, but he needs to learn that down here, when disaster strikes, we don't sow more chaos. We lend a hand.

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Thumbs up: Just one hour before Mayor John Whitmire and members of City Council were to engage in a battle Wednesday over proposed tax increases to cover cleanup costs from the derecho and Hurricane Beryl, the mayor announced the state came through with a \$50 million lifeline. Was it Whitmire's lovey-

dovey relationship with Republicans in Austin that delivered? Probably didn't hurt. Then again, the breakthrough felt like a replay of what happened during the mayoral term of another Democrat and former state legislator, Sylvester Turner. For now, the tax hike proposal has been withdrawn and budget battles delayed for another day, but that sound you're hearing isn't a sigh of relief from City Hall. It's the city moving closer and closer to the edge of the fiscal cliff that Houston controllers have warned about for years. Here's hoping that state money really does flow into city coffers and that Whitmire can deliver more pain-free fixes.

Oct 12, 2024



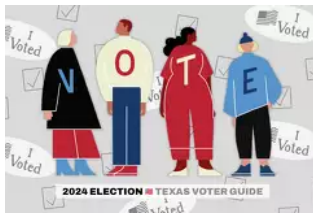
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OPINIONS FROM THE HOUSTON CHRONICLE EDITORIAL BOARD



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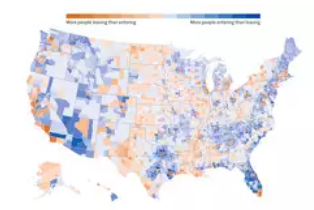
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Let's Play

BUSINESS

Fertittaville

The restaurant mogul has invested \$150 million to help change the face of Galveston. Now critics warn that he wants to turn the Island into Atlantic City.



By Katy Vine

July 2004



ON A CLEAR AND SUNNY AFTERNOON this past April, restaurant tycoon Tilman Fertitta was peering out the window of his helicopter, holding a toothpick between his teeth that pointed toward Galveston like a divining rod. Far below, the 32-mile-long, 2-mile-wide island stretched out before him, and he had an unobstructed view of the architectural legacies of some of the town's most powerful benefactors. To the west sat the Moody Gardens entertainment complex, which includes three giant, mirrored pyramids that dominate the landscape like an Egyptian monument. Directly beneath him was the late-1800's-era Strand district, meticulously restored in the seventies and eighties through millions of dollars of investment by George Mitchell. And on the south side of the strip, just before the Gulf, sat Fertitta's own contribution: a forty-foot-high rock volcano that erupts nightly on the half hour.

The chopper descended onto the lush green yard of the San Luis hotel, part of Fertitta's luxury resort. As the boss exited, a black Lincoln pulled up to meet him, but Fertitta dismissed the driver with a wave. "That's all right!" he shouted above the rotors' clamor. "I'm going to walk!" Dressed in a red polo shirt and faded jeans, his appearance was casual, but nearby employees

snapped to attention nonetheless. They are used to these visits; Fertitta surprises them every few weeks, hoping to get an unvarnished look at his operations. His critiques can be so precise that some longtime workers say he can detect a burned-out lightbulb before his helicopter touches down.

His inspection began at the Amazon-themed Rainforest Cafe, and Fertitta hadn't even reached the front door before he identified a problem. "What's with this color?" he asked, pointing to a sign on the outdoor gazebo. "Blue? This should be green; the blue looks like dog crap." Then he wound his way through the jam-packed retail store at the restaurant's entrance, stopping at a stack of T-shirts. "Why are these T-shirts so expensive?" he asked. "Would you pay for that? Where is the medium-sized T-shirt? All the extra-larges are on top." Finally, Fertitta climbed aboard the cafe's water ride, which takes passengers down a misty, dark tunnel where fake boa constrictors, monkeys, and other rain forest critters lurk and jerk mechanically from the cavern walls. As the ride took off, Fertitta became bothered by its instructional voice-over, and he shouted his displeasure above the sounds of chattering chimpanzees. "Can't we get an American accent for this recording instead of the British version?" he asked an employee.

"We tried that, Tilman, but it sounded stupid," the man shouted back.

"Oh," Fertitta said, a little crestfallen. "Well, could you at least turn it up, then?"

Tilman Fertitta, 46, is the chairman, president, and CEO of Landry's Restaurants Inc., which operates more than three hundred restaurants nationwide—including Joe's Crab Shack, Landry's Seafood House, and the Rainforest Cafe—out of its Houston headquarters. In that city, Fertitta is one of many big fish, but here in his native Galveston, he might as well carry a trident. He owns half a mile of the strip, from First to Sixty-first Street. He is also the owner of Fertitta Hospitality, which runs the city's new \$30 million convention center along with the upscale San Luis Resort, Spa, and Conference Center. In the past few years he has bought so much land on the Island that he makes headlines when he chooses *not* to buy a property. All told, he's invested \$150 million here, an influx of cash that some say is

responsible for sparking the economic boom now taking place in Galveston, a city that as recently as six years ago had few development prospects and was nearly bankrupt.

But among other residents, who are used to seeing a slower pace to the city's growth—or no growth at all—there is grumbling that Fertitta's role in developing the Island has gotten too big. They worry aloud that his legion of properties is turning Galveston into "Fertittaville," a fear that was only heightened two months ago, when Mayor Roger "Bo" Quiroga proposed changing the name of Fifty-seventh Street to Tilman Fertitta Boulevard. Of even larger concern is what they perceive to be Fertitta's long-term vision. This spring, when Fertitta backed a proposal during the special legislative session to bring video gambling to Texas, there was speculation that he hoped to turn it into a Gulf Coast version of Atlantic City.

The debate over Fertitta's influence was fresh in residents' minds in May, when a record voter turnout was expected for the mayoral election. The race featured two former city council members: Native Lyda Ann Thomas, a member of the powerful Kempner family, represented the conservative-growth old guard; New Jerseyborn Johnny Smecca represented those in favor of aggressive, Fertitta-style development. On record, Fertitta never endorsed either candidate, but it wasn't difficult to guess whose ticket he'd punch if he were eligible to vote. "I'll tell you exactly how it is, okay?" he said in his Houston office shortly before our ride in the chopper. "If you want new businesses so you don't have to drive to the mainland, you elect Johnny Smecca. If you like it the way it is—and decide you need no more building—you elect Lyda Ann Thomas. And that's for the people of Galveston to choose."

A FEW DAYS BEFORE FERTITTA'S helicopter drop-in, I joined a couple of locals seated at a small table at E Street Gallery and Coffee Haus, on Postoffice Street. One of them, Ladislav, was a Czech mason; the other, Nathan, was the owner of the Galveston Wedding Chapel. When I asked them to share their thoughts on Fertitta, it wasn't long before the pair had addressed the three basic complaints I would hear repeatedly:

“Mr. Fertitta has come here and put up all these restaurant,” Ladislav said, “and suddenly his income go up, up, up. It crazy. How it get like that?” (Translation: We’ve seen fast growth before—with Enron.)

“He put Fuddruckers on the Strand,” Nathan said. “He’s making it look like the west side of Houston.” (Translation: He’s tacky, and he’s turning the Island into a generic tourist town.)

“If anything happens to him,” Nathan said, “we’re done for.” (Translation: He has singular control of the Island.)

It’s this last complaint that resonates the most around here. One former mayor, who declined to be identified for this story, referred to the city’s historic relationship with its wealthiest residents as a “plantation mentality.” Indeed, for more than one hundred years, power on the Island has belonged almost exclusively to members of three families: the Moodys, Kempners, and Sealys, who made their money in cotton and banking, among other ventures, in the late 1800’s. All three families established foundations, which, since 1957, when Attorney General Will Wilson shut gambling down and effectively eliminated the Island’s biggest revenue stream, have often kept the city afloat, giving millions of dollars to charities and funding medical research and historical restoration.

Since gambling disappeared, Galveston’s main industries have been tourism and the hospital. The University of Texas Medical Branch doesn’t pay any local taxes. And Moody Gardens, the town’s most famous attraction, which includes a hotel and, until recently, the only major convention center, pays no ad valorem taxes. With no stable middle class and little in the way of new industry or large-scale development, the city has often struggled to come up with a solid revenue source. By the late nineties, when Mayor Quiroga was elected, the city had a \$1.8 million shortfall.

Tilman Fertitta has no relation to the Island’s three big families. Born in Galveston, he left the city in 1974 for Houston, where he opened his first Landry’s while he was in his early twenties. In 1984, after amassing a small fortune, he began buying up land along the seawall of his old hometown. He

saw the unrealized potential of tourism on the Island, and in addition to growing his restaurant empire, he wanted to build the city a new convention center. But he knew that any future center would have to compete with Moody Gardens, which had a huge advantage thanks to its tax-exempt status. So in 1996 Fertitta made a move long chronicled in Island lore. Asked to speak at an event at the Moody Convention Center, he stormed up to the microphone and directly attacked the Moody Foundation. He said its tax arrangement was scaring off viable competitors, including himself, and that it was the reason for Galveston's stagnant growth. The audience gave him a standing ovation.

Five years later, in 2001, Fertitta won over enough people around town, including Mayor Quiroga, to push for a special election on increasing the local hotel tax from 13 cents to 15 cents on the dollar. The plan would create funds for the city to build a Fertitta-run convention center to compete with the Moodys' and promised to create more jobs on the Island. Galveston voters overwhelmingly approved. "That election was not just on the convention center, okay?" Fertitta told me. "More people turned out for that election than for any mayor's race. That was a vote for change in Galveston."

Indeed, since then, change has been taking place at a rapid clip. The city has lured four lucrative cruise lines to dock in its port. UTMB has received a \$110 million grant to create a Galveston National Biocontainment Laboratory. The developer Centex is looking to build a half-a-billion-dollar project, including new homes, townhouses, and condos. "There hasn't been this level of investment on Galveston Island since the rebuilding after the 1900 storm," said Jeff Sjostrom, the president of the Galveston Economic Development Partnership. As Quiroga saw his term limit coming to an end, Galveston boasted a \$6 million surplus.

ON A SUNDAY MORNING IN APRIL, about seventy Galveston business leaders met for their weekly breakfast at Fish Tales, a Fertitta-owned restaurant on the seawall. UTMB president John Stobo was there, as was outgoing mayor Quiroga, among others. While casually dressed men and women sipped coffee out of white cups and pushed their eggs around small

china plates, a microphone was passed from table to table. The floor was open, but conversation centered primarily on economic development. Every time someone brought up a viable property and its potential as an investment opportunity, the same joke was repeated. “Somebody call Tilman,” an attendee would mutter. This would be followed by muffled laughter.

The suggestions weren’t entirely in jest. Though Fertitta is not the only person investing in town these days, his aggressiveness can sometimes make it appear that way. Fertitta’s convention center, completed in April, is surrounded by Fertitta-owned hotels and Fertitta-owned restaurants, creating a symbiotic environment in which all Fertitta-owned entities can feed off one another. He recently bought the nearby Flagship Hotel, and he says he wants to build an amusement park out on the Flagship’s pier, complete with a Ferris wheel and a roller coaster. He’s had his eye on a golf course, and he says he wants to turn piers nineteen and twenty into a yacht club. All of a sudden, Fertitta’s grip on Galveston tourism rivals—some might say surpasses—the hold that Moody Gardens once enjoyed.

If the Moody family is upset by Fertitta’s power grab, its members have been quiet about it publicly. (The foundation declined to comment for this story.) According to the *Galveston County Daily News*, however, at a city council workshop this spring, Irwin “Buddy” Herz Sr., the Moody family’s attorney, aired grievances against Fertitta and the city, claiming that the city was trying to sell property to the restaurateur that had been promised to a church. “How many people are going to be stomped on in the name of economic development?” he asked. “I’ve seen deals cut in the past—” Steve Greenberg, the director of governmental affairs for Landry’s Restaurants Inc., cut him off. “You’ve been part of them,” he said.

Fertitta’s growing obstacle these days is public opinion. In the past, any local opposition to his plans was outweighed by his ability to bring in new jobs. But his detractors started gaining footing when Fertitta backed video gambling at the special session. They say gambling will bring corruption, and some even point to Fertitta’s family history as a warning sign: During the

forties and fifties, his great-uncle Anthony Fertitta and his great-great-uncles Sam and Rosario Maceo worked together in the Balinese Room, the most notorious gambling tavern in the state. Asked about his own gambling aspirations, Fertitta said people were blowing them out of proportion. But he didn't deny that he supported some level of gambling on the Island. After all, he explained, how would it be fair for the horse-racing tracks—or the failing greyhound track in nearby LaMarque—to get slot machines and not Galveston? "I'll tell you," he said. "I used to think it wasn't coming. These days I think it's inevitable. Will it be two years, five years, ten years? You're going to be pulling a slot machine in Galveston, Texas, while we're all still breathing. I can promise you that."

BY ELECTION DAY, MAY 15, the divide among residents was visible downtown, where campaign signs littered the streets. That night, each candidate hosted a party for supporters. Thomas held hers at a VFW hall on Twenty-fourth Street, where the old guard converged to watch the results in the bingo parlor. They ate hot dogs and chips and drank keg beer out of plastic cups. "The direction the city is going in is just sad," one partygoer told me, summing up the mood inside. "We have been labeled anti-development. But we are for growth. I don't want a wall of hotels just like Miami Beach. We have to maintain ambience."

Meanwhile, down at Mario's Seawall, the Italian restaurant owned by Smecca's family, a predominantly middle-aged crowd had gathered. Men wearing baseball caps and women holding small children waited anxiously while they drank beer on tap and wine from the downstairs bar. "The biggest obstacle we're having to overcome is money. Lyda Ann Thomas has a lot of it, and she's using it," one woman explained, making the case that the election was about the haves and the have-nots. "Does Lyda Ann know how hard it is to scratch out a living and get from point A to point B?"

Neither candidate would be able to claim victory that night. Around nine-thirty an election official announced that there'd been a machine jam and that ballot counting would have to be postponed until a repairman could be called. (Word even got out that a mysterious "lost box" had appeared,

causing concern on both sides that the fix was in.) Shortly after, Smecca began thanking his supporters and saying good-bye. Before he left, I asked him if he thought it would be a long night. “No, no,” he said. “I don’t know that there’s too much to worry about.” By ten-thirty the next morning, however, the results were finally in: Thomas had crushed Smecca by thirty percentage points.

A WEEK LATER, TILMAN FERTITTA was plotting his next move. “I have to be careful here,” he explained. “Let me think.” Then, after a long pause, he made his pitch to the new regime. “Galveston didn’t elect a pro-economic-development mayor and council. But I think they’re all very smart people, and they see the right direction that Galveston needs to go in by being progressive. I think Galveston will be all right—if they make the right decisions.” The election capped an unusually bad week for Fertitta. A few days earlier, slot machines had been rejected in the special session and Quiroga pulled the proposed street-name change due to lack of support in the neighborhood. Any plans for Fertittaville—real or imagined—would have to be put on hold.

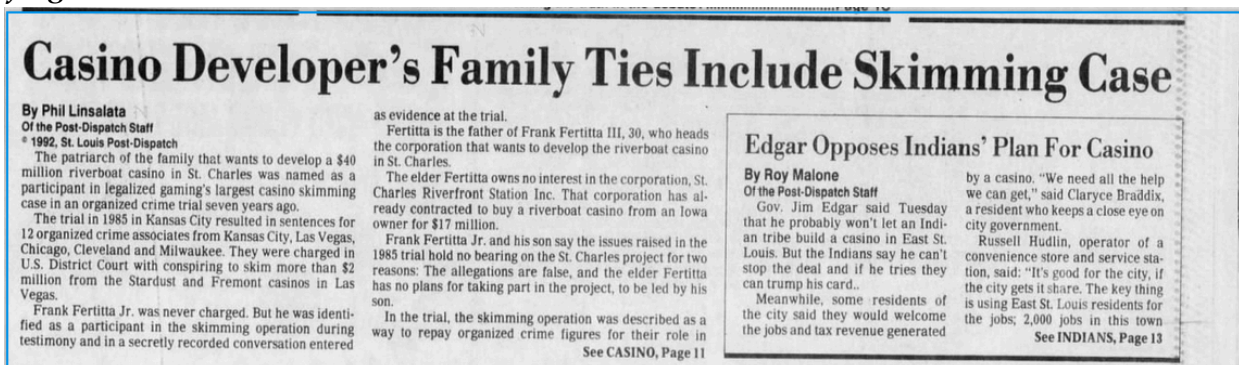
stlreporter

Because there's something happening here and you don't know what it is.

Frank J. Fertitta Jr.

The Casino Beat

More than 20 years ago the RFT dragged its feet reporting on the Michael Lazaroff scandal. Some people prefer to forget about it.



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Mobbed Up: On Oct. 14, 1992, St. Louis Post-Dispatch reporter Phil Linsalata revealed that Station Casino founder Frank J. Fertitta Jr. helped skim millions from Vegas casinos for the Kansas City Mafia. When a scandal later broke over the casino company's illegal activities in Missouri in 1999 and 2000, the Riverfront Times failed to report on Fertitta's ties to organized crime. Then-RFT managing editor Roland Klose is now an editor at the Post-Dispatch. The following story appeared on the Media Mayhem blog, Feb. 8, 2004. C.D. Stelzer is a former RFT staff writer.

If I had all this juicy information on Station Casino's founder Frank J. Fertitta Jr.

(<http://unlimitedfightnews.com/wordpress/from-bellboy-to-gambling-tycon-how-frank-junior-built-the-fertitta-empire-in-las-vegas/>) why didn't I write the story? Why pass such rich material to a fellow reporter? Was I altruistic or just lazy? Well, it's kind of a long story.

At a *Riverfront Times* staff meeting in late 1999, reporters were asked to submit issues that they were interested in covering. Among those I chose was the casino beat.

I had a good source — anti-casino lobbyist Steve Taylor (<https://lasvegassun.com/news/1997/feb/27/casino-groups-removing-gambling-limits-would-incre/>). When I was still freelancing for the *RFT* in the early 1990s, Taylor had provided me with accurate information. During this time, he was an environmental activist opposed to the Times Beach dioxin incinerator. I wrote a few dozen stories on the Times Beach Superfund Cleanup. One caught the DNR, EPA and their contractors cooking the books (<https://stlreporter.com/2015/01/15/why-the-times-beach-incinerator-should-be-shut-down/>) on the stack emission tests. Exposing this fraud won me top honors for investigative reporting (<https://www.thefreelibrary.com/News+media+ignored+dangers+of+dioxin.-a020562422>) in 1997 from the Missouri Press Association. Taylor leaked me reams of data that pointed to the corrupt practices. I knew I could trust him from experience. In his new job for an outfit called Casino Watch, he was down in Jefferson City during the legislative sessions, keeping tabs on the then nascent gambling industry. This meant he could relay developments in a timely manner. But hard-hitting, timely casino coverage didn't appear to be exactly what the *RFT* (<https://www.thefreelibrary.com/Riverfront+Times+turns+30-a0170280235>) was looking for under the *New Times* ownership (<https://www.stlmediahistory.org/index.php/Print/PrintPublicationHistory/riverfront-times>). After all, Station Casino, the gambling company that was ultimately kicked out the state and fined \$1 million, ran full-page ads in the *RFT* every week. But at the time, I was still naïve enough to believe advertisers didn't hold sway over editorial judgments.

A week after we submitted our choices for beat coverage, editor Safir Ahmed (<https://aan.org/aan/ahmed-staying-put-at-riverfront-times/>) announced the selections that he and managing editor Roland Klose (<https://muckrack.com/roland-klose>) had made. I didn't get the casino beat. Bruce Rushton (<https://muckrack.com/bruce-rushton/articles>) got it. (When I later wrote about the proposed Lemay casino, (<https://www.riverfronttimes.com/stlouis/praying-against-the-odds/Content?oid=2475303>) I pitched that idea to my editors as a St. Louis County



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Roland Klose, former RFT managing editor.

(<https://stlreporter.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/screen->

development issue.)

As a result, when I got a tip in December 1999 from attorney Joe Jacobson (<https://archcitylawyers.com/who-we-are/joe-jacobson/>) that Michael Lazaroff (<https://lasvegassun.com/news/2000/jun/14/former-station-casinos-outside-counsel-pleads-guil/>),

Station's lobbyist/lawyer, was about to be busted for illegally meeting with Volvo dealer and state gaming board chairman James Wolfson (http://mgc.dps.mo.gov/annual_reports/AR_1994.pdf), I handed it over to my editors. Within days of receiving the tip from Jacobson, Lazaroff attempted suicide. Lazaroff was then a law partner at Thompson Coburn. His office was next to former U.S. Sen. Thomas Eagleton's.]

This was a huge story and we had a jump on the *Post-Dispatch*. Being a good soldier and following the chain of command, I alerted my superiors, who assigned Rushton to cover the story. But I was still curious about the case. So I did some digging on my own. I soon discovered (and it wasn't very difficult) that Station's founder had past ties with the Mafia, Because of his mob ties he had been forced to put Station's Missouri gaming license in his son's name. Suddenly, a huge story grew much, much larger. Dutifully, I also handed over this information to Rushton, Ahmed and Klose.

What happened? Nothing.



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Former RFT staffer Bruce Rushton.

The biggest story I ever uncovered in my career and these three sat on it for a full 11 months. When Rushton's cover story (<https://www.riverfronttimes.com/stlouis/jokers-wild/Content?oid=2473245>) finally did see the light of day on Nov. 1, 2000, it didn't even mention Frank J. Fertitta Jr. It barely mentioned his son. Of course, there was no reference to organized crime. Leaving out Fertitta was like writing a story about the Anheuser-Busch brewery and leaving out the name of August Busch III. Even if Feritta's ties to the Mafia weren't deemed important, Rushton could have still dropped a short paragraph or a sentence into the body of the story. He didn't. His story was over 5,000 words long. So the omission wasn't because he didn't have enough space. And the omission wasn't because he was ignorant. So how many reasons for this "oversight" are left other than those two?

Believe it or not, an earlier story by Rushton on Lazaroff didn't even bother to mention Station Casino at all. Instead, it focused exclusively on illegal campaign contributions made by Lazaroff and his law partners. This story ran on July 12, 2000. Let me make this clear: Rushton — the casino beat reporter — wrote about a crooked casino lobbyist's illegal activities but failed to even mention anything about Lazaroff's largest client — Station Casino. By this point, Rushton already had been sitting on the story for eight months.

But it gets worse. After he wrote the less than definitive Lazaroff/Station's story in the summer of 2000, the *RFT* sent him to Atlanta to cover a stock car race, as a part of a fluffy sports profile on some amateur driver.



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Tipster Joe Jacobson.

I had been connected to the paper for a decade by this point and I never saw anything like that before. The *RFT* covers local issues mainly and only does limited sports coverage. It was unprecedented to send a reporter half way across the country to cover a minor sporting event. Unlike the Lazaroff/Station's story, Rushton cranked out the race car story in a couple weeks. (Quantity not quality counts most at the *RFT*. Bruce had to keep up with his quota.) Then he went on vacation in August for two weeks just as the Lazaroff hearings were set to start.

His cover story wouldn't run until November.

I remember the day he finally wrapped up the Lazaroff cover story. His spirits were buoyed. It was like a weight had been lifted off his shoulders. I saw him walking down the hall past my office. He was heading for the fire escape for a smoke break, as was his usual custom. But this time he hadn't waited until he got outside to light up, and Bruce wasn't smoking tobacco that day.

He bogarted the joint.

Mob realignment, violence expected in KC

Strike force official cites experience in other cities

By Joe Henderson
staff writer

Federal authorities think the removal of the Civella family's leadership will cause a realignment of Kansas City's organized crime—and with it, mob violence.

"It is our experience nationwide that when the leadership of a crime organization is forcibly removed, as was the Civella leadership, gangland violence, unfortunately, is almost inevitable," said Michael A. DeFeo, deputy chief of the Justice Department's Organized Crime and Racketeering Section.

Mr. DeFeo, a native of Kansas City who established the federal strike force here in 1971, was back last week for the installation of Richard J. Marien as attorney in charge of the strike force office.

Mr. Marien succeeds David B.B. Helfrey, who entered private practice in St. Louis after the Argent Corp. skimming trial earlier this year.

Citing Philadelphia as an example, Mr. DeFeo said Angelo Bruno, the late crime boss there, "was considered exceptionally non-violent during his era of domination."

"But after his murder five years ago, a gang war erupted that only now is showing signs of abating," he said.

The stage for the changes expected in the organized crime structure in Kansas City was set by successful prosecutions in the FBI's Operation Strawman, which included the Tropicana casino and Argent Corp. skimming cases.

Carl J. Civella, Carl Angelo DeLuna and Charles Moretina—regarded by federal authorities as the power behind the dominant Civella organization since the 1983 death of crime boss Nick Civella—are serving prison terms ranging from 20 to 30 years.

Peter J. Tamburello and Anthony Civella, Carl Civella's son, also are in prison serving five-year terms on charges developed during Operation Strawman. Both have been linked to the organization's leadership.

James Duardi, who commanded respect in Kansas City's criminal element, is serving an eight-year sentence in federal prison.

"We hope the worst Kansas City will experience will be at most sporadic, or hopefully, unsuccessful acts of violence," said Mr. DeFeo, who supervises all strike force offices west of Chicago.

"But realistically, we must expect it. We have no idea when it will start."

Mr. Marien, who took over last week from Mr. Helfrey, thinks maneuvering in the underworld may already have started.

"We believe, from information we have received, that the restructuring phase in Kansas City is under way," he said.

He declined to offer specifics but referred to the fatal gangland bombing of Carl Spero, a longtime foe of the Civella group, on Jan. 9, 1984; the murder a month later of Anthony Cardarella, who authorities said was close

See Violence, pg. 10B, col. 1

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After prosecuting the mob trial in Kansas City for the Justice Department, David Helfrey moved across the state and set up shop as a white-collar criminal defense attorney.

Who's Hiding What?

Don't get distracted by the shell game, folks. Nobody hid the fact that Station Casino founder Frank J. Fertitta Jr. was an associate of organized crime from *Riverfront Times* reporter Bruce Rushton. The information was packaged neatly and placed in his hands — by me. I gave the same information to editor Safir Ahmed and managing editor Roland Klose, too.

But in the opus that Rushton wrote about attorney and gambling lobbyist Michael Lazaroff in the late fall of 2000, Rushton failed, for unknown reasons, to mention anything about Fertitta's sordid past.



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Flipper: *Federal prosecutor-turned criminal-defense attorney David B.B. Helfrey.*

He could have asked David Helfrey, (<http://www.sandbergphoenix.com/people/david-helfrey>). Station's outside counsel, about Fertitta, of course, because Rushton interviewed him. But apparently he chose not to ask any tough questions of Helfrey, who prior to becoming a criminal defense attorney, was a federal prosecutor in Kansas City. In that capacity, Helfrey was in a position to know about Fertitta's organized crime background because FBI wiretap transcripts allude to Fertitta being involved in the Las Vegas skimming operation carried out by Carl Thomas, a casino executive who was recorded having conversations with Kansas City Mafia bosses Nick and Carl Civella among others in 1979. During the conversations, Thomas mentions Fertitta repeatedly as being a part of his crew, a crew that bilked the casinos out of millions and deposited the money into the hands of the Mafia families in Kansas City, Milwaukee, Cleveland and Chicago. The case became the basis for Nicholas Pileggi's 1995 non-fiction bestseller (<https://www.goodreads.com/review/show/1802702748>). Casino: Love and Honor in Las Vegas, which director Martin Scorsese made into a blockbuster movie (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FSLVPEemdG8>), starring Robert DeNiro, Sharon Stone and Joe Pesci.

Fertitta's tainted background is the reason that he chose to put Station's Missouri license in his son's name — Frank J. Fertitta III. Rushton knew this because I gave him a copy of a story by former *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* reporter Phil Linsalata (<https://www.huffpost.com/author/phil-linsalata>) from 1992,

when Station's was applying for the state license for the St. Charles casino. [In the 1992 story, Linsalata duly reported Fertitta Jr.'s Mafia ties.



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Michael Lazaroff

Rushton also knew that Michael Lazaroff feared for his life and was given state police protection during and after the Missouri Gaming Commission hearings that were held in Jefferson City in the summer of 2000. He knew this because he was told as much by Steve Taylor, an anti-casino lobbyist who attended the hearings. I later confirmed Taylor's recollection through Missouri Assistant Attorney Mike Bradley.

Why would Lazaroff be in fear of his life? Because another witness had died when asked to testify by the gaming board. Carl Thomas (<https://forums.sherdog.com/threads/the-full-story-behind-the-carl-thomas-crash-that-taints-the-fertitta-family-legacy.2771073/>) — the person who had direct knowledge of Fertitta's organized crime connections — had been asked in 1993 to provide background information on his former employee to the Missouri Gaming Commission. Thomas traveled to Las Vegas from his home in Oregon to confer with Station's executives in Las Vegas about the upcoming testimony. But he never made it to Missouri to testify. After his Vegas visit, Thomas returned to Oregon and died in a one-car accident (<https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1993-11-11-mn-55577-story.html>).

Lazaroff's own testimony refers to "Carl Thomas", and the "Fremont" casino and "Argent" corporation, all of which were part of the Kansas City Mafia's skim operation in Las Vegas in the 1970s. Rushton had a transcript of the Missouri Gaming Commission hearings in which Lazaroff made these references. He could have quoted directly from Lazaroff's testimony. Instead, he chose to portray him as a clown.

At the hearings, retired FBI agent and former Gaming Commissioner William Quinn (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1983/02/18/ex-agent-testifies-at-teamsters-hearing/93273712-133a-481b-acef-d4462bc13790/>) testified that he had



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Frank J. Fertitta Jr., who died in 2006, skimmed casino cash for the Civella crime family of Kansas City.

talked to Helfrey, Station's lawyer, on three occasions. Quinn already knew Helfrey because they had worked on the Operation Strawman cases together. Strawman was the FBI operation that resulted in the conviction of 19 Mafia members in the Midwest, including the Civella brothers of Kansas City (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kansas_City_crime_family), for skimming from the Hacienda, Fremont, Stardust and Tropicana casinos in Las Vegas.

The transcript of the Gaming Commission hearings, show that Quinn testified that on one occasion Helfrey asked him over the phone to meet with him and a Station's representative. Quinn's testimony shows that Helfrey had been retained after the Lazaroff scandal broke. In other words, Helfrey was already representing Station in a legal capacity. In short, Helfrey's and Lazaroff's legal services to Station Casino overlapped. They were both working for the same company at the same time. Moreover, if Helfrey and a Station's representative had met with Quinn, it would have been comparable to Lazaroff's violations in meeting with Gaming Commission chairman Wolfson. Such a meeting would have been in violation of the Commission's "ex parte" rule, which was set up in 1994 to make sure that state gaming commissioners did not fall under the influence of the casinos that they were supposed to be regulating. Quinn said he was concerned about his former colleague's suggestion and he refused to meet with Helfrey and the Station's representative. Again, Rushton had the transcript of Quinn's testimony. But instead of citing Quinn, he relied heavily on Helfrey's version of events in telling the story. Nobody hid this information from Bruce Rushton. But he did manage to hide it from the public.

Posted in Mobbed Up, Riverfront Days, Uncategorized and tagged Argent Corporation, Bruce Rushton, Carl Civella, Carl Thomas, Casino Watch, Casino: Lover and Honor in Las Vegas, David Helfrey, ex parte rule, FBI, FBI agent William Quinn, Frank J. Fertitta III, Frank J. Fertitta Jr., Fremont Casino, gambling, Gaming Commissioner William Quinn, Hacienda casino, Jefferson City, Joe Jacobson, Joe Pesci, Kansas City Mafia, Mafia, Martin Scorsese, Michael Lazaroff, Missouri Assistant Attorney Mike Bradley, Missouri Gaming Commission, Missouri Gaming Commission Chairman James Wolfson, Nicholas Pileggi, Nick Civella, Operation Strawman, organized crime, Phil Linsalata, Riverfront Times, Robert De Niro, Safir Ahmed, Sharon Stone, st. louis post-dispatch, Stardust casino, Station Casino, Steve Taylor, Tropicana on February 5, 2021 by stlreporter.

BLOG AT WORDPRESS.COM.

Maceo Organization

The **Maceo Organization**, also known as the **Maceo Syndicate** or **Maceo crime family**, was a criminal organization, that ran Galveston, Texas politically and criminally throughout most of Galveston's open era. The organization's bosses, Sam and Rosario Maceo, operated illegal gambling, prostitution, bootlegging and racketeering activities.^[1]

Early years

The Maceo brothers got their start by being associated with the Beach Gang, which was under the control of Irish American Ollie Quinn and German American Dutch Voight. They mostly controlled the Beach area of Galveston during the 1910s and 1920s. Their gang was a rival of Johnny Jack Nounes and George Musey's Downtown Gang. However, Dutch and most notably Quinn remained very powerful figures on the island due to the many political connections that reached the Texas State Senate.^[2]

New Regime

Soon, Quinn began mentoring Sam and Rosario Maceo. By the late 1920s, as they climbed up the ranks, the two brothers took control and transitioned the Beach Gang into their own personal organization, with Voight and Quinn acting more like partners than bosses. By the 1930s, the brothers eventually ran the Downtown Gang away from operating on the city, and now had complete control over it.^[3]

The Maceos' empire

Sam Maceo expanded the extortion system Quinn had established. He further developed the organization's political connections, establishing ties to prominent political figures, such as Texas Governor James V. Allred, William Lewis Moody Jr. and onetime Galveston Mayor, Herbert Y. Cartwright, eventually emerging as a prominent figure in politics and entrepreneurship himself. After the repeal of Prohibition, Sam capitalized the popularity of gambling in Texas and started building an illegal gambling empire in Galveston City and Galveston County, teaming up with notorious gangsters, such as Moe Dalitz, Frank Nitti and Albert Anastasia, although those figures never operated rackets in the city or county.^[4] Maceo was known to be a very well dressed and nice man, whose charisma and ability to influence people were legendary. On the other hand, Rose was the more quiet enforcer type in the family. Their annual income was reported to exceed beyond one million dollars. In the early 1930s, the Maceos

Maceo Organization

Founded	c. 1927
Founders	<u>Sam</u> and <u>Rosario Maceo</u>
Founding location	<u>Galveston, Texas</u>
Years active	c. 1920s-1980s
Territory	<u>Southeast Texas</u>
Criminal activities	<u>Racketeering</u> , <u>illegal gambling</u> , <u>prostitution</u> , <u>bootlegging</u> , <u>numbers game</u> , <u>bribery</u> , <u>political corruption</u> , <u>electoral fraud</u> , <u>extortion</u> , <u>money laundering</u> , <u>smuggling</u> , and <u>drug trafficking</u>
Allies	<u>Beach Gang</u> , <u>Dallas crime family</u>
Rivals	<u>Downtown Gang</u>

backed Frank L. Biaggne for the position of Galveston County sheriff and supported Walter Johnston as city police commissioner. Through his control of many politicians and other elected officials in Galveston County, as well as some in Austin and Washington, Sam Maceo was able to make several improvements to the city and transform it not only into a leading resort city, but also into a major cultural and economical center as well.^[5] The brothers also established many clubs and casinos, including the Turf Club, the Maison Rouge, the Balinese Room and the Hollywood Dinner Club, which was just a small part of the Maceo empire.

Fertitta Organization

After Sam and Rose's deaths in the early 1950s, the brothers were succeeded by the Fertitta Group, who moved the organization to Las Vegas, Nevada, where gambling has been legalized in 1931, and worked in the casino industry. These casino properties included the Stardust, the Tropicana, Circus Circus, the Sahara, and the Fremont, which Frank Fertitta Jr. managed. Frank Jr. also founded Palace Station and Station Casinos which is today one of the largest local casino operators in Las Vegas.^[6]

Known members

Bosses

- c. 1927-1951 - Salvatore "Sam" Maceo, (his death)
- c. 1927-1954 - Rosario "Rose" Maceo, (his death)
- c. 1954-1980s - Anthony, Vincent, and Frank Fertitta

See also

- Free State of Galveston

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U.S. NEWS

NBA gambling scandal shows that La Cosa Nostra is still alive and well

A string of federal operations decades ago nearly decimated New York's major crime families, but they haven't completely gone away.

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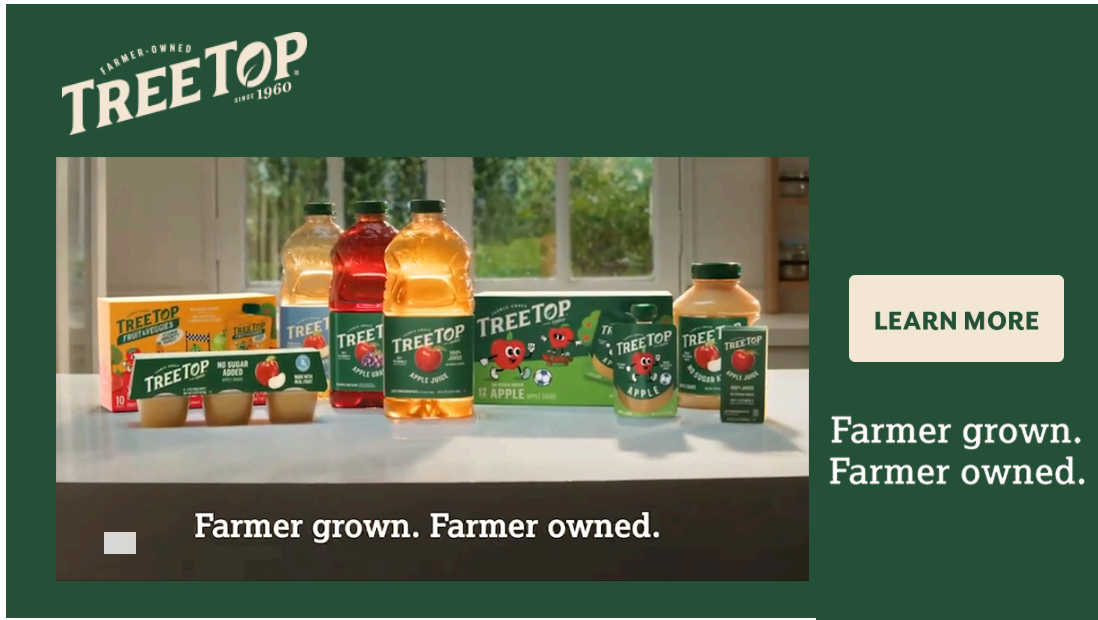
By David K. Li

Associates of four of New York's infamous "five families" crim
multimillion-dollar poker con that used elaborate technology
and brought rare, unappreciated light to the mob's shadowy



Associates of the Bonanno, Gambino, Genovese and Lucchese crime families were named in a sweeping indictment that also ensnared Portland Trail Blazers coach Chauncey Billups, and one-time NBA journeyman Damon Jones, according to prosecutors from the Eastern District of New York.

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Federal authorities didn't hesitate Thursday to pin the poker scam on [La Cosa Nostra](#), showing that organized crime is still a modern law enforcement concern even after FBI operations in the 1980s and 1990s seemed to decimate the five families.

"The mafia ... it's still a thing," said Geoff Schumacher, vice president of exhibits and programs for the Mob Museum in Las Vegas.

The mob works best [when the public knows less](#) about the people involved, according to Schumacher, who called famed bosses like the late Dapper Don, [John Gotti](#), an "aberration."

"They didn't want the general public to be well-versed in their business. The one guy who kind of defied that whole thing was John Gotti because he just believed that he was untouchable," Schumacher said.

A dozen mafia associates played a role in the poker scam, pro

- Ernest Aiello and Julius "Jay" Ziliani were linked to the Bon:
- Louis "Lou Ap" Apicella, Ammar "Flapper Poker" Awawdeh Minucci, Angelo Ruggiero Jr. were associates of the Gambir

- Matthew "The Wrestler" Daddino and Lee Fama were identified as associates of the Genovese crime family.
- Seth Trustman was linked to the Lucchese crime family.
- And Thomas "Juice" Gelardo was called an associate of the Bonanno crime family and later an associate of the Genovese crime family, according to the indictment.

Gambling "is an easy pinch" and bread-and-butter income source for the mob, the author and former Gambino mobster Louis Ferrante told NBC News.

"I wasn't at all surprised," Ferrante said. "Gambling has been a mafia mainstay for the last 100 years. With all the [RICO indictments](#) that put so many people away for the rest of their lives (in the 1980s and 90s), the mob has sort of scaled back and they stuck with loan sharking and gambling because if you get busted, as long as there's no violence involved, nobody's beat up or threatened, it's a slap on the wrist."

He added: "These guys could do a nickel maybe in the can, as opposed to doing 30, 40 years or life sentences."

Organized crime soldiers and associates are busted all the time but rarely make news, said Seth Zuckerman, New York criminal defense lawyer and former Brooklyn prosecutor.

"It's not what it used to be, but it definitely still exists," Zuckerman said. "In underground poker games and things like that, where you need protection, you need a source of cash, the mob still has its involvement."

With legal online gambling, users are required to put up all of the money before they place a bet but the crime families operate outside of the rules by acting as an intermediary, offering people the ability to place bets on credit.

"There's still a need for that," Zuckerman said. "There are people who want to bet on credit which as you know with legalized operations, you really can't territory."

Federal action against Billups and Jones spill into two separat insider sports betting information.

The alleged mafia members are only tied to the alleged poker long history of involvement in sports betting and poker.

- The most famous [sports betting scandal](#) in American history, [when the 1919 Chicago White Sox threw the World Series, was allegedly engineered](#) by gambler Arnold Rothstein, a mentor to early Genovese boss Charlie “Lucky” Luciano.
- The Colombo crime family had alleged connections to NBA [officials in the 1990s and early 2000s](#).
- Even though sports betting is largely legal in most states, that still didn't stop several Gambino soldiers from taking illegal bets in New York, [state prosecutors said last year in a 17-person indictment](#).
- The Lucchese crime family had alleged ties to a racketeering, gambling and money laundering operation out of New Jersey poker rooms that was taken down early this year, [officials said](#).

The New York City area's ["five families"](#) include the four mentioned in the indictment plus the Colombo crime family.

FBI Director Kash Patel said federal law enforcement had "entered and executed a system of justice against La Cosa Nostra to include the Bonanno, Gambino, Genovese and Lucchese crime families."

Old-fashioned mob muscle ensured victims paid up from their losses in rigged games, officials said.

"With respect to poker games held in the New York City area, members of the Bonanno, Gambino and Genovese Crime Families, used threats and intimidation to assure payments of debts" in games organized by defendants Awawdeh, Trustman, Zhen Hu and Robert Stroud, the indictment said.

All crime families involved "received proceeds" from the crooked games, the indictment said.

The mafia's alleged use of cutting-edge technology that included ~~hidden cameras and X-rays~~ shouldn't surprise anyone, Ferrante said, because a mob boss as anyone else.

"The mob moves with the technology," Ferrante said. "Don't t fingers,' or 'Joe the butcher' is making these moves. They're g technology and he's doing it for them."

And poker is no different from fuel, concrete and construction when it comes to wise guy involvement, according to Ferrante, the author of “Borgata: Clash of Titans: a History of the American Mafia.”

"The mob only has multiple families involved when it becomes something like gasoline, when they're doing multimillions of dollars," Ferrante said. "Concrete, when they were pouring all the concrete in New York; the windows, when they were putting in all the new energy efficient windows in the 90s; that's (when) all the families get involved because it's so big and there's so much money involved that you can't, one family can't keep it to themselves. "

He added: "So when you see four (of the five crime) families involved, you know that this is a huge racket."



David K. Li

Senior Breaking News Reporter

American Mafia

The **American Mafia**,^{[24][25][26]} commonly referred to in North America as the **Italian-American Mafia**, **the Mafia**, or **the Mob**,^{[24][25][26]} is a highly organized Italian American criminal society and organized crime group. The terms **Italian Mafia** and **Italian Mob** apply to these American-based organizations, as well as the separate yet related Sicilian Mafia or other organized crime groups in Italy, or ethnic Italian crime groups in other countries. These organizations are often referred to by its members as **Cosa Nostra** (Italian: [ˈkɔːza ˈnɔːtra, ˈkɔːsa -]; lit. 'Our Thing') and by the American government as **La Cosa Nostra (LCN)**. The organization's name is derived from the original *Mafia* or *Cosa Nostra*, the Sicilian Mafia, with "American Mafia" originally referring simply to Mafia groups from Sicily operating in the United States.

The Mafia in the United States emerged in impoverished Italian immigrant neighborhoods in New York's East Harlem (or "Italian Harlem"), the Lower East Side, and Brooklyn; also emerging in other areas of the Northeastern United States and several other major metropolitan areas (such as Chicago and New Orleans)^[27] during the late 19th century and early 20th century, following waves of Italian immigration especially from Sicily and other regions of Southern Italy. Campanian, Calabrian and other Italian criminal groups in the United States, as well as independent Italian-American criminals, eventually merged with Sicilian Mafiosi to create the modern pan-Italian Mafia in North America. Today, the Italian-American Mafia cooperates in various criminal activities with Italian organized crime groups, such as the Sicilian Mafia, the Camorra of Campania and the 'Ndrangheta of Calabria. The most important unit of the American Mafia is that of a "family", as the various criminal organizations that make up the Mafia are known. Despite the name of "family" to describe the various units, they are not familial groupings.^[28]

American Mafia

	<i>Cosa Nostra</i>
Founded	1860s ^[1]
Founding location	<u>New York City</u> , <u>New Jersey</u> , <u>Philadelphia</u> , <u>Chicago</u> , <u>Detroit</u> , <u>New Orleans</u> , <u>Boston</u> , and various other <u>Northeastern</u> and <u>Midwestern</u> cities in the United States
Years active	Since the mid-19th century
Territory	Primarily in the Northeast, the Midwest, <u>Southern California</u> , <u>Phoenix</u> , <u>Las Vegas</u> , and <u>Florida</u> , with smaller operations elsewhere in the United States Factions in <u>Southern Ontario</u> and <u>Montreal</u> in Canada
Ethnicity	Full members (" <u>made men</u> ") are of <u>Italian descent</u> ^[2] Other criminals of any ethnicity are employed as associates
Membership (est.)	Over 3,000 members and associates ^[3]
Activities	<u>Racketeering</u> , gambling, loansharking, extortion, labor union corruption, business infiltration, political corruption, drug trafficking, weapons trafficking, smuggling,

The Mafia is most active in the Northeastern United States, with the heaviest activity in New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, New Jersey, Pittsburgh, Buffalo, and New England, in areas such as Boston, Providence, and Hartford. It also remains heavily active in Chicago and has a significant and powerful presence in other Midwestern metropolitan areas such as Kansas City, Detroit, Milwaukee, Cleveland, and St. Louis. Outside of these areas, the Mafia is also very active in Florida, Phoenix, Las Vegas, and Los Angeles. Mafia families have previously existed to a greater extent and continue to exist to a lesser extent in Northeastern Pennsylvania, Dallas, Denver, New Orleans, Rochester, San Francisco, San Jose, Seattle, and Tampa. While some of the regional crime families in these areas may no longer exist to the same extent as before, descendants have continued to engage in criminal operations, while consolidation has occurred in other areas, with rackets being controlled by more powerful crime families from nearby cities.^[29]

At the Mafia's peak, there were at least 26 cities around the United States with Cosa Nostra families, with many more offshoots and associates in other cities. There are five main New York City Mafia families, known as the Five Families: the Gambino, Lucchese, Genovese, Bonanno, and Colombo families. The Italian-American Mafia has long dominated organized crime in the United States. Each crime family has its own territory and operates independently, while nationwide coordination is overseen by the Commission, which consists of the bosses of each of the strongest families. Though the majority of the Mafia's activities are contained to the Northeastern United States and Chicago, they continue to dominate organized crime in the United States, despite the increasing numbers of other crime groups.^{[30][31]}

Fictional accounts of the Mafia have long been a part of popular culture, especially since Mario Puzo's *The Godfather* was released in 1969. Francis Ford Coppola's film adaptation of the novel further contributed to romanticised accounts of the Mafia as well as *The Sopranos*.^[32]

Allies

theft, fraud, white-collar crime, money laundering, counterfeiting, prostitution, pornography, arson, bombing, kidnapping, assault, and murder^[4]

Sicilian Mafia^[5]

Camorra^[6]

'Ndrangheta^[7]

various independent Italian-American gangs (such as the 10th & Oregon Crew, Purple Gang, and Tanglewood Boys)^[8]

African-American mob^[9]

Armenian mafia^[10]

Chaldean mafia^[11]

Corsican mafia^[12]

Dixie Mafia^[13]

Greek mafia^[14]

Jewish-American mob^[15]

Lebanese mafia^[16]

Mexican Mafia^[17]

Russian mafia^[18]

Serbian mafia^[19]

various motorcycle gangs (such as the Hells Angels, Outlaws, and Pagan's)^[20]

various street gangs (such as the Bloods, Crips, and Latin Kings)^[21]

Rivals

Historically rivals of the Irish mob^[22]

Albanian mafia^[23]

and various other gangs and organized crime groups

Terminology

The word *mafia* (Italian: [ˈmaːfja]) derives from the Sicilian adjective *mafiusu*, which, roughly translated, means "swagger" but can also be translated as "boldness" or "bravado". In reference to a man, *mafiusu* (*mafioso* in Italian) in 19th-century Sicily signified "fearless", "enterprising", and "proud" according to scholar Diego Gambetta.^[33] In reference to a woman, the feminine-form adjective *mafiusa* means "beautiful" or "attractive". In North America, the Italian-American Mafia may be colloquially referred to as simply "The Mafia" or "The Mob"; however, without context, these two terms may cause confusion as "The Mafia" may also refer to the Sicilian Mafia specifically or Italian organized crime in general, while "The Mob" can refer to other similar organized crime groups (such as the Irish Mob) or organized crime in general.

History

Origins

Background

The first published account of what became the Mafia in the United States dates to the late 1860s. New Orleans newspapers reported that the city was experiencing a war between Sicilian gangs. The names of these gangs corresponded to the Sicilian cities their members came from — Palermo, Trapani, and Messina.^{[34][35]}

Sicilian crime groups in the United States first became influential in the New York metropolitan area, gradually progressing from small neighborhood operations in poor Italian ghettos to citywide and eventually national organizations. "The Black Hand" was a name given to an extortion method used in Italian neighborhoods at the turn of the 20th century. It has been sometimes mistaken for the Mafia itself, which it is not. The Black Hand was a criminal society, but there were many small Black Hand gangs. Black Hand extortion was often (wrongly) viewed as the activity of a single organization, because Black Hand criminals in Italian communities throughout the United States used the same methods of extortion.^[36]



Paolo Antonio Vaccarelli (also known as Paul Kelly), founder of the Five Points Gang

Giuseppe Esposito was the first known Mafia member to immigrate to the United States.^[29] He and six other Sicilians fled to New York after murdering eleven wealthy landowners, the chancellor and a vice-chancellor of a Sicilian province.^[29] He was arrested in New Orleans in 1881 and extradited to Italy.^[29]

From the 1890s to 1920 in New York City the Five Points Gang, founded by Paul Kelly, were very powerful in the Little Italy of the Lower East Side. Kelly recruited some street hoodlums who later became some of the most famous crime bosses of the century - such as Johnny Torrio, Al Capone, Lucky Luciano and Frankie Yale. They were often in conflict with the Jewish Eastmans of the same area. There was also an influential Mafia family in East Harlem. The Neapolitan Camorra was very active in Brooklyn. In Chicago, the 19th Ward was an Italian neighborhood that became known as the "Bloody Nineteenth" due to the frequent violence in the ward, mostly as a result of Mafia activity, feuds, and vendettas.

New Orleans was possibly the site of the first Mafia incident in the United States that received both national and international attention.^[29] On October 15, 1890, New Orleans Police Superintendent David Hennessy was murdered execution-style. It is still unclear whether Italian immigrants actually killed him, or whether it was a frame-up by nativists against the reviled underclass immigrants.^[29] Hundreds of Sicilians were arrested on mostly baseless charges, and nineteen were eventually indicted for the murder. An acquittal followed, with rumors of bribed and intimidated witnesses.^[29] On March 14, 1891, after the acquittal, the outraged citizens of New Orleans organized a lynch mob and proceeded to kill eleven of the nineteen defendants. Two were hanged, nine were shot, and the remaining eight escaped.^{[37][38][39]}

Prohibition era

On January 16, 1919, prohibition began in the United States with the 18th Amendment to the United States Constitution making it illegal to manufacture, transport, or sell alcohol. Despite these bans, there was still a very high demand for it from the public. This created an atmosphere that tolerated crime as a means to provide liquor to the public, even among the police and city politicians. While not explicitly related to Mafia involvement, the murder rate during the Prohibition era rose over 40% — from 6.8 per 100,000 individuals to 9.7 — and within the first three months succeeding the Eighteenth Amendment, a half a million dollars in bonded whiskey was stolen from government warehouses.^[40] The profits that could be made from selling and distributing alcohol were worth the risk of punishment from the government, which had a difficult time enforcing prohibition. There were over 900,000 cases of liquor shipped to the borders of U.S. cities.^[41] Criminal gangs and politicians saw the opportunity to make fortunes and began shipping larger quantities of alcohol to U.S. cities. The majority of the alcohol was imported from Canada,^{[42][43]} the Caribbean, and the American Midwest where stills manufactured illegal alcohol.

In the early 1920s, fascist Benito Mussolini took control of Italy and waves of Italian immigrants fled to the United States. Sicilian Mafia members also fled to the United States, as Mussolini cracked down on Mafia activities in Italy.^[44] Most Italian immigrants resided in tenement buildings. As a way to escape the poor lifestyle, some Italian immigrants chose to join the American Mafia.

The Mafia took advantage of prohibition and began selling illegal alcohol. The profits from bootlegging far exceeded the traditional crimes of protection, extortion, gambling, and prostitution. Prohibition allowed Mafia families to make fortunes.^{[45][46]} As prohibition continued, victorious factions went on to dominate organized crime in their respective cities, setting up the family structure of each city. The bootlegging industry organized members of these gangs before they were distinguished as today's known families. The new industry required members at all different



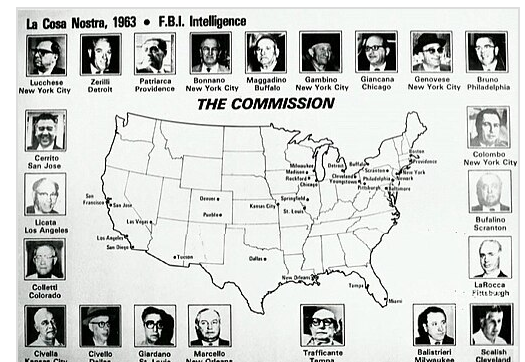
Al Capone's culturally publicized violent rise to power in Chicago made him an everlasting criminal figure of the Prohibition era.

employment levels, such as bosses, lawyers, truckers, and even members to eliminate competitors through threat or force. Gangs hijacked each other's alcohol shipments, forcing rivals to pay them for "protection" to leave their operations alone, and armed guards almost invariably accompanied the caravans that delivered the liquor.^{[47][48]}

In the 1920s, Italian Mafia families began waging wars for absolute control over lucrative bootlegging rackets. As the violence erupted, Italians fought Irish and Jewish ethnic gangs for control of bootlegging in their respective territories. In New York City, Frankie Yale waged war with the Irish-American White Hand Gang. In Chicago, Al Capone and his family massacred the North Side Gang, another Irish-American outfit.^[49] In New York City, by the end of the 1920s, two factions of organized crime had emerged to fight for control of the criminal underworld — one led by Joe Masseria and the other by Salvatore Maranzano.^[29] This caused the Castellammarese War, which led to Masseria's murder in 1931. Maranzano then divided New York City into five families.^[29] Maranzano, the first leader of the American Mafia, established the code of conduct for the organization, set up the "family" divisions and structure, and established procedures for resolving disputes.^[29] In an unprecedented move, Maranzano set himself up as boss of all bosses and required all families to pay tribute to him. This new role was received negatively, and Maranzano was murdered within six months on the orders of Charles "Lucky" Luciano. Luciano was a former Masseria underling who had switched sides to Maranzano and orchestrated the killing of Masseria.^[50]

The Commission

As an alternative to the previous despotic Mafia practice of naming a single Mafia boss as *capo di tutti capi*, or "boss of all bosses", Luciano created The Commission in 1931,^[29] where the bosses of the most powerful families would have equal say and vote on important matters and solve disputes between families. This group ruled over the National Crime Syndicate and brought in an era of peace and prosperity for the American Mafia.^[51] By mid-century, there were 26 official Commission-sanctioned Mafia crime families, each based in a different city (except for the Five Families which were all based in New York).^[52] Each family operated independently from the others and generally had exclusive territory it controlled.^[29] As opposed to the older generation of "Mustache Petes" such as Maranzano and Masseria, who usually worked only with fellow Italians, the "Young Turks" led by Luciano were more open to working with other groups, most notably the Jewish-American criminal syndicates to achieve greater profits. The Mafia thrived by following a strict set of rules that originated in Sicily that called for an organized hierarchical structure and a code of silence that forbade its members from cooperating with the police (Omertà). Failure to follow any of these rules was punishable by death.



FBI chart of American Mafia bosses across the country in 1963.

The rise of power that the Mafia acquired during prohibition would continue long after alcohol was made legal again. Criminal empires which had expanded on bootleg money would find other avenues to continue making large sums of money. When alcohol ceased to be prohibited in 1933, the Mafia diversified its money-making criminal activities to include (both old and new): illegal gambling operations, loansharking, extortion, protection rackets, drug trafficking, fencing, and labor racketeering through control of labor unions.^[53] In the mid-20th century, the Mafia was reputed to have infiltrated many labor unions in the United States, most notably the Teamsters and International Longshoremen's Association.^[29] This allowed crime families to make inroads into very profitable legitimate businesses such as construction, demolition, waste management, trucking, and in the waterfront and garment industry.^[54] In addition they could raid the unions' health and pension funds, extort businesses with threats of a workers' strike and participate in bid rigging. In New York City, most construction projects could not be performed without the Five Families' approval. In the port and loading dock industries, the Mafia bribed union members to tip them off to valuable items being brought in. Mobsters would then steal these products and fence the stolen merchandise.



Charles "Lucky" Luciano in 1948

Meyer Lansky made inroads into the casino industry in Cuba during the 1930s while the Mafia was already involved in exporting Cuban sugar and rum.^[55] When his friend Fulgencio Batista became president of Cuba in 1952, several Mafia bosses were able to make legitimate investments in legalized casinos. One estimate of the number of casinos mobsters owned was no less than 19.^[55] However, when Batista was overthrown following the Cuban Revolution, his successor Fidel Castro banned U.S. investment in the country, putting an end to the Mafia's presence in Cuba.^[55]

Las Vegas was seen as an "open city" where any family can work. Once Nevada legalized gambling, mobsters were quick to take advantage and the casino industry became very popular in Las Vegas. Since the 1940s, Mafia families from New York, Cleveland, Kansas City, Milwaukee and Chicago had interests in Las Vegas casinos. They got loans from the Teamsters' pension fund, a union they effectively controlled, and used legitimate front men to build casinos.^[56] When money came into the counting room, hired men skimmed cash before it was recorded, then delivered it to their respective bosses.^[56] This money went unrecorded, but the amount is estimated to be in the hundreds of millions of dollars.

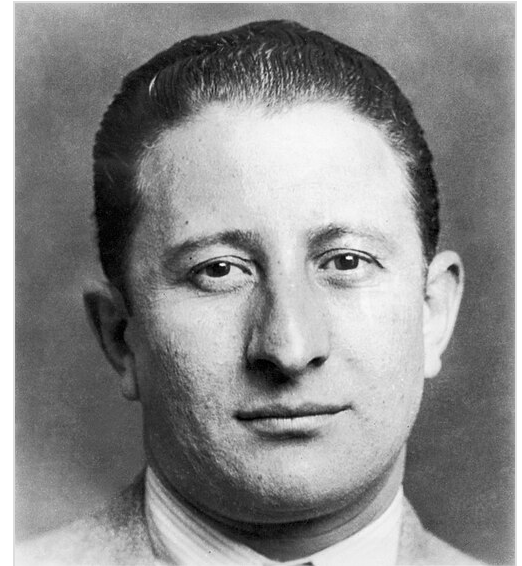
Operating in the shadows, the Mafia faced little opposition from law enforcement. Local law enforcement agencies did not have the resources or knowledge to effectively combat organized crime committed by a secret society they were unaware existed.^[54] Many people within police forces and courts were simply bribed, while witness intimidation was also common.^[54] In 1951, a U.S. Senate committee called the Kefauver Hearings determined that a "sinister criminal organization" known as the Mafia operated in the nation.^[29] Many suspected mobsters were subpoenaed for questioning, but few testified and none gave any meaningful information. In 1957, New York State Police uncovered a meeting and arrested major figures from around the country in Apalachin, New York. The event (dubbed the "Apalachin Meeting") forced the FBI to recognize organized crime as a serious problem in the United States and changed the way law enforcement investigated it.^[29] In 1963, Joe Valachi became the first Mafia member to turn state's evidence, and provided detailed information of its inner

workings and secrets. More importantly, he revealed the Mafia's existence to the law, which enabled the Federal Bureau of Investigation to begin an aggressive assault on the Mafia's National Crime Syndicate.^[57] Following Valachi's testimony, the Mafia could no longer operate completely in the shadows. The FBI put a lot more effort and resources into organized crime activities nationwide and created the Organized Crime Strike Force in various cities. While all this created more pressure on the Mafia, it did little, however, to curb its criminal activities. Progress was made by the beginning of the 1980s, when the FBI was able to rid Las Vegas casinos of Mafia control and made a determined effort to loosen the Mafia's stranglehold on labor unions.

The Mafia's involvement in the US economy

By the late 1970s, the Mafia were involved in many industries,^[29] including betting on college sports. Several Mafia members associated with the Lucchese crime family participated in a point-shaving scandal involving the Boston College basketball team. Rick Kuhn, Henry Hill, and others associated with the Lucchese crime family, manipulated the results of the games during the 1978–1979 basketball season. Through bribing and intimidating several members of the team, they ensured their bets on the point spread of each game would go in their favor.^[58]

One of the most lucrative gains for the Mafia was through gas tax fraud. They created schemes to keep the money that they owed in taxes after the sale of millions of dollars' worth of wholesale petroleum. This allowed them to sell more gasoline at even lower prices. Michael Franzese, also known as the Yuppie Don, ran and organized a gas scandal and stole over \$290 million in gasoline taxes by evading the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and shutting down the gas station before government officials could make him pay what he owed. Franzese was caught in 1985.^{[59][60]}



Carlo Gambino, head of the Gambino crime family

Labor racketeering helped the Mafia control many industries from a macroeconomic scale. This tactic helped them grow in power and influence in many cities with big labor unions such as New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, Detroit and many others. Many members of the Mafia were enlisted in unions and even became union executives. The Mafia has controlled unions all over the U.S. to extort money and resources out of big business, with recent indictments of corruption involving the New Jersey Waterfront Union, the Concrete Workers Union, and the Teamsters Union.^[61]

Restaurants were yet another powerful means by which the Mafia could gain economic power. A large concentration of Mafia-owned restaurants was in New York City. Not only were they the setting of many killings and important meetings, but they were also an effective means of smuggling drugs and other illegal goods. From 1985 to 1987, Sicilian Mafiosi in the U.S. imported an estimated \$1.65 billion worth of heroin through pizzerias, hiding the cargo in various food products.^{[62][63]}

Another one of the areas of the economy that the Mafia was most influential was Las Vegas, Nevada, beginning just after World War II with the opening of the first gambling resort, The Flamingo.^[64] Many credit the Mafia with being a big part of the city's development in the mid-20th century,^[65] as millions of dollars in capital flowing into new casino resorts laid the foundation for further economic growth. This capital did not come from one Mafia family alone, but many throughout the country seeking to gain even more power and wealth. Large profits from casinos, run as legitimate businesses, would help to finance many of the illegal activities of the Mafia from the 1950s into the 1980s.^[64] In the 1950s more Mafia-financed casinos were constructed, such as the Stardust, Sahara, Tropicana, Desert Inn, and Riviera. Tourism in the city greatly increased through the 1960s and strengthened the local economy.

The 1960s were also when the Mafia's influence in the Las Vegas economy began to dwindle, however.^[64] The Nevada State government and Federal government had been working to weaken Mafia activity on the Strip. In 1969, the Nevada State Legislature passed a law that made it easier for corporations to own casinos. This brought new investors to the local economy to buy casinos from the Mafia. The U.S. Congress passed the RICO Act a year later. This law gave more authority to law enforcement to pursue the Mafia for its illegal activities. There was a sharp decline in mob involvement in Las Vegas in the 1980s. Through the RICO law, many in the Mafia were convicted and imprisoned.^[66]

The RICO Act

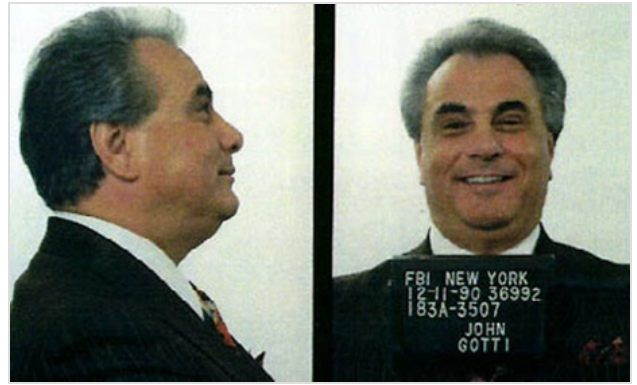


Sammy Gravano

When the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act (RICO Act) became federal law in 1970, it became a highly effective tool in prosecuting mobsters. It provides for extended criminal penalties for acts performed as part of an ongoing criminal organization. Violation of the act is punishable by up to 20 years in prison per count, up to \$25,000 in fines, and the violator must forfeit all properties attained while violating the RICO Act.^[67] The RICO Act has proven to be a very powerful weapon because it attacks the entire corrupt entity instead of individuals who can easily be replaced with other organized crime members.^[29] Between 1981 and 1992, 23 bosses from around the country were convicted under the law while between 1981 and 1988, 13 underbosses and 43 captains were convicted.^[54] Over 1,000 crime family figures were convicted by 1990.^[67] While this significantly crippled many Mafia families around the country, the most powerful families continued to dominate crime in their territories, even if the new laws put more mobsters in jail and made it harder to operate. A high-profile RICO case sentenced John Gotti and Frank Locascio to life in prison in

1992,^[68] with the help of informant Sammy Gravano in exchange for immunity from prosecution for his crimes.^{[44][69]}

Aside from avoiding long prison stretches, the FBI could put mobsters in the United States Federal Witness Protection Program, changing their identities and supporting them financially for life. This led to dozens of mobsters testifying and providing information during the 1990s, which led to the imprisonment of hundreds of other members. As a result, the Mafia has seen a major decline in its power and influence in organized crime since the 1990s.



John Gotti just after his arrest in 1990

On January 9, 2003, Bonanno crime family boss Joseph Massino was arrested and indicted, alongside Salvatore Vitale, Frank Lino and capo Daniel Mongelli, in a comprehensive racketeering indictment. The charges against Massino himself included ordering the 1981 murder of Dominick "Sonny Black" Napolitano.^{[70][71]} Massino's trial began on May 24, 2004, with judge Nicholas Garaufis presiding and Greg D. Andres and Robert Henoch heading the prosecution.^[72] He now faced 11 RICO counts for seven murders (due to the prospect of prosecutors seeking the death penalty for the Sciascia murder, that case was severed to be tried separately), arson, extortion, loansharking, illegal gambling, and money laundering.^[73] After deliberating for five days, the jury found Massino guilty of all 11 counts on July 30, 2004. His sentencing was initially scheduled for October 12, and he was expected to receive a sentence of life imprisonment with no possibility of parole.^[74] The jury also approved the prosecutors' recommended \$10 million forfeiture of the proceeds of his reign as Bonanno boss on the day of the verdict.^[75]

Immediately after his July 30 conviction, as court was adjourned, Massino requested a meeting with Judge Garaufis, where he made his first offer to cooperate.^[76] He did so in hopes of sparing his life; he was facing the death penalty if found guilty of Sciascia's murder, as one of John Ashcroft's final acts as Attorney General was to order federal prosecutors to seek the death penalty for Massino.^[77] Massino thus stood to be the first Mafia boss to be executed for his crimes, and the first mob boss to face the death penalty since Lepke Buchalter was executed in 1944.^[78] Massino was the first sitting boss of a New York crime family to turn state's evidence, and the second in the history of the American Mafia to do so.^[79] (Philadelphia crime family boss Ralph Natale had flipped in 1999 when facing drug charges, though Natale was mostly a "front" boss while the real boss of the Philadelphia Mafia used Natale as a diversion for authorities.)^[80]

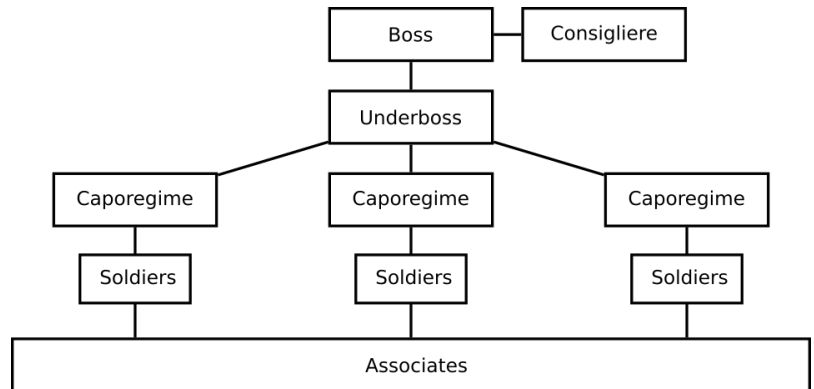
21st century

In the millenium, the Mafia has continued to be involved in a broad spectrum of illegal activities. These include murder, extortion, corruption of public officials, gambling, infiltration of legitimate businesses, labor racketeering, loansharking, tax fraud schemes and stock-manipulation schemes.^[81] Although the Mafia used to be nationwide, today most of its activities are confined to the Northeast and Chicago.^[82] While other criminal organizations such as the Russian Mafia, Chinese Triads, Mexican drug cartels and others have all grabbed a share of criminal activities, the Mafia continues to be the dominant criminal organization in these regions, partly due to its strict hierarchical structure.^[82] Law enforcement is concerned with the possible resurgence of the Mafia as it regroups from the turmoil of the 1990s, although FBI and local law enforcement agencies now focus more on

homeland security and less on organized crime since the September 11 attacks.^{[83][84]} To avoid FBI attention and prosecution, the modern Mafia also outsources much of its work to other criminal groups, such as motorcycle gangs.^[82] In the case of the killing of mob associate Sylvester Zottola on October 4, 2018 and attempted shooting of his son Salvatore Zottola, a Bloods gang leader named Bushawn Shelton was one of those hired for the hit.^[85]

Structure

The American Mafia operates on a strict hierarchical structure. While similar to its Sicilian origins, the American Mafia's modern organizational structure was created by Salvatore Maranzano in 1931. He created the Five Families, each of which would have a boss, an underboss, capos, and soldiers—all only of full-blooded Italian origin—while associates could come from any background.^{[86][87][44]} All inducted



members of the Mafia are called "made" men. This signifies that they are untouchable in the criminal underworld and any harm brought to them will be met with retaliation. With the exception of associates, all mobsters within the Mafia are "made" official members of a crime family. The three highest positions make up the administration. Below the administration, there are factions each headed by a *caporegime* (captain), who leads a crew of soldiers and associates. They report to the administration and can be seen as equivalent to managers in a business. When a boss makes a decision, he rarely issues orders directly to workers who would carry it out but instead passes instructions down through the chain of command. This way, the higher levels of the organization are insulated from law enforcement attention if the lower level members who actually commit the crime should be captured or investigated, providing plausible deniability.

There are occasionally other positions in the family leadership. Frequently, ruling panels have been set up when a boss goes to jail to divide the responsibility of the family (these usually consist of three or five members). This also helps divert police attention from any one member. The family messenger and street boss were positions created by former Genovese family leader Vincent Gigante.

- **Boss** – The boss is the head of the family and is sometimes called the *Don* or "Godfather". The boss receives a cut of every operation. Operations are taken on by every member of the family and of the region's occupying family.^[88] Depending on the family, the boss may be chosen by a vote from the caporegimes of the family. In the event of a tie, the underboss must vote. In the past, all the members of a family voted on the boss, but by the late 1950s, any gathering such as that usually attracted too much attention.^[89] In practice, many of these elections are seen as having an inevitable result, such as that of John Gotti in 1986. According to Sammy Gravano, a meeting was held in a basement during which all capos were searched and Gotti's men stood ominously behind them. Gotti was then proclaimed boss.
- **Underboss** – The underboss, usually appointed by the boss, is the second in command of the family. The underboss often runs the day-to-day responsibilities of the family or oversees its most lucrative rackets. He usually gets a percentage of the family's income from the boss's cut. The

underboss is usually first in line to become acting boss if the boss is imprisoned, and is also frequently seen as a logical successor.

- **Consigliere** – The *consigliere* (counselor) is an advisor to the family and sometimes seen as the boss's "right-hand man". He is used as a mediator of disputes and often acts as a representative or aide for the family in meetings with other families, rival criminal organizations, and important business associates. In practice, the *consigliere* is normally the third-ranking member of the administration of a family and was traditionally a senior member carrying the utmost respect of the family and deeply familiar with the inner workings of the organization. A boss will often appoint a trusted close friend or personal advisor as his official *consigliere*.
- **Caporegime** (or capo) – A *caporegime* (also captain or skipper) is in charge of a crew, a group of soldiers who report directly to him. Each crew usually contains 10–20 soldiers and many more associates. A capo is appointed by the boss and reports to him or the underboss. A captain gives a percentage of his (and his underlings') earnings to the boss and is also responsible for any tasks assigned, including murder. In labor racketeering, it is usually a capo who controls the infiltration of union locals. If a capo becomes powerful enough, he can sometimes wield more power than some of his superiors. In cases like that of Anthony Corallo, they might even bypass the normal Mafia structure and lead the family when the boss dies.
- **Soldier** (Soldato in Italian) – A *soldato* or "soldier" is an inducted (or "made") member of the Mafia in general and an inducted member of a particular Mafia crime family, and traditionally they can only be of full Italian background (although today many families require men to be of only half-Italian descent, on their father's side). Once a member is made he is untouchable, meaning permission from a soldier's boss must be given before he is murdered. When the books are open, meaning that a family is accepting new members, a made man may recommend an up-and-coming associate to be a new soldier. Soldiers are the main workers of the family, usually committing crimes like assault, murder, extortion, intimidation, etc. In return, they are given profitable rackets to run by their superiors and have full access to their family's connections and power.
- **Associate** – An associate is not a member of the Mafia, but works for a crime family nonetheless. Associates can include a wide range of people who work for the family. An associate can have a wide range of duties, from virtually carrying out the same duties as a soldier to being a simple errand boy. This is where prospective mobsters ("connected guys") start out to prove their worth. Once a crime family is accepting new members, the best associates of Italian descent are evaluated and picked to become soldiers. An associate can also be a criminal who serves as a go-between in criminal transactions or sometimes deals in drugs to keep police attention off the actual members, or they can simply be people the family does business with (restaurant owners, etc.) In other cases, an associate might be a corrupt labor union delegate or businessman.^[89] Non-Italians will never go any further than this, although many non-Italian associates of the Mafia, such as Meyer Lansky, Murray Humphreys, Gus Alex, Gerard Ouimette and Jimmy Burke, wielded extreme power within their respective crime families and carried the respect of actual Mafia members.



Jewish associate Meyer Lansky's (right) work with Lucky Luciano made him an important figure in developing the American Mafia.

Rituals and customs

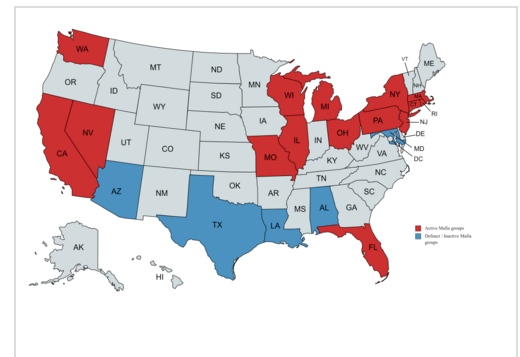
The Mafia initiation ritual to become a "made man" in the Mafia emerged from various sources, such as Roman Catholic confraternities and Masonic Lodges in mid-19th century Sicily.^[90] At the initiation ceremony, the inductee would have his finger pricked with a needle by the officiating member; a few drops of blood are spilled on a card bearing the likeness of a saint; the card is set on fire; finally, while the card is passed rapidly from hand to hand to avoid burns, the novice takes an oath of loyalty to the Mafia family. The oath of loyalty to the Mafia Family is called the Omerta. This was confirmed in 1986 by the *pentito* Tommaso Buscetta.^[91]

A hit, or murder, of a made man must be approved by the leadership of his family, or retaliatory hits would be made, possibly inciting a war. In a state of war, families would "go to the mattresses," which means to prepare for a war or be prepared in a war-like stance. It was mainly derived from the film *The Godfather*, as the origin of the phrase is unknown.^[92] Omertà is a key oath or code of silence in the Mafia that places importance on silence in the face of questioning by authorities or outsiders; non-cooperation with authorities, the government, or outsiders.^{[93][94]} Traditionally, to become a made man, or full member of the Mafia, the inductee was required to be a male of full Sicilian descent,^[95] later extended to males of full Italian descent,^[96] and later further extended to males of half-Italian descent through their father's lineage.^[95] According to Salvatore Vitale, it was decided during a Commission meeting in 2000 to restore the rule requiring both parents to be of Italian descent.^[97] It is also common for a Mafia member to have a mistress.^[98] Traditionally, made members were also not allowed to have mustaches, part of the Mustache Pete custom.^{[99][100]} Homosexuality is reportedly incompatible with the American Mafia code of conduct. In 1992, John D'Amato, acting boss of the DeCavalcante family, was killed when he was suspected of engaging in homosexual activity.^[101]

List of Mafia families

The following is a list of Mafia families that have been active in the U.S. Note that some families have members and associates working in other regions as well. The organization is not limited to these regions. The Bonanno crime family and the Buffalo crime family also had influence in several factions in Canada including the Rizzuto crime family and Cotroni crime family,^{[102][103][104]} and the Luppino crime family and Papalia crime family,^{[105][106]} respectively.

- Bufalino crime family (Northeastern Pennsylvania)
- Chicago Outfit (Chicago, Illinois)
- Cleveland crime family (Cleveland, Ohio)
- Dallas crime family (Dallas, Texas)
- DeCavalcante crime family (Northern New Jersey)
- Colorado crime family (Denver, Colorado)
- Detroit Partnership (Detroit, Michigan)



Map of Mafia groups in the U.S. by state

- The Five Families (New York, New York)
 - Bonanno crime family
 - Colombo crime family
 - Gambino crime family
 - Genovese crime family
 - Lucchese crime family
- Kansas City crime family (Kansas City, Missouri)
- Los Angeles crime family (Los Angeles, California)
- Buffalo crime family (Buffalo, New York)
- Milwaukee crime family (Milwaukee, Wisconsin)
- New Orleans crime family (New Orleans, Louisiana)
- Patriarca crime family (New England)
- Philadelphia crime family (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania)
- Pittsburgh crime family (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania)
- Rochester crime family (Rochester, New York)
- San Francisco crime family (San Francisco, California)
- San Jose crime family (San Jose, California)
- Colacurcio Organization (Seattle, Washington)
- St. Louis crime family (St. Louis, Missouri)
- Trafficante crime family (Tampa, Florida)



"Don Vito" Genovese became leader of the Genovese crime family. Genovese served as mentor to the future boss of the Genovese crime family Vincent "Chin" Gigante.^[107]

Cooperation with the U.S. government

During World War II

U.S. Naval Intelligence entered into an agreement with Lucky Luciano to gain his assistance in keeping the New York waterfront free from saboteurs after the destruction of the SS Normandie.^[108] This spectacular disaster convinced both sides to talk seriously about protecting the United States' East Coast on the afternoon of February 9, 1942. While it was in the process of being converted into a troopship, the luxury ocean liner, *Normandie*, mysteriously burst into flames with 1,500 sailors and civilians on board. All but one escaped, but 128 were injured and by the next day the ship was a smoking hull. In his report, twelve years later, William B. Herlands, Commissioner of Investigation, made the case for the U.S. government talking to top criminals, stating "The Intelligence authorities were greatly concerned with the problems of sabotage and espionage...Suspensions were rife with respect to the leaking of information about convoy movements. The *Normandie*, which was being converted to war use as the Navy auxiliary *Lafayette*, had burned at the pier in the North River, New York City. Sabotage was suspected."^[109]

Plots to assassinate Fidel Castro

In August 1960, Colonel Sheffield Edwards, director of the Office of Security of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), proposed the assassination of Cuban head of state Fidel Castro by Mafia assassins. Between August 1960 and April 1961, the CIA, with the help of the Mafia, pursued a series of plots to poison or shoot Castro.^[110] Those allegedly involved included Sam Giancana, Carlos Marcello, Santo Trafficante Jr., and John Roselli.^[111]

Recovery of murdered Mississippi civil rights workers

In 2007, Linda Schiro testified in an unrelated court case that her late boyfriend, Gregory Scarpa, a *capo* in the Colombo family, had been recruited by the FBI to help find the bodies of three civil rights workers who had been murdered in Mississippi in 1964 by the Ku Klux Klan. She said that she had been with Scarpa in Mississippi at the time and had witnessed him being given a gun, and later a cash payment, by FBI agents. She testified that Scarpa had threatened a Klansman by placing a gun in the Klansman's mouth, forcing the Klansman to reveal the location of the bodies. Similar stories of Mafia involvement in recovering the bodies had been circulating for years, and had been previously published in the New York *Daily News*, but had never before been introduced in court.^{[112][113]}

Law enforcement and the Mafia

In several Mafia families, killing a state authority is forbidden due to the possibility of extreme police retaliation. In some rare strict cases, conspiring to commit such a murder is punishable by death. Jewish mobster and Mafia associate Dutch Schultz was reportedly killed by his Italian peers out of fear that he would carry out a plan to kill New York City prosecutor Thomas Dewey and thus bring unprecedented police attention to the Mafia. However, the Mafia has carried out hits on law enforcement, especially in its earlier history. New York police officer Joe Petrosino was shot by Sicilian mobsters while on duty in Sicily. A statue of him was later erected across the street from a Lucchese hangout.^[114]

Kefauver Committee

In 1951, a U.S. Senate special committee, chaired by Democratic Tennessee Senator Estes Kefauver, determined that a "sinister criminal organization" known as the Mafia operated around the United States. The United States Senate Special Committee to Investigate Crime in Interstate Commerce (known as the "Kefauver Hearings"), televised nationwide, captured the attention of the American people and forced the FBI to recognize the existence of organized crime. In 1953, the FBI initiated the "Top Hoodlum Program". The purpose of the program was to have agents collect information on the mobsters in their territories and report it regularly to Washington to maintain a centralized collection of intelligence on racketeers.^[115]

Apalachin meeting

The Apalachin meeting was a historic summit of the American Mafia held at the home of mobster Joseph "Joe the Barber" Barbara, at 625 McFall Road in Apalachin, New York, on November 14, 1957.^{[116][117]} Allegedly, the meeting was held to discuss various topics including loansharking, narcotics trafficking, and gambling, along with dividing the illegal operations controlled by the recently murdered Albert Anastasia.^{[118][119]} An estimated 100 Mafiosi from the United States, Italy, and Cuba are thought to have attended this meeting.^[119] Immediately after the Anastasia murder that October, and after taking control of the Luciano crime family, renamed the Genovese crime family, from Frank Costello, Vito Genovese wanted to legitimize his new power by holding a national Cosa Nostra meeting. As a result of the Apalachin meeting, the membership books to become a made man in the mob were closed, and were not reopened until 1976.^[120]

Local and state law enforcement became suspicious when numerous expensive cars bearing license plates from around the country arrived in what was described as "the sleepy hamlet of Apalachin".^[121] After setting up roadblocks, the police raided the meeting, causing many of the participants to flee into the woods and area surrounding the Barbara estate.^[122] More than 60 underworld bosses were detained and indicted following the raid. Twenty of those who attended the meeting were charged with "Conspiring to obstruct justice by lying about the nature of the underworld meeting" and found guilty in January 1959. All were fined, up to \$10,000 each, and given prison sentences ranging from three to five years. All the convictions were overturned on appeal the following year. One of the most direct and significant outcomes of the Apalachin Meeting was that it helped to confirm the existence of a nationwide criminal conspiracy, a fact that some, including Federal Bureau of Investigation director J. Edgar Hoover, had long refused to acknowledge.^{[119][123][124]}

Valachi hearings

Genovese crime family soldier Joe Valachi was convicted of narcotics violations in 1959 and sentenced to 15 years in prison.^[125] Valachi's motivations for becoming an informer had been the subject of some debate: Valachi claimed to be testifying as a public service and to expose a powerful criminal organization that he had blamed for ruining his life, but it is also possible he was hoping for government protection as part of a plea bargain in which he was sentenced to life imprisonment instead of the death penalty for a murder, which he had committed in 1962 while in prison for his narcotics violation.^[125]

Valachi murdered a man in prison who he feared mob boss, and fellow prisoner, Vito Genovese had ordered to kill him. Valachi and Genovese were both serving sentences for heroin trafficking.^[126] On June 22, 1962, using a pipe left near some construction work, Valachi bludgeoned an inmate to death who he had mistaken for Joseph DiPalermo, a Mafia member who he believed had been contracted to kill him.^[125] After time with FBI handlers, Valachi came forward with a story of Genovese giving him a kiss on the cheek, which he took as a "kiss of death".^{[127][128][129]} A \$100,000 bounty for Valachi's death had been placed by Genovese.^[130]

Soon after, Valachi decided to cooperate with the U.S. Justice Department.^[131] In October 1963, Valachi testified before Arkansas Senator John L. McClellan's Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations of the U.S. Senate Committee on Government Operations, known as the Valachi hearings, stating that the Italian-American Mafia actually existed, the first time a member had

acknowledged its existence in public.^{[132][133]} Valachi's testimony was the first major violation of *omertà*, breaking his blood oath. He was the first member of the Italian-American Mafia to acknowledge its existence publicly, and is credited with popularization of the term *cosa nostra*.^[134]

Although Valachi's disclosures never led directly to the prosecution of any Mafia leaders, he provided many details of the history of the Mafia, operations and rituals, aided in the solution of several unsolved murders, and named many members and the major crime families. The trial exposed American organized crime to the world through Valachi's televised testimony.^[135]

Commission Trial

As part of the Mafia Commission Trial, on February 25, 1985, nine New York Mafia leaders were indicted for narcotics trafficking, loansharking, gambling, labor racketeering and extortion against construction companies under the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act.^[136] On July 1, 1985, the original nine men, with the addition of two more New York Mafia leaders, pleaded not guilty to a second set of racketeering charges as part of the trial. Prosecutors aimed to strike at all the crime families at once using their involvement in the Commission.^[137] On December 2, 1985, Gambino family underboss Neil Dellacroce died of cancer.^[138] Gambino boss and *de facto* commission head Paul Castellano was later murdered on December 16, 1985.^[139]

In the early 1980s, the Bonanno family were kicked off the Commission due to the Donnie Brasco infiltration, and although Rastelli was one of the men initially indicted, this removal from the Commission actually allowed Rastelli to be removed from the Commission Trial as he was later indicted on separate labor racketeering charges. Having previously lost their seat on the Commission, the Bonannos suffered less exposure than the other families in this case.^{[140][141]}

Eight of the nine defendants were convicted of racketeering on November 19, 1986^[142]—the exception, Anthony Indelicato, was convicted instead of the 1979 murder of Carmine Galante^[143]—and all were sentenced on January 13, 1987.^{[144][145]}

In the early 1990s, as the Colombo crime family war raged, the Commission refused to allow any Colombo member to sit on the Commission^[146] and considered dissolving the family.

2011 indictments

On January 20, 2011, the United States Justice Department issued 16 indictments against Northeast American Mafia families resulting in 127 charged defendants^[147] and more than 110 arrests.^[148] The charges included murder, murder conspiracy, loansharking, arson, robbery, narcotics trafficking, extortion, illegal gambling and labor racketeering. It has been described as the largest operation against the Mafia in U.S. history.^[149] Families that have been affected included the Five Families of New York as well as the DeCavalcante crime family of New Jersey and Patriarca crime family of New England.^[150]

In popular culture

Film

The film *Scarface* (1932) is loosely based on the story of Al Capone.^[151]

In 1968, Paramount Pictures released the film *The Brotherhood* starring Kirk Douglas as a Mafia don, which was a financial flop. Nevertheless, Paramount's production chief Robert Evans subsidized the completion of a Mario Puzo novel with similar themes and plot elements and bought the screen rights *before* completion.^[152]

Directed by Francis Ford Coppola, *The Godfather* became a huge success, both critically and financially (it won the Best Picture Oscar and for a year was the highest-grossing film ever made). It immediately inspired other Mafia-related films, including a direct sequel, *The Godfather Part II* (1974), also (partly) based on Puzo's novel, and yet another big winner at the Academy Awards, as well as films based on real Mafiosi like *Honor Thy Father* and *Lucky Luciano* (both in 1973) and *Lepke* and *Capone* (both in 1975). *The Godfather* has been credited with significantly romanticising the Mafia.^[153]

Television

A 13-part miniseries by NBC called *The Gangster Chronicles* based on the rise of many major crime bosses of the 1920s and 1930s, aired in 1981.^[154] *The Sopranos* was an award-winning HBO television show that depicted modern day American-Italian mob culture in New Jersey. Although the show is fictional, the general storyline is based on its creator David Chase's experiences growing up and interacting with New Jersey crime families. The Netflix true crime docuseries *Fear City: New York vs The Mafia* and *Mob War: Philadelphia and The Mafia*^[155] chronicle various mafia families in New York City and Philadelphia, respectively. The animated sitcoms *Futurama* and *The Simpsons* portray fictional mafioso characters.^[156]

Video games

The Mafia has been the subject of multiple crime-related video games. The *Mafia* series by 2K Czech and Hangar 13 consists of four games that follow the story of individuals who inadvertently become caught up with one or multiple fictional Mafia families while attempting to rise in their ranks or bring them down as revenge for something they did to them. The *Grand Theft Auto* series by Rockstar Games also features the Mafia prominently, mainly in the games set within the fictional Liberty City (based on New York); the games set in the "3D universe" canon feature the Forelli, Leone and Sindacco families, while those in the "HD universe" have the Anceletti, Gambetti, Lupisella, Messina and Pavano families (a reference to the Five Families), as well as the less-influential Pegorino family. In all games, the different Mafia families serve as either employers or enemies to the player. In 2006, *The Godfather* was released, based on the 1972 film of the same name; it spawned a sequel, itself based on the film's sequel.

Music

Within hip-hop music, mafioso rap is a subgenre of gangster rap characterized by references to Italian-American mobsters and mafiosi, and themes of racketeering, organized crime, and luxury. Emerging with Kool G Rap from the 1980s East Coast hip-hop scene,^[157] the genre was expanded through the 1990s and 2000s by such releases as Raekwon's *Only Built 4 Cuban Linx...*,^[158] Jay-Z's *Reasonable Doubt*,^[159] Nas's *It Was Written*, AZ's *Doe or Die*, Sean Combs's *No Way Out*, The Firm's *The Album*, Junior M.A.F.I.A.'s *Conspiracy*,^[160] Rick Ross's *Teflon Don*,^[161] among others.

See also

- African-American organized crime
- Atlantic City Conference – 1929 summit of organized crime leaders
- Black Mafia Family – Detroit-based African-American criminal organization
- Black Mafia – Philadelphia-based African-American criminal organization
- Bratva – "Russian mafia"
- Camorra – Criminal organization in Italy
- D-Company – "Indian mafia"
- Havana Conference – 1946 meeting of US organized crime figures in Cuba
- Irish-American organized crime – United States criminal syndicate of Irishmen and Irish-Americans
- Jewish-American organized crime – Jewish Mob or the Jewish Mafia
- La Eme – "Mexican Mafia"
- Ndrangheta – Criminal organization in Italy
- Sacra Corona Unita – Criminal mafia-type organization
- Sicilian Mafia – Organized Italian crime syndicate
- The Corporation – "Cuban mafia"
- Timeline of organized crime
- Triad – "Chinese mafia"
- Unione Corse – "Corsican mafia"
- Yakuza – "Japanese mafia"

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External links

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