



Al Capone's Beer Wars: A Complete History of Organized Crime in Chicago during Prohibition

John J. Binder

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Ideal for true-crime fans, historians, and library collections, this is a comprehensive picture of Prohibition-era crime.

John Binder's *Al Capone's Beer Wars* covers much more than the Capone criminal beat for its intricate history of Prohibition.

Binder draws from his experience as the author of two previous books on organized crime, and as an expert consultant about the mob, for this authoritative investigation. Deeply researched, the book makes excellent use of official records and newspaper accounts, and of interviews with the relatives of crime figures. The result is a broad-brush account of how the mob came to dominate the underworld industries of prostitution, gambling, labor, and narcotics.

The book brims with capsule but colorful tales of the henchmen that led the reigning twelve gangs during Prohibition, and with stories of crooked politicians who smoothed the way for criminal takeovers of industries and towns. Although bootlegging was the most lucrative criminal industry, sex was the underworld's biggest business. The author describes, sometimes in graphic detail, the lives and services offered by the thousands of prostitutes in the mob's flourishing red-light districts. Considerable terrain is covered; at times, details can overwhelm.

More attention is devoted to Al Capone, who emerged victorious from the 1922-32 bloody Beer War between his South Side gang and the North Siders. Ultimately, Capone was brought down by his tax evasion and not by his legions of enemies. Although Capone went off to prison, his gang thrived under the leadership of Frank Nitti. Binder gives Capone credit for his leadership—a violent combination of good business sense and cruelty.

This is a truly comprehensive history of crime in Chicago during Prohibition that will appeal to true-crime readerships and that will make an excellent addition to library collections for its coverage of an era. Extensive sources are a welcome feature for historians and the curious alike.

KARL HELICHER (May/June 2017)

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