



The Mafia and the Machine: The Story of the Kansas City Mob

Frank R. Hayde

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The story of the American Mafia is not complete without a chapter on Kansas City. Events unfolding in this city affected the fortunes of all the 'families', & shaped the entire underworld. In this book, Frank Hayde ties in every major name in organised crime as well as the corrupt Kansas City police force.

The Mafia and the Machine: The Story of the Kansas City Mob Details

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Cassidy says

This book features a bunch of different people and events. It was interesting to learn how big of an influence Kansas City was. Definitely worth reading.

Joel says

Brilliant. The first half covers a lot of the same stories related in Tom's Town, but this is a much lighter, quicker and frankly entertaining read. Highly recommended to anyone with an interest in the mafia or the dark, ignored side of Kansas City history. I can't wait to read it again.

Longfellow says

As someone who grew up in a K.C. suburb and has resided for the last decade within city limits, I've done relatively little to know the city's history and tour its unique historic sites. But it hasn't been for a lack of interest, and thus I found Frank Hayde's *The Mafia and the Machine: The Story of the Kansas City Mob* fascinating, reading it over the course of several days.

A few points of summary. The "machine" refers to the political influence of a group of men who worked outside the law to gain wealth and to control much of K.C.'s development in the early twentieth century. Jim Pendergast basically commenced this level of influence, and his younger brother Tom, whose name became more widely known, took it to another level. The Pendergasts were Irish immigrants, and they and other Irishmen were heavily active in the West Bottoms area. Surprising news to me was how much good Jim and Tom did in a "Robin Hood" kind of style. They gave food and money to countless folks in need, and even used an office in the Crossroads area (1908 Main St) to disperse money to folks who could line up and wait their turn to express their need. Hayde suggests that, were it not for Prohibition, Tom may have followed more closely in the footsteps of his older brother, who truly was focused on doing good for people of the city, despite wielding questionable influence over politics and operating outside the bounds of law to some extent.

Not far from the West Bottoms is the River Market area (also called City Market and River Quay at various points), and just east of that is Columbus Park and Little Italy. Some Italian immigrants from this area comprised the local "mafia," and the joining of these two forces, machine and mafia, is an early focus in Hayde's book. There was, of course, some infighting at times, but both mafia and machine were agreed in the purpose of accomplishing political influence and thus work to place particular democrats in local offices. The culmination of this partnership was when Johnny Lazia served as Commissioner of Crime for a few years, and this is where the facts become astounding. Lazia was essentially in charge of the local police force even though he had an armed robbery on his record from years earlier. He functioned as the local mafia boss and controlled law enforcement. Add in that the majority of local politicians were essentially hand-picked by the machine and the mafia, and you've got one unbelievable outfit (Harry Truman, future U.S. President, for

example, was largely indebted to T. Pendergast for his initial success in K.C. politics).

For both the mafia and the machine, it seems that illegal gambling and prostitution were foundational to their profits, though of course being able to call in favors from politicians as well as influence most local policies brought much financial favor as well. It was the gambling, however, and the welcome practice of vice in general without legal consequences that led to K.C.'s reputation as a "wide open" town, a kind of lingering feeling of the "wild west." Even to the local mafia's fading days, profit from gambling (by skimming Las Vegas casinos) remained a staple.

The biggest drawback to *The Mafia and the Machine* is the impossibility of retaining the names and activities of all the players; the "Cast of Characters" appendix in the back of the book contains 112 names.

Nonetheless, there are some that stand out, like the Pendergasts and Lazia, as well as a number of historic events that make for memorable stories, like the Union Station massacre, the River Quay bombing, and the gunning down of Lazia in the circle drive of Park Central Apartments on Armour Blvd. These apartments have been renovated in recent years and offer studios and one bedrooms from \$700 to \$1,100 per month.

I suppose thematically this book is really about power, the greed for it and the ruthlessness required to maintain control. Eventually, at least according to Hayde's account, power and money seem to have become the only things that mattered, as most mafia activities became motivated only by the acquisition of more money, mostly illegally, and an exclusively selfish approach to participating in K.C. culture and society, which is quite a contrast from the intention of Jim Pendergast and to a lesser extent, Thomas Pendergast. The violence increased, the body count mounted, and eventually the majority of the most influential mafia members were convicted, not of murder, but of more white-collar crimes like fraud and skimming money from Las Vegas casinos in the '70s and '80s. The final bit of fascination I'll testify to is the realization that mob activity was still going strong during my lifetime: a local mob war in the late '70s resulted in multiple retaliatory hits in the River Quay and surrounding area, which according to Hayde, left this previously thriving area essentially a ghost town.

There's little evidence of mafia influence in K.C. now, but I can't help but wonder about all the illicit schemes for acquiring money that remain ongoing locally and around the country, as well as the extent to which schemers are willing to go to protect themselves from getting caught. But mostly, I'm thankful for the many thriving areas and neighborhoods K.C. now enjoys.

Jennifer says

The Mafia and the Machine: The Story of the Kansas City Mob

Having lived in the Kansas City area for about 12 years, I've heard a few stories about the city's history. I've heard about the availability of alcohol during Prohibition, the seedy and exciting nightclubs that used to line the streets downtown, the Nell Donnelly kidnapping and of course, the Mafia.

But the Kansas City Mafia stories were unlike those from New York or Chicago. Instead of operating in secret and being constantly pursued by police, the KC Mafia seemed to be an accepted part of daily life. This book is a great introduction to the strange arrangements between politicians, organized crime and law enforcement in the city.

I found the first several chapters of the book to be the most interesting. This was a time when Jim and Tom Pendergast ruled the neighborhoods and political clubs, and few were elected without their approval. They were part of what was called the "Machine", which was essentially a second government controlling the city, often with more influence than the official Kansas City government.

Later in the book, you start to read about a more modern Mafia in control, one more concerned with Las Vegas casinos and using explosives to get their message across.

This book does a good job introducing the reader to a very influential time in Kansas City politics. While it's a little on the short side, it does provide a starting point for further investigation into the subject.

Taylor says

I am alittle under halfway through this book, and it is jam packed with history. Kansas City, although often nodded at in the Mafia genre, is seriously underappreciated by the general public. Hayde's book tells the true story of Kansas City and every dirty crime secret it holds, including its intertwinement with local politics. For those interested in Kansas City history, this book would be a great aid.

Jason says

I started this book on a Sunday afternoon and had to read it in one setting, I couldn't put it down. Even if you're not within a few hours of KC, it's a fascinating look at the relationship between the mafia and politics.

Brian Raymond says

A bit disjointed but very interesting

John Lippe says

Top 3 mafia cities in the US: NYC, Chicago, and KC. This book explores the mafia's relationship with political bosses and how it made KC the city it is today. Great read

Suzanne says

While the writing style is fairly dry, I found the content of The Mafia and the Machine to be totally fascinating. I'd heard mention over the years of the Mafia's presence in Kansas City, but had no idea of the extent of it, or the city's colorful history as it's documented here. If you'd like a general overview of the seedier side of Kansas City from the beginning to end of the 20th century--complete with street addresses that might surprise you and have you looking at familiar neighborhoods in a new way--check this one out. An entertaining and very eye-opening read!

Walt says

Interesting and entertaining, there is an overabundance on the machine and considerably less on the Mafia. Largely omitted was the very violent Prohibition era. If anything, the book continues to over-simplify which suggests either too many gaps or not enough research. The works cited is lacking, so it is difficult retracing Hayde's steps to see if he did anything beyond the most basic newspaper references. Because there is so little available about the Kansas City mob, this book fills a niche.

Taylor says

This is a comprehensive yet readable history of an important -albeit little known -element of the American Mafia. Fleeting references to Kansas City are made in virtually every Hollywood mafioso production -from 'The Godfather' to 'Mickey Blue Eyes', however, few outside the Heartland known the magnitude of the KC syndicate during the 20th century. Author Frank Hayde draws KC's mob lineage back to the days of outlaw Jesse James and holds legendary political boss Tom Pendergast largely responsible for the foothold the Sicilian 'Cosa Nostra' established in this then fledgling cow town. My only wish is that Hayde would have written this book before the Martin Scorsese film 'Casino'. Hayde illustrates the all-important role that KC played in the real life plot that inspired the film. If you've already seen the film, re-watching it will make for a whole new viewing experience after reading this book.

Aundrea says

A look into Kansas City's past and you'll find it is certainly the case of the truth being stranger than fiction. This book has all the down and dirt on the Mob and how it affected politics in Kansas City. One of the featured stories is the real story behind the movie "Casino".

St. Louis Dispatch, Ralph Coghlan: "We understand that Kansas City is one of the most wide-open towns in the United States, is that true?"

Tom Pendergast: If by calling the city wide-open, you mean gambling and poker games where the poor man obtains his recreation just as the big men do in their clubs, its wide-open. I wouldn't put a stop to it.

Pendergast was known "Big Tom" and was Kansas City's first marshall.

Thomas says

Author Frank Hayde left no stone unturned as he assembled a comprehensive and readable history of the Kansas City underworld. He neatly tied together generations of political shenanigans by the influential Pendergast political machine and numerous murders and illicit business ventures by the local Sicilian-Italian

Mafia organization.

In telling just over a century's worth of history, Hayde did considerably more than merely hit the high points - the Union Station Massacre, point-shaving allegations against the Kansas City Chiefs, the Strawman case, and the shocking assassination of a political boss within a Democratic headquarters. Hayde also provided rich detail on little known events, such as the Election Day riots of the 1920s and 1930s and the River Quay war, without ever allowing his narrative to become bogged down.

The result is the most complete picture yet of the Kansas City underworld and of the mutualistic relationship between organized politics and organized crime.

As thorough and well crafted as the book is, there are some missing elements. There is no index, and the Table of Contents' brief titles often provide little or no clue as to the subject or time period dealt with in individual chapters. Researchers on the topic of Kansas City organized crime could also be frustrated by the lack of notes and the incompleteness of the bibliography.

As it stands, *The Mafia and the Machine* is solid history and interesting reading.

Erin Coleman says

Tons of information in this book. Too much, in fact. A whole book could be written on any of the characters (who become very hard to keep straight) or events mentioned. I was also disappointed that what could have been a very engaging and exciting book read like an extremely dry textbook. Packed with history, but I think the author bit off more than he could chew. That being said, it sure was interesting to read about places a couple of blocks from where I was. Just wish the author hadn't been so ambitious.

Adam says

Of course I have to take the information presented on face value since I didn't research it myself. However, if you love learning about KC history this is a great read. I have heard tidbits over the years as my mother grew about neighbors to some Italian families in Kansas City so I enjoyed fleshing out some details.
