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### TURNING POINT Using Intel to Stop the Mob, Part 2

08/09/07



Joseph Valachi testifies before the Senate on October 1, 1963, showing how he was initiated into the Mafia by having to burn a crumpled ball of paper in his hands while taking the mob oath. AP Photo.

During this time, we'd been using intelligence to paint a picture of criminal activities, mostly locally on a case-by-case basis. In 1946, we launched the **General Investigative Intelligence Program**—our first national criminal intelligence initiative—to survey the crime landscape and gather details on key players, including mobsters.

By the early 50s, we'd gained (according to one memo) "considerable information concerning the background of operations of hoodlums and racketeers throughout the country," using informants, discrete inquiries, and public sources. We'd also pulled together intelligence through surveys on the Mafia, on bookmaking and race wire activities, and on other criminal rackets.

In 1953, the New York office—facing rising mobster activity—specifically asked to open intelligence files on 30 top hoodlums in the city to get a general picture of their activities and to keep an eye out for violations of federal law. On August 25 th of that year, we made it an official national "**Top Hoodlum Program**," asking all field offices to gather information on mobsters in their territories and to report it regularly to Washington so we'd have a centralized collection of intelligence on racketeers.

**It's important to understand:** at the time, most racketeering activities—including gambling and loan sharking—were beyond our jurisdictional reach. Still, we needed to build a bank of information to better understand the threat and to be prepared if federal laws were broken.

Three key developments would help us further expose the length and breadth of organized crime generally and the Mafia specifically in the years to come.

- In 1957, New York State Police Sergeant Edgar Croswell discovered a secret meeting of top Mafioso at the rural estate of mob leader Joseph Barbara in Apalachin, New York. We immediately checked the names taken by Croswell. We had information in our files on 53 of the 60 mobsters; forty had criminal records. Croswell's discovery led us to intensify our interest in these figures (not begin it, as some have speculated) and to arrest mobsters who violated federal law. In part because of Apalachin, we realized that local and regional crime lords were conspiring and began to adjust our strategy accordingly.
- In 1961, Attorney General Robert Kennedy created an Organized Crime and Racketeering Section in the Department of Justice to coordinate activities by the FBI and other department agencies against the criminal threat.
- In 1963, thanks in part to the FBI, the first major Mafia turncoat—**Joseph Valachi**—publicly spilled the beans before a Senate subcommittee, naming names and exposing plenty of secrets about organized crime history, operations, and rituals.

As the threat became clearer, Congress began giving us more tools to combat it—including jurisdiction over more mobster related crimes like gambling and, in 1968, the ability to use court-authorized electronic

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surveillance in cases involving organized crime.

**As a result of these intelligence efforts and new tools, our campaign against the mob turned a corner.** The next key piece of the puzzle would come in the early '70s, with the passage of the Racketeering Influenced and Corrupt Organizations or "RICO" statute that would enable us to take down entire mob families. More on that later.

**Resources:**

- [Part 1 of the Series](#)
- [FBI History website](#)
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