



Gangsters of Harlem

By Ron Chepesiuk

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For the first time ever, author Ron Chepesiuk chronicles the little known history of organized crime in Harlem. African American organized crime has had as significant an impact on its constituent community as Italian, Jewish, and Irish organized crime has had on theirs. Gangsters are every bit as colorful, intriguing, and powerful as Al Capone and Lucky Luciano, and have a fascinating history in gambling, prostitution, and drug dealing. In this riveting, vivid documentation, Chepesiuk tells the little-known story of organized crime in Harlem through in-depth profiles of the major gangs and motley gangsters whose exploits have made them legends.

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Editorial Review

Review

New York has always been the epicenter of the American gangster scene. I once saw a shirt in a store on St. Mark's Place that had a picture of a machine gun-toting gangster with the caption, "New York City, Family owned and operated since 1920." So true.

My publisher, Barricade Books, based out of Ft. Lee across the GW Bridge, has been putting out mob books on topics other than Al Capone and John Gotti. I just finished the new book by Ron Chepesiuk, *Gangsters of Harlem*. The book is a good overall picture of the various criminal elements that have held sway over the legendary Manhattan neighborhood. The early part of the book deals with the Mafia activity in the 1920s and '30s. It's some of the same material I've seen in other places. But the book really starts to take off when we get to the 1950s and the rise of the black crime figures. Ironically it's just as the neighborhood begins its gradual state of decline. Familiar names like Nicky Barnes and Frank Matthews (who is still on the lam after 25 years - take that Whitey Bulger!) are mixed in with Bumpy Johnson.

By the time the 1980s comes along, all hell breaks loose. Crack is the name of the game and gangbangers take control of the streets. No more code of honor. Paranoia and corruption rule. Some of the most violent criminals you'll ever read about plied their trade in Harlem. Chepesiuk delivers the story with plenty of quotes from cops and DEA agents who were there at the start of the crack "epidemic." Though street gangs are not my favorite crime subject, I have to say these are the best chapters in the book. It's new and fresh information, maybe that's why I liked them.

The book ends with two "tacked on" chapters, one on numbers kingpin Spanish Raymond Marquez (excellent), the other on police corruption (boring).

Overall, *Gangsters of Harlem* was a great read. It could have used more pictures, and there was hardly any mention of the Pleasant Avenue connection and the Italians who still ran East Harlem through the 1970s, but that does not detract greatly.

As Harlem reaps the benefits of gentrification (or not, as some people argue), stories like those in this book may become distant memories and the neighborhood might be known once again for more than crime. --Blog Critics

About the Author

Ron Chepesiuk is head of the Winthrop University Archives and has been a freelance writer and journalist since 1982. He is the author of numerous historical books, including *Winthrop College: A Pictorial History*, and he has published more than 1,500 magazine and newspaper articles in over 200 publications, including *Modern Maturity* and *The New York Times*. Gina Price White is the assistant archivist at the Winthrop University Archives. She has written articles on local history for the *Chester News and Reporter* and the *Rock Hill Herald*. The authors hope their tribute to the influential women of South Carolina will inspire others to collect these valuable records and preserve them for future generations.

J. D. Jackson is a theater professor, aspiring stage director, and award-winning audiobook narrator. A classically trained actor, his television and film credits include roles on *House*, *ER*, and *Law & Order*. J. D. was named one of *AudioFile* magazine's Best Voices of the Year for 2012 and 2013.

Users Review

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