Stephen R. Schneider, Iced: the story of organized crime in Canada

Cameron N. McIntosh

Published online: 21 July 2010
© Springer Science+Business Media, LLC 2010

Stephen Schneider’s book, Iced: The Story of Organized Crime in Canada, ended up being twice as long as he originally planned, with a bibliography that necessitated a separate online document (freely downloadable at: http://www.blindsidemedia.net/iced/Bibliography.pdf). None of this is surprising, however, given the scope of the material he set out to consolidate in this impressive chronicle of Canada’s underworld.

The first stop for Schneider’s time machine is the late 1500s, where he details the exploits of Canada’s premier criminal organizations: pirates off the Eastern seaboard. When we arrive in the 19th century, we meet the various gangs of thieves and smugglers who plied their trade on the Canadian plains, as well as a number of fraudsters who operated in larger urban centers. The second part of the book takes us through the dark side of the early 20th century, beginning with the terrorization of Italian immigrant communities by the infamous “Black Hand” extortionists, moving on to discuss the burgeoning Canadian vice scene (i.e., drugs, gambling, and prostitution), and then providing an exceptional account of the domestic contraband liquor trade during the Prohibition era and Canada’s numerous “rumrunners”, who profited enormously from smuggling alcohol to the United States from 1920 to 1933. The last two parts of the book cover the rapid growth of organized crime players and their activities in Canada from the mid-1930s to the present, such as the rise of Italian and Asian organized crime groups, Canadian connections to Columbian cocaine cartels, warring outlaw motorcycle gangs, credit and debit card fraud rings, human smuggling and trafficking, and the domestic marijuana and synthetic drug production industries.

C. N. McIntosh

Law Enforcement and Policing Branch, Public Safety Canada, 269 Laurier Avenue West, Ottawa, ON K1A 0P8, Canada

E-mail: cameron.mcintosh@ps-sp.gc.ca
At various points in his synopsis, Schneider shows us that he has no inhibitions about dropping the usual academic writing conventions in favour of a more creative and entertaining mode. Peppered throughout the book are several “period pieces” on various organized crime groups and their exploits, told in the popular slang of the times, and in some cases, language appropriated from works of fiction (e.g., Anthony Burgess’s dystopian classic, *A Clockwork Orange*). Readers should particularly enjoy a narrative in Chapter 10 on the Canadian outlaw motorcycle gang scene, inspired by Hunter S. Thompson’s surreal roman à clef, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*.

For the most part, the author takes a descriptive, rather than analytical approach to his subject, so academics and researchers looking for a critical, in-depth, theoretical treatment of the causes of Canadian organized crime might be somewhat disappointed. However, given the sheer volume of information to be covered, the sacrifice of depth for breadth is understandable. There is one reflective section at the end of the book, in which Schneider subscribes to the view that is swiftly becoming more popular among organized crime experts, namely that criminal groups are typically more emergent than strategic (Morselli et al. 2010). According to this perspective, criminal organizations more commonly arise in response to pre-conditions or criminogenic factors in the surrounding environment (e.g., mass demand for illicit goods and services, high impunity and corruption, porous borders), rather than simply “invading” a territory with a coordinated, rational plan to dominate one or more illicit markets. This is a potentially helpful point for law enforcement officials and policy makers to consider when developing suppression and prevention strategies for organized crime.

A limitation of the book, however, is the too brief attention given to the issue of Aboriginal organized crime in Canada. The only treatment of the topic focuses on cigarette smuggling coordinated by the Mohawk Warrior Society on the Akwesasne reserve, straddling the U.S.-Canada border. Nowhere in the book does Schneider mention the Aboriginal gangs from the Canadian Prairie Provinces that have become top law enforcement priorities (Criminal Intelligence Service Canada 2004; Grekul and LaBoucane-Benson 2008), such as the Indian Posse, Native Syndicate, and particularly the Manitoba Warriors, who in 1998 became the target of a major Winnipeg police initiative known as Operation Northern Snow, which resulted in 35 charges under Canada’s then only one-year-old criminal organization law—these charges were later reduced via plea bargaining to drug trafficking and conspiracy (CBC 2000). While it is true that a paucity of reliable scholarship exists on Canada’s Aboriginal organized crime groups, it would have served readers much better had Schneider summarized the available information and given us his perspective on the situation.

Overall, however, *Iced* provides a highly readable, informative and entertaining introduction to the historical landscape of organized crime in Canada. The future, in all likelihood, will provide Schneider with further chapters for a second edition.

**Disclaimer** Although the author is an employee of Public Safety Canada, the views expressed herein are his own and do not necessarily reflect the views of Public Safety Canada or the Government of Canada.
References


