

Al Capone and His American Boys
Memoirs of a Mobster's Wife

Edited by William J. Helmer

(Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011. Pp. xxi, 376. Illustrations, notes, index. \$29.95.)

Prohibition-era gangsters are all the rage. The American public, thanks to popular culture (in the form of films like *Public Enemies*—based on a much better book—and Ken Burns's PBS miniseries), and to scholarly works, remains as fascinated today as they were nearly a century ago. Into this mix comes William Helmer's *Al Capone and His American Boys*, which offers unique insight into the midwestern organized crime world of the 1920s. Helmer's entry into this world is Georgette Winkeler, who was married to one of Al Capone's enforcers and left an unpublished manuscript of her story.

Georgette's husband was Gus Winkeler, a small-time St. Louis hoodlum who grew into one of Capone's trusted soldiers. His criminal activities ran the gamut but culminated with his participation in the 1928 murder of Brooklyn crime boss Frank Yale and the 1929 St. Valentine's Day massacre. As Georgette relates it, Winkeler was one of Capone's "American Boys": a group of non-Italian, native-born criminals, whom he trusted with high-profile missions because they were not easily associated, in the minds of either the police or other mobsters, with his organization. After Capone's fall from power, Winkeler carved his own niche in Chicago before running afoul

of the Italian mobsters he had once served. Frank Nitti, the man entrusted with the Capone organization, hated these independent contractors and systematically pushed out and murdered the American Boys, including Winkeler.

Georgette's account is fun to read, but one wonders about its tone. Her recollection reads at times like the morality tale of a good wife out to redeem her fallen husband understanding little of what she is surrounded by. But her supposed naïveté is countered at other times when she seems to be the ultimate insider to her husband's world. Readers will wonder not only what to believe about Georgette's persona, but also what she might have left out. Regardless of these questions, her account raises intriguing issues about Capone's organization as well as the crime and corruption associated with it.

Thankfully, Helmer assumes an active editorial style. He offers the reader a small reference encyclopedia of who's who, as well as asides within the book, which provide needed insight on and clarification of events that Georgette has described. He also offers plenty of pictures to go along with both the narrative and the editorial inserts.

There is much to like about *Al Capone and His American Boys*, and

it is highly recommended for those who are interested in both organized and unorganized crime in the 1920s and 1930s. It is also an intriguing book because of the questions it raises in the reader's mind. Georgette paints a different picture of the Capone organization from the one which some mob historians have constructed. Her account also raises particular questions for Hoosiers. Indiana was the birthplace of several of the criminals who appear in the book, as well as the location of some of the events that occur within it, and yet we still have no focused account of organized crime in Indiana during this period. Did something about the

Midwest prompt this rise of lawlessness? Was the mafia active in places like Indianapolis? Did local police, not unlike FBI director J. Edgar Hoover, ignore them? If there was not mob activity, why not? If *Al Capone and His American Boys* is just a starting place for asking these questions, then we can thank both Helmer and Georgette for it.

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The Roots of Modern Conservatism Dewey, Taft, and the Battle for the Soul of the Republican Party By Michael Bowen

(Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011. Pp. ix, 254. Notes, bibliography, index. \$45.00.)

How do we tell the story of the American Right, and where do we start? These are the questions underlying Michael Bowen's interesting study, *The Roots of Modern Conservatism*. Too often, Bowen argues, the story begins with Barry Goldwater and the successful campaign to make him the 1964 Republican presidential nominee. However, as Bowen astutely notes, Goldwater represented "not the birth of a new political movement, but rather, a passing of the torch between generations" (p. 205).

We have to look more closely, then, at the almost two decades before 1964. Prior historians have done so by studying the development of a conservative intellectual movement around magazines like *National Review*; grassroots mobilization in places like Orange County, California; or polarizing figures like Senator Joseph McCarthy.

Bowen argues that we should also look at internal struggles for the control of the Republican Party. Coming out of World War II, the G.O.P., once the dominant party in American