I remember one night Pam showed up at the House at three in the morning. Not that there was anything unusual in somebody showing up that late; the TV was always on with competition from at least one stereo, there were shoulders to cry on, ears anxious for the latest gossip, and always somebody was there who was ready to share good dope with all comers.

Pam used to show up often at the House. She came mainly to relate her long tales of woe and amorous disappointment, though it was almost always the same disappointment: daughter of a prominent English professor, a perennial student, she was bright enough, but she seemed to specialize in getting into ruts that repeated themselves month after month and year after year.

Robert Warshow, in “The Gangster as Tragic Hero”

Thus, the importance of the gangster film, and the nature and intensity of its emotional and esthetic impact, cannot be measured in terms of the place of the gangster himself or the importance of the problem of crime in American life. Those European movie-goers who think there is a gangster on every corner in New York are certainly deceived, but defenders of the "positive" side of American culture are equally deceived if they think it relevant to point out that most Americans have never seen a gangster. What matters is that the experience of the gangster as an experience of art is universal to Americans. There is almost nothing we understand better or react to more readily or with quicker intelligence.

This night, though, Pam had a different tale to tell. She announced that she and her friend Annie, the daughter of a prize-winning biologist, had gone to see “The Godfather,” that they had been so deeply moved that, instead of going home, she’d gone tripping around town in search of the Mafia.

“The Mafia!”

Twisto Levine, Doctor of Crime, connoisseur of petty theft, bars and New Haven lowlife, a man who savored his brief but illuminating contact with the Invisible Forces, laughed out loud.

Pam turned: a serious look on her face reproved Twisto.

“Yes, the Mafia,” she said, explaining that after seeing “The Godfather” she realized that she could find, in the Mafia, that human closeness that had been lacking in her life ever since she’d been a child.

“But Pam,” said Twisto, “where’d you go to find them?” Well, it turned out that Pam hadn’t quite located
the Mafia yet. And that it was only this failure that
tainted her otherwise successful evening. Not that she
hadn't tried hard. To begin with, she and Annie had
gone to the Billy Budd room of the Holiday Inn where
they spent the last of their money on Scotch. From
there, they’d moved on to another hotel. The action
there had begun on a promising note: a small group of
meaty, middle-aged men, Italian-looking and drunk,
crowded around the two girls. Pam found them plenty
vulgar enough to qualify as Mafiosi. It was just that as
soon as she and Annie began to get somewhere, they
were suddenly booted out of the hotel (by a couple of
bouncer-pimps, who were apparently concerned with the
effect that an invasion by the competition would
have on their business).

From there (later we discovered that they'd crashed a
convention of cash-register salesmen) Pam and Annie hit
the bar at the Midtown Motor Inn, ordered drinks,
and began their Mafia watch in the semi-darkness. "I'm sure
they were on their way," said Pam, "I'm sure. Otherwise
why would the bartender have hustled us out? Got us
out so quick he never even asked us to pay for our
drinks."

"Going back there tomorrow night?" I asked, with a
straight face.

A blissful expression settled over Pam's face. She
nodded, faintly, peacefully.

Twisto broke the long moment of silence that followed.
"Where the fuck's the coke," he said. "I said where the
hell is the goddamn coke." He fumbled under the chair,
and found nothing. "You bring any coke Pam? You cop
any coke from the Mafia?"

She ignored him, and turned back to me, her eyes half
open, as if in a trance.

"What kind of opera records you keep around here?"
she asked.

**Question:** Is organized crime Italian?

**Answer:** Mario Puzo, in *The Godfather Papers*:

... do Italians and American-Italians control organized crime
in America? The answer must be a reluctant but firm
Yes. ... Most of the operators in organized crime in this
country will bleed Italian blood. That fact must be accepted.

**Answer:** Nicholas Gage, *The Mafia in Not an Equal
Opportunity Employer*:

Clearly, the underworld in the United States is as much a
melting pot as any other aspect of our culture, and the
opportunities for vice have attracted just as many ethnic
groups as the opportunities for legitimate achievement ... if
every member of the Mafia disappeared tomorrow, organized
crime would still be an immense, if largely invisible, parasite
sucking the lifeblood of American society.

**Question:** Is there a Mafia?

**Answer:** J. Edgar Hoover, 1961---No.

**Answer:** J. Edgar Hoover, 1966---No.

**Question:** If there is a Mafia, is it growing? declining?

**Answer:** *Life* magazine series, September, 1967:

... Each year it handles $20 billion in illegal bets, of which it
keeps $7 billion profit. ... On every bet made, be it $1 or
$10,000, the Mob collects a cut of the action, called vigorish ---
usually 10%.

... no one can say for sure just what its legitimate investments
amount to. ... The best hint came from gangland's own
financial wizard --- Mayer Lansky himself --- who made a modest
appraisal of the Mob's private holding.

"We're bigger than U.S. Steel," said Lansky.

Even though U.S. Steel's assets are $5,642,379,942 and its
1966 profits came to $249,238,569, Lansky's boast strikes
federal investigative agencies as conservative. The gangsters are
in almost everything, ...

The Mob's power over the nation's biggest port and its rackets ---
shakedowns, shylocking and thievery --- stems from its grip on
ILA locals. The Gambino gang today dominates the
unions on the Brooklyn piers. On the docks of Manhattan and
in New Jersey ports, the Vito Genovese gang is rigidly in
control.

**Answer:** Nicholas Gage, in *New York* magazine, July 24,
1972:

The DeCalvacante tapes reveal, for the first time, the kind of
seediness that makes up Mafia life. They show DeCalvacante,
whom the F.B.I. had labelled as the boss of New Jersey,
running all over the state trying to find a $130 a-week job for a
Gambino relative. They tell of Mafia underbosses giving their
wives $50 a week household money and paying $125 a month
rent. Contrary to what most journalists write about the mob
and most police claim, the DeCalvacante papers proved the
majority of the Mafia's membership are not millionaires, but
are low-level, uleer-ridden, working-class worryers --- in
construction gangs or scavenging for jobs in factories or along
the Jersey piers --- who carry messages, administer occasional
beatings or watch over failing businesses on which they are
continuously trying to borrow money. One has a hard time
reconciling the Mafia life-style according to DeCalvacante with
the declaration of Carl M. Loeb, president of the National
Council on Crime and Delinquency, who would have us believe
that "in ten or fifteen years organized crime will have amassed
at least one half trillion dollars and will then own the entire
United States."

**Question:** Where is the Mafia?

**Answer:** Yale men, 1970: The Copper Kitchen (Chapel
Street, between College and High).

**Answer:** Yale men, 1966: in Olivia's (Chapel Street,
between College and High).

**Answer:** Magazine freaks, 1972: Consult *New York*
magazine, issue of July 24, which features: "Mafia Maps:
Where to find Your Local Button Man": six pages in the
center of the magazine which cover Manhattan,
Brooklyn and the Bronx, and which tell you where to find the Mafia's favorite social clubs and restaurants, dumping grounds, florists, mortuaries and historical sites.

Answer: Pam: ????

Question: Where is the Mafia?

It is a new place, clean and well-lighted, on the corner of Mulberry and Hester. The sign outside the building is white, brightly lighted plastic that announces through the night: Scungilli, Calamari, Mussels. Umberto's Clam House. Pepsi.

Inside, a counter runs down the length of the restaurant; behind it, waiters and chefs scurry about in front of a wall of light green tile. Just above them, the wall turns into white plaster: fastened to it is a ring buoy with letters labelling it "Umberto's" painted around its entire circumference; on either side of the ring buoy, paddles are clamped onto the wall.

We walked in at midnight; a waiter sat the three of us at a table for four near the front door.

Twisto was finishing a story as we glanced over the menu. It was one of his good ones, one which may or may not be true, but which I had heard so many times that I thought I had witnessed it myself. It was about Eugene Genovese, who, after a Black History lecture at Yale one day three years back, was asked whether or not he was related to Vito Genovese.

Twisto had to hurry the punch-line; he spoke it in a whisper, as the waiter was hurrying back to our table to take orders.

"So, Genovese turns on the kid, and he says, 'Do you think that if I was related to Vito Genovese I'd be teaching in this dump?"

I looked up at the waiter, who was dressed in a bright red coat; I nodded meaninglessly at him.

"Spaghetti with clam sauce," I said.

"Red or white sauce," he asked, with a heavy Italian accent.

Ask him, I said to myself. Ask him now.

"Red," I said.

Twisto order the scungilli, and Pam asked for Calamari.

"You see down there," Twisto whispered as the waiter left us. He pointed to the other end of the restaurant, where a side door led out to Mulberry Street. "That door is where the guy that took Joey came in. Joey and three others were setting at these two tables there." He pointed out two of the small, shellacked butcher-block style tables near the door. "5:30 A.M., April 7, Joey's 43rd birthday. Man comes in, 5'8", black hair, wearing a light tweed car coat. Suddenly he's blazing away with his .38, and that's the end of Joey."

I looked down the two neat rows of tables that ran down the length of the restaurant. The window near the table where Gallo was killed was like all the other windows in the place: fish net in the window, holding round colored plastic baubles, and on the window-sill a model of a ship. Between us and Joey's death seat, autographed pictures had been hung along the wall: Bob Hope, Johnny Carson, a host of Italian nightclub singers that I didn't recognize, and a framed page out of New York magazine in which Umberto's is highly recommended.

This clean, well-lighted place was not a proper place for death. And yet, on that night twenty shots were fired from four guns into the walls and tables and the flesh of Joey Gallo; tables were overturned, ketchup and hot sauce spilled all over the place as Gallo stumbled out the front door to die in the middle of Hester Street (several months before, only a block away, Don Corleone had been shot by thugs under the direction of Francis Copolla).

"It gives me the creeps," said Pamela. "It's like being in some old palace, or Mount Vernon, or somethin' like that."

The waiter returned with scungilli and calamari. Five minutes later he came with my spaghetti and later again with coffee and Italian pastry, but I never managed to ask him where he was and what he was doing at that moment in the dawn that earned Umberto's its place in history.

Thomas Wolfe, From "Only the Dead Know Brooklyn"

"Listen!" I says. "You get dat idea outa yeen head right now," I says. "You ain't never gonna get to know Brooklyn," I says. "Not in a hundred yeahs. I been living heah all my life," I says, "an' I don't even know all deh is to know about it, so how you expect to know deh, I says, "when you don't even live heah?"

"Yes," he says, "but I got a map to help me find my way about."

"Map or no map," I says, "yuh ain't gonna get to know Brooklyn wit no map," I says.
“Little Caesar,” film script, scene 1.

... Rico picking up a discarded Chicago newspaper and becoming interested in a story. He looks with disgust at a cheap ring which he twists on the little finger of his left hand, then turns to Joe. Thereupon a close up view shows Rico showing Joe the newspaper story, which reads:

UNDERWORLD PAYS RESPECTS TO DIAMOND PETE MONTANA.

Joe glances swiftly at the story, and looks questioningly at Rico:

JOE: Well, what's that gotta do with the price of eggs?
RICO: (snatching away paper). A lot. Big time (Musing)

"Diamond Pete Montana." He don't have to waste his time on cheap gas station. ... He don't have to waste his time on hick cops. ... He's in the Big Town, doin' things in a big way.

JOE: (jerking his thumb at the newspaper). Is that what you want? A party like that for you, Rico? "Caesar Enrico Bandello Honored By His Friends!"

Rico straightens up and draws a deep breath, and his jaw sets grimly as he stares into vacancy. He mutters as though talking to himself:

RICO: I could do all the things that fellow does. More! When I get in a tight spot, I shoot my way out of it. Like tonight ... sure, shoot first... argue afterwards. If you don't the other feller gets you. ... This game ain't for guys that's soft!

The classic analysis of the gangster's position in the American imagination is Robert Warshaw's short essay, "The Gangster as Tragic Hero." Warshaw opens his essay by identifying Americanism, along with Communism, as an equilatral ideology which is committed to a cheerful view of life, as opposed to that tragic sense which "is a luxury of aristocratic societies, where the fate of the individual is not conceived of as having a direct and legitimate political importance. ..." Though at the time Warshaw wrote (1948) mass culture was only entering into its cultural empire, he conceived of movies and television as the indispensable tools of a society bent on maintaining public morale at the level of "happiness."

But within the mass culture of happiness addiction, there was room, perhaps even a need for a subversive element, something that would lend expression to "that part of the American psyche which rejects the qualities and the demands of modern life, which rejects 'Americanism' itself." For Warshaw, it was the gangster-film which, alone among popular forms, accomplished this by expressing the fears and secret yearnings that lurked in the modern, urban-American mind:

The gangster is the man of the city, with the city's language and knowledge, with its queer and dishonest skills and its terrible daring, carrying his life in his hands like a placard, like a club. For everyone else, there is at least the theoretical possibility of another world — in that happier American culture which the gangster denies, the city does not really exist; it is only a more crowded and more brightly lit country — but for the gangster there is only the city; he must inhabit it in order to personify it: not the real city, but that dangerous and sad city of the imagination which is so much more important, which is the modern world. And the gangster

... though there are real gangsters— is also, and primarily, a creature of the imagination. The real city, one might say, produces only criminals; the imaginary city produces the gangster: he is what we want to be and what we are afraid we may become.

In the classic gangster film that Warshaw writes about, which might be best represented by "Little Caesar," the meaning of the gangster's career is contained in the meaning of his drive to success. For in the city, says Warshow, success is at a premium: "One must emerge from the crowd or one is nothing." And yet, success within these terms must lead inevitably to the final bullet because "success is always the establishment of an individual pre-eminence that must be imposed on others in whom it automatically arouses hatred." The others shoot back; a new Mr. Big climbs to the top, at least temporarily.

For Warshow, the meaning of the gangster's doom in the form-film goes beyond the form-wisdom that "Crime doesn't pay." The gangster is doomed not because his means are unlawful, but rather, because in the modern consciousness "all means are unlawful, every attempt to succeed is an act of aggression, leaving one alone and guilty and defenseless among enemies: one is punished for success. This is our intolerable dilemma: that failure is a kind of death and success is evil and dangerous—is, ultimately, impossible."

Rico Bandello, Little Caesar, falls to the state of a flophouse denizen before getting shot by cops on a cold, windy night on a deserted street of the city's industrial section. This is the standard end for the gangster, the lone contemptuous death that links him to the Macbeth side of tragic literature. But if we are to take the "Little Caesar" pattern as the standard for the genre, it quickly becomes apparent that the most successful recent gangster film may be noted not so much for the way it fits into that pattern, as for the ways in which it departs from it. Don Corleone dies, not alone on the streets, but in the family garden, playing with his grandson. As the novel makes explicit, the Don's function is not to stand out in success, but to govern wisely:

Vito Corleone was a man with vision. All the great cities of American were being torn by underground strife. Guerrilla wars by the dozen flared. ... Don Corleone saw that the newspapers and government agencies were using these killings to get stricter and stricter laws, to use harsher police methods. ... He decided to bring peace to all the warring factions in New York City and then in the nation.

"The Godfather" begins in the court of the wise governor, where the Don is dispensing the traditional Sicilian wedding day favors to his guests. Power attained and wisely exercised is at the center of the film: unlike the novel, the film never even touches on the story of the rise of the Corleone Family. Consulting the novel, however, one may see that the rise of Vito Corleone was not only different from that of such a traditional gangster as Al Capone, but that it is to the differences

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themselves that we must turn in order to perceive the foundations of Don Corleone's real, lasting power:

The Don held the Capones in small esteem as stupid, obvious cutthroats. His intelligence informed him that Capone had forfeited all political influence because of his public arrogance and the flaunting of his criminal wealth. The Don knew, in fact was positive, that without political influence, without the camouflage of society, Capone's world, and others like it, could be easily destroyed. He knew Capone was on the path to destruction.

Real success, real lasting power, depends upon repression. It is not a riotous bursting out of anonymity; indeed, its development depends on the capacity to maintain anonymity. If, in some perversely American sense, Little Caesar and Scarface may be said to resemble Macbeth, then Michael Corleone might in an equally twisted way be compared to Prince Hal in Henry IV: repressing an important part of his natural self, betraying the human companion of that self (i.e. Kate, who, representing the staid virtues of WASPdom may be unsatisfactory as a replacement for Falstaff; but more on this later) by denying her access to his new, official self. Michael's assumption of power is accompanied by a lie that shifts the basis of his personal life.

Twisto always liked to use the steam-room for these meetings of his: in the morning, it was almost always sure to be empty; and of someone came in he would be spooked immediately. So it was top security. Twisto said, too, that spending time in the steam room kept him in shape. Of course, the real reason was that the steam room reminded him of or gangster films, corrupt boxing, and the whole world of old city gyms.

That day, I met Twisto in the locker room at 10:30. When we got upstairs and sat down in the clouds of pent-up steam, I was waiting for Twisto to begin discussing the problem of selling to two keys of lousy marijuana that he'd somehow been conned into buying.

But Twisto began far a field.

"You know Frankie Costello?" he asked; 'I mean, you read about him, right?"

"Yeah."

"You remember how it was he retired . . . Vincente Gigante, ex-boxer, 'The Chin' they called him, he comes right up to Frank and he says, 'This is for you Frankie! Just like that, and with Frank sitting on top of the world practically, and walking there in the lobby of his apartment up on Central Park West, which is where he's King."

I felt the steam bring the sweat to my skin, and felt the drops begin to slide down my side.

Twisto continued.

"Sometimes it takes something like that to convince somebody he's human, you know what I mean? That he shits and sweats like you and me that not only can he fuck up, but he did fuck up, something important, somewhere, someplace along the line that he can't even remember."

Twisto cleared his throat. Sitting across the room from me, his legs drawn up on the long stone bench, he was nearly invisible. I tried to puzzle out what he was getting at.

"You know who burned me on those keys of dope? It was Chaney. Chaney again. Smiling all the time, smooth pretty boy, fast talker, oozing his way in and out of other people's hustles, other people's beds, talking his little way into bed with half the freshmen chicks on campus. Remember, after he fucked over Josie we voted him Face I'd Most Like to Punch? Well, a couple days ago I was talking to Jim Morello. Chaney burned him too, tried to steal his coke connection in New York. I said to him I'd sure like to mess that pretty-boy's face up, that if I ever got to know somebody important, that's one favor I'd ask. Then Jim says to me, 'You know Vinnie diCarlo, don't you,' and of course I did. So he says, 'Some of the boys he used to work with, when he was into that kind of thing, they'd take a contract like you're talking about for a hundred bucks."

He paused.

"If I could only be there, if I could only see that one short second of terror on his fucking face, that one last moment before he gets hit, when finally, for the first time, he knows that he's gonna look different come morning, and that there ain't no way he can weasel out of it."

Twisto forced a hollow laugh.

I asked if he really meant to go through with taking out the contract.

"I don't know," he said, softly, uneasily. "You play with something in your mind for so long and feel so comfortable with it, then suddenly it's gonna happen on the street, outside your brain, it makes you feel dizzy. I wish I could tell you," he said, "but I just don't know."

**Tom Hagen to Jack Woltz, in The Godfather:**

". . . I don't think you've understood how important this very small favor is to my client. Mr. Corleone held the infant Johnny in his arms when he was baptized. When Johnny's father died, Mr. Corleone assumed the duties of parenthood, indeed he is called 'Godfather' by many, many people who wish to show their respect and gratitude for the help he has given them. Mr. Corleone never lets his friends down."

Six weeks before the the Mott Street scene, Albert Ruddy, the film’s producer, was uncertain whether he would be able to make the movie at all. Ruddy had already run into trouble trying to negotiate with house-holders in Manhasset, N.Y., for a site that looked like a godfather’s compound. The entire community and its bureaucrats had sabotaged his efforts. Finally, Ruddy went in search of a godfather of his own.

The moment he reached that agreement with Colombo, Ruddy’s troubles were over. Suddenly, the threats of union woes evaporated. Protest letters from Italian-American groups stopped; planned demonstrations and boycotts were called off. A location for the godfather’s compound was found on Staten Island, and Colombo’s men made a house-to-house tour of the neighborhood, smoothing ruffled feathers.

When the filming actually began, Ruddy found that with Colombo’s men around, instead of being harassed by neighborhood toughs, shaken down by various unions and visited by corrupt cops, The Godfather troupe was untouchable.

When the filming actually began, Ruddy found that with Colombo’s men around, instead of being harassed by neighborhood toughs, shaken down by various unions and visited by corrupt cops, The Godfather troupe was untouchable.

“The Mafia is Not an Equal Opportunity Employer,” declares the title of Nicholas Gage’s fine collection of articles on the Mafia. True enough. True also that equal opportunity is not the only principle of constitutional rule that’s put on ice (orcased in cement) in the administration of what many journalists have enjoyed referring to as America’s “other government.” Indeed, it is perhaps just these anti-liberal principals that begin to explain how the Don has staked out his powerful Empire in the American imagination.

Because, despite devotion to the death to Democracy, despite every American’s vision of his country as the sacred Cradle of Democracy, the ideal practice of modern liberal government is something that no one, in his deepest self, can believe in. And this, perhaps, is because its virtues lie not in what it is, but in the nightmare visions of what it is not: visions that no matter how real and recent, evaporate quickly in the banal daylight of a thousand standardized tests and bureaucratic forms.

Nothing, really, is sillier than the idea that power is something to be amassed, via exhibitions of pure competence, simply for the sake of exhibiting honesty, more and better competence, and a serene view of all petitioners as numbered collections of paper virtues and qualifications. Why get power, we ask, if not to park your car fearlessly in No Parking Zones, or to see that craven look of apologetic recognition cross the face of some rookie who’s pulled you over on a speeding charge? Confess, a little honesty, admit it. Because if you don’t you’re obviously lying, and if you’re not lying, then there’s something really queer and weird about you. I mean, a man who doesn’t use his influence to help his friends and family, what kind of a man can he be? For friendship, as Don Corleone tells Johnny Fontane, “is everything. Friendship is more than talent. It is more than government. It is almost the equal of family. Never forget that.”

And of course, no one in government really does forget that; we all know that their creaky platitudes are greased with rake offs and personal favors: they, too, are human, though they are to be held somewhat in contempt for the small-time, unimaginative form that their hypocrisy must take.

Warshow points out that the exact content of the gangster’s business is irrelevant; to the viewer his activity is defined by the violence he uses to attain his position. Similarly, the exact nature of the Godfather’s rackets are irrelevant (we learn of his specific business dealings only to the extent that we know he is opposed to supplementing them with narcotics dealing); what is important are the values that not only define the Don’s style, but which also provide the strength of his organization. These values are the simple, powerful ones that run thick in all human blood: friendship, family, and the powerful loyalties based on these; a fundamental sense of personal and family honor, and the determination to revenge all insults to that honor; and the intelligence and patience to maintain these values without turning them into a suicidal bandwagon. That power corrupts is what we take as a given in this world; what we see in the “Godfather” is a corruption that is nonetheless a vision of strength and dignity.

The subterranean nature of the Don’s mythic Empire adds another dimension to its attractiveness. Nothing is quite what it seems to be; respect for the unknown in any situation must be maintained. The Corleone Family exists as a chastisement of anyone foolish enough to be intoxicated with the latest arrogant wisdoms, anyone foolish enough to believe that one is safe cultivating only the obvious newspaper headline contacts. And so Jack Woltz, Emperor in his own kindom, awakes to find the severed head of his favorite horse in his bed:

Woltz was not a stupid man, he was merely a supremely egotistical one. He had mistaken the power he wielded in his world to be more potent than the power of Don Corleone. He had merely needed some proof that this was not true. He understood this message. That despite all his wealth, despite all his contacts with the President of the United States, despite all his claims of friendship with the director of the FBI, an obscure importer of Italian olive oil would have him killed. Would actually have him killed!
We love it, watching the humiliation of the powers that run our daily lives. Careful, Senator, there are those who in certain spheres are more important than you. Keep within your limits. Movie moguls, contain your arrogance when it comes to Johnny Fontane, the Don’s obnoxious Godson. And Congressman, prepare to eat crow when you subpoena Frank Sinatra.


Frank Sinatra played to a packed house last night, belting out an angry tune that left a Capital Hill Committee as limp as the bobby soxers he used to wow.

"The voice" justified his early nickname by spending much of his 95 minutes of testimony bellowing denials at the House Select Committee on Crime that he had ever been a front man for the Mafia. At times it was hard to tell whether he was the witness or the investigator.

Swarms of eager visitors, including many young women not yet born when Mr. Sinatra was inspiring screaming riots as the Paramount in the 1940's, jammed the cavernous House Caucus Room. Hundreds more waited outside, and there were squeals of delight as he passed through the throng.

It didn’t seem to matter that Mr. Sinatra is overweight, 56, retired and shows glimmerings of scalp at the back of his head. The audience was with him all the way, laughing and clapping at his belligerent attacks on the committee.

‘I resent it. I won’t have it. I’m not a second class citizen,” the singer declared, wagging a finger at the committee. . . .

By the end of the hearing, committee members surrendered to a kind of love-in. Representative Charles Rangel of New York, referring to a title bestowed on Mr. Sinatra by a disc jockey, ringingly told the witness, “You’re still chairman of the board.”

Unfortunately, however, so much of this is sleight of hand—or mind (the coach disappears at midnight: or maybe not until 1, depending on when the last feature starts in your neighborhood theater). Because Don Corleone and his realm exist as a fantastic mixture of elements that just don’t blend, except in a novel or a film. Vast, hidden power, power infused with blood-values and wielded by a ruler wise enough to hand-tailor justice to each particular situation; power-games in which the player puts up his life as stakes in the quest of victory and gain: drama on a scale large enough to be epic, and yet small enough to be grasped as something resembling our lives, or at least the lives we would like to lead.

But the realm of such drama is a dream, its vintage details lifted from the 1940s, and welded together with the emotional imperatives of Nixon’s ’70s. We yearn for the human level in public drama, for the personalization and humiliation of all that is invisible, banal and idiotic in the colossus that runs our lives; yet surely we’ve been suckered somewhere if our frustration must culminate in a vision of Marlon Brando as the Godfather. Because we all really know that power today not only corrupts, but also makes dull and colorless. Inside the Mafia as well as in our government. The fruit of the organizational genius of men like Vito and Michael Corleone and (in real Mafia Life) Meyer Lansky is always an organization whose anonymous power, to a large extent, is based on its capacity to mirror the corporate structure off which it feeds. Nicholas Gage describes this new corporate image of organized crime:

To represent the syndicate in the sophisticated businesses it was financing, Lansky began recruiting bright young men with no links to the underworld. He trains them in the art of being invisible, which he has perfected. These men will be the inheritors of power in organized crime, making the job of law enforcement officials in the future even more difficult than it is now. "At least the old bunch had records and we knew them,” says one police official. 'It will take us years just to identify this new button-down breed. And some we’ll probably never know."

Michael Corleone, first of the button-down breed. It is his emergence as the new and even more powerful Don that is the drama of "the Godfather." And it is a drama in which, as we have noted, the rise to power is not paid for by loneliness and death, as was the case with Little Caesar; in fact, Michael’s rise to power is synonymous with his discovery of his place within his family and his tradition. And though we have compared Michael’s ascent to power with that of Prince Hal, we should also note a fundamental difference: Hal must sacrifice the life of instinct in order to rule; Michael, on the other hand, must only admit to himself the impossibility of communicating the harsh realities of a man’s world to his wife; what he sacrifices, in the film, is his reluctance to kill. Having done that, he may join the colorful world of the capo Clemenza as he prepares to kill, to “make his bones.”

The discovery of personal identity in a junction of power and tradition is the possibility embodied in the rise of Michael Corleone. If only the reluctance to kill is sacrificed. Unlike the classic gangster hero, Michael pays a minimum price for success.

We may recall at this point the modern dilemma that Warshow saw at the heart of gangster-films: "... that failure is a kind of death and success is evil and dangerous—is, ultimately, impossible." This dilemma he saw resolved at the end of the film by the gangster’s death: "The dilemma is resolved because it is his death, not ours. We are safe; for the moment we can acquiesce in our failure, we can choose to fail." Unlike this classic gangster, however, the natural son of the Godfather pays a minimal price for his success. Success is possible if only we pay that small price. The subversive drama has carried us through bullets and gore only to mirror the society’s dream. Perhaps this is one reason why the Godfather and his son stand so close to the center of America’s fantasy life in the Age of Nixon.