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The Black Hand: The Epic War Between A Brilliant Detective And The Deadliest Secret Society In American History



Synopsis

The gripping true story of the origins of the mafia in America—and the brilliant Italian-born detective who gave his life to stop it* Soon to be a major motion picture starring Leonardo DiCaprio* Beginning in the summer of 1903, an insidious crime wave filled New York City, and then the entire country, with fear. The children of Italian immigrants were kidnapped, and dozens of innocent victims were gunned down. Bombs tore apart tenement buildings. Judges, senators, Rockefellers, and society matrons were threatened with gruesome deaths. The perpetrators seemed both omnipresent and invisible. Their only calling card: the symbol of a black hand. The crimes whipped up the slaving tabloid press and heated ethnic tensions to the boiling point. Standing between the American public and the Black Hand's lawlessness was Joseph Petrosino. Dubbed the "Italian Sherlock Holmes," he was a famously dogged and ingenious detective, and a master of disguise. As the crimes grew ever more bizarre and the Black Hand's activities spread far beyond New York's borders, Petrosino and the all-Italian police squad he assembled raced to capture members of the secret criminal society before the country's anti-immigrant tremors exploded into catastrophe. Petrosino's quest to root out the source of the Black Hand's power would take him all the way to Sicily—but at a terrible cost.
Unfolding a story rich with resonance in our own era, *The Black Hand* is fast-paced narrative history at its very best.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

A conversation with Stephan Talty The author of *The Black Hand* talks about what drew him to this mafia origin story and the surprising relevance it still has today.

Bottom two photos courtesy of the Petrosino family archive. What inspired you to write this story?

The hero of the book, Joseph Petrosino, was an immigrant from Italy. My parents were immigrants as well, both of them from Ireland. That probably played a part in why I chose this story. When I read about the laborers who dug the New York subway tunnels or worked as miners in West Virginia or seamstresses on the Lower East Side for very little money, I was reminded of what my parents went through, and to see how the Black Hand terrorized those people made me want to look at the whole period. But the story wasn't so simple as that, a story of predators and victims. What I found so intriguing about Petrosino in particular is that he was attacked from all sides: he was targeted by the Black Hand, shunned by the federal government when he asked for help in saving his people, and even attacked by some of his fellow Italians. He had one of the loneliest tasks in American history. But, in the end, he prevailed. What surprised you most in your research? I had thought this was mostly a New York story. But when I went to the archives, I found articles about the terror of the Black Hand in Louisiana, Georgia, California, Canada, Washington and hundreds of other places, small towns and big cities. And the organization also targeted non-Italians: judges, justices of the peace, professional baseball players, maestros at the Met, tavern owners, Congressmen. So it was just a much larger and deeper part of the American narrative than I anticipated.

What is unique and new in this history? What I hoped to do with the book was weave in the story of the Italian exodus to America with the story of Petrosino and the Society of the Black Hand. The detective was part of a vanguard of Italian-Americans who fought the deep and violent prejudice against their people, and I wanted to tell the story of that hard entry into American life. The Irish and the Jewish immigrants of that time told their stories in novels and memoirs; there are many fewer Italian accounts of those early years, for many reasons. I hope this goes a way toward filling that gap. What relevance does *The Black Hand* have today? The reaction to the Black Hand was that America essentially had a panic attack about immigration, and it follows rather eerily the contours of the debate we're having today. The Black Hand phenomenon was about crime, of course—and the crime was real and terrifying in the 1900s—but it was also about the country regarding these often poor, strange, dark-haired people and wondering what was going to become of the Republic, of fearing for its democratic traditions and its common culture.

In this way, Petrosino is a conflicted character: some people in the Italian colonies saw him as an Uncle Tom figure who'd become too American too fast, while others looked at him and saw a person who would put his life on the line so they could live decently in the new country, a hybrid figure that showed the potential for Italian-Americans. He was caught between those two images, and it cost him dearly.

"Talty resurrects the engaging saga of Joseph Petrosino . . . An absorbing exploration of one man's obsession to redeem his heritage amid familiar fears of foreigners." •The New York Times "Unspools like a thriller." •Entertainment Weekly "Talty succeeds in vividly portraying Italian-American mores at the dawn of the 20th century, and his well-researched account is replete with anecdotes of mayhem, terror and heroism." •USA Today (3 out of 4 stars) "Gripping . . . A valuable recounting of a lurid and little-known episode in American history." •Washington Post "Taut, brisk, and very cinematic . . . A sharply defined portrait of Petrosino." •Newsday "The Black Hand is nonfiction noir at its best: a real-life Godfather prequel that pits an unforgettable Italian-American hero against the seemingly unstoppable menace that would become the New York Mafia." •MARK ADAMS, author of the New York Times bestseller *Turn Right at Machu Picchu* "What a terrific read! Through incredible historical research and a detective's eye for the telling detail, Stephan Talty chronicles Joseph Petrosino's dogged pursuit of cold-blooded extortionists and killers. It's a story about immigration, urban life, and the struggle of law enforcement to confront the terror spread by a start-up criminal underworld at the turn of the 20th century." •DICK LEHR, author of the New York Times bestseller *Black Mass* "The Black Hand is a fascinating immersion into an almost forgotten time and culture in which a mysterious criminal enterprise terrorized immigrants seeking a new life in America. Stephan Talty's book provides a richly woven, engrossing tale of one man determined to help his fellow Italian-Americans resist the threat and prosper. A solid addition to the American history library." •GREGORY A. FREEMAN, author of *The Forgotten 500* "Stephan Talty is a marvelous storyteller, and with *The Black Hand*, he's hit a gusher: the true tale of one of New York City's greatest detectives at war with a lethal secret society and at odds with his own department. In Talty's hands, this is a thrilling instant classic." •ROBERT KOLKER, author of the New York Times bestseller *Lost Girls* "Given the secret nature of the Black Hand • which terrorized New York and the nation a century

ago —• Talty's account is extraordinarily detailed. Even more intimate is the portrait of Petrosino, chief Mafia detective. An important and gripping book. —• A. J. BAIME, author of *The Arsenal of Democracy* —• "Readers of this propulsive, cinematic book will feel transported to a crucial moment in our history. Stephan Talty's masterful portrayal of this early age of organized crime swept me up instantly and didn't let go until the final page. In the spirit of *The Black Hand's* richly-evoked Italian-American world, I say —bravo."

—• CHARLES BRANDT, author of the New York Times bestseller *I Heard You Paint Houses* —• "Stephan Talty's thoroughly researched —• *The Black Hand* —• vividly recounts the rise of Italian organized crime in New York, the Italian immigrant police detective who led the fight against it, and the anti-Italian hysteria it aroused across America. It's a great book. —• —• TYLER ANBINDER, author of *City of Dreams* —• "Stephan Talty's —• *The Black Hand* offers a fascinating glimpse of a period in New York City in what is a classic and suspenseful account of a growing terror and the detective who won't give up, no matter what it costs him. —• —• GILBERT KING, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *Devil in the Grove* —• "The story of what [Petrosino] did almost single-handedly, as well as the systems he devised to do so, is fascinating, and the persecution, low pay, abuse, and ignorance of the immigrants —• rich culture strike a chord close to home these days. Talty is an excellent storyteller, and this particular story is highly relevant as America's next set of immigrants struggles for acceptance. —• —• Kirkus Reviews, starred review —• "Gripping . . . Talty's fast-moving and well-constructed narrative gives the law enforcement hero and pioneer the recognition he deserves. —• —• Publishers Weekly —• "Exciting . . . —• Talty's writing is wonderfully evocative in capturing the complex immigrant experience of hope, fear, pride and bewilderment. —• —• BookPage

STEPHAN TALTY —• is the award-winning author of *Agent Garbo*, *Empire of Blue Water*, and other best-selling works of narrative nonfiction. His books have been made into two films, the Oscar-winning *Captain Phillips* and *Granite Mountain*. He is also the author of two psychological thrillers, including the New York Times bestseller *Black Irish*, set in his hometown of Buffalo. He has written for the New York Times Magazine, GQ, and many other publications. Talty now lives outside New York City with his family.

I couldn't put this book down. A dark but interesting tale of what life was like for some of our forefathers.

I have been reading this book for weeks which never happens. I am determined to finish it, however it is just one dimensional .. I am hoping that at some point it picks up .. or this book won't be finished until 2018

Well done story of Lt. Joseph Petrosino of the NYPD fighting the Black Hand.

Early delivery and an outstanding read!

Excellent!!!!!!

Couldn't finish the book

Very few actual detailed descriptions of what the good detective did. It reads like a skim of newspaper articles.

Good book

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