


# Gangland Killings in Chicago, 1919-1933

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## Abstract

According to the Chicago Crime Commission (CCC), 729 people were slain gangland style in Cook County, Illinois during the Prohibition Era from 1919 to 1933. Using the CCC records, Chicago Police Department (CPD) homicide records (2012), and newspaper accounts, this study analyzed a variety of data about these killings, including the types of killings as well as the major reasons for the killings, such as bootlegging, gambling, labor racketeering, vice, or other criminal disputes. Many of the study's results contradicted conventional wisdom. For example, 43% of the killings were unrelated to organized crime. Also, only 40% of the killings were tied to bootlegging, and the victim belonged to one of the major bootlegging gangs in the area in only 40% of those cases. Therefore, while various members of Chicago's Prohibition Era gangs were killed, those casualties are much smaller than expected.

“When gangsters kill, they only kill each other.”—Arthur Lashly (1929).

“A real goddam[n] crazy place! Nobody's safe in the streets.”—  
Quote about Chicago during Prohibition attributed  
to Charles “Lucky” Luciano.

## Keywords

Organized Crime; Prohibition; Gangland Killings

## Introduction

According to the Chicago Crime Commission (CCC), 729 people were slain gangland style in Cook County, Illinois—which contains the city of Chicago and the surrounding area—from 1919 to 1933. This accounts for 15% of the murders in the county during

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this period, which is essentially the Prohibition Era. While data for other cities in the United States are incomplete, Chicago was clearly the *gangland* murder capital of the country during Prohibition. Although Prohibition ended more than 70 years ago, this dataset has not been analyzed. Therefore, many conclusions about Prohibition gangland violence have been reached based on incomplete evidence and, as the opening quotations indicate, they sometimes conflict.

Using the CCC records, Chicago Police Department (CPD) homicide reports (2012), and newspaper accounts, we collect a variety of data concerning these killings. Because this period is known for its organized criminal activity, we stratified the sample by the major reasons for the killings, such as bootlegging, gambling, labor racketeering, vice, or other criminal disputes, and examined each type of killing in each stratum as well as in the full sample. Many of the results contradict conventional wisdom. For example, 43% of the killings were unrelated to organized crime. Also, only 40% of the killings were tied to bootlegging, and the victim belonged to one of the major bootlegging gangs in the area in only 40% of those cases. Therefore, while various members of Chicago's Prohibition Era gangs were killed, those casualties are much smaller than expected based on the total of 729 victims.

## The Data

The CCC's enumeration of gangland killings begins with the slaying of Frank Poroino (aka Porcino or Focino) on January 4, 1919 and continues to the present day. Unfortunately, we are unable to find in the CCC's files or in the Chicago newspapers any details at the inception of the list concerning the criterion used to classify a murder as a gangland killing. However, the typed list of victims is entitled "Gangland Style Killings" and, in a newspaper article in 1962, long-time CCC Operating Director Virgil Peterson refers to them as "gang style." While the CCC's exact definition of a gangland style murder is unknown, contemporary, and later definitions are available. These definitions are consistent with CCC criteria based on our examination of the killings from 1919 to 1933.

Lashly (1929) defines a gangland killing as a murder committed by a gang of organized criminals and consistent with gang methods. These killings are premeditated, do not involve robbery or other common motives, and are carried out in a manner which allows the killer(s) to usually escape. From the extant CCC files, the determination appears to be based on evidence presented at the coroner's inquest into each slaying, the verdict of the coroner's jury, and information developed by the CCC. The Cook County Coroner and the CCC had trained investigators on staff during this era, so the designation most probably reflects more than just witness testimony at the inquest.

All the victims were found in Cook County. Therefore, the list does not include killings outside the county even though Chicago gangsters sometimes dumped their victims elsewhere and even committed murders outside the state. This does not, however, appear to be a serious limitation in the data. Organized crime historian Jeff Thurston's files on gangland killings from 1931 to 1933 revealed only eight victims

found outside Cook County whose deaths are related to Chicago gangland. This indicates that the CCC killings (which total 119 for these 3 years) are understated by approximately 7% because of the geographical focus.

Beyond the basics, such as when the killing occurred, how many people were accidentally killed or wounded, and how many slayings resulted in an arrest or conviction, we collect information related to who the victim was, why he was killed, how the killing occurred, and where the body was found. Arthur Lashly's study of the years 1926 and 1927 (part of the *Illinois Crime Survey* of 1929) is the only other systematic examination of gangland killings during Prohibition. Lashly, however, examines only the victim's ethnicity, where the body was found, how many victims were killed by guns, and the outcome of the case. The results in the next section are compared to Lashly's and to the common wisdom whenever possible.

The data were drawn from three primary sources: the CCC files (which were found for the years 1927, 1928, 1930, 1931, and 1932), the CPD homicide records (which are available online and on microfilm), and newspaper articles (primarily from the *Chicago Tribune*). The CPD's records go through the year 1930 while the *Chicago Tribune* data are available for all the relevant years. The general rule in the data collection is that we tried to obtain two sources for each killing; at least one official source (CCC or CPD) and one newspaper, or two newspapers in 1933 because the CCC and CPD records were unavailable. The CPD and CCC records provided valid information on basic details, such as the age of the victim and what happened at the crime scene. They provided little information on occupation or why the victim was killed. The newspapers provided much better information on the victims and the motive. We used the CCC as the primary source for most of the data, followed by the CPD, and then the newspapers. That is, if the sources conflicted, information from the primary source was used. Nonetheless, the newspapers were the primary sources for data on who the victims were and why they were killed, followed by the CCC and the CPD.

## Results and Analysis

### *Why Were the Victims Killed?*

The number of gangland killings per annum is reported in the first panel of Table 1. From initially between 20 and 30 killings a year, the total rose to 37 in 1922. There were at least 50 gangland killings every year from 1923 to 1930, with a maximum of 75 in 1926. While the figure for 1931 (48) is roughly comparable to the low during the preceding several years, the killings per annum declined below 40 in 1932 and 1933.

Because this was a period of major organized criminal activity, we break the killings down by causes related to organized and ordinary crime. The results are reported in the second panel of Table 1. The first seven causes are related to organized crime: bootlegging, the struggle for the control of the *Unione Siciliana*, gambling, labor union control or labor racketeering, business racketeering, the taxi cab wars in Chicago, vice (prostitution), and the Chinese tong wars.

**Table 1.** Gangland Killings Per Annum.

	1919	1920	1921	1922	1923	1924	1925	1926	1927	1928	1929	1930	1931	1932	1933	Total
Total CCC killings	24	23	29	37	52	56	64	75	58	72	56	64	48	39	32	729
Killings per Annum (by Cause)																
Bootlegging	0	2	1	6	11	6	29	41	38	29	16	21	11	21	3	235
Unione Siciliana	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	12	8	1	3	0	0	0	25
Gambling	0	0	0	0	2	2	2	0	2	1	2	3	3	3	3	23
Labor union or rackets	0	5	1	4	2	7	0	2	1	3	6	5	9	8	2	55
Business rackets	0	0	1	0	1	4	1	2	3	4	2	2	0	1	0	21
Taxi wars	0	0	1	0	1	4	1	1	0	1	1	2	0	0	0	12
Vice	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	4	0	0	1	0	0	6
Organized crime related	0	7	3	10	16	16	31	45	45	38	27	30	23	29	8	328
Tong wars	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	2	1	0	0	0	0	6
Italian feud	3	3	6	8	3	1	5	7	3	1	0	2	0	0	1	43
Black hand	4	2	4	9	9	12	3	2	4	7	0	9	1	0	1	67
Politics	0	0	13	2	1	2	0	1	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	23
Gang related—other	7	2	1	1	0	0	2	3	1	1	3	5	3	3	4	36
Other causes	6	9	2	5	10	15	12	21	9	14	11	5	9	3	9	140
Cause unknown	5	1	6	9	18	11	17	3	6	13	17	14	15	7	12	154

Note: All Unione related killings are counted as bootlegging killings. All taxi wars killings are counted as business rackets killings. Totals for a year may exceed the number of actual killings because often there were multiple reasons for the killing. CCC = Chicago Crime Commission.

According to the newspapers, many murders had nothing to do with organized crime. Some resulted from feuds in the Italian community; during this era, Southern Italians were especially likely to settle disagreements privately. Black Handers were freelance extortionists who preyed heavily on Italian immigrants. Other killings resulted from political struggles, especially for control of the near West Side 19th ward Democratic organization. Various killings were attributable to disagreements among common criminals. Often there were multiple reasons given for the killing, while in 154 cases the cause was unknown.

Bootlegging was the stated reason for 235 (40%) of the 575 killings in which the cause was reported. Rivalries related to the *Unione Siciliana* accounted for 25 murders. While bootlegging was the most frequently reported cause of gangland killings during this era, 60% of the CCC killings were unrelated to bootlegging. This contrasts with Russo’s (2001, pp. 31-32) conclusion that “two-thirds of the deaths in Chicago are due to the beer running trade” during Prohibition.

Prohibition took effect in January 1919, but the first related killing occurred on May 11, 1920 when “Big Jim” Colosimo was shot. There were few bootlegging murders until 1923, when three South Side O’Donnell mobsters were killed in fighting with the (then) united Saltis and Sheldon gangs. The bootlegging total dropped to six in 1924, but the murder of North Side gang leader Dean O’Banion on November 10, 1924 ignited the North versus South Side (Torrio–Capone) gang war. The bootlegging killings after 1924 ebbed and flowed with the gang wars, reaching a height of 41 in 1926 when the North versus South Side war, the South Side wars behind the

stockyards (the “Back of the Yards wars”), and the battle for control of the Chicago Heights were at their worst. The gangland truce after the killing of Hymie Weiss in October of 1926 reduced bootlegging killings in 1927. This was offset, however, by the Aiello brothers’ attempt to wrest control of the *Unione Siciliana* from Capone ally Tony Lombardo. Similarly, peace after the St. Valentine’s Day Massacre kept the bootlegging killings below 20 during 1929. The end of the North Side gang in late 1930 and the waning of Prohibition led to fewer alcohol-related killings in the 1930s.

The gamblers, who received their franchises directly from the politicians, cooperated fairly peacefully during this period. Until 1930, there were no more than two gambling killings a year. Capone and others made major inroads into established gambling only as the bootlegging wars waned circa 1930 and the outgunned gamblers, knowing the odds, generally went along quietly. For example, there were only 23 gambling-related killings, as many as those related to politics and a 10th of those related to bootlegging, from 1919 to 1933.

There were 55 labor union-related killings during this period. The unions themselves had a long history of violence, either in excluding nonunion workers or resulting from internal power struggles. In fact, the first major killing on this list is the slaying of Maurice “Mossy” Enright by rival labor racketeers on February 2, 1920. The Capone gang moved in on various unions circa 1930, which explains the increase in labor killings during the early 1930s. Business racketeering was responsible for 21 deaths, mostly from the taxi cab wars. Killings related to vice activities were minimal (six in total) because the vice operators in the city largely coexisted peacefully. The tong wars accounted for six deaths in Chicago, all during short periods of time.

Of the 575 killings with a known cause, 328 were owing to organized crime, indicating that 43% of the CCC killings (247 of 575) were unrelated to organized crime, which contradicts standard wisdom. For example, Lashly (1929, p. 637) stated that “bootlegging and gambling are directly responsible for practically all Cook County gang murders.” Regarding other killings, feuds in the Italian community caused 43 murders in total and these were prevalent during the early part of the period. Sixty-seven murders were due to Black Hand extortion, the most frequent reason after bootlegging for gangland style killings. These killings decreased noticeably during the early 1930s. Politics accounted for 23 killings, mostly during the early 1920s. Barring a few cases, the victims were usually followers rather than political leaders. Problems among ordinary criminals accounted for 36 killings, while 140 were caused by various other factors.

Bienen and Rottinghaus (2003) speculated that organized crime was responsible for the increase in homicides in Chicago during the 1920s. Analysis of the CCC killings sheds light on this issue. There were 4392 nonaccidental homicides in Chicago (see Bienen and Rottinghaus (2003, Table 5) from 1919 to 1930 versus 2,236 during the preceding 12-year period. Based on the CCC killings, an estimated 239 murders *in* the city of Chicago were due to organized crime from 1919 to 1930. Even if the number of organized crime killings from 1907 to 1918 is arbitrarily set to zero, the increase in these murders (239) accounts for only 10% of the increase in nonaccidental homicides.

**Table 2.** Number of Members of Major Bootlegging Gangs Killed—All Killings.

	1919	1920	1921	1922	1923	1924	1925	1926	1927	1928	1929	1930	1931	1932	1933	Total
Torrio/Capone	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	5	1	4	6	1	3	23
Sheldon/Stanton	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	3	0	2	1	1	1	0	0	13
Saltis	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	1	2	0	0	0	6
South Side O'Donnell	0	0	0	0	3	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	NA	7
Genna	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	8	0	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	16
Druggan-Lake	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	3	0	0	0	3	1	0	0	10
West Side O'Donnell	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	3	0	0	0	0	NA	NA	NA	4
North Side	0	0	0	0	1	2	3	2	0	4	6	7	NA	NA	NA	25
Schultz-Horan	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Chicago Heights	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	7	2	1	0	2	0	0	0	13
20 <sup>th</sup> Ward	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	4
Downs/McGeoghegan/Quinlan (DMQ)	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	2	2	0	4
McErlane	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	1	0	0	1
"Red" Bolton	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	1	1	0	0	1	3
Circus	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	3
Guilfoyle/Kolb/Winge (GKW)	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	0	0	0	0	0	0	NA	NA	NA	0
Battaglia-Carr	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	1	1	0	0	2
Touhy	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	3
Total	0	2	0	1	4	5	20	31	5	14	10	22	13	4	7	138

Note: NA = Not Applicable because the gang appears to not have been in existence at the time.

### Who Were the Victims?

It is interesting to examine how many of the victims belonged to the major gangs whose primary focus was liquor. The results are reported by gang, for 18 gangs (including two in the suburbs) and by year in Table 2. The first 11 gangs were operating from the start of Prohibition and the other seven arose later. The approximate years each gang was in existence are shown in the table. The North Side gang had the most members killed, 25 in total, which includes Aiello and Zuta gangsters allied with George Moran starting in 1927. The Capone gang is second with 23 dead and the Genna gang is third with 16. Fourth on the list is the Sheldon–Stanton mob, which fought with Frank McErlane and Joe Saltis in the mid-1920s after they separated from the latter, and the various Chicago Heights gangs with 13 victims each. The Druggan–Lake gang, which is invisible in the standard gang war histories, had experienced 10 casualties.

For the remaining gangs, the number of victims ranged from seven for the South Side O'Donnells to zero for the Guilfoyle-Kolb-Winge (GKW) gang, with the South Side O'Donnell troops being largely killed in two brief episodes. The Saltis gang had six members killed, two in retaliation for an attempt on the life of Frank McErlane. The large number of Downs–McGeoghegan–Quinlan (DMQ) gangsters killed per year is a testimony to the murderousness of Frank McErlane. The DMQ mob slaying rate of 1.33 members killed per annum is fourth behind the North Siders (2.08 per annum), the Gennas (1.77), and the Capone gang (1.53).

The total number of major gang members slain each year is reported in the last line of the table. The previously discussed gangland truces are clearly evident, with only five bootlegging gang members killed in 1927 and 10, including the five in the St. Valentine's Day Massacre, in 1929. The most lethal years of the gang wars were: 1925 (20 killed following O'Banion's death), 1926 (31 killed), and 1930 (22 killed).

How dangerous were the gang wars for the ordinary gang member? The figure of 138 dead is surprisingly low, compared to our expectations and those of gangland historians familiar with the CCC figure of 729 killings. Putting the numbers into perspective, the Capone gang had 500 gunmen, but only 23 casualties during the 15-year period. Similarly, in 1924, the North Side gang had 200 gunmen but only 25 North Siders—including Aiello and Zuta gangsters—were killed. On the one hand, the figure of 138 killed is understated because it does not include bodies found outside of Cook County. Increasing the total by 17% to adjust for these omissions still yields only 161 victims. On the other hand, a number of the killings were a consequence of internal gang discipline or other reasons, so the figures overstate the gang war casualties.

There is a simple explanation for this low total; the phrase "gang war" is a misnomer. Gun battles between major gangs during the Prohibition Era were virtually unknown. Rather, gang war-related killings were a series of executions. The victims were usually caught off-guard, they rarely returned fire, and infrequently killed their killers.

Table 3 tabulates the occupations of the victims by year and Table 4 shows the victims' occupations by killing type and for the members of the major gangs. Often there

**Table 3.** Occupation of the Victim—All Killings.

	1919	1920	1921	1922	1923	1924	1925	1926	1927	1928	1929	1930	1931	1932	1933	Total
Bootlegger	0	4	3	4	8	6	25	42	21	27	18	31	16	17	11	233
Gambler	0	1	0	0	2	2	3	1	0	1	2	2	3	5	2	24
Vice operator	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2	0	0	1	0	0	6
Union official	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	1	1	1	0	0	8
Labor/business racketeer	0	1	0	0	2	5	3	3	0	1	8	2	3	2	0	30
Labor leader	0	4	1	1	1	2	0	3	0	5	2	2	7	5	2	35
Businessman	2	0	4	5	5	9	6	10	13	6	3	7	3	7	1	81
Black hander	0	2	1	5	0	0	3	0	0	0	2	2	1	0	1	17
Law enforcement	0	0	0	2	1	1	4	1	2	3	3	1	0	0	0	18
Politician	0	0	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	4
Criminal (nonorganized crime)	7	2	1	3	0	0	2	4	4	5	5	4	6	2	8	53
Other	6	5	9	7	9	15	8	11	15	14	8	14	10	6	8	145
Unknown	9	8	10	10	24	17	16	5	3	11	6	1	1	1	0	122

Note: Totals for a year may exceed the number of killings because the victims often had multiple occupations.



**Table 4.** Occupation of the Victim—For Members of Major Gangs and by Cause of Killing.

	<i>n</i>	Bootlegger	Gambler	Labor leader	Business-man	Vice operator	Unione official	Black hander	Racketeer	Law enforce	Politician	Criminal (other)	Other	Unknown
Bootlegging	235	164	8	3	20	4	7	2	7	6	2	7	23	12
Unione Siciliana	25	17	0	0	3	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	4	1
Gambling	23	4	12	1	3	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	2	0
Labor union/rackets	55	8	2	29	0	0	1	0	12	2	1	0	7	0
Business rackets	21	1	0	2	6	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	7	0
Taxi wars	12	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	6	0
Vice	6	1	0	1	1	3	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
Tong wars	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	0	0
Italian feud	43	5	0	0	6	0	0	2	1	0	0	5	14	11
Black hand	67	6	0	0	22	0	0	4	0	1	0	0	20	15
Politics	23	6	0	1	4	0	1	0	0	0	2	1	8	2
Gang related—other	36	13	2	1	1	0	0	3	0	0	0	18	3	0
Major gang members	138	132	10	3	0	5	6	2	11	0	1	1	0	0

Note: The sum of the occupation figures may exceed the total number of killings (N) because the victims often had multiple occupations.

**Table 5. Method of Killing—For All Killings, for Members of Major Gangs and by Cause of Killing.**

	<i>n</i>	Pistol	Pistol (probably)	Shotgun	Machine gun	Gun (other)	Gun (unknown)	Stabbing	Strangulation	Explosion	Beating	One way ride
All killings	729	208	174	109	29	4	182	18	6	5	12	142
Bootlegging	235	69	48	52	15	2	56	3	4	0	2	69
Unione Siciliana	25	3	4	11	1	1	5	0	1	0	0	2
Gambling	23	10	4	3	3	0	3	0	0	0	0	2
Labor union/rackets	55	26	15	9	6	0	1	1	0	0	0	5
Business rackets	21	9	2	2	3	0	6	0	0	0	0	1
Taxi wars	12	4	2	2	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	1
Vice	6	1	3	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Tong wars	6	2	2	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0
Italian feud	43	14	10	4	0	0	13	2	0	0	0	6
Black hand	67	18	16	13	0	0	18	3	0	1	0	5
Politics	23	13	4	3	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	5
Gang related— other	36	10	15	5	1	0	5	0	0	0	1	17
Major gang members	138	47	30	28	15	3	20	1	2	0	1	42

Note: All Unione related killings are counted as bootlegging killings. All taxi wars killings are counted as business rackets killings. The sum of the category figures may exceed the total number of killings (N) because in some cases multiple weapons were used.

**Table 6.** One Way Rides—All Killings.

	1919	1920	1921	1922	1923	1924	1925	1926	1927	1928	1929	1930	1931	1932	1933	Total
One way ride	6	2	2	1	2	5	6	22	17	17	10	17	17	10	8	142
Total CCC killings	24	23	29	37	52	56	64	75	58	72	56	64	48	39	32	729

Note: In 27 cases it is unclear whether the victim was taken on a one way ride. CCC = Chicago Crime Commission.

is more than one occupation reported for the deceased, especially if he was a criminal. Not surprisingly, many of the victims were engaged in bootlegging and this is most often the reason they were killed. Among the 235 bootlegging killings, a minority of the victims (only 97) were members of the major gangs. Instead, most victims were independent bootleggers or businessmen, such as bar owners or merchants who may have supplied bootleggers.

Eighty-one of the victims (the second largest number) were businessmen, meaning they apparently had some ownership in the business they operated and many of these killings were related to bootlegging or the Black Hand. More than 50 of the dead were common criminals and between 20 and 40 victims were gamblers, labor leaders, or racketeers. Eighteen individuals in law enforcement were killed gangland style during this time period, most frequently for reasons related to bootlegging and 17 blackhanders were slain. A handful of politicians and vice operators was killed, and eight officials of the *Unione* were slain, mostly during the War of Sicilian Succession.

The results conflict markedly with conventional wisdom, for example, the opening quote by Lashly (1929), that the gangsters only killed each other. The clearest contradiction of this statement is that 18 members of law enforcement were killed gangland style. More broadly, of the 607 victims with a known occupation, 45% (274) of them were not known to be involved in any illegal activity.

### How Were the Victims Killed?

Tables 5 and 6 report the types of weapons used and how many killings were “one way” rides. In a few cases, more than one type of weapon was used. For example, in the St. Valentine’s Day Massacre, John May and Reinhardt Schwimmer were shot by a machine gun and a shot gun. In the full sample, 208 victims were shot with a pistol, 174 were apparently shot with a pistol and, based on the cases where the weapon was known and the circumstances of the other killings, the 182 cases where the victim was shot with an unknown weapon most likely involved a pistol. Summing these figures, in 564 of 729 slayings a handgun was probably used. A shotgun was involved in 15% (109) of the killings, making it the second most frequently used weapon. Therefore, Prohibition Era killers eliminated their victims largely as their predecessors had done, with handguns and shotguns.

Although the Thompson submachine gun was the weapon of choice in many famous Prohibition events, even after 1925 it was employed sparingly. For instance,

from 1926 to 1933, the submachine gun was used in only 27 of 444 CCC killings. This is inconsistent with the conclusion by Schoenberg (1992, p. 140) that the submachine gun “would displace the shotgun as the weapon of choice” in gangland, and with Thrasher’s (1937, p. 181) statement that “[t]he machine gun became the standard weapon of Chicago gangs . . . in 1926.” Other guns (e. g., rifles) were used in four killings. Eighteen victims were stabbed or hacked to death, six were strangled, 12 were beaten, and five were killed in explosions. Although bombings were common in Chicago during this period—there were 753 in the city from 1920 to 1928—the bombers focused on destruction of property and few deaths resulted. Lashly’s (1929, p. 593) claim that “[No] recent bombing in this community has resulted in loss of life” is, however, incorrect, unless he is referring to only 1926 and 1927. The submachine gun was used more frequently in bootlegging killings than in general and most frequently in labor union, business racketeering, and gambling-related killings and those of major gang members. The shotgun was used more heavily in bootlegging, labor-related, and Black Hand killings and the murders of major gang members than in the killings overall. It was used most heavily in the *Unione*-related killings.

Another common belief is that the one-way ride was widely used during Prohibition (Binder, 2003). Although it occurred in 20% of the cases, it was far from the preferred method. Nearly one third of the bootlegging killings and killings of major gang members were one-way rides. At the extreme, almost half of the CCC killings of common criminals were one-way rides. The ordinary criminal gangs in Chicago first used this method, with six such rides in 1919 and 1920. The use of the one-way ride did, however, increase after 1925.

### Further Results

Twenty-one of the victims were unintentionally killed and 61 people were accidentally wounded during the CCC killings. This is at odds with Lashly’s (1929) conclusion that “[i]n the two years passed only two innocent bystanders were killed in Cook County and neither was killed by gangsters.” In fact, there were six such killings in 1926 and 1927. We examined the CPD records on-line to determine how many killings resulted from “drive-by” shootings. Overall, 10% of the CCC killings found in the CPD data set were the result of a drive-by shooting. This type of killing became much more common after 1923 and some years almost 20% of these killings were drive-bys. The evidence does not, however, support the statement that after the submachine gun was introduced in 1925 “the drive-by shooting becomes the centerpiece of gangster recrimination.”

We also examined where the killings occurred, defined in terms of geographic area as well as the type of structure or place the body was found. Overall, 551 of the killings occurred in Chicago, 14 in the northern suburbs, 70 in the western suburbs, and 91 in the southern suburbs. In 136 of 458 cases, the killing occurred inside a building. In 43 instances, the victim was in an automobile and 14 of these were the result of a drive-by shooting. More than half of the victims (273 of 458) were found outdoors where the body was plainly visible (e.g., in the street, an alley, or a yard). Five victims

were found in areas where the body was not as visible, such as a prairie or vacant lot. Only one victim was found in a permanent body of water, the Chicago River, as opposed to the belief that the river was a major depository for gangland victims. According to the CCC, only 32 killings resulted in a trial and only six cases resulted in a conviction after appeal.

## Conclusions

Although a variety of research has examined murders in Chicago in general, there has been no systematic study of gangland killings in the area during Prohibition, beyond the investigation by Lashly of a few aspects of this type of crime in 1926 and 1927. Our analysis of 729 gangland style killings from 1919 to 1933 yields a number of interesting results that often contradict conventional wisdom about the gang wars and related killings in the Chicago area. To list a few of the major results, the gangsters did not just kill each other, the submachine gun was not the dominant weapon after its introduction, and relatively few members of the major bootlegging gangs were killed during the gang wars. These results provide a basis for future research on gangland slayings and violence during Prohibition.

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