

hensive account of a type of criminality that, in its rationality and structure, stands in marked contrast to ordinary "street crime." With roots in both American and southern Italian culture, organized crime developed in the moral climate created by the robber barons of the late 19th century. These "captains of industry" became folk heroes by their ascent from rags to riches, and many used their money for philanthropic ends. But many were willing to use any means, fair or foul, to achieve their power and wealth. Many of the hallmarks of later organized crime—extortion, violence, bribery of political officials—were commonplace activities with the robber barons.

In the decades following the Civil War, thousands of immigrants swarmed into our large cities and helped to build the urban political machines. The numerous street gangs of the period engaged in many legitimate political activities; they also used intimidation and violence to secure votes for their patron, the ward boss. In exchange for votes, the ward boss protected a wide range of illegal activities. Immigrants from southern Italy were already part of Old World organizations (the Mafia being the most infamous example) that were secretive, strongly hierarchical, and violent.

It is tempting to speculate on what might have happened to organized crime had there been no Prohibition. Would it have dwindled as the urban machines declined and as the various ethnic groups became assimilated? We will never know. Prohibition did little to advance "traditional" morality, but it did create unprecedented opportunities for organized crime in the United States. Before Prohibition, gang activity was largely under the control of ward bosses. The huge profits of the speakeasies brought gangsters to the top of the heap. With the repeal of Prohibition, organized crime contracted and regrouped. Its hardy practitioners survived the crisis and are still very much with us.

Abadinsky discusses several reasons for the long prevalence of organized crime. For one thing, the propensity of American lawmakers to outlaw a variety of popular products and activities has created a natural and lucrative setting for criminal activity. Abadinsky also observes that the "American way of life" places undue stress on economic success, while its means of achievement are not readily available to large segments of our population." Organized crime provides a quick way up the social ladder for the poor: Consider the

Great Gatsby. Cultural characteristics of some ethnic groups have also fostered organized crime. Jews were once prominent in organized crime, but the emphasis in Jewish culture on educational attainment soon opened a different means of social and economic ascent. Because Italian families had never placed the same value on education, many Italian young men continued to move into organized crime, while their Jewish counterparts were becoming consultants, psychiatrists, and yuppies. In making his policy recommendations, Abadinsky urges vigorous law enforcement coupled with an acute awareness of the historical backgrounds of those groups that still control this murderous underworld.

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The Celts of the West

by Andrew Shaughnessy

The Lords of the Isles: The Clan Donald and the Early Kingdom of the Scots by Ronald Williams, London; Chatto & Windus, The Hogarth Press; \$19.95.

The ancient story of early Scotland will not be fully told until much more study has been completed. The face of the land literally is pockmarked with the remains of settlements and dwellings—many unexcavated—raised in an age so remote from our own, we scarcely know the names of the races that inhabited them. Riddles there are in abundance; answers to these riddles may not be discovered until future archaeologists supply them. Perhaps some of the ancient enigmas never will be satisfactorily explained. Into this seemingly unfruitful field ventures Ronald Williams; and the result, *The Lords of the Isles*, proves to be a work of unusual interest and insight.

Williams begins his study with the founding in A.D. 500 of the Celtic kingdom of Dalriada (an area of land corresponding roughly to the western parts of present-day Argyllshire) by a force of Irish *Scotti*. It was from the leader of this host which established itself in Dalriada, one Fergus Mac Erc, that the chiefs of the Clan Donald claimed their descent. For nearly a thousand years the Lords of the Isles (as they liked to style themselves) held sway over a great sweep of territory in the far

northwest of Scotland, ruling for the most part as potentates quite independent of the Scottish crown. Not until late in the 15th century was the power of the Lordship broken and its vast and scattered island patrimony forfeited to the crown. It is the story of the vicissitudes of the ancient Lordship that Ronald Williams tells with much spirit in his book.

A good portion of the early chapters is devoted to the activities of St. Columba, who arrived in Dalriada in 561 to begin his mission of preaching the gospels to the Picts. In this endeavor he seems to have enjoyed a fair measure of success, since Pictish attacks against Dalriada appear to have ceased shortly thereafter. From the island of Iona—perhaps the most hallowed spot on Scottish soil and reputedly the burial place of not fewer than 48 Scottish kings—Columba established the Celtic Christian Church in Scotland. It was from here that his missionaries set forth upon their work of evangelizing.

In later chapters, Williams details the bloody events surrounding the arrival in the Hebrides—about A.D. 790—of the Vikings in their sleek longships. From that time until the Battle of Clontarf near Dublin in 1014, when the Irish hero Brian Boru effectively diminished the might of the Hebridean Norse, the Vikings established a reign of terror along the western seaboard of Scotland. Amid the general confusion of the Viking ascendancy, the direct line of descent among the chiefs of Clan Donald became very uncertain, though later genealogists claimed to have traced it. At all events, about the year 1140, under the leadership of Somerled, the great progenitor of Clan Donald, the Celtic Gaels reemerged as a formidable power in the west. But, looking at events in a much broader context, the sands of time clearly were running out for the Celtic peoples. By Somerled's time a far more vigorous race—the Normans—were fast consolidating their power in the land; and even though the old Lordship continued to survive late into the 15th century, enjoying some periodic successes, its strength inexorably waned.

For those of Scots descent—and they are a numerous body in these United States—Ronald Williams' book provides a highly readable account of the early history of that interesting land. The interpretations Williams draws are sound ones based on a thorough apprehension of his subject.

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SCREEN

Ground Zero, 1950

by Kate Dalton

Desert Bloom; written and directed by Eugene Corr; produced by Michael Housman; Columbia Pictures.

In December 1950, at the Nellis Air Force Base outside of Las Vegas, the Atomic Energy Commission set off the first atomic bomb since Nagasaki. The year before, the Soviets had conducted their first atomic test—an unpleasant surprise to most Americans—and Mao had taken over China. Truman announced in January of '50 that he was directing the AEC to start work on the vastly more destructive hydrogen bomb. In February Senator Joseph McCarthy announced that he had in his possession a list of 205 Communists who were working in the State Department. In May Alger Hiss was convicted of perjury, and in June the North Koreans, supported by the USSR, advanced south of the 38th parallel and invaded South Korea. The United Nations (then just five years old) sent troops, but by December MacArthur's armies were in retreat.

Desert Bloom is set in that hot December. Korea, McCarthy, the Nellis Air Force Base are all part of the outer storm, but director Eugene Corr is more interested in the inner weather of a single family, some of those ostensibly simple folk—no one here but us chickens—who are as complicated as they come.

Amid all the details that go into making a movie, creating characters is not usually a priority. Producers will pour their energies into developing a "look" or a "star," as part of their effort to make a "smash," but that's as far as the effort goes. Usually when Hollywood takes up a bit of history, at best it's a pageant and at worst a disaster. When was the last time anyone made a film about the Civil War or the

Cuban Missile Crisis because he was interested in plumbing the depths of the characters of Lincoln or JFK or, for that matter, of anyone else of the time? Nobody gives a hoot about a *personality*. People want to make films about whole *eras* because they like the rush of the grand historical sweep. They want the wind in their characters' hair, spray on their faces, and the New World rising out of the sea, shining like Botticelli's Venus. It's the Cecil B. De Mille syndrome—10 years in the making! On four continents! With a cast of thousands! And, naturally, the characterization of Lincoln or Columbus or Cleopatra suffers accordingly.

But, to his great credit, Corr has abandoned the forest for the trees: for Rose, 13; Lily, her mother; Starr, her favorite aunt; and Jack, her stepfather. The story line is built around Rose, and it's principally her memories of the time and her point of view that we're allowed to share—first boyfriend, first glasses, victory at the county spelling bee. The movie, nevertheless, is Jon Voight's.

Voight plays Jack, who came home from the Second World War badly scarred, and his limp is only part of it. Barricading himself with his clippings, medals, old war stories, and shortwave can't help him stop the nightmares or keep him from drinking. Jack is both the hero and villain of the piece. He is sometimes kind, sometimes drunk and bumbling, sometimes drunk and cruel, pitiful at certain times, despicable at others. He has to correct himself, "nigger" to "Negro," when talking about Duke Ellington, whose music he reveres. And he has a paranoia about Jews, that somehow coexists with true admiration and even some identification with Einstein—"They thought Einstein was retarded," he says over one strained breakfast, where he is fighting to keep his children's affection, his wife's esteem, and his own self-respect, "but he was the opposite of retarded. He was a genius!"

His relations with his stepdaughter Rose show the most strain, and he takes a lot of his frustration out on her. And yet it's Jack, not Lily, who shows up at Rose's moment of triumph at the spelling bee (absolutely the funniest bee in movie history), and it's Jack, not Lily, who notices Rose is missing the night she runs away. He's a wonderful character, completely contradictory and completely realistic, with his virtues all inextricably mixed-up with his faults, in one great Gordian knot of a personality.

Of all the characters, only Lily (played by JoBeth Williams) rings occasionally untrue, sometimes bordering on parody. Nothing comes out of her mouth that isn't one of the clichés used by people who have long since stopped thinking. For Lily there is some excuse: not thinking too hard is her way of coping, and seeing things as she wants to see them is an improvement on reality, given that her first husband ran out and left her with three girls to raise, and her second spouse is still intermittently fighting with the 3rd Army. When times are tough there's a lot of comfort in clichés, and Lily takes refuge there time and again. They serve all her purposes—to soothe, to rebuke, to praise.

"Rise and shine, it's A-bomb time," she calls to her sleeping children the morning of the test—that's Lily, true to the end. And as with that line, there is no funny moment in *Desert Bloom* that doesn't have something serious or sad to it; nothing frightening that isn't also sometimes ridiculous; no one utterly dear who isn't sometimes extremely unkind. It's a beautifully made movie, and everything and everyone in it is handled with a light and true touch. That includes the frame story—for the whole movie leads up to the morning of the test, and in these days of such strident films as *The China Syndrome* and *The Day After*, peopled with characters that are only foils for a message that's sledgehammered home, Corr's restraint is astonishing. It's clear