

WHY DO THEY DO IT?

WHITEY BULGER



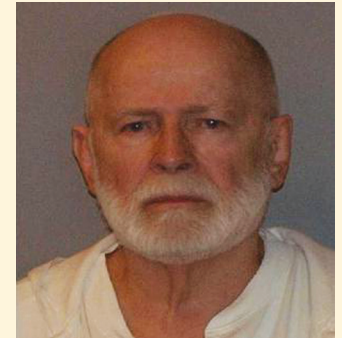
Whitey Bulger (James Joseph “Whitey” Bulger Jr.) is perhaps the most notorious gangster from the South Boston area, which is saying a lot given the history and tradition of organized crime in “Southie,” as they call it. Bulger was a key figure of a criminal organization from the early 1970s to the mid-1990s and head of this organization for much of that time. Under heat from authorities, he fled in 1994, and for 12 years he was on the FBI’s “Ten Most Wanted” list. Bulger was apprehended with his long-term girlfriend, Catherine Greig, in Santa Monica, California, in 2011. He was sentenced on November 14, 2013 to two terms of life imprisonment, plus five years.

Bulger is believed to have been largely in charge of narcotics distribution and extortion rackets in the Southie area during most of the 1980s and early 1990s, along with the violence inherent to such a position. Interestingly, most sources show that he was also an FBI informant during much of this time period, which allowed him to essentially “get away with murder” and his other illegal activities.

Perhaps most related to this chapter, Bulger was seen locally as a type of Robin Hood figure, considered by most people on the streets as a sort of guardian protecting the interests of the neighborhood or local area. After all, Bulger had been a key element of organized crime in that area for many years, and this led to a subcultural/cultural climate placing him

as an authority for all that happened in that locale. Furthermore, much of his business dealt with narcotics distribution and extortion, so his motives fit the other theories in this chapter of being largely based on finding criminal opportunities despite the relatively poor and deprived conditions of the South Boston region.

So why did he do it? As alluded to before, Bulger likely saw the draw of organized crime as being his only way to achieve the higher financial and/or social status that could be obtained in the South Boston area. After all, there were not many legitimate opportunities open to him given his early criminal record, not to mention the deprivation and lack of stable employment in that region. Furthermore, he probably also desired to become an important figure in the subculture/culture of that area, and the only likely way to do that was to become a prominent figure in the organized crime syndicates.



U.S. Marshals Service photo

Whitey Bulger (1929–) was the head of one of the most notorious organized crime syndicates in Boston until he was apprehended in Southern California in 2011.

THINK ABOUT IT:

1. Can you relate to Bulger’s local community’s attitude toward him as a type of hero?
2. How do you think such a subculture develops in local communities for such prominent gangsters?

Sources: MacKenzie, E., & Karas, P. (2004). *Street soldier: My life as an enforcer for “Whitey” Bulger and the Boston Irish Mob*. Hanover, NH: Steerforth; Weeks, K., & Karas, P. (2009). *Brutal: My life inside Whitey Bulger’s Irish Mob*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.