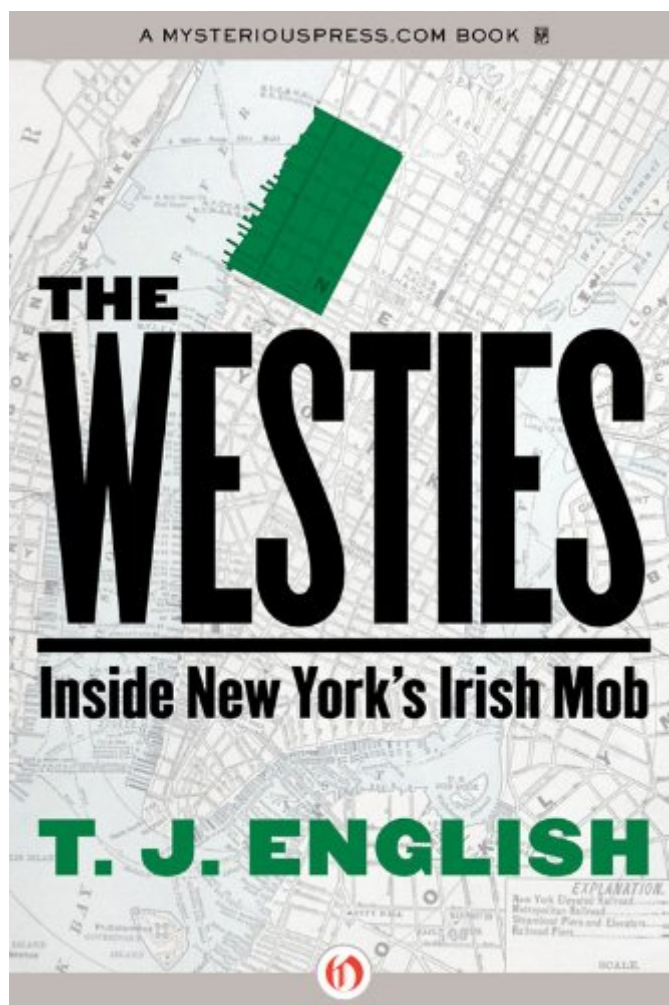


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The Westies: Inside New York's Irish Mob



Synopsis

A chilling true story of murder and betrayal on Manhattan's gritty West Side. It's men like Jimmy Coonan and Mickey Featherstone who gave Hell's Kitchen its name. In the mid-1970s, these two longtime friends take the reins of New York's Irish mob, using brute force to give it hitherto unthinkable power. Jimmy, a charismatic sociopath, is the leader. Mickey, whose memories of Vietnam torture him daily, is his enforcer. Together they make brutality their trademark, butchering bodies or hurling them out the window. Under their reign, Hell's Kitchen becomes a place where death literally rains from the sky. But when Mickey goes down for a murder he didn't commit, he suspects his friend has sold him out. He returns the favor, breaking the underworld's code of silence and testifying against his gang in open court. From one of the creators of NYPD Blue and Homicide: Life on the Street comes an incredible true story of what it means to survive in the world of organized crime, where murder is commonplace.

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Customer Reviews

The Westies controlled the West Side of Manhattan, known as Hell's Kitchen (currently Clinton). TJ English takes us through a history of the Westies, primarily as a personal history of several of the main characters. Of these characters, Mickey Featherstone was perhaps the most interesting. There

is no doubt Featherstone was a nasty sort-you certainly didn't want to be on his bad side. But he also had some interesting touches that made him a very complex and multi-dimensional character. If I had to characterize him, he was sort of a anti-Shakespearean hero...a man who is basically evil, but with a tragic "good" flaw.I won't spoil the excitement of the book by revealing too many details, but English does a very credible job of relating the trials and tribulations of Featherstone, fellow gangster Jimmy Coonan, and a host of other mostly despicable characters.The Westies were a loose organization-even their name came from the newspapers-but were a constant target of organized crime investigators. The book ends with the virtual elimination of the Westies as a gang, although Realtors and Developers may have been as much responsible as cops and prosecutors.There is a fair amount of blood and gore in the book, but while somewhat graphic, is not overly sensationalized or highlighted. The book is easy and almost "fun" to read. I found myself actually "rooting" for Featherstone, as his character does create sympathy and empathy, despite his obvious character flaws.So if you are a fan of crime history, especially relating to NYC or organized crime, you will enjoy this volume.

First lets get one thing straight. The movie and book "Sleepers" has been proven to be fiction with a little bit of fact mixed in. Those two criminals in it were based on a composite of other Westies. This book is the real deal. It tells the frightening story of one of the most vicious group of thugs who ever walked the streets of New York (the other being the infamous DeMeo crew- see the book "Murder Machine"). The only fault I have with this book is that the author sanitizes Mickey Featherstone a little too much. Retired Detective Joe Coffey who busted Featherstone said it best about him on 60 Minutes "You wouldn't want to get into an argument with him (Featherstone) over a parking space." As other reviewers have previously mentioned, the Westies (and that was never really their name - they were known as the Coonan Crew) were long on muscle and short on brains and too many of them wound up as drunken drug addicts. They also lacked the organization and the tradition that the Italian mob families had - which helped lead to their early demise. This book is a great companion book to the previously mentioned "Murder Machine" as there are a cross over of many of the characters from one book to the other. Roy DeMeo like Jimmy Coonan and Coonan's feared sidekick Eddie "the Butcher" Cummiskey, specialized in dismembering the corpses of people who ran afoul of him. It was DeMeo who negotiated the alliance between the Westies and the Gambino's. English doesn't go to far into the Coonan-DeMeo relationship though only to refer to him as "a feared mafia enforcer." The story of the meeting in Brooklyn's "Tomasso Restaurant" between Paul Costellano and his goombahs and Jimmy Coonan and Mickey Featherstone as told in both this

book and "Murder Machine" would be hysterical if it wasn't so murderously serious. A great read for a rainy Saturday morning and for people with strong stomachs.

I thought this book was very well written. While the story focuses on the Hells Kitchen Irish Mob in the 70s and 80s, it reviews the history of racketeering on the west side of Manhattan going back to the earlier part of the 20th century. A story spanning that much time and history seems difficult to organize, but English did a great job. Also, the sheer amount of characters could be baffling, but English does a good job of reminding you who is who throughout the book. Aside from the technical way the book was written, the story that is actually told is absolutely fascinating to me. It is difficult to imagine how people like Jimmy Coonan and Eddie Cumiskey could actually exist in real life. I would often read this book on the NYC subway and would regularly find myself wincing in disgust or gasping in horror at the violence these guys committed without batting an eyelash. One problem I had was that I think English paints Mickey Featherstone too much as an innocent victim of his surroundings and own psychological issues. That dude was a cold-blooded murderer. As a lawyer, I also found the parts of the book covering the Westies' various trials and the defense lawyers' and government's approaches to those trials to be particularly interesting. The descriptions of the investigations of the New York police and various federal agencies is also interesting.

T. J. English did a great job of packing 20 years or so of the escapades of a bunch of West Side psychopaths into this book, and bringing it all to a head with their 1987-88 RICO trial. Throw in just enough Hell's Kitchen background from the late 1800's to the 1960's to give one a sense of place, a smattering of contemporary Italian mob activity for perspective, a broad brush sweep of what was happening on the law enforcement side of the Westies' activities, numerous gangster "war" stories, a chapter or two from the criminal lawyers' point of view, even a street map of landmarks from the book, and you've got a mighty fine true-crime read. Sure, some of the stories may be somewhat exaggerated - or even complete fiction - since apparently the lion's share of the book is based on Mickey Featherstone's recollection and testimony, but English doesn't shy away from letting the reader know about Featherstone's proclivity for telling tall tales and his sometimes tenuous touch with reality. It appears that the author took care to research and corroborate what he could. English tells a good story himself, and the tales he recounts have a realistic feel. The only way to improve the paperback version of this book would be to pack in more photos (there are about 20). But I'm not complaining. Read it and enjoy!

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