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Literary Review #1: Goodfellas

CRIM 100

Before I answer the questions of the literary review it is important, I explain the upbringing and life of Mr. Henry Hill who is the main subject in the film Goodfellas. Henry was born and raised in Brooklyn NYC in the 40s and saw that the mob ran everything and wanted to be just like them. In the film he is quoted as saying "To me, being a gangster was better than being president of the United States". He started working with the Lucchese crime family at the age of 12 in 1955 and continued a life of organized crime until 1980. I will explain how this life ended for him later.

As I mentioned Henry first involved himself in a life of crime at the age of 12 when he started doing small jobs for members of the Lucchese crime family. His first arrest was when he was 16, now in the movie they depict it happening that he was selling stolen cigarettes for Jimmy Conway and he was busted for stolen property; In reality he was arrested for trying to buy new tires for his boss with a credit card that happened to be stolen. It is believed that this first arrest was a setup by his boss to see if Henry was loyal and could be trusted with more important work, and since Henry didn't say anything or give up any names he was released and congratulated by his criminal employers. After that day, the rest of his life was solidified with the crime family.

Henry was a career criminal so it was only a matter of time before it would eventually catch up with him. After him and a close friend threatened a degenerate gambler the gamblers

sister got everyone arrested (including her brother). Henry was sentenced to 10 years in prison which for that crime alone seemed excessive but considering all the other bad things he did and got away with, I can't say it was an unjust punishment. Once he was let out, he was told that the family is not allowed to get involved in narcotics, which was a big problem because Henry was already involved in moving high volumes of cocaine across state lines. He knew if he was caught the family would kill him before the police had a chance to arrest him.

Against direct orders to not mess with drugs or to talk to anyone messing with drugs Henry dives headfirst into interstate drug trafficking at obnoxious quantities. To make a long story short the DEA was investigating Henry and all the people working with him in the drug business and they arrest him. This was a massive problem for Henry, it meant that the family knew he was lying to them, he was disloyal to them and the only way to preserve their safety was to kill Henry. The Lucchese crime family turned their backs on Henry, and he was now unemployed, facing life in prison and all his friends are trying to kill him and his family.

There were few times the police were shown in the film, but the one time I do remember was when Henry was first arrested an agent pulled out his pistol, shoved it against Henry's head and was yelling at him "I will blow your head off! Turn the car off slowly!". Needless to say, I think that could've been handled better but at the same time Henry was a drug smuggler and these were DEA agents doing their job so it is what it is.

What ended up happening with Henry was both a blessing and a tragedy, he was left with no choice other than to betray everything he had ever known and turn state's witness against his Lucchese family members in exchange for placement in the witness protection

program. He gave up everybody he had a connection with, including his lifelong friends but it is important to remember that had he not done this he would've been "whacked" and the same would likely happen to his wife and kids.

In the film Henry mentions why it is so hard for men like him to get caught and it reflects a specific issue mentioned in the latest chapter; He claimed that since the mob was more organized than the police, the police catch mobsters only when they get lucky, and the mob gets sloppy. This statement illustrates the truth behind bad communication and poor leadership in the police force back then.

Two concepts that came from the book really connect with Henry's situation, the first being the broken windows concept. Minor offenders (like when Henry was using a stolen credit card or selling cigarettes) must be apprehended because then the fear of crime will be reduced in that neighborhood. This is likely one reason they gave Henry such a hard time over the credit card but as I mentioned earlier it was also potentially a setup. The second concept was the federal government making a deal with Henry in exchange for placement in the Witness Security Program. Which from previous readings we know that the US Marshals oversee this program and have no tolerance for any rule breaking, which is precisely why Henry Hill was kicked out of the Witness Security program. Henry kept blowing his cover by telling people his real identity, the agents argued that nobody who needs protecting would volunteer this information and Henry was removed from the program. He lived the remainder of his life peacefully in Los Angeles until he passed away in 2012.