



The Good Rat

Jimmy Breslin

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Of course Pulitzer Prize winner Jimmy Breslin recognized Burton Kaplan right away as the Mafia witness of the ages. Breslin comes from the same Queens streets as mob bosses John Gotti and Vito Genovese. But even they couldn't match Kaplan in crime—and neither could anybody else.

In his inimitable New York voice, Breslin, "the city's steadiest and most accurate chronicler" (Tom Robbins, *Village Voice*), gives us a look through the keyhole at the people and places that define the mafia—characters like Sammy "The Bull" Gravano, Gaspipe Casso (named for his weapon of choice), Thomas "Three-Finger Brown" Lucchese, and Jimmy "The Clam" Eppolito, interwoven with the good rat himself, Burt Kaplan of Bensonhurst, the star witness in the recent trial of two New York City detectives indicted for acting as hit men in eight gangland executions.

Breslin takes us to the old-time hangouts like Pep McGuire's, the legendary watering hole where reporters and gangsters (all hailing from the same working-class neighborhoods) rubbed elbows and traded stories; the dog-fight circles and body dumps at Ozone Park; and the back room at Midnight Rose's candy store, where Murder, Inc., hired and fired.

Most compelling of all, Breslin captures the moments in which the Mafia was made and broken—Breslin was there the night John Gotti celebrated his acquittal at his Ravenite Social Club on Mulberry, having bribed his way to innocence only to incite the wrath of the FBI, who would later crush Gotti and others with the full force of the RICO laws.

As in his unforgettable novel *The Gang That Couldn't Shoot Straight*, Breslin brings together these real-life and long-forgotten Mafia stories to brilliantly create a sharp-eyed portrait of the mob as it lived and breathed, as it sounded and survived.

The Good Rat Details

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From Reader Review The Good Rat for online ebook

Matt says

My first Breslin book. A punchy, true-life story about two NYPD cops who worked as contract killers for the Mob, and the old-school career criminal who takes the stand against them (the titular "Good Rat".) Lots of guys named "Joey-the-this" and "Frankie-the-that" if you're into that sort of thing.

Patrick DiJusto says

I never expected to find my uncle on Page 76! But there he is, large as life. Why is my uncle in a book about the Mafia? There are some things we don't talk about outside the family.

The book is another Breslin masterpiece. It's mostly about Louis Eppolito and Stephen Caracappa, NYPD officers known as the Mafia Cops because of their willingness -- let's face it, it was eagerness -- to do little jobs for the Mob, which quickly turned into big jobs like murder. As always, Breslin expresses his complete contempt for the mob mentality.

The Good Rat is almost a darker followup to his 1969 comic novel *The Gang That Couldn't Shoot Straight*.

Jason Koivu says

Jimmy Breslin made me an offer I couldn't refuse: a book with mobsters, crooked cops, a turncoat, and a trial in which a stool pigeon sings about the mafia's secrets.

Journalist Breslin made a career of following the mafia, writing of Queens, NY from the street-level. In *The Good Rat* he writes of the 2006 trial of two police detectives as they are brought down by the testimony of Burton Kaplan, an aging man with thick mob ties, who decided to come clean in hopes of seeing the outside again and spending time with his family before he dies.

As they are described, you can smell the streets and even feel as if you've walked into the mob-frequented bars alongside the writer, who spent much of his time in such joints. But beyond even that, Breslin's real talent is in creating a mind's eye image of these almost larger-than-life characters. I call these real-life men "characters," because what else do you call men with nicknames like Gaspipe, The Clam, Fat Tony and Three-Finger Brown?

The Good Rat masterfully interweaves the trial with NY mafia history, going back and forth to illuminate some time, place or person mentioned during Kaplan's testimony. Conversely, this background info is presented to set up thrilling reveals during the trial.

Who are the good guys? Who are the bad guys? Is a rat ever good? Sure, he's helping to put away some men

who did terrible things, but after all, he wouldn't have the information with which to dig their graves unless he himself had gotten his hands dirty.

David Macpherson says

this was a mess but a good mess, like a jumble of food thrown on a plate at a buffet. Breslin seemed to be writing out of obligation because this was kind of hobbled together. It is a look at the end of the mafia. Disjointed is the only word for it. But the writing is good and the mob characters are fascinating, so its a fine ramble, though with no straight path.

Keith says

Great Jimmy Breslin. Gruff, plain language. NYC tabloid style writing at its best. Could've been a serial in the Daily News.

Cynthia says

Damon Runyan meets Tom Wolfe. Or better yet, this is ... Jimmy Breslin, and requires no comparison. This is a book about the end of the Mafia in America. Much of it is a straight transcript (carefully edited for the truly mind-blowing bits) of a Jewish mobster named Burton Kaplan who was quite elderly and in prison and offered to share some incriminating stories from the old days. Breslin intersperses the transcript with some narrative and with his own extremely colorful memories of his days of hanging with the mob, and writing about its characters. When I was growing up, in the 1970s and 80s, john gotti was the most famous mobster. Breslin explains how gotti's rise in the mob signaled the end of the Mafia. This is a sort of loosely organized book but it's fascinating and a fast read.

columbialion says

Veteran columnist Breslin blow the lid off of the infamous mafia cops, in this true crime expose of murder deception and treachery of NYC crime annuls.

Brad says

Great story. I think this is one of the few books that is actually more beneficial to hear aloud as opposed to read, because Breslin uses a substantial amount of Burt Kaplan's testimony to tell Kaplan's story of life in the Mafia, and I believe the audiobook made the story that much more effective.

It was interesting how Breslin portrayed Kaplan, who for all purposes was a rat, and how he exposed Louis Eppolito and Stephen Caracappa as the corrupt cops they were found to be. It is a great book to get to learn more about the workings of the mafia.

Tiffany says

I listened to this on audiobook - it made my awful new D.C. commute much more bearable. Anyone thinking of reading this book - I would highly recommend the audiobook. I would give it 5-stars for narration/voice acting.

I liked how the book had sizable excerpts of the court case itself, interspersed with Breslin going deeper into the lives of the cast of characters.

This is the first book about the Mafia that I have ever read, and although I knew pretty much nothing about organized crime, I enjoyed the book. I also thought it was unique how Breslin talks about how he himself interacted with the gangsters during his journalistic career -- gave it a little more flair than the standard true crime or historical book.

Steve says

This is the first book I've read by Breslin, and it was pretty much impossible to put down. Car bombs, wise guys, torture (before murder), simple murder, murder for hire, dog murder (to be honest, the dog had it coming), mistaken murder(wrong guy with the same name of the intended), crooked cops who murder people for money, etc. One thing that always strikes me when reading mob books is that Hollywood, which can mess up anything, never understates the violent reality of the Mafia. These characters will kill you.

Beyond all the carnage, one reality Breslin consistently underscores, and which cuts down the romantic image more than a bit, is that this is an organization devastated by RICO, and Age. The two major contract killers in this book are a couple of bad cops -- not Mafia themselves. What you are left with are a bunch of 70 year old guys trying to rat each other out -- organization be-damned. Come to think of it, Breslin is a 70 something guy himself, and at the edges, the book is about him as well, as well as his city, its people, its ethnic neighbourhoods, Irish, Italian, Jewish, during a particular time when the "Good fellas" ruled, and fell. I was kind of reminded of the title of the Sergio Leone movie: Once Upon a Time in America.

One minor complaint I had was a Breslin comment in the book that Kaplan reminded him of Dostoyevsky's character from Crime and Punishment, Rashkolnikov. There is nothing to compare. Two completely different characters. Oh, there's plenty of Crime -- and Punishment in Breslin's book, it just has nothing to do with the great novel. So why go there? The story is compelling without the comparison. Kaplan, the "Good Rat" of the title, from what I read, was just as amoral in all things criminal as his murderous pals. There's nothing good about him. He was a tool for the mob, and became a tool for the Feds. Still, this is a great read. Check it out.

Betty says

A surprisingly entertaining book considering the topic. Jimmy Breslin has built a story of the Mafia old and current around the court case against two extremely "dirty" cops in the NYPD. Burt Kaplan, working for the Mafia for decades, is the witness; now in his 70s and tired of prison life, he has turned "rat". Kaplan is, from the book cover in this version "one of the most devastating turncoats of all time". The court transcripts have

a certain fascination which give great insight into the minds of the Mafia. Everything is run like a business, as is fairly well-known, but to hear it in the words of Kaplan, the descriptions of murder, making people disappear, comes across as just a day in the office. He tells everything straight as if describing ordering a meal to be delivered, or shipping a parcel out. Kaplan's "voice" and Breslin's style are what make the story so entertaining.

Breslin fills in background between sessions of the transcript with what appears to be the results of interviews through the years. Raised in the same location as the Families, he knew them personally and by reputation. This is what makes the story. He knows what he is talking about and has a wonderful flow between the transcripts and the "normal" lives of the people referred to. He gives us perhaps the most accurate picture of the history from the 1950s to the present of the "families" including their movement from Brooklyn to Staten Island, and on into the final crumbling days of the Dons. I was pleasantly surprised by this book, I thought it would be a lot of blood and guts described in great detail and do not usually read books to do with the Mafia. This book is so unexpected, I'm inclined to read Breslin's other books on the same topics. I would recommend this book for it's courtroom interest, it's historical fact, and it's entertainment value. Very good.

Sonya S says

I wish that I could have enjoyed this book more. As it is, I feel that the narrative of this nonfiction was far too jumbled, too confused. I felt as though I was picking up the second or third novel in the series, rather than a stand-alone non-fiction. Perhaps, though, it is because I know nothing more than cursory information about organized crime lore and legends in America, especially of the modern sort. Many of the people were introduced without much background, and often the author himself was placed into the scenes without much explanation. It took me a good long while to figure everything out. I felt that there were, perhaps, three books being written into one, and the result was confusing. This is a pity, because I felt like the story of the main character was tremendously interesting.

Bookmarks Magazine says

The Good Rule demythologizes the all-but-glamorous life of organized crime. While Breslin focuses on the trial of the "Mafia Cops," a story also recounted in Guy Lawson and William Oldham's *The Brotherhoods* (2006), Breslin, to critics' delight, uses the case to delve deep inside the Mafia's demise and the bloody, backstabbing stories within it. An unsentimental writer, Breslin sees the mob for what it is

Tom Schulte says

Not only is the narrator very good, but this audio production uses different voices as in the courtroom scenes with an actor playing the part of Mob information Burton Kaplan and a third for the attorney questioning him.

The is a very detailed and revealing look at the post-Castellano, Gotti-era NY mob as it was fracturing and strange bedfellows relationship with Louis Eppolito and Stephen Caracappa are two former New York Police

Department (NYPD) police detectives who worked on behalf of the New York Mafia while they committed various illegal activities.

Along with "I Hear You Paint Houses", this is the second non-fiction Mafia book that suggests to me that Richard "The Iceman" Kuklinski exaggerated and lied in many of his hitman "confessions".

Frank Taranto says

An interesting book about the Mafia in NY based around the trial of two cops who killed for them. The central character in the book is Burt Kaplan, who turned informer to get out of jail and to not be the fall guy when other mobsters turned states evidence. It is also about the history of the Mafia in NY as well as about Jimmy Breslin himself.
