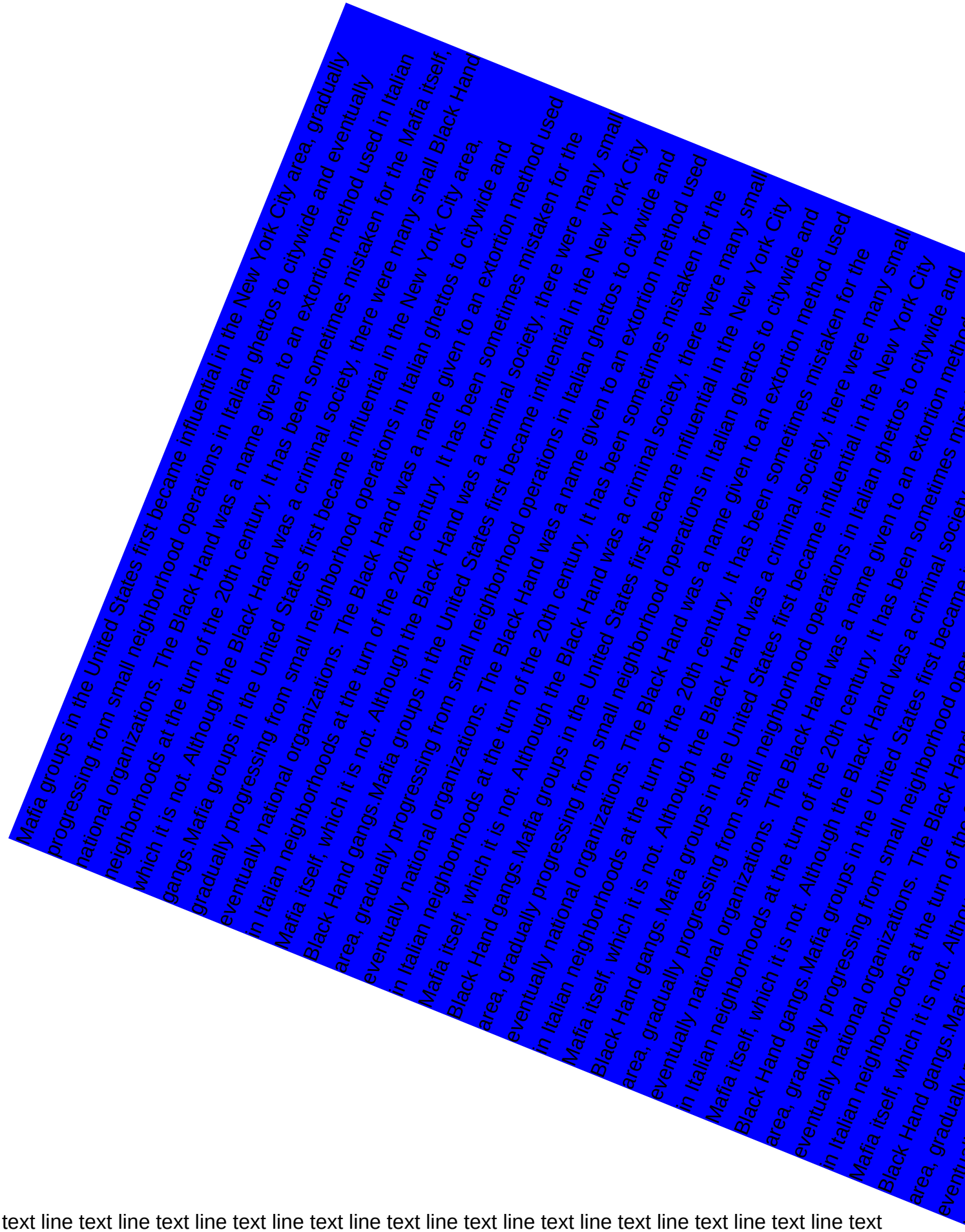
Mafia groups in the United States first became influential in the New York City area, gradually progressing from small neighborhood operations in Italian ghettos to citywide and eventually national organizations. The Black Hand was a name given to an extortion method used in Italian neighborhoods at the turn of the 20th century. It has been sometimes mistaken for the Mafia itself, which it is not. Although the Black Hand was a criminal society, there were many small Black Hand gangs.