

Jewish Gangsters



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Introduction

- Immigrant experience of upward mobility and limited opportunities
- Organized Crime
 - Prohibition (1920 – 1933) and bootlegging
 - Gambling
 - Extortion and racketeering
- Jewish-Italian Cooperation ensured after 1929
- Let's look at a few famous examples – the list is not exhaustive by any means and we'll have time to add to it

Paradox

- Separating business from personal
 - Murdering, but not on Shabbos
 - Ritual connection separated from ethical practice
- Eastern European immigrants (or their children)
- Many contributed to Jewish causes, supported and participated in synagogues, and are buried in Jewish cemeteries
- Active disruption of anti-Semitic activity in the 30s & 40s

Arnold Rothstein

- Life

- 1882-1928
- New York
- Transformed the activity of hoodlums into organized crime, applying business principles to the underworld enterprises
- 1919 World Series
- Took advantage of Prohibition to make a lot of money

- Death

- Murdered in Manhattan after refusing to pay debts from a three-day poker game
- Dissolution of his “empire” helped to elevate younger mobsters



Louis “Lepke” Buchalter

- Life

- 1897-1944
- New York
- Labor racketeering
- Head of Murder, Inc.
- Arranged for Dutch Schultz to be murdered
- Indicted for other murders and crimes
- Went into hiding and eventually surrendered
- Was implicated by Abe Reles after Reles flipped

- Death

- Only American mob boss to have been executed for conviction of murder (of Joseph Rosen)



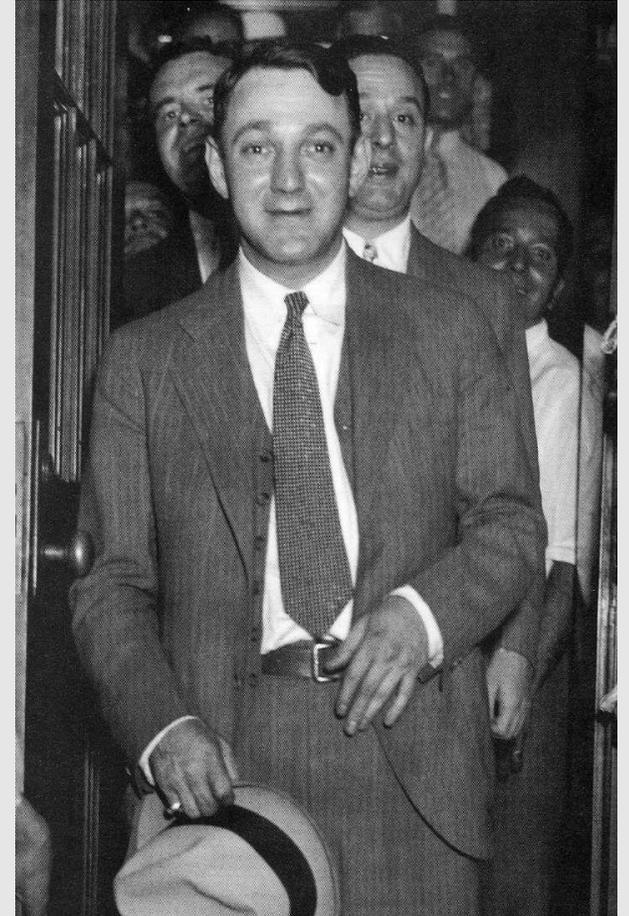
Dutch Schultz

- Life

- 1902-1935
- New York
- Petty crimes and then bootlegging
- Instigated gang wars, got involved in racketeering (got in trouble for tax evasion)
- Converted to Roman Catholicism to cozy up with Lucky Luciano
- Tried to get others in the National Crime Syndicate to kill prosecutor Thomas Dewey, they refused, and killed Schultz instead

- Death

- Killed by Murder, Inc. gunmen



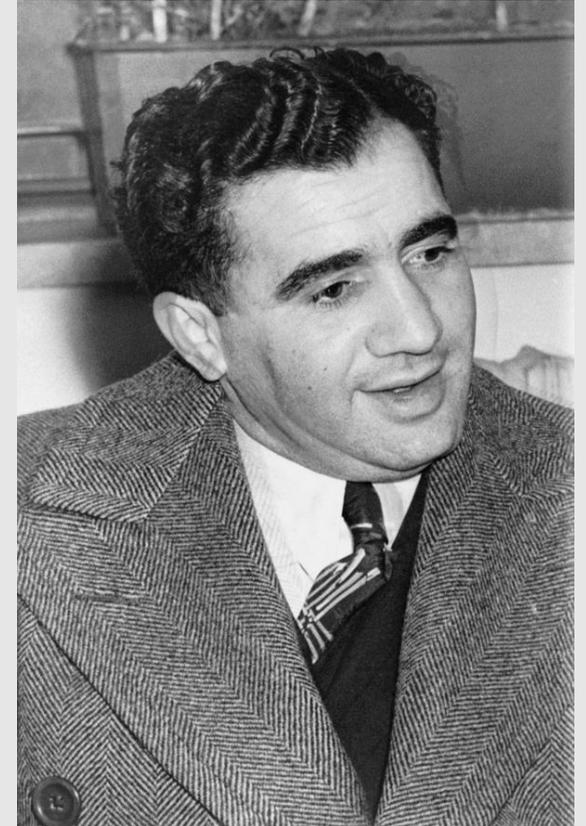
Abe Reles

- Life

- 1906-1941
- New York
- Started as a bootlegger, but was adept at murder (pretty gruesome feud with the Shapiro Brothers)
- Turned as a witness for the prosecution and helped send associates to the electric chair (including Lepke Buchalter)

- Death

- Fell out of a window while in police custody, just before he was set to testify against Albert Anastasia



Meyer Lansky

- Life

- 1902-1983
- New York, Cuba, Florida
- Childhood friend of Benjamin “Bugsy” Siegel – Bugs and Meyer Mob (Prohibition) that became Murder, Inc.
- Involved in gambling across the world
- Established the National Crime Syndicate with Charles “Lucky” Luciano and others in Atlantic City in 1929
- Enlisted others to break up pro-Nazi German Bund rallies
- Helped the US government during WWII (Operation Underworld)



- Helped get arms to the Haganah
- Extended his operations into pre-revolutionary Cuba
- Anti-Castro and pro-extortion
- Tried to move to Israel in 1970, Golda Meir turned him down
- Never convicted of anything more serious than gambling
- Death
 - Peacefully at home in Miami Beach
 - Who knows how much money he had or where it ended up?



Benjamin “Bugsy” Siegel

- Life

- 1906-1947
- New York
- Close friend and associate of Meyer Lansky, saw need for Jewish organization like the Italians had
- Gambling and bookmaking wire operations, casinos, and prostitution
- Popular in Hollywood and helped create Las Vegas
- Career of ups and downs

- Death

- Shot in Beverly Hills, crime remains officially unsolved



Moe Dalitz

- Life

- 1899-1989
- Active in Detroit, Cleveland, Las Vegas
- Was part of the Purple Gang (Little Jewish Navy)
- Bootlegging until 1933, then gambling
- Enlisted in US Army in WWII
- Became a prominent businessman in Las Vegas
- Developed the Las Vegas Convention Center, helping to transform city from gambling town to resort destination

- Death

- Peacefully in Las Vegas at age 89



Alex "Shondor" Birns

- Life

- 1907-1975
- Cleveland
- Regularly in and out of trouble with the law from an early age
- Got involved with the Maxie Diamond gang (control of the dry-cleaning racket)
- Prostitution, extortion, gambling, boxing, hospitality – a real renaissance man
- Quarreled with other criminal gangs, including Don King

- Death

- Car bombing in Cleveland



Conclusion

- A varied bunch of criminals, but still criminals
- These people did not create crime dynasties
- Counter to the stereotypes about Jews – a point of pride for some
- Organized crime continues – Israelis, Russians
- Who else belongs in this esteemed crowd?
 - Abner “Longy” Zwillman
 - Sam “Red” Levine
 - Mickey Cohen
 - Louis Rothkopf
 - Harry “Gyp the Blood” Horowitz
 - ???