

Meyer Lansky

American gangster

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Also known as: *Maier Suchowljansky*

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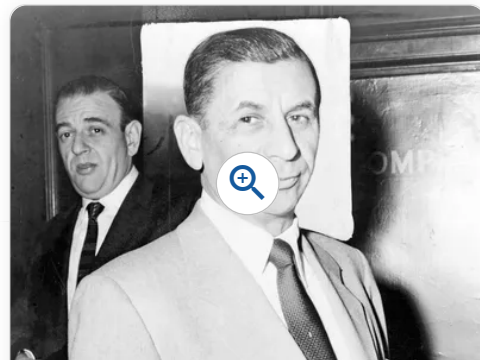
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Meyer Lansky, original name **Maier Suchowljansky**, (born July 4, 1902 [officially assigned date by U.S. authorities], [Hrodna](#) (also spelled Grodno), [Russian Empire](#) [now in Belarus]—died January 15, 1983, [Miami Beach](#), Florida, U.S.), one of the most powerful and richest of U.S. [crime syndicate](#) chiefs and bankers. He had major interests in [gambling](#), especially in [Florida](#), pre-Castro Cuba, [Las Vegas](#), and the [Bahamas](#).

A Polish [Jew](#) born in the Russian Pale of Settlement, Lansky immigrated with his parents to [New York's](#) Lower East



Meyer Lansky

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Born: July 4, 1902 • [Hrodna](#) • [Belarus](#)

Died: January 15, 1983 (aged 80) • [Miami Beach](#) • [Florida](#)

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Side in 1911. By 1918 he and the American gangster [Bugsy Siegel](#) were running a floating [crap game](#) and then graduated into highly lucrative auto theft and resale. In the course of the 1920s Lansky's gang branched into burglaries, liquor [smuggling](#), and other rackets and came under the aegis of crime boss [Giuseppe Masseria](#). Lansky and Siegel had also developed a squad of professional murderers for hire, the [prototype](#) for the later [Murder, Inc.](#), headed by [Louis Buchalter](#) and [Albert Anastasia](#). Lansky became a naturalized citizen in 1928.

It was allegedly Lansky who persuaded the Italian-born crime boss [Lucky Luciano](#) to have Masseria assassinated in 1931 and provided Siegel's services for that purpose, making the four-man "hit" team representative of the major New York crime factions. Between 1932 and 1934 Lansky joined Luciano and the American gangster [Johnny Torrio](#), among others, in forming the national crime syndicate and became one of its major overseers and bankers, often laundering funds through foreign accounts.

By 1936 Lansky had begun to develop gambling operations in Florida and [New Orleans](#) and also in Cuba, where he arranged payoffs to Cuban dictator [Fulgencio Batista](#). He also financed Siegel's casino developments in Las Vegas (and ordered Siegel's execution in 1947, after Siegel wshed on the syndicate). When [Fidel Castro](#) came to power in Cuba in 1959, Lansky turned to the Bahamas, building casinos on Grand Bahama and Paradise islands in the 1960s after nurturing government cooperation. He also extended his gambling empire to other areas of the Caribbean and even across the Atlantic to [London](#). He was involved in [narcotics](#) smuggling, [pornography](#), [prostitution](#), labour [racketeering](#), and [extortion](#) and had control of such [legitimate](#) enterprises as hotels, golf courses, and a meatpacking plant. Monies were secreted in Swiss banks. By 1970 his total holdings were estimated at \$300 million.

In 1970, fearing both a call to a [grand jury](#) and indictment for income-tax evasion, he fled to [Israel](#), seeking to remain under the Law of Return; however, Israel eventually expelled him, and he ended up back in the [United](#)

States facing several indictments. In 1973 he was convicted of **contempt** of a grand jury, a verdict overturned on appeal, but acquitted of income-tax evasion. Indictments on other charges were abandoned in 1974, partly because of his **chronic** ill health. In 1979 the House of Representatives Assassinations Committee, ending its two-year investigation of the **Warren Commission** report, linked Lansky with **Jack Ruby**, the nightclub owner who killed U.S. Pres. **John F. Kennedy**'s assassin, **Lee Harvey Oswald**.

Lansky died of **lung cancer** and was buried in Miami in an Orthodox Jewish ceremony.



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Bugsy Siegel

American gangster

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Bugsy Siegel, byname of **Benjamin Siegel**, (born February 28, 1906, [Brooklyn, New York](#), U.S.—died June 20, 1947, [Beverly Hills](#), California), American gangster who played an instrumental role in the initial development of [Las Vegas gambling](#).

Siegel began his career [extorting](#) money from Jewish pushcart peddlers on New York's Lower East Side. He then teamed up with [Meyer Lansky](#) about 1918 and took to car [theft](#) and, later, [bootlegging](#) and gambling rackets in New York, [New Jersey](#), and [Philadelphia](#). He and Lansky also ran a murder-for-hire operation, the forerunner of [Murder, Inc.](#) In 1931 he was one of the four executioners of [Joe Masseria](#).

In 1937 the syndicate leaders sent him to the West Coast to develop rackets there. In [California](#) the handsome gangster successfully developed gambling dens, gambling ships (offshore beyond the 12-mile [19-km] limit), narcotics [smuggling](#), [blackmail](#), and other illegal enterprises and equally successfully [cultivated](#) the company and friendship of Hollywood stars and celebrities. He developed a nationwide bookmakers' [wire service](#) and in 1945 began realizing his dream of a gambling oasis in the desert northeast of [Los Angeles](#). In that year he built the [Flamingo Hotel and Casino](#) in Las Vegas, [Nevada](#), originally budgeted at \$1,500,000 but costing eventually \$6,000,000, much of it in syndicate funds from the east. The cost overruns involved extensive skimming by Siegel, who had his girlfriend Virginia Hill deposit the money in European banks; he also began writing bad checks to cover construction costs. Such actions and other [duplicities](#) angered Lansky and other eastern bosses. In the late evening of June 20, 1947, Siegel was killed in his palatial



Bugsy Siegel

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Born: February 28, 1906 • [New York City](#) • [New York](#)

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Beverly Hills home, brought down by a fusillade of bullets fired through his living-room window. At almost the same moment, three of Lansky's henchmen walked into the Flamingo Hotel in Las Vegas and declared that they were taking over.

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This article was most recently revised and updated by [Amy Tikkanen](#).

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