

Murder, Inc.

Most of us have heard of *Murder, Inc.* Perhaps you even remember Twentieth Century Fox releasing the movie *Murder, Inc.* in 1960, written for the screen by Irve Tunick and Mel Barr from the book by Burton Turkus and Sid Feder, *Murder, Inc.* But was there ever any real *Murder Inc.*? Well, sort of...

Murder, Inc. was the name the press gave to organized crime groups in the 1930s through the 1940s that acted as the "enforcement arm" of the American Mafia, the early organized crime groups in New York and elsewhere. The groups were composed of largely Italian-American and Jewish gangsters from the Brooklyn neighborhoods of Brownsville, East New York, and Ocean Hill. *Murder, Inc.* was believed to be responsible for between 400 and 1,000 contract killings, until the group was exposed in the early 1940s by former group member Abe "Kid Twist" Reles. In the trials that followed, many members were convicted and executed, and Abe Reles, himself, died after falling out of a window. Thomas E. Dewey first came to prominence as a prosecutor of *Murder, Inc.* and other organized crime cases.

The Bugs and Meyer Mob was the predecessor to *Murder, Incorporated*. The gang was founded by New York Jewish American mobsters Meyer Lansky and Benjamin Siegel in the early 1920s. After the Castellammarese War and the assassination of U.S. Mafia boss Salvatore Maranzano, Italian mafioso Charles "Lucky" Luciano created the Commission. Soon after, Siegel and Lansky disbanded the Bugs and Meyer gang and formed the 'process' later dubbed *Murder, Incorporated*.

Murder, Inc. was established after the formation of the commission of the National Crime Syndicate, to which it ultimately answered. It was largely headed by mob boss Louis "Lepke" Buchalter and Mangano Family underboss Albert Anastasia. Albert "The Mad Hatter" Anastasia was the troupe's operating head, or "Lord High Executioner", assisted by Lepke's longtime associate Jacob "Gurrah" Shapiro.

In 1932 Abe Wagner informed on the crime syndicate to the police. He fled to Saint Paul and adopted a disguise to evade possible pursuit. Two killers, George Young and Joseph Schafer, found and shot him but were later apprehended. Bugsy Siegel failed to get them released.

In the 1930s Buchalter used *Murder, Inc.* to murder witnesses and suspected informants when he was investigated by crusading prosecutor Thomas Dewey. In one case, four killers hacked loan shark George Rudnick to pieces on the mere suspicion he was an informant.

Most of the killers were Italian and Jewish gangsters. In addition to carrying out crime in New York City and acting as enforcers for Louis "Lepke" Buchalter, they accepted murder contracts from mob bosses all around the United States. In his biography *The Valachi Papers*, Mafia turncoat Joe Valachi insisted *Murder, Inc.* did not commit crimes for the Mafia, but this is contradicted by other sources.

Based in part out of Rosie "Midnight Rose" Gold's candy store at the corner of Saratoga and Livonia Ave in Brooklyn, *Murder Inc.* hit men used a wide variety of weapons, including ice picks, to murder their victims. Though the group had a number of members, Harry "Pittsburgh Phil" Strauss was the most prolific killer, committing over 100 murders (some historians put the number as high as 500). The killers were paid a regular salary as retainer, as well as an average fee of \$1,000 to \$5,000 per killing. Their families also received monetary benefits. If the killers were caught, the mob would hire the best lawyers for their defense.

During the 1940s a series of trials focused on many of these killers. Many were executed or imprisoned, and *Murder, Inc.* vanished within a few years. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Murder,_Inc.]

