Meyer Lansky Biography

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Biography

Meyer Lansky, born Maier Suchowljansky, was one of the most powerful U.S. organized crime figures of the twentieth century. Lansky extended the influence of organized crime into Cuba and after World War II financed the efforts that created the gambling industry in Las Vegas, Nevada. Lansky's operations included all major areas of vice, including gambling, prostitution, pornography and narcotics trafficking.

Lansky was born on July 4, 1902 in Grodno, Russia. He immigrated with his family to the United States in 1911, settling in New York City. By the time he was sixteen, Lansky was involved with gambling and auto theft with his associate Bugsy Siegel. During the 1920s Lansky expanded his operation and organized a gang that committed burglaries, smuggled alcohol, and killed persons for hire.

By the mid-1930s Lansky had joined with Lucky Luciano to form a national crime syndicate. Lansky became the banker for the organization and an expert in money laundering, but he also acted as an entrepreneur, establishing gambling operations in New Orleans, Florida and Cuba. To assure the success of his Havana enterprise, Lansky paid bribes to Cuban dictator Fulgencio Bautista.

In the 1940s Lansky funded Bugsy Siegel's development of Las Vegas as a gambling resort and had Siegel killed when he double-crossed the syndicate. After Fidel Castro came to power in Cuba in the 1959, Lansky shifted his gambling empire to Grand Bahama and Paradise Island. Throughout the 1960s he remained a powerful figure, amassing a fortune estimated over $300 million. Lansky fled to Israel in 1970 after being indicted for tax evasion. He was eventually expelled by Israel but U.S. prosecutors had no success in convicting him of any crimes. He died on January 15, 1983 in Miami Beach, Florida.