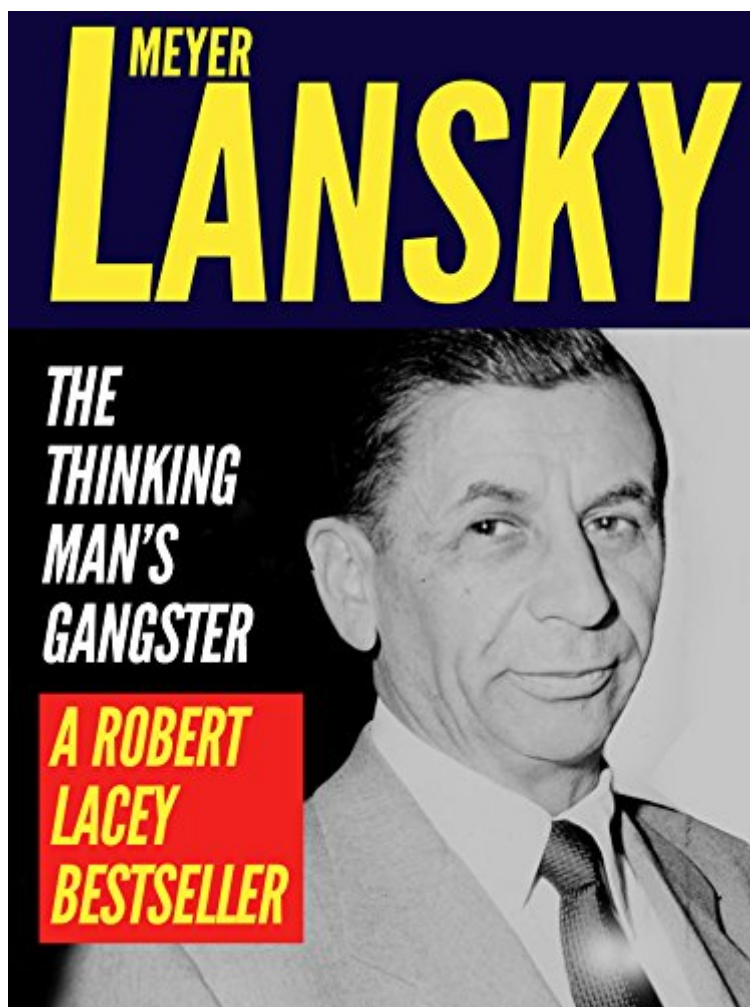


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# Meyer Lansky: The Thinking Man's Gangster



## Synopsis

First published in 1991 as *Little Man: The Gangster Life of Meyer Lansky*, the original text has been revised and updated for this edition by Robert Lacey, and much bonus material added. Daring and well written – it would be criminal not to read it. • People magazine They called Meyer Lansky the Godfather of the Godfathers, the Chairman of the Board of the National Crime Syndicate, the Mafia's banker. They credited him with a personal fortune of \$300 million, with having said "We're bigger than U.S. Steel." • He was portrayed on the screen in *The Godfather, Part II* as Hyman Roth, dividing up Cuba with his fellow gangsters, and more recently in *Boardwalk Empire* as himself, played by Anatol Yusef. If, in the mythology of organized crime, Al Capone symbolized the crude menace of the machine gun and the baseball bat, Meyer Lansky stood for the brains, the sophistication, the hot money, the sheer cleverness of it all. And yet, when it came down to it, no law enforcement official in 60 years could find much to pin on the supposed boss of bosses, and within a few years of Lansky's death, his crippled son was living on welfare.

*Meyer Lansky: The Thinking Man's Gangster* is a book about organized crime unlike any other yet written. In this brilliant biography and social history, Robert Lacey separates the strands of fact and legend in Meyer Lansky's career, revealing a truth about the gangster life in America that is far more fascinating and dramatic than fiction. A Jewish immigrant from Russia, Lansky broke into a life of crime running crap games and acting as a shtarke, a strong-arm man for Jewish and Italian gamblers on the Lower East Side of New York. Teaming up with his pals Lucky Luciano and Bugsy Siegel, he graduated to bootlegging. Meyer became the master of the "share-out," keeping all the figures in his head and dividing up the spoils from smuggled liquor shipments. In the thirties and forties he moved on to illegal gambling, running the classiest casinos around. He invested in modern Las Vegas – though he never really liked the place – and became the gambling consultant to President Batista during Havana's glory days. In World War II he even acted as a go-between for U.S. Naval Intelligence, paving the way for gangster help to the Allied invasion of Sicily. Then in 1951 Estes Kefauver's Senate Crime Committee named Lansky as one of the leaders of organized crime in America, fueling the legend that would eventually destroy him. Cuba's revolutionary leaders expelled him in 1960 as a corrupting influence. His attempts to go into legitimate business and later to settle in Israel were frustrated by the shadows of his past. His every step was dogged by the FBI and the IRS, as his family disintegrated and his health declined. His death was front-page news, but at the end, his power and wealth were all gone.

Based on dramatic new documentation and firsthand interviews with Lansky's close friends and business associates, with law enforcement experts, and members of the Lansky family, *Meyer Lansky: The*

Thinking Manâ™s Gangster is a powerful and irresistible narrative of a man and a way of life never before truly examined. Robert Lacey has written, in this bestselling biography, a groundbreaking exploration of organized crime in America and of our enduring fascination with criminals.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I first read the print version under the title Meyer Lansky and the Gangster Life. It's a really good book. I saw that it had been updated and released for kindle, so I bought it. The updates are at the back of the book, links to videos and FBI info and such.

I read the original version of this book - Little Man - and thoroughly enjoyed it. I bought this one because I wanted to see what had been added and the answer is quite a lot, as discussed in the Author's Notes at the end. The book separates fiction from fact and it is a fascinating story, but very sad. When you read the details of Lansky being denied the Right to Return to Israel, based on conjecture and charges of which he was later acquitted, the story takes on the trappings of tragedy, a tragedy which continues to the end of Meyer Lansky's life. Did he break the law, particularly those related to gambling. Yes, clearly he did, and he also paid off public officials who were only too eager

to take the money. But he didn't commit murder, traffic in drugs or prostitution, or any of the heinous crimes which would leave you with no sympathy for him whatsoever. True, he did know and did business with those who did, especially his childhood friends Luciano and Siegel, but he was not an accessory to their crimes. And clearly his children, particularly his disabled son, Buddy, suffered mightily - no one would nominate Meyer Lansky for Father of the Year. All in all, I recommend this book to anyone and everyone who has an interest in the reality of organized crime, not the nonsense you see on TV in shows like AMC's *Making of the Mob - New York*, which casts him as a prime mover in criminal activities without any semblance of fact. Oh, and while Hyman Roth in *Godfather II* may have been suggested by Lansky's life, the real story is quite different in case you're interested.

This is a tremendously researched book, made extremely difficult by the secretive nature of the subject man. It exposes the wild imagination of the media in order to sell their products. It is somewhat sympathetic to a gambler who avoided the seedier crimes that his contemporaries pursued. Despite his reputation as a criminal, it is interesting that he was considered totally honest and morally straight.

Robert Lacey has chosen to present an essentially sympathetic picture of a very private man, whom he argues was not really at all like the character who has been portrayed so often in popular literature. Lacey examines the public's need to mythologize the power of the criminal in a democratic society--to imagine and glorify him as outlaw, the man who lives by his wits and brains and succeeds beyond all imagining in a corrupt world. That mythic Lansky was the godfather of godfathers, a man who never had to pick up a gun because others, not as smart, were there to do it for you. Lacey doesn't buy that; instead he portrays Lansky as a ulcerated business man bright enough to have seen before others that a great deal of money could be made legally and illegally by catering to needs of the public otherwise prohibited by law, first the need to drink alcohol, second, the desire to gamble. Meyer always avoided the seamier side of crime--prostitution and drugs--concentrating instead on those profit-making enterprises that had less risk of prosecution. The human side of his story is very dismal indeed. He died with little money despite the rumors that he was the king of crime, and had millions hidden in banks all over the world. Lacey makes the case that Lansky was never as rich or powerful as others have claimed, nor was he as violent. The book details how he made money but lost most of it. His family life was miserable, his children crippled either physically or emotionally. There is no glamour in the story, only a life of disappoint and

frustration. Other writers on the subject disagree with Lacey's view, but this is a very convincing argument. Lansky was neither genius nor monster.

An easy read with very good research. So much written about Lansky has been based on conjecture and fantasy, it was nice to read an accurate account. Lacey provides a straightforward tale of a flawed man from a crazy time. This isn't some fawning glossy mob story. Sick and essentially broke at the end, Meyer Lansky was a shell of his reputation at the end of his life.

\*\*\*\*\*NOTICE\*\*\*\*\* This book may be a good read, but when you turn a page you may or may not get the next page, there are sections missing. It is frustrating to go to the next page and be on an entirely different subject....in the middle of a sentence.

This is a highly researched and fascinating look at a fascinating figure and to be fair Robert Lacey is the key to its success. These sort of crime stories can be loaded one side or another but just when Lacey looks as though he is going to fall for the legend he puts the balance back into it and never just leaves it to Meyer to deliver his own story. This balance is so important to a book like this. Lansky may have been just a smart figures man on the wrong side of the business street and his determination to stay under cover means his was not a colourful life. But again Lacey makes him an interesting fascinating figure. Possibly at times too generous -Lansky didn't get where he was being a family man and a gentleman- but you never feel you were reading a "loaded" biography as so many are. Outstanding

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