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Charles "Lucky" Luciano (born Salvatore Lucania; November 24, 1897–January 26, 1962) was instrumental in creating the American Mafia as we know it today. After graduating from the gritty street gangs of New York, Luciano went on to become a henchman for the American branch of the infamous Cosa Nostra. A criminal mastermind, it was Luciano who orchestrated the unification of warring mob factions, creating the first Organized Crime Commission. In addition to taking on the mantle of the first kingpin of the modern Genovese crime family, he and his mob associates launched the highly successful and lucrative National Crime Syndicate. Known For: Charles "Lucky" Luciano was the criminal mastermind whose influence in shaping the mafia earned him the title of "father of modern organized crime." Born: November 24, 1897 in Lercara Friddi, Sicily, ItalyParents: Rosalia Capporelli and Antonio LucaniaDied: January 26, 1962 in Naples, Campania, ItalySpouse: Igea LissoniCriminal Convictions: Pandering, drug traffickingPublished Work: The Last Testament of Lucky Luciano: The Mafia Story in His Own Words (as told to Martin A. Gosch and Richard Hammer)Notable Quote: "There's no such thing as good money or bad money. There's just money." Luciano's family immigrated to the United States in 1906. His criminal career began not long after. At the age of 10, he was charged with his first crime (shoplifting). Luciano launched his first racket in 1907, charging Jewish and Italian kids in his Lower East Side neighborhood anything from one or two pennies to as much as a dime for his protection to and from school. If they refused to pay, Luciano beat them up rather than protect them. One of the kids, Meyer Lansky, refused to ante up. After Luciano failed to pound Lansky to a pulp, the two became friends and joined forces in the protection scheme. They remained friends and close associates throughout most of their lives. At the age of 14, Luciano dropped out of school and started a \$7 per week delivery job, but after winning more than \$200 in a craps game, he realized there were faster and easier ways of earning money. His parents sent him to The Brooklyn Truant School in hopes of straightening him out but in 1916 after his release, Luciano took over as leader of the notorious Five Points Gang, where he became acquainted with future Mafia leaders Vito Genovese and Frank Costello. In the years leading up to World War I, Luciano expanded his criminal enterprises to include pimping and drug trafficking, and while the police named him as a suspect in several local murders, he was never indicted. By 1920, Luciano had branched out into bootlegging and illegal gambling. With financing and an education in social skills from his mentor "Arnold the Brain" Rothstein, Luciano and his partners were grossing over \$12 million a year from the sale of illicit alcohol by 1925. Luciano, Costello, and Genovese had the largest bootlegging operation in New York with a territory that extended as far as Philadelphia. By the late 1920s, Luciano had become a chief aide in the largest crime family in the country, led by Giuseppe "Joe the Boss" Masseria. Initially recruited as a gunman, as time went on, Luciano came to despise the old Mafia (Cosa Nostra) traditions—and especially Masseria's belief that non-Sicilians could not be trusted (which ironically, turned out to be true in Luciano's case). After being kidnapped and mugged, Luciano discovered "Joe the Boss" was behind the attack. A few months later, he decided to betray Masseria by covertly joining forces with the second largest mafia clan led by Salvatore Maranzano. The Castellammarese War began in 1928 and, over the next two years, several gangsters connected to Masseria and Maranzano were killed. Luciano, who was still working for both camps, led four men—including Bugsy Siegel—to a meeting he had arranged with Masseria. The four men sprayed his former boss with bullets, killing him. After the death of Masseria, Maranzano became the "Boss of Bosses" in New York but his ultimate goal was to become the leading boss in the United States. Maranzano appointed Lucky Luciano as his No. 2 man. The working relationship was short-lived, however. After learning of a plan by Maranzano to double-cross him and wipe out Al Capone in the bargain, Luciano decided to strike first, organizing a meeting at which Maranzano was killed. Lucky Luciano became "The Boss" of New York and, almost overnight, he began moving into more rackets and expanding their power. The 1930s were prosperous times for Luciano, who was now able to break ethnic barriers formerly laid out by the old Mafia. He strengthened his outreach in areas of bootlegging, prostitution, gambling, loan-sharking, narcotics, and labor rackets. In 1936, Luciano was convicted on charges of compulsory prostitution (pandering) and drug trafficking. He was sentenced to 30-50 years but maintained control of the syndicate while behind bars. In the early 1940s at the onset of America's involvement in World War II, Luciano struck a deal with U.S. Office of Naval Intelligence. He offered to supply information to help protect the mob-run New York docks from Nazi saboteurs in exchange for a move to a better prison and the possibility of early parole. Luciano was transferred to Great Meadow Correctional Facility from the Clinton Correctional Facility in Dannemora in upstate New York. He continued his collaboration, known as "Operation Underworld," for the remaining years of the war. In 1946, Governor Thomas E. Dewey (who while serving as Special Prosecutor was responsible for Luciano's conviction) granted the mobster a commutation of sentence and had him deported to Italy, where he was able to resume control over the American syndicate. Luciano snuck into Cuba in October 1946, where he attended "The Havana Conference," a meeting of the five major crime families hosted by Lansky who already had an established presence in Cuba. The cover for the meeting was an appearance by Frank Sinatra. During the week-long conference that focused on the heroin trade and gambling activities in Cuba, and also to decide the fate of Bugsy Siegel and his Las Vegas money pit, the Flamingo Hotel, Luciano met privately with Genovese, who suggested that Luciano take on a figurehead role as "Boss of Bosses" while allowing Genovese to control the day-to-day activities of the syndicate. Luciano declined, saying: "There is no 'Boss of Bosses.' I turned it down in front of everybody. If I ever change my mind, I will take the title. But it won't be up to you. Right now you work for me and I ain't in the mood to retire. Don't you ever let me hear this again, or I'll lose my temper." When the U.S. government got wind of Luciano's presence in Cuba, it quickly moved to have him repatriated to Italy, where he remained for the rest of his life. While he continued to profit from mob-related activities, his power and influence waned. As Luciano grew older, his long-time relationship with Lansky began to falter. Luciano felt he wasn't getting his fair share from the mob. Disgruntled, he arranged to have his memoirs written—not to bare his soul so much as to set the record straight as he saw it. He outlined his exploits to writer Richard Hammer and had also arranged to meet with producer Martin Gosch about a possible film version of the project. Word of his confessional ("The Last Testament of Lucky Luciano: The Mafia Story in His Own Words," published posthumously) did not sit well with Luciano's former mob associates. In 1962, Luciano suffered a fatal heart attack in the Naples airport, where he talked about the movie with Gosch. There is some conjecture that Luciano did not die of natural causes and that his death may have been a hit in retribution for his "turning canary." Luciano's body was sent back to the United States and buried at St. John's Cemetery in New York City. It is believed that Luciano was one of the most powerful men in organized crime and to this day, his influence over the gangster activity can be felt in this country. He was the first person to challenge the "old Mafia" by breaking through ethnic barriers and creating a network of gangs that comprised the first national crime syndicate and continued to exert control organized crime long after his death. Donati, William. "Lucky Luciano: The Rise and Fall of a Mob Boss." Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2010. Gosch, Martin A.; Hammer, Richard. 1974. "The Last Testament of Lucky Luciano: The Mafia Story in His Own Words." Little Brown and Company.Newark, Tim. "Boardwalk Gangster: The Real Lucky Luciano." New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2011. One accessory that wasn't added at the factory are the bullet holes. They're famous getaway cars, and the amazing thing is that they're still with us, which is more than you can say for their former owners. Probably the most famous getaway car is a gray 1934 Ford V-8, stolen by Clyde Barrow and Bonnie Parker and in use by them on a multi-state, 2,500-mile crime spree (leaving nine corpses) before their luck ran out at a roadblock. The moment forms the climax of the film "Bonnie and Clyde," and the more than 100 bullets tearing into both them and the car are captured in highly effective slow motion. A landmark of cinema, many say. Bonnie and Clyde's death car is at Whiskey Pete's in Pimm, Nevada. (Photo: Whiskey Pete's) The next time you're in Pimm, Nevada, stop by Whiskey Pete's Resort and Casino, because that's where the decidedly unrestored Ford resides, looking just like its stand-in does in the movie. Pete also has the blue shirt Barrow was wearing on May 23, 1934, when the lawmen closed in. It's a bit worse for wear, too, with several holes, but at least it appears to have been through a laundry since then. Other ghoulish "memorabilia" is promised, too. Bonnie Parker, with stogie, gun and Ford. (Photo: Public Domain/Wikipedia) By the way, Barrow was particular about his cars. He actually wrote a letter to Henry Ford (now in the Ford Museum) proclaiming his admiration for the quality of the man's V-8s. Here's the full text of that letter, whose authenticity has been questioned: While I still have got breath in my lungs I will tell you what a dandy car you make. I have drove Fords exclusively when I could get away with one. For sustained speed and freedom from trouble the Ford has got ever other car skinned and even if my business hasn't been strickly legal it don't hurt anything to tell you what a fine car you got in the V8. And here's video: The Essex Terraplane is not well remembered today, but the bluesman Robert Johnson put one into a song, and John Dillinger actually bought his with cash from his bank jobs — he wasn't a car thief like Bonnie and Clyde. The last I heard, Dillinger's 1933 Terraplane was at the convention center in Richmond, Virginia, following a tour of airports. It was just in Baltimore, and I saw it in Indianapolis. The Terraplane, valued at \$150,000, has a bullet hole or two, but they're far more discreet than those worn by the poor Ford. Dillinger bought the car from the Pothoff Brothers Motor Company in St. Paul, Minnesota, in March 1934, when he had only a few more months to live. For obvious reasons, the car was registered to Dillinger's brother, Hubert, who was with him when the pair crashed the Terraplane into a farmer's field on April 7, 1934. Hubert subsequently repaired the Essex, but left the bullet holes — perhaps with a thought to future value. Ol' J.D., on foot by this time, had his rendezvous with destiny at a Chicago movie theater in July of that same year. His last thoughts were undoubtedly of his Essex, which is owned by the National Museum of Crime and Punishment in Washington, D.C. Dillinger also had a 1932 Studebaker Commander he used in 1933 to rob the Central National Bank in Greencastle, Indiana — a textbook robbery that went off without a hitch. That car is in the Volo Auto Museum. Essex was his favorite brand, though. Nothing but the best for bootlegger and crime boss Al Capone. On a recent visit to Kansas City, I stopped by the Rieger Hotel, where the legendary boss Tom Pendergast held court, and a sign in the bathroom says, "This is where Al Capone urinated." Undoubtedly he arrived in his famous armored Cadillac. The green, four-passenger 1928 Model 341 town sedan (above) isn't hugely impressive to look at — it wasn't even the top of the Cadillac range that year — but the quality was built in. The mobster's car is heavily armor-plated, one of the first cars to be so-equipped. As the video below shows, motorists who came under attack could lower steel curtains (complete with slits for firing back). A big steel plate protects the firewall. The glass is an inch thick and bulletproof. Here's video on what went into this unique Cadillac: It's these specific details that make the Caddy even more valuable, and it explains a 2012 auction price of \$341,000. RM Auctions, which sold the car, said its provenance "has never been questioned," but in fact it has. Capone's ownership isn't that well-documented, although the son of the armor plate installer said in 1933 that the car is authentic. Another Capone Cadillac, a gorgeous 1940 V-16 convertible, is unrestored at the Collings Foundation, in Stow, Massachusetts, and can reportedly be seen there by special appointment, was also a car guy. In his life of crime, he "was known to be enjoying many luxuries, including high-powered automobiles and expensive jewelry, without any visible means of support," the FBI reported. For a famous kidnapping, he used a seven-passenger Cadillac (or Buick, the victim wasn't sure). These days, "Machine Gun" Kelly is a rapper, and he's had misadventures with cars, too, totaling a Nissan Altima and a Ford Explorer. In more modern times, mobster John Gotti showed impeccable taste in cars, owning a 1972 Jaguar E-Type convertible with V-12 power. That car, which cost \$7,500 new, is now at the Mob Museum in Las Vegas.

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