



Little Man: Meyer Lansky and the Gangster Life

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Based on interviews with Lansky's close friends & criminal associates, with law enforcement experts, & with members of Lansky's own family, & using previously unpublished documents written by Lansky himself, this is both the biography of a mob operator & a social history of American crime.

Little Man: Meyer Lansky and the Gangster Life Details

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From Reader Review Little Man: Meyer Lansky and the Gangster Life for online ebook

Kurt says

A fantastic biography of Meyer Lansky, the greatest Jewish Gangster in America.

D. Johnson says

Man or myth

Interesting bio of reputed underworld crime boss Meyer Lansky...found it very intriguing and entertaining... great bonus material included at the end of this tome

Sheridan says

It is of interest to read the book now, in 2012, a few years after the death of the scumbag. This book is a crude, now I think laughably crude, attempt to lionise a little twerp. Ironically it shows where he made his roots- preying on his fellow Jews in the most violent manner. I did not see a mention of the prostitution and porn "industry" that he helped spawn- if that is the correct word!
I started but did not want to read all of it- the writer and his subject, indeed most of the characters are thoroughly dislikeable. But as a social snapshot of how a scumbag would like to be seen it is interesting. There is nothing nice in the world of people like this, nothing.

Anthony says

Interesting and well written biography of Jewish gangster Meyer Lansky. The book begins with his birth in a small Jewish village called Grodno in Eastern Europe and subsequent immigration at ten years of age to America with his family. The book details his youth as a precocious young gambler and his entry into bootlegging during Prohibition years. LITTLE MAN describes his underworld contacts and friends (Frank Costello, Benny Siegel, Lepke Buchalter, Charlie "Lucky" Luciano etc) and the most notable incidents of his life such as his setting up the collaboration with the U.S. Navy with the then imprisoned Luciano to defend the East Coast from Nazi saboteurs and u-boats to his relationship and involvement with Benny Siegel in "Bugsy's" financial adventures and consequent assassination in Las Vegas.

My biggest problem with this book is that the author is extremely sympathetic to Lansky and writes his biography almost like a tribute to him. He views Lansky like an ideal product of the American dream, a patriotic Jewish American businessman who dealt in fairly harmless vices such as gambling, carpet joints, and casinos and who relied on an aura of violence he cultivated through his underworld contacts and business associates to do "his business" while never condescending to put a hit on anyone or resorting to the use of violence himself. The biography almost makes it sound like America's criminalization of gambling is what made the virtually harmless diminutive in stature gangster a criminal. That otherwise he'd just have

been no different than any other successful businessman. It also only briefly touches on his early Prohibition years, completely ignoring the fact that the Jewish-American Bugs and Meyer Mob had a reputation for being one of the most notoriously violent Prohibition gangs of the 1920s.

Was Meyer Lansky just a family man, a first-rate business man, who was just a shadow figure in the criminal underworld, avoiding violence as much as possible and preferring legality if given the choice? Whose reputation is one that is unfounded, blown out of proportion, and sensationalized by his associations with that eras most violent gangsters? According to Robert Lacey, that is the case.

Larry says

Ok, it isn't necessarily this book's fault (entirely anyway) I gave it only one star.

See, here's the thing: I have decided effective right now, I am done reading biographies of mobsters in America, Each time I think "well maybe this one will be unique, perhaps give me insight to an interesting, but deeply flawed character".

And every motherfucking time I finish the thing and nope, it's another waste of time, the guy is a despicable thug abut who the only interesting thing is he was a criminal.

Yep. My last Mafia book.

Fuck the mob.

Cwn_annwn_13 says

I noticed some of the reviews on Amazon of this book called it a whitewash. I would say that's true to say the least. For that matter at times it almost reads like a tribute. This shouldn't be surprising considering Laceys main primary source for this book was Lanskys son. You would think Meyer Lansky was just a hard working business man that straddled the line of legality from time to time when he ran his bootleg liquor and gambling parlors. He claims that Lansky never ordered a hit or even used intimidation when running his rackets. The only violent incidents mentioned were streetfights growing up and Lansky allegedly going with a group of hoodlums and breaking up a "Nazi" (they were actually pre-WW2 German-American nationalists) meeting.

Most historians acknowledge that the Mafia almost certainly had serious dirt on J. Edgar Hoover and many think Lansky was the one that had the pics to prove it if you know what I mean. There are even those that claim Lansky was in on the JFK assassination and attempts to kill Castro. I won't even bother with going into how Hollywood has made organized crime out to be an Italian/Sicilian thing when the truth is some of the most ruthless gangsters were Jews. I'll also skip over just how Russian the "Russian" Mafia really is.

Christine Lamoreaux says

I had to quit reading this biography. IT WAS SOOOOOOO DULL. Not the subject (I admire Lansky)

but Lacey's prose is flat... and then out of the blue he moralizes: "Being Jewish, it seemed, only aroused pride in Meyer Lansky if it involved aggression and violence. The little Jew going to shul in his skullcap was not an object of respect. The little Jew who beat up Nazis was." This approach in any biography infuriates me and even though I've only made it to page 150 Lacey has done it one too many times. I dread reading the book and that means it is time to move on. Maybe I will be able to pick it up at a later time but I truly doubt it. Good luck to all who attempt it.

UPDATE: I did finish it but my opinion has not changed. It was excruciating and left me saddened. The ending was abrupt and horrible. Boo-hiss on Robert Lacy.

Jillian Fischer says

I'm not usually a big fan of biographies, but thoroughly enjoyed this book. I have always been interested in the history of the mafia/gangster life in America, but most of what I knew was info about the Sicilians (i.e., the Bonannos, Colombos, Genoveses, Luccheses, & my all-time favorites the Gambinos). I knew there were Jewish gangsters, & had heard of Meyer Lansky, but didn't realize there was an entire organized Jewish mob back in the late part of the 19th century/early 20th century. Meyer Lansky was quite a character! I also love reading about the history of New York City, so this book was quite enjoyable. I gave it 4 rather than 5 stars because it was interesting & fun to read, but not particularly moving (which is my experience with most biographies).

Malcolm says

I would have rated this book higher if the passages about the later stages of Lansky's life been edited down. Too much ink spent on explaining how Lansky's wealth did not approach \$300 million and there was no organized national syndicate that he was the accountant and/or planner for. I was persuaded by the evidence, but I didn't need all the argument. Lacey is a good story-teller though and seems to research thoroughly, so I will try out more of his non-fiction.

J.H Gaines says

absolutely Loved this book1 we have all seen the films and the documentary's so I brought this off of eBay and gave it a go, it is one of the only books I have actually read twice.

it is fascinating to see how New York was at the turn of the century and legalised gambling came to be in america, it is a great insight into gambling from the back room games in New York to the swanky parlours in Sarasota springs and Miami to ultimately Las Vegas and Atlantic City.

the book captures the feel of the time very well and you can visualise the locations and almost hear the click of the roulette wheel and the dealing of the cards.

A fascinating insight into the USA and to how so much of the country was built by people like Lansky.

Steven says

A biography is a difficult proposition. It must include the events in a persons life, but information from the

early years preceding a person's fame are not always easy to obtain or to understand its context. The events of the subject's associates, and the surrounding world that interacts with them can be difficult to interpret, and previously written reports necessitates reliance upon other writer's skill and integrity in reporting. Understanding the individuals meaning, to themselves, to others, their emotions, desires, their achievements and disappointments is most difficult. The writer's own sensibilities might interfere, and then he must again rely upon the impressions of others. Even if he could interview the subject of the biography, would that interview yield anything beyond an individual's tainted self image, or desire for remembrance? The author, Mr. Lacey, interviewed many of the people closest to Mr. Lansky, and researched his subject well without always drawing definite conclusions, but rather providing the ambience that would provide some sense of the subject but allowing the nebulousness of an individual's existence. This was an excellent biography of Meyer Lansky's life, some of the good, some of the bad, some of the triumphs, and some of the sad disappointments, but like every individual's Rosebud, there are things we shall never know.

Neil Pierson says

During his lifetime, Meyer Lansky was the stuff of organized crime legend. He was portrayed as the Chief Financial Officer of the Mafia, devising brilliant devices to turn illicit schemes into wealth for gangsters and accruing a great fortune himself.

In reality, he was an interesting figure but nowhere near the hype.

He started life as a poor, Jewish kid who emigrated to New York from Russia with his family. He had a great faculty for numbers and became fascinated by the craps games he observed on New York's sidewalks. He quickly mastered the odds, which led him to the immediate realization that the games were rigged. He watched the scams closely and was able to predict when the games' operators were going to allow a sucker to win. He rode along with the winners, then got off before the ride ended. He was able to win regularly as long as he didn't get greedy and didn't call any attention to what he was doing. Those were lessons he remembered all his life. He observed something else while watching the craps games: The bettors *knew* the games were rigged. But they played anyway. A player plays even when he knows better.

As an adult, Lansky's specialty was running gambling casinos, legal or otherwise. He grasped the ironic truth: To have a long and successful criminal career, you have to be honest. Gamblers knew that at Lansky's casinos, the odds favored the house, but the games were fair. Lansky's colleagues in organized crime knew that when Lansky split the proceeds, everyone got their fair share.

While he was alive, it was said that Lansky could have been fabulously successful as a straight businessman. But that wasn't true. Most of his legitimate investments failed. His biggest investment and failure was the Riviera Hotel and Casino in Havana. Although it was the product of massive bribery of Cuban government officials and others, the hotel and casino were licensed and legal. Lansky was heavily invested and stood to make millions. But the Cuban revolution happened, the hotel and casino were seized by the government, and Lansky lost his stake. He spent the rest of his life trying to scratch together a living from skimming Las Vegas casinos and other small schemes.

Those looking for justice in the universe would be gratified by Lansky's final years. As an old, sick man, he was denied residence in Israel; he was hounded by the FBI; the INS tried to deport him; his three children were hellishly dysfunctional; and he died broke.

Anthony Ambruso says

Very good book

This was an excellent biography of Meyer Lansky. It was well-written, thoroughly researched, and honestly told. I don't read many "mafia" books. This one interested me because I thought there might be some redeeming qualities of Lansky. He was arithmetically smart, but knew nothing about family and life. One thing this book did cause me to do was to reevaluate my long held beliefs about "the mob." I now believe Hoover had it right, and I dislike giving him credit for anything.

Erik Graff says

Well researched and very well written, this is a biography of Meyer Lansky (ca. 1902-1983) and his family members nested within a social history of organized crime which goes far in the direction of demythologization.

Although involved in illegal enterprises, mostly concerning gambling, throughout his life, and although expensively pursued by local and federal authorities through much of it, Meyer Lansky was rarely convicted of anything and, despite his enormous reputation as a mob boss, died leaving only moderate wealth behind.

Harold says

I thoroughly enjoyed this. An un-hyped biography that dispenses with all the mythology surrounding its subject. Meyer Lansky has been heralded for the past 40 years as a criminal mastermind that organized the rackets into a corporate entity that was "bigger than US Steel." In reality he was primarily, after a beginning as a bootlegger, a guy that ran legal and illegal casinos. He ran them honestly, believed in the power of the payoff when it came to the authorities and the strength of being a man of his word. He was never connected by any law enforcement agency with murder or muscle. He had a spotless reputation among his associates, many of whom were mobsters, as being scrupulously honest and keeping his commitments. In the 60s and 70s he began to be painted as a criminal mastermind. Law enforcement agencies shadowed him for 25 years and could never come up with anything. Of course this was taken as evidence of just how slick he was.

Well...apparently he was just what he claimed to be. A gambler. All the hype took a toll on his life. He didn't want the attention. When called before the Kefauver committee in a private moment he asked Kefauver, who liked to gamble, why he was so keen on persecuting gamblers. Kefauver replied "I just don't want you people running it." Of course the "you people" meant Italians and Jews. And who runs gambling today? The big corporations. Kind of makes you think.
