

1920's Slang | Mafia History | 1920's History

SLANG:

- All Wet - Describes an erroneous idea or individual, as in, "he's all wet."
- Bee's Knees - An extraordinary person, thing, idea; the ultimate.
- Berries - That which is attractive or pleasing; similar to bee's knees, as in "It's the berries."
- Big Cheese - The most important or influential person; boss. Same as big shot.
- Bluenose - An excessively puritanical person, a prude, Creator of "the Blue Nozzle Curse."
- Bump Off - To murder.
- Cake-Eater - An effete ladies' man, or someone who attends tea parties.
- Carry a Torch - To suffer from unrequited love.
- Cat's Meow - Something splendid or stylish; similar to bee's knees.
- Cat's Pajamas - Same as cat's meow.
- Cheaters - Eyeglasses.
- Crush - An infatuation.
- Darb - An excellent person or thing (as in "the Darb" - a person with money who can be relied on to pay the check).
- Fall Guy - Victim of a frame.
- Flapper - A stylish, brash, hedonistic young woman with short skirts and shorter hair.
- Flat Tire - A dull witted, insipid, disappointing date. Same as pill, pickle, drag, rag, oilcan.
- Frame - To give false evidence, to set up someone.
- Gams - A woman's legs.
- Giggle Water - An intoxicating beverage.
- Gin Mill - An establishment where hard liquor is sold.
- Heebie-Jeebies - The jitters.
- High-Hat - To snub.
- Hooch - Bootleg liquor
- Hooper - Dancer.
- Hotsy-Totsy - Pleasing.
- Jake - OK, as in, "Everything is Jake."
- Jalopy - Old car.
- Joint - A club, usually selling alcohol.
- Keen - Attractive or appealing.
- Kisser - Mouth.
- Line - Insincere flattery.
- Moll - A gangster's girl.
- Neck - Kissing with passion.
- Pet - Same as neck, but more so.
- Pinch - To arrest.
- Pushover - A person easily convinced or seduced.

- Ritzy - Elegant (from the hotel).
- Sheba - A woman with sex appeal (from the movie Queen of Sheba).
- Sheik - A man with sex appeal (from the Valentino movies).
- Speakeasy - An illicit bar selling bootleg liquor.
- Spiffy - An elegant appearance.
- Stuck On - Having a crush on.
- Swanky - Ritzy.
- Swell - Wonderful. Also: a rich man.
- Take for a Ride - To drive off with someone in order to bump them off.
- Torpedo - A hired gun.

NOTES OF INTEREST:

- Myer Lansky and Al Capone were doing their thing at this time as well. Al Capone took out Bugs Maron in St. Valentine's Massacre in 1929.
- The Stidda is a rival of the Mafia (active along much of Sicily's southern coasts).
- "PENTITI"= turncoats.
- Omerta: code of silence.
- Colombian necklace: slice neck of victim, including carotid artery, in order to kill the victims and instill fear and send a message to others who have not paid for their drugs or have been informants to the police.
- The Outfit, Syndicate, La Cosa Nostra: other mob names.
- "Liquidation": taking out a family.
- Wharton School of Business: learn the intricacies of stealing while staying within the confines of the law.
- White money=legal; black money=illegal.
- Make his bones: kill to establish oneself in the Family.
- Bruglione: executive baron in charge of certain territories.
- Soldiers.
- Under boss: executive officer.
- Mayor of the "" enclave: in charge of one part of the Mafia family.
- To become too American: someone who will shout out her grief and secrets to everyone; disregard of the Omerta code.
- A Communion: the victim's body disappears, never to be found: "fancy".
- A Confirmation: the victim's body is found: simple.

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

18th amendment: Volstead Act, Prohibition The entire US became "dry".

19th amendment: women got the vote.

Oldsters were shocked by a sharp change in manners and morals. Skirt hemlines crept knee ward and women began to smoke in public. 4 million men

had shed their first WW uniforms to search for better times. Prior to the 18th amendment a woman seen in a saloon was branded a hussy. 15 cent highball drinks in 1919 shot up to 75 cents now that it was forbidden. If you went to a cabaret with your own pint of gin you paid \$1 for a pint of ginger ale and \$1 for ice.

Historically the Volstead Act went into effect midnight 1/16/20. 59 minutes later, on the morning of 1/17/20, 6 masked and armed men invaded a railroad switch yard, bound and gagged 2 trainmen and imprisoned 6 others in a shanty. They looted 2 freight cars and trucked away whiskey stamped "for medicinal purposes only". Originally valued at \$100,000 the haul was diluted and rebottled to net about \$300,000. This was the 1st in a 14 year run of hi-jacking.

The resentments of the Volstead Act turned many otherwise honest citizens into criminals, as home-brew processors of "bathtub gin" and customers of the many Blind Pig and Speakeasy establishments that mushroomed around the country. Speakeasy means "one speaks softly when ordering illicit liquor".

The US Congress appropriated \$2 million and 1,520 agents to enforce prohibition. By 1931 a 2 year study reported that the nation was paying \$10 million per day to bootleggers. During the 14 dry years of Prohibition, it was estimated the national government spent \$363 million and state and local communities nearly \$3 billion in vain efforts to enforce the laws of prohibition. It took until 12/33 to have the 21st amendment wipe out Prohibition's 18th amendment.

ST. VALENTINE'S DAY MASSACRE, 2/14/29. Prohibition developed an era of crime never to be forgotten. More than 10 individual gangs controlled most of Chicago. The 2 top leaders in the underworld of vice and crime were Alphonse "Scarface" Capone with his notorious Southside gang and George C. "Bugs" Moran who controlled the Northside mob.

Greed & mistrust started a chain of vengeance killings between members of the Capone and Moran gangs. After an attempt on Capone's life from cavalcade of machine-gun fire from a parade of hoodlum-filled cars, Big Al sent the order out to "get Moran".

For 3 weeks, Capone's look-outs observed every move of Moran's booze peddling depot at 2122 North Clark Street, known as the SMC Cartage Company. A phone call was made and Moran agreed to be on hand personally to receive a shipment of hijacked booze to be delivered at 10:30 am on the morning of 2/14/29. 5 of Moran's top henchmen and a mechanic who occasionally drove get-away cars, had gathered to unload a supposed shipment of stolen booze. An optometrist who enjoyed the excitement of hanging around hoods had joined them to hear about their previous night's exploits, which made a total of 7 men inside that building on that fateful day.

One man, a brother-in-law, was often mistaken for Moran, and when he entered, word went out from the look-outs in their room across the street, that Moran was in the building. A runner delivered the news to 4 waiting killers. 2 of the killers dressed as police officers and 2 plainclothesmen climbed into a

simulated police car and sped off to the address.

The phony police entered the garage and gave the order, "up against the wall". thinking this was merely a routine police check, the 7 surprised men reluctantly lined up facing the wall. Immediately the 2 plainclothesmen stepped into the picture, handed 2 Thompson sub-machine guns to the uniformed men , then whipped out 2 sawed off shotguns from under their full length coats. "Let 'em have it" said one of the killers. and with a cold blooded calm proceeded to empty a 100 rounds of .45 caliber bullets from the Thompson sub-machine guns and then emptied the 4 barrels of the 2 sawed off shotguns.

At 10:20 on the cold brisk morning of 2/14/29, the most bizarre chapter in the history of American gangland crime was written, to be known forever as "the St. Valentine's Day Massacre".

It was found out later than Bugs Moran had seen the police car outside and missed being victim #8 by a matter of minutes. Although the killers got away from the scene of the crime, there was never any doubt who did the job. When interviewed later, Moran said, "only Capone kills like that!"

The chief suspects of the Massacre were never brought to trial:

- **Machine Gun Jack McGurn:** massacre manager. 2/17/36, 2 men walked up to McGurn in a Chicago bowling alley, handed him a card and while he was reading it, they snuffed out his life with 14 bullets from a machine gun. The card was a Valentine's Day greeting.
- **John Scalisi and Albert Anselmi:** professional assassins. Less than 3 months after the massacre their bodies were found near the Illinois state line on the Indiana side. They had been viciously beaten with a baseball bat, knifed and shot.
- **Fred Killer Burke:** kidnapper, bank hold-up man and killer. When 2 machine guns used in the massacre were found in his home, he confessed to murdering a Michigan police officer and received life imprisonment in preference to being vulnerable to Moran's henchmen.
- **Fred Goetz:** rapist, robber, killer & Killer Burke's partner. Found shot to death in a Chicago alley.

The 7 Victims of the Massacre were also killers, thieves and racketeers. Their ages at the time of the killings averaged 32.

- **Dion O'Banion:** 1st leader of the Northside mob was murdered at the height of his power at age 32. He was given a gaudy funeral with \$50,000 worth of flowers and a \$10,000 coffin. His killers were his biggest mourners.
- **Bugs Moran:** The last leader of the Northside mob was buried at Leavenworth Prison in a cheap wooden coffin in a prison-made wool suit with 6 convicts as pall bearers. he died while serving 10 years for a \$4,000 bank hold up. Nobody mourned.

- Charles "Lucky" Luciano: born in Sicily, 1897. Founder of national crime syndicate in the 1930's with the help of Meyer Lansky and Bugsy Siegel. Trained with the 5 Points gang under John Torrio; Capone also was a member of the 5 Points gang and trained under Torrio (Capone took over after Torrio). Lucky's money came from prostitution -- he controlled most of Manhattan's whore houses. By 1935 he was considered "the Boss of Bosses". By 1935 DA Thomas Dewey had gathered enough evidence to convict Luciano on 90 counts of extortion & prostitution. He was sentenced to 30 - 50 years in prison. Rumor has it that when Allied forces in W.W.II needed help in their invasion of Sicily, they contacted Lucky and offered him a deal. If he'd contact his Mafia friends there, he would be released under the condition that he would be deported to Italy. He accepted. He lived in Rome for a year but was dissatisfied with how his US operations were being run. He called a meeting w/Lansky and Siegel in Cuba. He got into an argument with Siegel which resulted in the latter's murder a few months later. US authorities heard about him being in Cuba and force him back into "retirement" in Italy. He considered writing his memoirs and making a movie of his life. In 1/62, he went to Naples airport to meet an American movie producer. As he walked up, ready to shake hands, he grabbed his chest, collapsed and died of a heart attack.
- Meyer Lansky. b. 1902, Poland. Jewish. He was a law-abiding teen until he was walking home from his apprenticeship as a toolmaker and heard a woman screaming. He came across at 14-year old Benjamin Siegel fighting a young Charles Luciano over the free services Siegel had been receiving from one of Lucky's prostitutes (the screaming woman). Not knowing either man, Lansky decided to come to the aid of Siegel and beat Luciano over the head with a monkey wrench. After this unusual introduction the men would become close friends and business partners. Lansky eventually created Murder, Inc. a large mob of contract killers that were hired out to other gangs as they were needed. Lansky was also appointed a position on Lucky's national syndicate's board of directors. He was mostly in charge of financial matters, arranging for the millions of dollars in income to be laundered but also headed the gambling rackets. Lansky arranged for the deal (and subsequent early parole) between Lucky and government during W.W.II. Around that time, Siegel had gotten himself into trouble squandering syndicate money on his venture in Las Vegas. Although Lansky had considered Siegel his "closest friend", he agreed to Siegel's elimination after that latter refused to cooperate with syndicate orders. By the 60's, Lansky's gambling rackets had extended 1/2 way across the globe, including So. America and Hong Kong. He fled to Israel when our government was planning to charge him with tax evasion but Israel revoked his visa under pressure from the US. Lansky was made to stand trial. Reportedly he managed to escape conviction because his power stretched to the highest level of government. He died in Miami in 1983. At the time of his death, his

fortune was estimated at \$400 million.

- Al Capone. Born in Brooklyn in 1899. Died 1947. By 1925 he was the head of his own gang and was also a marked man. The man who took in as much as \$110 million in one year (the average law-abiding citizen in 1927 was taking home just \$2400/year in pay) died a diseased degenerate after being released early (11/39) from his 11 year jail sentence for income tax evasion so he could die peacefully in his Miami, FL home. In 1929, Eliot Ness and the Justice Department went after him. Ness survived 3 assassination attempts and the crime-busting 10-man squad became famous as "the Untouchables". But it was Capone's huge illegal earnings that led to his downfall. Indicted for tax evasion, Capone initially pleaded guilty in the hope of a short sentence. The judge refused to agree so Capone chose to go to trial. He still expected a short sentence and was very surprised when he received an 11 year sentence. His reign ended with that sentence. Made his money from the protection business, gambling, brothels, illegal liquor trade. Got his name, "Scarface" after he was slashed across the cheek while working as a nightclub bouncer. He is believed to be responsible for 300 murders. Unlike the usual criminal, Capone encouraged publicity and was keen to see his name/picture in the newspapers. This self-publicist adopted a flamboyant style of dressing which included lime-green suits and brilliantly-colored silk ties. Even Capone's gangland thugs had their own trademark: a gyre felt hat with a black silk band.

GREAT MAFIA QUOTES (I think I got these from "The Last Don" by Mario Puzo):

"A man can go with another woman without betraying his wife. This is the nature of man. A wife cannot have another man without betraying her husband."

"A man must be careful when he goes with a woman who's not his wife. Great men have been ruined because women made them forget loyalty, made them forget their friends, and opened the door to their enemies."

"If you betray family, you are damned to hell for eternity. If family betrays you then no punishment is severe enough."

"Governments come and go, laws come and go. You owe loyalty to your family, to your own blood, and to your wife or to your husband. And if your wife has given you children and if she is a good wife, you owe loyalty to her family too. Capice?"

Mafia Valentines ("borrowed" from somewhere. I'm including them because they're funny). The Don suggests you laugh:

- My love for you... it came and went. So your feet are now in wet cement.

- I'm here to fulfill your fondest wishes- Now that your husband sleeps with the fishes.
- I picked up this card from a slim selection, But that's all they offer in witness protection. Love, J. Doe
- Be my Valentine ... and we can do it execution-style.
- Cinderella got her fella, with a slipper made of glass. So please be mine, Valentine, or I'll have to whack your ass.
- Violets are blue, roses are red. I blew up your car - So why ain't you dead
- The day we met, my little pet, I knew with just one look, you'd bear a son, and now that's done, So shut your mouth and cook!
- Hey...Youse da greatest. Youse da best. But you're untouchable Like Elliot Ness.
- Lust is fleeting, True love lingers. Be mine always and you'll keep your fingers.
- Hope da chocolates is good, but y'know, dis ain't really what a guy's heart looks like.
- When a goon makes you die, cuz you told him goodbye -- that's amore!