



# Prohibition Gangsters: The Rise and Fall of a Bad Generation

*Marc Mappen*

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Master story teller Marc Mappen applies a generational perspective to the gangsters of the Prohibition era—men born in the quarter century span from 1880 to 1905—who came to power with the Eighteenth Amendment.

On January 16, 1920, the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution went into effect in the United States, “outlawing the manufacture, sale, or transportation of intoxicating liquors.” A group of young criminals from immigrant backgrounds in cities around the nation stepped forward to disobey the law of the land in order to provide alcohol to thirsty Americans.

Today the names of these young men—Al Capone, Lucky Luciano, Dutch Schultz, Legs Diamond, Nucky Johnson—are more familiar than ever, thanks in part to such cable programs as *Boardwalk Empire*. Here, Mappen strips away the many myths and legends from television and movies to describe the lives these gangsters lived and the battles they fought. Placing their criminal activities within the context of the issues facing the nation, from the Great Depression, government crackdowns, and politics to sexual morality, immigration, and ethnicity, he also recounts what befell this villainous group as the decades unwound.

Making use of FBI and other government files, trial transcripts, and the latest scholarship, the book provides a lively narrative of shootouts, car chases, courtroom clashes, wire tapping, and rub-outs in the roaring 1920s, the Depression of the 1930s, and beyond. Mappen asserts that Prohibition changed organized crime in America. Although their activities were mercenary and violent, and they often sought to kill one another, the Prohibition generation built partnerships, assigned territories, and negotiated treaties, however short lived. They were able to transform the loosely associated gangs of the pre-Prohibition era into sophisticated, complex syndicates. In doing so, they inspired an enduring icon—the gangster—in American popular culture and demonstrated the nation’s ideals of innovation and initiative.

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