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Tough Jews

Tough is defined as: an adjective meaning strong or durable; not brittle or tender; it can mean capable of great endurance, as in sturdy or hearty; when used to describe a person it can mean rough, rowdy or vicious. A tough criminal is hardened or incorrigible.

When it comes to the personal qualities of strength, endurance and hardiness, I think of my father, Abraham Kuperman. I mean that in terms of both his physical attributes, but also because of his perseverance. He combined his toughness with gentleness and, while he could be intimidating at times, especially to those who did know him, there was nothing of the criminal about him, although he certainly knew of criminals in his past....but when I think of “Tough Jews” his is the first face that comes to mind. I would like to dedicate this presentation to his memory.

As always, let me begin by telling you why I think this topic is relevant. I have wanted to do this presentation for a long time because the *Tough Jew* is a side of our Jewish identity that is underexplored. When we discuss the Jewish experience, whether we talk about the American Jewish Experience, the European Jewish Experience or the Israeli Jewish Experience, we rarely use the word “tough” to describe our people. We know about Jewish scholars, Jewish entrepreneurs, but not so much about tough Jews. And this curious gap in our self-knowledge affects our identity, diminishing it by denying part of the past.

When I research these papers, every so often I come upon an author who manages to express what I have felt for years. Rich Cohen, the author of *Tough Jews, Fathers, Sons and Gangster Dreams* recalls being in high school and watching a movie about the Holocaust with his class, most of his fellow students being non-Jews. He recalls feeling a sense of embarrassment about the images of naked Jews, using their hands to cover themselves, being herded to their deaths. Most of the Jews seemed elderly, certainly they had been starved and their spirits broken by that point. But they seemed so docile, so resigned to their fate. It was this feeling of embarrassment that would lead Cohen to study about the Jewish criminals in America as part of his search to find Jews that would fight back. I understand how he felt. The thing is that portrayal is not complete.

Even in the camps, at the worst of times, there were Jews that did fight back and I don't know why we don't emphasize this in our history. I don't mean just the heroic men and women of the Warsaw ghetto, whose struggle against the Nazis is well-known. To my mind the toughest Jews that ever lived were the Jews that rose up at a place called Treblinka.

Treblinka was a death camp, a camp designed solely for extermination of unwanted people, which operated between July 1942 and October 1943 in Poland. Treblinka was northwest of Warsaw and southeast of Bialystok. During the 15 months that Treblinka was operational, 850,000 people were killed there, of whom 800,000 were Jews. Unlike other camps, there was no slave labor for the German war effort at Treblinka; all efforts were directed toward the extermination and disposal of the remains of the Jews.¹

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treblinka_extermination_camp

On August 2, 1943, some 1,500 prisoners assigned to a work detail rose up, seized weapons and turned on the Nazis. They sprayed kerosene on the buildings and set them on fire. Approximately 600 of the freedom fighters are believed to have escaped, although only 40 are known to have survived the war. The rest were killed by the Wehrmacht, by special units sent to hunt them down, by Polish peasants, by Ukrainian fascist bands. Every hand was raised against them. But they died free. There was also a rebellion at the Sobibor camp about two months later.



Figure 1 The memorial at Treblinka. Each stone represents a Jewish town or city, the population of which was exterminated at the camp.

These uprisings came late and had only a minimal effect on the machinery of extermination. Even the Germans said that they had almost finished their extermination efforts in the areas. I don't want to overstate the importance of what happened at Treblinka in the grand scheme of things. But when I learned about these Tough Jews, they made a real difference in my sense of Jewish identity.

I first read *Treblinka*² by Jean-Francois Steiner the year before my Bar Mitzvah, in 1967. Not long after I read *Treblinka*, I would read *The Murderers Among Us: The Simon Wiesenthal Memoirs*³. I read about how Wiesenthal tracked down and arrested Franz Stangl, commandant of both Treblinka and Sobibor camps. Stangl would be tried, convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment. Reading about those who rose up at Treblinka and about Wiesenthal, a Holocaust

² http://www.amazon.com/Treblinka-Jean-Francois-Steiner/dp/0452011248/ref=pd_bxgy_b_img_a

³ <http://www.amazon.com/Murderers-Among-Us-Wiesenthal-Memoirs/dp/B0006BQG60>

survivor himself, were my first experiences with *Tough Jews*. Between June 5th and June 10th of 1967, the Six Day War took place and I would learn about another tough Jew.

Moshe Dayan⁴ was Israeli Defense Minister during the Six Day War. He was the son of Ukrainian immigrants, who had come to Palestine before World War I. Moshe Dayan fought alongside the British in 1938 as part of the Palestine Supernumerary Police; he was arrested in 1938 as part of the crackdown on the *Haganah* and spent two years in prison. He was released in 1941, and again fought alongside the British as part of a reconnaissance unit during World War II. He lost his eye when the binoculars that he was using at the time were struck by a bullet from a Vichy French gun.

In the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, he served as the commander of the 89th Armored Battalion and Dayan became the protégé of David Ben-Gurion. In the 1950s, Dayan was promoted to Chief of Staff of the Israel Defense Forces and he personally commanded the Israeli forces fighting in the Sinai during the 1956 Suez Crisis.

In 1959, Dayan left the military and joined the leftist Mapai political party. His politics always leaned to the left. In 1964, Dayan was appointed Minister of Agriculture. In 1967, he was appointed Minister of Defense as a move to improve morale in the military. He probably had little to do with Israeli preparations for what turned out to be one of the most successful wars of all time. But Dayan was a highly visible figure during this war and personally oversaw the capture of East Jerusalem during the fighting. To me, and remember that I was not quite 12 years old then, Moshe Dayan might as well have won the war single-handedly. He seemed a hero of Biblical proportions.

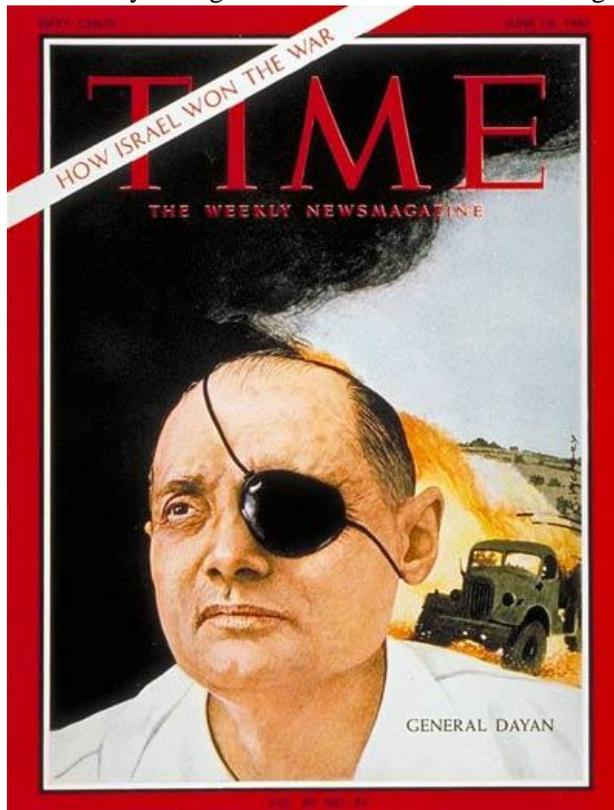


Figure 2 Dayan on the cover of Time magazine

Ironically, Dayan would late in life express regret over his decisions during the Six Day War. In a 1976 interview with Israeli reporter Rami Tal, Dayan would say, “I made a mistake in allowing the Israeli conquest of the Golan Heights. As defense minister I should have stopped it because the Syrians were not threatening us at the time.”

In 1979, he would resign from his post as Foreign Minister in the cabinet of Menachem Begin in a disagreement of how Israel should handle the Palestinian territories. Because of his willingness to negotiate with the Palestinians, Begin did not put Dayan in charge of the peace mission. What does Moshe Dayan have in common with the Jews that rebelled at Treblinka? They are Tough Jews, but their lives were also influenced by Eastern European anti-Semitism.

⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moshe_Dayan

Coming to America

Fleeing the Russian pogroms, more than 20,000 Jews came to America each year from 1880 to 1889. In 1900, the Romanian persecutions began, and even more Jews came to the United States. By 1924, two million Eastern European Jews⁵ had come to America, the “*Goldene Medinah*,” the Golden Land.

The Jews of Eastern Europe, most of the world’s Jewish population, didn’t realize it, but they were participating in a process of self-selection. Those Jews that stayed with the familiar, with the world that they knew, were a few decades away from the gas chambers of Treblinka, Auschwitz and the other camps, from a Final Solution that would wipe out 6 million of them. Those Jews that stepped out into the unknown, that took that long ocean voyage across the Atlantic to the New World, would face adversity. In the last decades of the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century, the Lower East Side was the world’s most densely populated slum. And those Jews who, like Moshe Dayan’s parents, made the long journey to Palestine would face adversity as well.

One of the Jews that came to America told a story, a part of his family’s oral history, about the Jews in Europe who saw their situation as hopeless, as a punishment from God, and of one Jew who spoke out. “One man- I don’t remember his name, but I wish I did- held a meeting in my grandfather’s house. “Jews,” he shouted, “Why do you just stand around like stupid sheep and let them come and kill you, steal your money, kill your sons and rape your daughters? Aren’t you ashamed? You must stand up and fight. You are men like other men. A Jew can fight. We have no arms, but it doesn’t matter. We can use sticks and stones. Fight back! Don’t be frightened. Hit them and they’ll run. If you are going to die, die fighting.”⁶

The Jew that told that story came to America in 1911 from Grodno, Poland. In America, he would find success and wealth beyond his wildest dreams. He would tell the story to Uri Dan, an Israeli reporter. He would add, “This speech is burned into my memory. I carried the words with me when I finally traveled with my mother to America and the Lower East Side. I remembered those words when I fought back at the Irish as a boy on the East Side. They were like flaming arrows in my head.” These are the words of a Tough Jew. His name was Meyer Lansky and he would be a founding father of organized crime in America.



Figure 3 A Rosh Hashanah greeting card from the early 1900s. In the picture, Russian Jews, packs in hand, gaze at their American relatives, who are beckoning them to the United States.

⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_Jews_in_the_United_States#Jewish_Immigration

⁶ *Tough Jews: Fathers, Sons and Gangster Dreams*, by Rich Cohen

Our Ancestors: The Farbrekhers (Crooks)

With that quotation from Meyer Lansky, let me begin by talking about Jewish criminals. I want to make sure that I avoid the temptation to glorify these men, who were merchants of vice, murderers and brutes.

The Eastern European Jewish experience in America was a hard one. At one point 540,000 Eastern European Jews were packed into one-and-a-half square miles of tenement in New York's Lower East Side. The conditions of poverty were appalling, the squalor horrific. And then, as now, poverty and desperation breed crime and vice.

It is hard to believe, but many Jewish women turned to prostitution to support themselves. At the turn of the twentieth century, a survey conducted by the US Immigration Commission of 2,000 prostitutes arrested in New York found that the single largest ethnic group of women was the Jews⁷. A few years later a similar survey conducted at the Bedford Hills State Reformatory corroborated these finds. The Lower East Side was New York's largest red-light district and most of the prostitutes were Jewish.

In 1906, New York Police Commissioner William McAdoo wrote by way of explanation, "The horrors of the sweatshop, the awful sordidness of life in the dismal tenement, the bitter, grinding poverty, the fierce competition, the pitiful wages for long hours of toil under unwholesome conditions, physical depression, and mental unhappiness are all allied with the temptation to join the better-clad, better-fed and apparently happier people." The reasons seem valid until one takes into account that in New York at this time Jewish women were both proportionately and in terms of absolute numbers more likely to turn to prostitution than members of other immigrant groups experiencing similar conditions. Prostitution was epidemic in the Jewish community at that time. The reform movements of that time, such as the Mugwumps, sent detectives out to conduct interviews and gather information. Records exist today of the lives of women such as Rosie Solomon, who had left behind a son and husband in Russia. When he was 14, her son would follow her to New York; Rosie would give the lad \$100 and send him back to Russia. Jennie Silver was another prostitute interviewed. She lived with her husband and small child that she would send out from her room while she "entertained" a customer.⁸

Prostitution was not just a matter of individual women looking to make money. An often cited report entitled "The Social Evil with Special Reference to Conditions Existing in the City of New York" published in 1900 contained the phrase "Almost any child on the East Side in New York will tell you what a '*nafke bias*' is" referring to the Yiddish term for a brothel.⁹

Along with the prostitute came the Jewish pimp. At the turn of the century, the slang term for these men was "cadets." Sometimes the cadet was the woman's boyfriend or even husband and sometimes the relationship was purely business. Motche Goldberg was called the "King of the Vice Trust." In 1890, he began with one girl; by 1912, he had controlling interest in eight brothels, managed 114 women and earned a spectacular \$4,000 a month.¹⁰

⁷ *The Rise and Fall of the Jewish Gangster in America*, Albert Fried

⁸ Ibid

⁹ http://www.newvoices.org/arts_and_culture?id=0105

¹⁰ Ibid

In order to operate such businesses, the cadets needed protection and for that they turned to Tammany Hall. Tammany Hall was represented on the Lower East Side by Timothy D. "Big Tim" Sullivan. Sullivan was the child of Irish immigrants who had been born in New York's infamous Five Points slum in 1862. He rose from poverty to serve one term in the Congress of the United States, but he was dissatisfied with the amount of graft that he received there. He is quoted as saying, "In New York, we use Congressmen for hitchin' posts." He returned to New York and set about building one of the most powerful political machines in the country, headquartered out of his office at 207 Bowery Street.

"Big Tim" was a reformer, sponsoring women's rights legislation, limiting the hours that women could be forced to work and sponsoring one of the oldest gun control laws in America, the Sullivan Act.¹¹ He was also famous for being able to get the vote out for Democratic candidates, through the use of tactics such as "repeaters." He once wrote how, if a man started the day with a full beard, you could vote him four times by shaving off first the chin whiskers, then the side burns and finally the moustache.



Figure 4 "Big Tim" Sullivan

the *Whyos Gang*, an Irish Gang operating out of the Five Points area. The gang's war cry sounded like "Why oh" in the manner of a bird, an owl.

The Whyos were headquartered out of a bar on the Bowery with the unsavory name of the Morgue. One of their leaders was Josh Hines, who conspicuously wore two pistols and extorted money from gambling dens. The Whyos would be ended by a Jewish gangster, Monk Eastman.

Under the protection of Tammany Hall, all kinds of vices thrived on the Lower East Side. Stuss was a card game, where you bet on matching the cards that were turned over by the dealer. Stuss parlors were common on the Lower East Side, as were pool halls. Pool halls were originally places where you could go to bet on the outcome of horse races, without actually going to the track. The outcomes of the race would be conveyed by first telegraph and then telephone to the pool hall and posted there. While you were waiting, you could play cards or billiards; hence the association of billiards and pool. The pool hall was frequented by people too poor to go to the race track. Eventually the card parlors and the pool halls would be owned by Jews, giving Jews entry to the world of organized gambling. More about this later.

The first Jewish gangsters were petty criminals, thieves, pickpockets and such. Beginning as individuals working alone, they soon banded together. Abe Greenthal, for example, commanded a gang of thieves called the *Sheeney Gang*.

But Jews were not living in a vacuum. The Lower East Side had been home to Irish immigrants generations before and the most powerful gang in New York was

¹¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timothy_Sullivan

Monk Eastman, born Edward Osterman, “began life with a bullet-shaped head, and during his turbulent career acquired a broken nose and a pair of cauliflower ears.” His face was heavily veined and scarred and he completed his look by wearing a derby hat several sizes too small that perched atop his shock of unruly hair. Lest you think that he posed a humorous figure, Monk was known to carry a “locust” or 4-foot long police club, into which he cut a notch for every head bashed. Noting one night that he had 49 notches cut, he turned to an innocent bystander in the notorious Silver Dollar Smith’s Saloon (the owner was actually Jewish) and struck the poor fellow to make it an even 50. Monk Eastman’s gang was the first large scale, organized Jewish crime organization. The Monk Eastman Gang sometimes called the Coin Collectors fought against the Irish Whyos and the Italian Five Points Gang of Paolo Antonio Vaccarelli, who used the alias of Paul Kelly. The Five Points Gang would produce such alumni as John Torrio, Al Capone and Charles “Lucky” Luciano. At least fifty Jewish *shtarkes* and an equal number of Italian gangsters participated in a pitched gun battle on the streets of New York. Some accounts have over a thousand Jewish toughs available to answer Monk’s call. Competition from the Jewish and Italian gangs was enough to drive the Irish gangsters uptown, to the Hell’s Kitchen area.

Monk was a brute. In addition to his club, he carried brass knuckles, a blackjack and a pistol. He once bragged that he was a gentleman, because he always removed his brass knuckles and never used his blackjack when beating a woman. He would eventually pick the wrong target and try to rob a rich young man whose father had engaged a pair of Pinkerton agents to keep watch over him. Monk would exchange shots with the guards and flee...right into the grasp of a New York policeman. He would be sent to prison, serve time and come out to a New York that was changed. He would enlist in World War I, even though he was 44 years old, where he would serve with honor. But when he returned to America, he would return to petty crime.

The Eastman Gang provided the strong arm muscle and repeat voters needed by Tammany Hall. The gang continued after Monk went to prison under the leadership of such vicious criminals as Max Zweibach, who was the first “Kid Twist”, and the murderous “Big Jack” Zelig. After the Zelig era, “Dopey Benny” Fein would lead the gang into a new area of crime, providing muscle for the burgeoning labor unions.

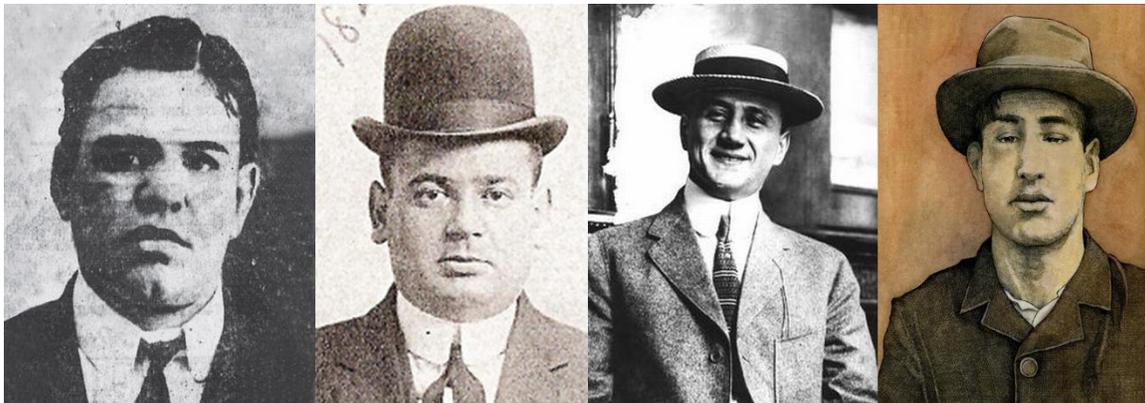


Figure 5 Faces not even a mother could love: Monk Eastman, “Kid Twist” Zweibach, “Big Jack” Zelig and “Dopey Benny” Fein.

“Dopey Benny” Fein was born in 1889 to an impoverished Jewish family on the Lower East Side. His eyes were always half closed due to a medical condition. As a teenager, he ran a gang of pickpockets, until he was caught and sent to the Elmira Reformatory.

When he was released, he joined “Big Jack” Zelig’s gang. He would become the first Jewish gangster to make a full-time career out of labor racketeering. The Lower East Side sweat-shops of the turn of the century were growing into factories. More and more laborers were joining unions. The factory owners began hiring thugs to act as strike-breakers. Dopey Benny’s gang began hiring themselves out to protect striking workers. From providing protection, they expanded to wrecking non-union shops and beating up scabs.¹²

Benny had a price list printed and he carried it around. Shooting a scab in the leg cost \$60; breaking an arm cost \$200; demolishing a non-union shop could cost between \$150 and \$500 depending on the size of the shop; murder cost \$500 per victim. Benny was proud that he never accepted money from the bosses, once leaving \$15,000 on the table. Later thugs like Louis “Lepke” Buchalter and his partner “Gurrah” Shapiro would not be so particular.

These early Jewish gangsters set the pattern for the next generation. They prided themselves on their toughness and brutality. They organized criminal activity in ways that were novel. The future of organized crime in America would follow in the patterns that they had set: vice, including prostitution and gambling; “protection” and extortion; cooperation with other ethnic gangs, most especially the Italian gangs; political corruption.

The Jewish gangsters were nothing if not adaptable. Only a generation or two removed from oppression in Europe, they thrived in America. One gangster in particular would help the Jewish gangs branch out from the Lower East ghetto and would show them how to make more money than they ever imagined.

Arnold Rothstein and His Boys

Arnold Rothstein was an anomaly. He didn’t come from poverty; he wasn’t “from the neighborhood.” His father, Abraham Rothstein, was a wealthy businessman and a pious Jew and the Rothstein family lived uptown. Arnold’s older brother would become a rabbi. Arnold had to travel downtown in order to find the gambling dens that he loved to frequent. According to Arnold’s wife, as a teenager he would wait until his father put his money and valuables in a drawer for the Sabbath. Arnold would rifle the drawer taking money, sometimes taking his father’s watch to pawn, and use the money to gamble. He always won and would be able to return things before the Sabbath was over. Gambling was Arnold’s passion.¹³

“Big Tim” Sullivan recognized Rothstein’s talents and his uptown sophistication. Sullivan asked Arnold to manage his gambling concession in the Metropole Hotel on Forty-Third Street in Manhattan. Arnold was so successful and attracted such a loyal following that, with Big Jim’s permission, he was able to open his own gambling establishment a few blocks away. Arnold attracted clients that included Julius Fleischmann, the yeast king, and Joseph Seagram, the Canadian whiskey baron. Percival H. Hill, of the American Tobacco Company, once lost \$250,000 to Arnold in a single night.

Not everyone was glad of Arnold’s success. A group of fellow gamblers, knowing that Arnold prided himself on his skills at playing pool and his inability to refuse a bet, lured him into a high-stakes match. They brought in a ringer, a professional pool shark from Philadelphia named John Conway. Arnold played against Conway for 36 hours straight. At the end of the marathon, Arnold had a spectacular run and broke Conway, turning a potential defeat into a legendary victory.

¹² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Benjamin_Fein

¹³ *The Rise and Fall of the Jewish Gangster in America*, Albert Fried

A caricature of Rothstein appears in the book *The Great Gatsby*, by F. Scott Fitzgerald, as Meyer Wolfsheim, described as having fixed the 1919 World Series. Rothstein was indeed accused of having participated in the so-called “Black Sox” scandal. He was called to testify before a Grand Jury in Chicago investigating the incident. Rothstein testified ““The whole thing started when (Abe) Attell and some other cheap gamblers decided to frame the Series and make a killing. The world knows I was asked in on the deal and my friends know how I turned it down flat. I don't doubt that Attell used my name to put it over. That's been done by smarter men than Abe. But I was not in on it, would not have gone into it under any circumstances and did not bet a cent on the Series after I found out what was underway.”



Figure 6 Arnold "The Brain" Rothstein

Whether Rothstein participated in the fixed World Series or not is still debated. What is more important is what Rothstein did after Prohibition, the Volstead Act, became the law of the land on January 16th, 1920. “Waxey” Gordon, a Jewish criminal whose real name was Irving Wexler and who had been a member of “Dopey” Fein’s labor enforcers, approached Arnold Rothstein with an idea. Prohibition was coming and Waxey Gordon wanted to set up a smuggling operation to bring liquor into the United States through Detroit from Windsor. Gordon had been working with another Jewish criminal, “Big Maxey” Greenberg and they believed they had the connections, but needed financing to the tune of \$175,000 to get the operation started. Rothstein listened to the proposition and told Gordon that he would think it over. He kept Gordon in suspense for a couple of days. Finally he got back to him and said that he liked the idea, but he wanted to make few changes. First, Arnold would be in charge of the operation, not just bankroll it. Second, the operation would be through New York, not Detroit. Third, they would not use just speed boats, Rothstein would bring in a ship from England with 20,000 cases of Scotch. The ship would stay in international waters off Montauk in Long Island. Speed boats would ferry the Scotch to shore, where it would be loaded onto a convoy of trucks. The trucks would follow a route where the local police had all been bribed and would off-load the liquor at a series of warehouses in Queens.

The operation came off without a hitch. It was repeated ten times without a problem, making Gordon and Greenberg rich and Rothstein richer. The eleventh time, the US Coast Guard discovered the corruption within its ranks and set a new patrol to await the ship off Montauk. Someone got word out to Rothstein and he was able to divert the vessel to Cuba. But he was done with bootlegging and walked away from the smuggling operation in 1921.

Rothstein had many protégés, including: Johnny Torrio, who would move to Chicago with his protégé, the young Al Capone; Meyer Lansky, Charles “Lucky” Luciano; “Legs” Diamond; and Frank Costello. Lansky and Luciano in particular would build a national crime syndicate that had its start in the bootlegging operation. In the Roaring Twenties, liquor was the equivalent of crack, making hundreds of millions of dollars for organized crime. Of course that was not their only business. In addition to the old standbys of prostitution and gambling, by the 1920s heroin distribution in America was dominated by Jewish gangsters, most especially Meyer Lansky. Again, there is substantial evidence that the importation was started by Rothstein. In 1926, Irving Sobel, a Rothstein employee is arrested for selling heroin. That same year, Rothstein sends George Uffner to Asia to make large-scale drug purchases.¹⁴ We also know that Luciano was involved in the heroin trade and that Arthur Flegenheimer, better known as “Dutch Schultz” fought with “Bumpy” Johnson over control of the heroin trade in Harlem.

Rothstein is shot and mortally wounded on November 5th, 1928. He refuses to identify his murderer to the police and is quoted as saying “Me mudder did it” and for telling the police “You stick to your business and I’ll stick to mine.” There are several theories as who his murderer was, including “Dutch” Schultz (revenge) or gambler George “Hump” McManus (gambling debt.) Rothstein is buried at Ridgewood Union Cemetery after an Orthodox Jewish Funeral.

After Rothstein’s death, Arnold’s Boys establish a national crime syndicate and establish a new business venture once again dominated by Tough Jews: Murder, Inc.



Figure 7 The Next Generation: Louis "Lepke" Buchalter, his partner "Gurrah" Shapiro, Meyer Lansky, "Dutch" Schultz and "Pretty" Amberg.

Murder, Inc. and the Brownsville Connection

Rothstein’s influence would continue on long after his death. He taught his protégés style (Luciano would say of Rothstein “He taught me how to dress”), pioneered the wholesale importation of both liquor and drugs and helped create the first alliances between different ethnic gangs. He may well have conceived the idea of a national syndicate extending far beyond the Lower East Side; certainly his students, Luciano and Lansky, would see that idea to fruition. But they would have to overcome an obstacle first.

¹⁴ <http://www.davidpietrusza.com/Rothstein-Chronology.html>

As happens so often, before you can build something new, you must do away with the old. In the case of organized crime, the old guard was in the form of the Italian bosses. Joseph “the Boss” Masseria was the boss of the Italian Mafia based out of the Little Italy section of New York. He refused to work with other ethnic groups, including the Jews. Luciano was an underling in his operation, although Luciano’s contacts extended far afield. But in 1927, a force had come to challenge Masseria’s dominance in the Italian community. Salvatore Maranzano had arrived in the United States in 1927, as part of a wave of Italian Mafiosi that had been driven out of Italy and Sicily by Mussolin’s crackdown on crime. Maranzano is the leader of a wave of old-school criminals including Joseph Bonnano, Joseph Profaci, the Meggadino brothers and many other men who would be influential in organized crime. Maranzano declares war on Masseria. Because Maranzano and the others came from the Castellamara area of Italy, this period is referred to as the Castellamara War.

Luciano is “asked” by Maranzano to betray his boss, Masseria. When he hesitates, he is made an offer that he can’t refuse. He is kidnapped, tortured, slashed with a knife and stabbed with an ice pick and left half-dead in Staten Island. His survival is what leads him to be nick-named “Lucky.” Luciano is persuaded and to prove his loyalty, betrays Joe “the Boss.” Meeting Masseria for lunch at Scarpata’s restaurant in Coney Island, the two have a leisurely lunch that continues until everyone else has left the restaurant. At that point an execution squad consisting of Joey Adonis, Albert “the Executioner” Anastasia, Vito Genovese and a Jewish gangster, Bugsy Siegel, kill Maseria and his bodyguards.¹⁵

This leaves Maranzano in control, a situation that Luciano and the Jewish criminals, find unacceptable. He turns to his Jewish friends, Meyer Lansky and Bugsy Siegel in particular for help. They hire six Jewish gunmen, including Samuel “Red” Levine, an Orthodox Jew who wore a Yarmulke and refused to commit murder on the Sabbath, to take care of Maranzano. On September 10th, 1931, five men impersonating federal agents enter Maranzano’s New York offices. They hold his bodyguards in one room and take Maranzano into his inner office, where he is murdered. The lieutenants of both Masseria and Maranzano have no problem switching allegiances because the former was killed by people within his organization and the latter was killed by outsiders. The age of the Jewish hitman has arrived.

The Jewish population, including Jewish gangsters, has expanded well beyond the hub of the Lower East Side. Across the bridge in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn a smaller war has been taking place.

¹⁵ *The Rise and Fall of the Jewish Gangster in America*, Albert Fried



Figure 8 Meyer and Irving Shapiro

Meyer, Irving and Willie Shapiro ran an operation that included brothels, bootlegging and slot machines. They may have been planning to enter into enforcement in the garment industry, which had been the province on Louis “Lepke” Buchalter and “Gurrah” Shapiro (no relation.) The Shapiro brothers had farmed out some of their enforcement work to a gang of Jewish toughs from Brownsville, headed by Abe “Kid Twist” Reles and Martin “Bugsy” Goldstein. Reles was the son of Austrian Jews. His father disappeared when Abe was quite young; Reles the senior last known job was peddling knishes on the streets of Brownsville.

There is considerable debate as to the origin of the “Kid Twist” moniker. Was it homage to “Kid Twist” Zweibach? Did it derive from his love of chocolate twist candies? Or was it because he had a predilection for a certain method of strangulation? No one is sure, although I lean toward the first theory. (A contemporary gangster, born Arthur Simon Flegenheimer in the Bronx, took the name of an old school gangster, *Dutch Schultz*.)

Whatever the origins of the name, Reles was a cold-blooded killer. In 1931, he decided to turn against his bosses, the Shapiro brothers and decided that Meyer in particular must die. The first attempt failed when the petty thief that had betrayed the Shapiros to Reles betrayed Reles in turn to the Shapiros. Shots were exchanged, but both sides escaped. Meyer responded by raping and beating Reles’ girlfriend. War had come to Brownsville.

In addition to “Bugsy” Goldstein, Reles would bring aboard his boys, including Harry “Pittsburgh Phil” Strauss, Albert “Allie Tick Tock” Tannenbaum, Abraham “Pretty” Levine and Italian gangsters “Happy” Maione and Frank Abbandando. Associates include the Amberg brothers, Louis “Pretty” Amberg and Joseph and Hyman. They would eventually win the war against the Shapiros and be remembered by Lepke Buchalter as men who had killed before and could be counted on to kill again. Reles and his boys would be called upon many times over the next twenty years when a mobster became “inconvenient.” They took such a business-like attitude toward committing executions that a reporter dubbed them “Murder Inc.”



Figure 9 Abe "Kid Twist" Reles, "Pittsburgh Phil" Strauss, Martin "Bugsy" Goldstein, "Happy" Maione and "Pretty" Levine.

Their callousness and brutality cannot be overstated. A story that is perhaps not true but is nevertheless indicative of the fear that Murder Inc. inspired has Abe Reles and Bugsy Goldstein sitting at the gang's hangout, Midnight Rose's candy store. (So-called, because it never seemed to close as long as the gang wanted to hang out.) A fellow named Johnny comes up, looking for someone named Angelo. Johnny doesn't know it, but Reles has accepted a contract to kill him. The problem is that it is Friday afternoon and Reles has an appointment to have dinner at his mother's house. He invites Johnny to come along for the meal and afterwards he'll help him find Angelo. Reles' mother puts out an additional plate and they all eat gefilte fish, chicken soup with noodles and boiled chicken. After the meal, Reles talks his mother into going out. Reles and Goldstein bludgeon the poor unfortunate, take him into the bathroom where they murder Johnny, cut him up and fit the pieces into garbage bags which they take to an unknown destination to be incinerated.

That story might or might not be true, but the results of an autopsy of one of Pittsburgh Phil's victims, a George Rudnick, are on file. The Brooklyn medical examiner wrote "There were 63 stab wounds on the body. On the neck, I counted 13 stab wounds between the jaw and collarbone. On the right chest, there were 50 separate circular wounds..." These were the marks of an ice pick.

Murder Inc. killed anyone who was perceived to pose a threat to Lepke and the mob. This might include union leaders, civilians or other gangsters. Pittsburgh Phil in particular was much in demand and was sent to cities all over the US for his work. He sometimes wouldn't even know his victim's name; the unfortunate would just be pointed out to him. It is estimated that Pittsburgh Phil killed at least 100 men, maybe many more.

In 1935, Michigan's own Thomas Dewey was named Special Prosecutor for New York County and began to go after the mob. One of the first gangsters that he went after was Dutch Schultz, who had begun his career as a thug from the Bronx. When Schultz announced that he was going to defy Lepke, Lansky, Luciano and the rest of the bosses, "Mendy" Weiss and Charles "the Bug" Workman were sent to kill him. This was only the first of a series of mob killings ordered by Lepke. Murder Inc. killed union leader Joseph Rosen, thug George Rudnik whose autopsy was cited above, union organizer Max Rubin, Hyman Yuran who was once Lepke's partner, Leon Sharff and his wife, Isadore Friedman, Albert Shuman, Whitey Friedman, Harry "Big Greenie" Greenberg... all of these were members of Lepke's organization, who might have done something suspicious or maybe nothing at all. At least 13 old-timers of the organization are killed. The organization was killing itself.

Toward the end, it is always your friends that betray you. This leads to a paranoid atmosphere where no man trusts another and each tries to strike first.

Finally, in 1940, a small time hood named Harry Rudolph who is being held as a material witness in a killing comes forward with information about Reles, Bugsy Goldstein and Anthony Maffetore¹⁶. Reles is arrested and would turn State's evidence, his testimony leading to the convictions of his former partners. Reles would die while in police custody, under suspicious circumstances. Six police officers responsible for assuring the safety of Reles as a witness are all supposed to have fallen asleep. Reles again supposedly ties bed sheets together and attempts to climb out of his hotel window; although why someone who had testified against the mob would flee witness protection is never explained. He is supposed to have fallen more than sixty feet to his death. The thing is that his body is found more than twenty feet out from the wall, as though it was thrown rather than having fallen. One of the criminals of the time comments that this only proves "A canary can sing, but he can't fly." In 1961, "Lucky" Luciano would tell his biographer that it cost \$50,000 to have the police murder Reles.

Still based on Reles' testimony before his death, all the other members of Murder Inc. are sent to the electric chair.

To the Midwest and Beyond

As mentioned before, Pittsburgh Phil was known to travel frequently, sometimes out to the Midwest, to kill people he didn't even know. That was because the Syndicate had expanded west from New York and had branches in every city.

Abner "Longie" Zwillman ran operations out of Newark, New Jersey. He initially used World War I era armored trucks to smuggle liquor out of Canada. When his operation expanded, he had ships come down and anchor off the Jersey shore. When you bought liquor wholesale, you would be issued a chit and you would take your boat out to the ship to redeem your certificate. In 1959, he was issued a subpoena to testify before the McClellan Senate Committee. Before he could testify he would be found hanged in his home, an apparent suicide. But bruises on his body indicate that he may have been helped.

Johnny Torrio had moved to Chicago, taking young Al Capone with him. Capone soon ran a bootlegging empire second to none. Capone's friend, business strategist and advisor was Jake "Greasy Thumb" Guzik, a Jew who had been born in Russia in 1886. Guzik had joined Torrio's gang when Prohibition came along. He became Capone's friend. Not everyone welcomed a Jew. When Guzik was beaten by a hijacker and roughneck named Joe Howard, Capone sought Howard out. He exchanged words with Howard, pulled out a revolver and, putting it to Howard's face, pulled the trigger. Guzik would remain loyal to Capone until he was sentenced to prison and then to Capone's heirs including Frank Nitti, Paul "The Waiter" Ricca, Sam Giancana and Tony Accardo. When Guzik went to prison, he was found to have an IQ of 82. He might not have been smart, but he was loyal.

In Detroit, proximity to Windsor created opportunities during Prohibition. While there were many gangs in Detroit, none were more infamous than the Purple Gang. They earned the nickname the "Third Avenue Navy" or the "Little Jewish Navy" from their nighttime excursions back and forth across the Detroit River carrying booze from Canada, or just as frequently, hijacking the booty of

¹⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Murder,_Inc.

other bootleggers.

The Purple Gang was a family affair. Organized and led by the Bernstein brothers, Abe, Raymond, Joey and Izzy; the Keywells Philip and Harry; and the Fleishers, Sam and Harry. Like many of the gangland names, there are multiple explanations as to why they were called the Purple Gang. Was it because a merchant, complaining about being extorted, compared them to meat gone bad, saying “they are off color, they are tainted, purple.” Or did they own purple swim suits as kids? Did they take the name because one of their members happened to be wearing a purple sweater one day? Or was it a journalist’s invention, like “Murder, Inc.”

Regardless of the origins of the name, they are known to have cut a bloody swath including: in 1927, using arson, beatings and killings as part of the Cleaners and Dryers War; later in 1927, the first use of the machine gun in the Miraflores Massacre; the murders of Police Officer Vivian Welch, Arthur Mixon, Harry Millman and the executions of Purple Gang members Abe Axler and Eddie Fletcher; and finally, the Collingwood Massacre. It was the Collingwood Massacre that would lead to the gang’s downfall.¹⁷



Figure 10 The Purple Gang hiding their faces from the photographer in 1929.

The expansion of the Syndicate mirrored America’s Westward expansion. In 1937, the mob would send Bugsy Siegel to California to help develop gambling operations with Los Angeles mobster Jack Dragna.¹⁸ Dragna was from Corleone in Italy, which may figure into the Godfather movies. Siegel would be very successful and he would also fall in love with the Hollywood lifestyle. In 1946, against his will, Lansky would send Siegel down to safeguard the mob’s biggest investment, the Flamingo Hotel in Las Vegas. In 1947, as Siegel sat with his friend Allen Smiley in Virginia Hill’s Beverly Hills home reading the Los Angeles Times, an unknown assailant fired at him through the window with a .30-caliber military M1 carbine, hitting Siegel many times, including twice in the head. No one was charged with the murder, and the crime remains officially unsolved¹⁹

Was This Trip Really Necessary?

It is hard not to romanticize the Jewish gangsters. They came from poverty, fought against other gangs that sought to harm and repress their people, faced anti-Semitism. In the 1930s, Jewish gangsters broke up American Nazi rallies in New York and elsewhere. But you know what? Most

¹⁷ <http://www.j-grit.com/criminals-the-purple-gang.php>

¹⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Benjamin_Bugsy_Siegel

¹⁹ Ibid

of the victims of Murder Inc. and the Purple Gang were Jews. Even when they didn't kill, they didn't care who they sold bath tub gin or heroin to. And there were plenty of other Jews, some with nothing more to start with than the gangsters had, that made their way through legitimate means.

Once upon a time, Jewish boxers were not only common; they were a dominant force in pugilism. Abe Atell, "The Little Hebrew" was the first featherweight champion in 1903, winning 125 fights, 52 by knockout, and only being beaten 18 times, fighting to a draw 23 times. In championship fights, he went, 18-3-3. Benny "the Ghetto Wizard" Leonard, born Benjamin Leiner on the Lower East Side, fought from 1911, when he was only 15 years old, until 1932. His record was 183 wins (70 by TKO), 19 losses and 11 draws. He won the lightweight championship and defended it 6 times. When Benny Leonard retired, Barney Ross took over where Leonard left off, winning the lightweight championship in 1933. Ross was born Beryl David Rosofsky, the son of a Talmudic scholar who had immigrated to America from his native Brest-Litovsk after barely surviving a pogrom. He would post a record of 74 wins (22 TKOs) against 4 losses and 3 draws.²⁰ Ross was a triple division (lightweight, junior welterweight and welterweight) who also took time off from boxing to enlist in Marines during World War II. He was facing Court Martial for slugging a Marine for making an anti-Semitic remark, but a Jewish officer, Captain Berthol E. Davis, talked the court into sending Ross overseas. He fought at Guadalcanal and earned a Silver Star.²¹

Max Baer would not fit some definitions of what a Jew is. His father, Jacob Baer was Jewish of French ancestry; his mother, Dora Bales, was of Scottish, German and Irish ancestry. He was born in Omaha, Nebraska and grew up in Colorado and Northern California. He began his boxing career in 1929. In 1930, he almost quit after he killed boxer Frankie Campbell. Campbell had knocked Baer down and went to his own corner, where he began waving to the crowd. Baer got up and flew at Campbell, landing a cheap shot to the back of Campbell's head that knocked him down. When the fight resumed, Baer began to pummel Campbell unmercifully. When the referee stopped the fight, Campbell would fall to his knees. Campbell would be taken to the hospital, where he would die from the blows that he received from Baer. Legend has it that Baer went with Campbell's wife to the hospital and stayed by Campbell's bedside all night. Baer is supposed to have broken down and cried at the pronouncement of Campbell's death. Baer was accused of manslaughter, but would be acquitted. Brain specialist Dr. Tilton E. Tillman "declared death had been caused by a succession of blows on the jaw and not by any struck on the rear of the head," and that Campbell's brain had been "knocked completely loose from his skull" by Baer's devastating blows.

Baer never made a point out of his Jewish identity, until he fought Max Schmeling, Hitler's favorite boxer, in a bout at Yankee Stadium. Baer came out wearing an embroidered Star of David on his trunks. Baer explained "'My father is Jewish and my mother is Scotch-Irish. I wore the insignia because I thought I should, and I intend to wear it in every bout hereafter.'" He dominated the German fighter, until the fight was stopped in the tenth round. Legend has it that as Baer punched away at Schmeling he was heard to say "That ones for Hitler."²²

In 1934, Baer would become the Heavyweight Champion of the World. In 1935, Baer lost to Jim Braddock in a bout that became the story of the movie, *Cinderella Man*. That movie makes no mention of the Schmeling fight and portrays Baer as a brute. Despite the fact that one of the

²⁰ http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/2083369/top_5_jewish_boxers_of_all_time.html

²¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barney_Ross

²² <http://www.slate.com/id/2120151/nav/ais/>

film's producers was Brian Grazer, who is Jewish, members of the Jewish community complained that the one-sided portrayal of Baer was anti-Semitic. Whether this is true or not, the issue of how Jewish athletes are shown in the media is one that has been around for a long time.

We have talked about the Jewish gangsters and talked about Jewish boxers; these two aspects of the Tough Jew come together in the story of "Bummy Davis vs. Murder Inc." as told by Ron Ross.²³ Born in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn in 1920, Abraham Davidoff lived in the same neighborhood and at the same time as Murder, Inc. "Abraham" was (of course) called "Avrum" by his parents; "Avrum" became "Vroomy" with his family; "Vroomy" became "Boomy" and "Boomy" became "Bummy." "Bummy" was a name created by his boxing manager, Johnny Atell, as part of a "tough guy" persona. Davis objected strongly to the name, but Atell talked him into it, saying "You want to make money fighting, don't you? People like to come to fights to see guys they think are tough." Davis would also be called "Al" for reasons that I have never understood. (My father was also an Abraham, called Al.) Abe or Al Davidoff was the youngest of three brothers; his oldest brother, Willy, was a thug and a gangster who ran a protection racket in Brownsville. Harry, the middle brother, followed in Willy's footsteps. While it would have been easy enough for him also to become a criminal, Abraham chose a different path. His first job, while still a boy, was as a pushcart vendor, describing himself as "the best tomato salesman in the world."²⁴ For a brief but memorable moment, he had aspirations to become a cantor, until he learned that you had to go to religious school first. But his true calling was boxing.

In order to fight while still a minor, he assumed the name "Giovanni Pasconi." He fought at Knights of Columbus boxing nights, until a reporter for an Italian paper overheard "Giovanni's" father talking to him in Yiddish and the young boxer answering in the same language. Given that he spoke not even a word of Italian, suspicions were raised. But he would return to the ring soon enough.

In 1937, at age 17, Al "Bummy" Davis would begin his professional boxing career (that is, as himself). He won his first 21 fights, 15 by knockout. His streak would end when Jack Sharkey would fight Davis to a draw. In 1938, Davis would square off against Bernie "Schoolboy" Friedkin, an older, more experienced, popular boxer who was also from Brownsville. Friedkin

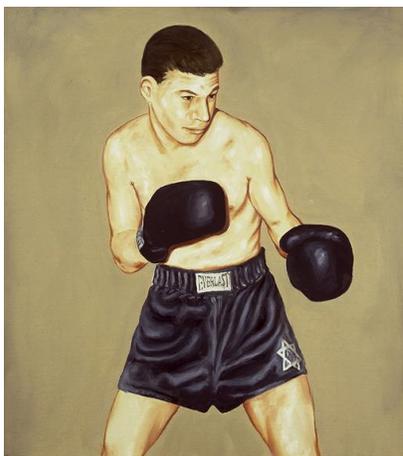


Figure 11 Artist's rendering of Bummy Davis

was believed to be ahead on points...until he ran into Davis' left hook at the beginning of the fourth round. That was all she wrote and Davis would come out as a neighborhood hero.

Loved in Brownsville, Davis was vilified in the press, especially after he beat beloved but aging former champion Tony Canzoneri. Canzoneri was a fan favorite and when Davis knocked him out, it seemed as though a younger fighter had somehow disrespected a revered veteran. Davis didn't handle the booing of the fans well. His reputation only got worse when he, Davis, got into a fight with a man named Mersky in a candy store. Mersky called Davis a lousy fighter and threw candy at him. One piece of candy bounced off Davis' head. Okay. A second

²³ <http://www.ronross.us/notes.html>

²⁴ <http://www.jewsinsports.org/profile.asp?sport=boxing&ID=78>

piece again bounced off Davis' head. And then Davis' fist bounced off Mersky's nose, followed by Mersky bouncing off the floor of the candy store. Oy. The police came looking for Davis, who turned himself in. But his reputation as a bully was fixed in the public's mind.

So hurt was he by the fans reaction at his next fight, Al "Bummy" Davis would quit boxing for a time in 1940. He would return after a few months, accepting a fight against Fritzie Zivic, because he thought it would help his friend and manager, Johnny Atell. Zivic was a dirty fighter and repeatedly put his thumb in Davis' eye. The ref warned Zivic three times, but didn't actually do anything to stop it. Davis perhaps overreacted. He hit Zivic below the belt. Far below the belt. Actually he hit Zivic below the belt more than thirty times, in a series of rapid fire punches that made every fan wince. Okay, so Davis had issues. The NY State Boxing Commission lowered the boom, fining Davis \$2,500 and suspending his license.

In 1941, Davis enlisted in the US Army. Davis had discipline issues. He wasn't cut out to be a soldier, it seems. But the Army found a use for him, arranging for rematch against Zivic for Army Emergency Relief. Davis would lose the fight, but reestablish himself as a boxer.

Davis would be discharged from the Army just after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Davis is the first soldier that I have ever heard of that, during wartime, the Army decided that they really didn't want. On his discharge papers, an honorable discharge I should add, the reason listed was a skin condition.

During his time in the Army, Davis would marry a nice Jewish girl from the neighborhood, Barbara Kovsky. This would lead to the period of greatest stability and success in Davis' life. Still under boxing suspension in New York, between September 1942 and August 1943, he fought in Washington, D.C., Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago, and other cities, and won 11 of 15 fights. In August of 1943, the New York State Boxing Commission restored his license, in part because Fritzie Zivic did the right thing and appeared before the board and confessed that he had provoked Davis.

Back boxing where he loved to be, in Madison Square Garden, being cheered by the Brownsville faithful, he would win four out of the next five fights. In his best remembered match, he would score a stunning upset by beating former and future lightweight champion Bob Montgomery in a stunning upset. Davis would continue fighting for a time, fighting well enough to get some major bouts. He would lose to Rocky Graziano in 1945; his last fight was a victory against Johnny Jones.

During this last stage of his career, Davis earned a quarter of a million dollars in purses. It should have been enough to assure him and his family (he had been blessed with a son) a life of comfort, if not luxury. But like many athletes, he was just not good with money. He bought a bar, soon discovered that he had not talent for managing it and was forced to sell it. He was finally ready to leave Brownsville and move his family, his wife, his son and his aging parents, down to Miami. But he didn't get out quite fast enough. The night that he was turning the bar over to its new owner, four young men with guns came in to rob the place. Davis confronted them and they called him a bum. He went after the four of them with just his fists. Shot once, he still managed to chase them out into the street. He ran after them was shot again and died on the Brownsville streets. He was 25 years old.

Bummy Davis was a legend in Brownsville, a beloved son of the streets. When he died the whole neighborhood turned out. Part of the reason that he was so loved is that his very faults were

qualities that people could identify with, including his temper. And it was his temper that made him face down Abe Reles and his gang on the streets of Brownsville, according to Ron Ross.

The incident is supposed to have taken place in 1939, during his first stint as a boxer. Reles and the boys try to intimidate Davis into throwing a fight. He won't do it. Reles, Buggsy Goldstein, Pittsburgh Phil Strauss and Happy Maione confront him on a main street, Livonia Avenue, as he is leaving Beecher's gym. The thugs all have guns, Davis has nothing. But that day, Bummy Davis, professional boxer, fades into the background, and Al "Boomy" Davidoff, Brownsville street kid, comes to the fore, shouting "You want me? You want ME? I'm right here!" For reasons even they could not explain, the four murderers look at wild-eyed man in front of them, look at each other, and get into their Packard and drive away. It is this incident that will inspire Harry Rudolph to come forward and testify against Reles. After all, it must have seemed, if Bummy can face him down, Reles must be vulnerable.

Ron Ross does a superb job creating not only a vivid and unforgettable portrait of Al "Bummy" Davis, but also of showing what Jewish life was like in New York in the years leading up to World War II.

The War Heroes: Hank Greenberg

More than 550,000 American Jews would serve in the US military during World War II. Eleven thousand Jewish Americans would be killed fighting for their country and another forty thousand would be wounded. There were three recipients of the Medal of Honor, 157 recipients of the Army Distinguished Service Medal, Navy Distinguished Service Medal, Distinguished Service Cross, or Navy Cross, and about 1600 recipients of the Silver Star. About 50,000 other decorations, citations and awards were given to American Jewish military personnel, for a total of 52,000 decorations. During this period, Jews were approximately 3.3 percent of the total U.S. population but constituted about 4.23 percent of the U.S. armed forces. About 60 percent of all Jewish physicians in the United States under 45 years of age enlisted in the service as military physicians and medics²⁵. These men and women should be remembered as Tough Jews.

Most were not professional athletes, like boxer Barney Ross. But some were. Baseball player "Hammerin' Hank" Greenberg is best remembered as the "Jewish Babe Ruth" for hitting 58 home runs for the Detroit Tigers in 1938. But what makes him a Tough Jew in my book is that, while he was honorably discharged from the Army on December 5th, 1941, two days before Pearl Harbor, as part of the release of all men 28 years old and older, Greenberg immediately reenlisted and volunteered for service in the United States Army Air Forces. He graduated from Officer Candidate School and was commissioned as a first lieutenant in the USAAF. He eventually served overseas in the China-Burma-India Theater, scouting locations for B-29 bomber bases.²⁶

Hank Greenberg remained in uniform until the summer of 1945. The day after he was discharged, he was wearing a different uniform as a Tiger again. In his first game back, he homered. That year he would again be voted to the All-Star Team.

Miscellaneous

Benjamin "Benny" Friedman was born in Cleveland in 1905 to an Orthodox Jewish family. Although he originally wanted to be a championship strongman, when he was in high school he

²⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Jews

²⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hank_Greenberg

decided that football was the sport for him. He played football at the University of Michigan as a quarterback from 1924-1926. In a single game against Indiana in 1925, Friedman was responsible for 44 points, after throwing five touchdowns, kicking two field goals and eight extra points. In 1926, he was voted All-American and MVP of the Big Ten.

After college he was recruited into the NFL and played for the Cleveland Bulldogs (1927), Detroit Wolverines (1928), New York Giants (1929-1931) and Brooklyn Dodgers (when that was a football team (1932-1934)).

He quickly became one of the first great NFL players. In 1928 Friedman led the league in rushing touchdowns and touchdown passes, a feat that has never been accomplished again.

Hockey is not a sport that you would associate with Jews. Nevertheless, Lazarus “Larry the Rock” Zeidel was a retired hockey player, who played for both the Detroit Red Wings and the Chicago Blackhawks in the 1950s. In 1952, he was part of the Red Wings team that won the Stanley cup.²⁷

Why does he qualify in the Tough Jew category? Joe Pelletier’s GreatestHockeyLegends.com describes Zeidel as follows:

Larry Zeidel was hockey's Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

On the ice he was the evil Mr. Hyde and off the ice he was the nice Dr. Jekyll. He received the tag of "The fastest stick in the Midwest" and it wasn't because of his slick stickhandling. Larry had a reputation of using his stick as a spear whenever he felt it necessary, which was quite often.

No other professional player was involved in more stick swinging incidents than Larry. His most famous one came in the NHL against Bruins Eddie Shack. Both combatants tried to scalp each other after Shack had made racial remarks against Larry, who was Jewish. In another stick swinging incident that happened in the WHL it was Larry and Willie O'Ree (the first black player in the NHL) who tried to chop off each other's heads. WHL's league president Al Leader almost expelled Larry from the league.²⁸

Wrestling is another sport where Jews seem unlikely participants. Managers or owners, sure. But Jewish wrestlers?

William Scott “Bill” Goldberg is the son of Ethel, a classical violinist, and Jed Goldberg, a graduate of Harvard University, with medical degrees as an obstetrician and gynecologist. His grandfather, Marcel, came to America from Romania, entering by way of Ellis Island. His great-grandfather on his father’s side came over from Russia. Bill was Bar Mitzvahed at Temple Israel in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Bill went to college at the University of Georgia and played as a defensive end. He was selected as the 302nd pick of the NFL draft in 1990, and played one season for the LA Rams. He was traded to the Atlanta Falcons, where he played two seasons. Bill was later traded to the Carolina Panthers, but was cut.

²⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Larry_Zeidel

²⁸ <http://broadstreetbullies.blogspot.com/2009/11/larry-zeidel.html>

He would make a career change and train at the World Championship Wrestling (WCW) Power Plant. He would make pro wrestling history with a winning streak of 108 straight matches, each ending with a victorious Goldberg shouting “Who’s next?” Goldberg would win several championships.²⁹

Every wrestler needs enemies to heighten the drama. One of Goldberg’s earliest foes was punk wrestler Raven. Raven was 75th victim and by defeating him, Goldberg won the US Heavyweight Championship. Not many people knew that Raven’s real name was Scott Levy and this was a battle between two “nice Jewish boys.”



Figure 12 Two Nice Jewish Boys: Goldberg and Raven

Conclusions and Summary

The Tough Jew is a part of our history, of our identity. From Simon Bar Kokhba to Bill Goldberg, we have been a tough and resilient people, surviving whatever was thrown at us.

Even our gangsters, who were **not** good people, are part of our heritage. Meyer Lansky spoke about disrupting a Bund rally in New York:

The stage was decorated with a swastika and a picture of Adolf Hitler. The speakers started ranting. There were only fifteen of us, but we went into action. We threw some of them out the windows. Most of the Nazis panicked and ran out. We chased them and beat them up. We wanted to show them that Jews would not always sit back and accept insults.³⁰

Lansky and fellow mobsters Charles Luciano and Albert Anastasia were also instrumental in helping the US Office of Naval Intelligence in Operation Underworld, in which the US government recruited criminals to watch out for German infiltrators and submarine-borne saboteurs. There are a lot of questions as to whether the program actually prevented anything, but it is one of those things where it nothing happened, then it worked, right?

After the Murder Inc. thugs were only memories, Brownsville Jews were heard to say “If only Mendy Weiss or Pittsburgh Phil could have Hitler alone....” They would have shown him what

²⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bill_Goldberg

³⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meyer_Lansky

Tough Jews were all about.

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