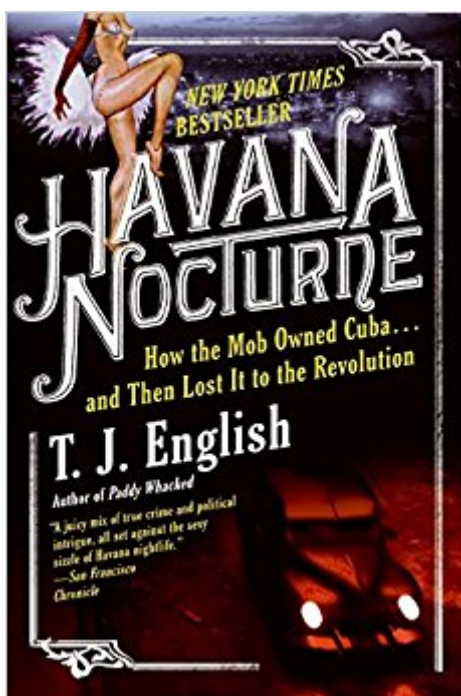


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# Havana Nocturne: How The Mob Owned Cuba And Then Lost It To The Revolution



## Synopsis

In modern-day Havana, the remnants of the glamorous past are everywhere—old hotel-casinos, vintage American cars & flickering neon signs speak of a bygone era that is widely familiar & often romanticized, but little understood. In *Havana Nocturne*, T.J. English offers a multifaceted true tale of organized crime, political corruption, roaring nightlife, revolution & international conflict that interweaves the dual stories of the Mob in Havana & the event that would overshadow it, the Cuban Revolution. As the Cuban people labored under a violently repressive regime throughout the 50s, Mob leaders Meyer Lansky & Charles "Lucky" Luciano turned their eye to Havana. To them, Cuba was the ultimate dream, the greatest hope for the future of the US Mob in the post-Prohibition years of intensified government crackdowns. But when it came time to make their move, it was Lansky, the brilliant Jewish mobster, who reigned supreme. Having cultivated strong ties with the Cuban government & in particular the brutal dictator Fulgencio Batista, Lansky brought key mobsters to Havana to put his ambitious business plans in motion. Before long, the Mob, with Batista's corrupt government in its pocket, owned the biggest luxury hotels & casinos in Havana, launching an unprecedented tourism boom complete with the most lavish entertainment, the world's biggest celebrities, the most beautiful women & gambling galore. But their dreams collided with those of Fidel Castro, Che Guevara & others who would lead the country's disenfranchised to overthrow their corrupt government & its foreign partners—an epic cultural battle that English captures in all its sexy, decadent, ugly glory. Bringing together long-buried historical information with English's own research in Havana—including interviews with the era's key survivors—*Havana Nocturne* takes readers back to Cuba in the years when it was a veritable devil's playground for mob leaders. English deftly weaves together the parallel stories of the Havana Mob—featuring notorious criminals such as Santo Trafficante Jr & Albert Anastasia—and Castro's 26th of July Movement in a riveting, up-close look at how the Mob nearly attained its biggest dream in Havana—and how Fidel Castro trumped it all with the revolution.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Old Havana mambos on the brink of the abyss in this chronicle of Cuba in the decades before the 1959 revolution. True-crime writer English (Paddy Whacked) presents an empire-building saga in which the "Havana Mob" of American gangsters, led by visionary financier Meyer Lansky, controlled Cuba. Empowered by permissive gambling laws and payoffs to dictator Fulgencio Batista, the Mafia poured millions into posh hotels, casinos and nightclubs, skimmed huge profits and sought to make Havana its financial headquarters. The results: exuberant nightlife, a giddy Afro-Cuban jazz scene, sordid backroom sex shows and the occasional grisly gangland hit. English revels in purple prose ("the island seethed like a bitch with a low-grade fever") and decadent details, including an orgy with Frank Sinatra and a bevy of prostitutes that was interrupted by autograph-seeking Girl Scouts and a nun. But his estimate of the importance of the Havana mob and its "showdown" with Castro's puritanical rebels seems inflated. More suppliant than suzerain to Batista, the mob focused on internecine feuds and paid little attention to the brewing insurrection. The casinos, hotels and nightclubs were all the mob owned-but they sure threw one hell of a party. Photos. (May) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

The penetration of American organized crime into the gambling and entertainment industries in Cuba has been well documented. The actual process of this takeover is quite interesting, involving political corruption, mob culture, and the interaction of Cuban ruling elites and revolutionary figures. English, who teaches a course on organized crime at the New College of California, places Meyer Lansky and Lucky Luciano at the center of his narrative. As portrayed by English, these boyhood friends combine brutality, cynicism, and an expansive vision of creating a criminal empire with a protected base in Cuba. English writes eloquently about prerevolutionary Havana, where the glitter of nightlife and an "anything goes" facade covered up the widespread poverty and decadent political culture under Batista. As long as English sticks to organized crime he remains on solid ground. Unfortunately, when he ventures into the political realm, he oversimplifies, displaying an

appalling ignorance of the complexities of the various groups opposed to Batista. Still, this is a valuable examination of organized-crime figures and their efforts to thrive in a seemingly receptive environment. --Jay Freeman --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

If you want to know why the revolution you will find it all here. This is an excellent book and I probably should have given it a five (originally I gave it a 4). I am probably a bit too picky but the author's use of language, while consistently engaging, lively, informative, colorful and descriptive occasionally messes up a metaphor. Like I said, I'm way too picky--I strongly recommend this book for anyone who wants to know the fascinating back story of the Cuban revolution and a reasonable explanation for the incredible longevity of the Fidelista state. It certainly won't put you to sleep--maybe that is the highest compliment I can give a popular history account. I just went back and changed my rating. With out preaching, the book describes the utter moral bankruptcy of the collection of Cuban gangsters, large landowners, rich factory owners and others in the Cuban elite who eagerly sold their country out to the highest bidder--which just happened to be the American mob.

There is lots of stuff in the news about Cuba and whether we should move forward after 50 years of sanctions. I would highly recommend this very well researched history of Cuba before the "revolution". Why was there a revolution? Why did the people throw their President out and support the rebels? If you listen to some tell it, you would think that Cuba was a peaceful paradise where everything was wonderful and happy. The real story is a much more sordid tale of American mobsters and American corporations milking the country dry while a corrupt dictator lined his and his cronies pockets with bribes, payoffs, torture and oppression. The only people that were happy with the state of things before Castro, were those that were living the highlife financed by gambling, drug running, prostitution and backroom deals. America helped to create Castro and hedged their bets, playing both sides... There is a lot to be learned about what we did to the Cuban people and how we plundered this island and it's common people. America's hands are far from clean in this..... get the whole story.

This book was the first selection in a new men's book-reading club that I joined. Among twelve men who read it, I was the only one who thought it was mainly a pastiche of urban legends and tall tales by wise guys--just to let you know that mine is a minority opinion. Much of the material overlaps with another mob history, "Five Families." About those tall tales: did you hear the one about Senator John

Kennedy being set up with two prostitutes in Havana, in a special room outfitted with a two-way mirror? The wise guys watched and laughed, and kicked themselves later for not taking pictures, which could be used to bribe a Senator (later, President). But why would the mobsters go to the trouble of outfitting a special room with a two-way mirror, and neglect to include a storage unit with camera equipment in the adjoining room? Did you hear the one about Frank Sinatra--how a wise guy got him out of an unfavorable contract by sticking a gun in his producer's mouth? Nancy Sinatra, in her biography of her father, tells a different story--Frank Sinatra's new recording company bought him out of his previous contract for over \$70,000, a lot of money in the 1950s. When I brought this up in the book club, everyone dismissed Nancy Sinatra's story as biased and went with the wise guy's version-- even though T. J. English himself says that his version is just a gangster-tale! (The wise guy version appears also in "Five Families.") The oddest thing about this is that while Nancy Sinatra's version of the story can be documented with a contract, the gangster version cannot be -- supposedly because the wise guys didn't have a camera with them -- yet people prefer to believe the version that can't be proved. Which leaves me with two questions. First, why are most people ready to believe stories like this that look like urban legends and are seldom subject to critical examination? Second, what was it about the mob-culture that encouraged wise guys to spit-shine their street creds with a never-ending blather of tall tales? Was it because they got loose tongues after drinking too much wine in their Italian restaurants? Or was it because the only way to advance in the organization was to have a reputation for being tough and tricky? I'm proposing this as a serious research question. In my opinion, the wise-guy tales are of no intrinsic interest (except to minds degraded from reading National Inquirer), but they are interesting as by-products of a peculiar mob-culture in America.

Throughout my thirty years as a history teacher, I never had any interest in the history of the Mob. And then I read Havana Nocturne. This is one terrific read. The author tells not only the history of organized crime in Cuba, but also the political history of the island--how Batista staged a coup in 1952 and how Fidel Castro used the abuses of American corporations and the political corruption by the gangsters to foment revolution. Along the way, the book includes profiles of mobsters like Meyer Lansky, Lucky Luciano, Santo Trifficante and Albert Anastasia. He also discusses the glamorous night life of Havana in the 1950s. I would highly recommend this book to any history buff or anyone interested in the history of organized crime in America.

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