



# The Gangs of New York: An Informal History of the Underworld

By *Herbert Asbury*

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The basis of Martin Scorsese's acclaimed 2003 film, *The Gangs of New York* is a dramatic and entertaining glimpse at a city's dark past.

Focusing on the saloon halls, gambling dens, and winding alleys of the Bowery and the notorious Five Points district, *The Gangs of New York* dramatically evokes the destitution and shocking violence of a turbulent era, when colorfully named criminals like Dandy John Dolan, Bill the Butcher, and Hell-Cat Maggie lurked in the shadows, and infamous gangs like the Plug Uglies, the Dead Rabbits, and the Bowery Boys ruled the streets. A rogues' gallery of prostitutes, pimps, poisoners, pickpockets, murderers, and thieves, Herbert Asbury's whirlwind tour through the low life of nineteenth-century New York has become an indispensable classic of urban history.

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### Editorial Review

#### From Library Journal

Journalist Asbury pulled this book together from several official sources, including police records as well as unofficial ones such as the rough memories of criminals. True to the title, the book is a history of crime both organized and not that permeated the dirty underbelly of New York City and its boroughs in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Some of these gangs were so vicious they would post signs warning police to stay out of their neighborhoods or else! The 1927 volume is the basis of Martin Scorsese's forthcoming film of the same name starring Daniel Day-Lewis and Titanic heartthrob Leonardo DiCaprio, so make sure to have at least one copy on hand. This edition contains numerous illustrations and a foreword by Jorge Luis Borges.

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#### Review

"A distinct contribution to Americana. . . . The tale is one of blood, excitement, and debauchery."

—*The New York Times*

"One of the essential works of the city. . . . It owns a direct pipeline to the city's unconscious."

—Luc Sante, author of *Low Life: Lures and Snares of Old New York*

"A univeral history of infamy, the history of the gangs of New York contains all the confusion and cruelty of the barbarian cosmologies."

—Jorge Luis Borges

"One of the best American books of its kind. Mr. Asbury writes in a direct and engaging manner."

—Edmund Pearson, *The Saturday Review of Literature*

#### About the Author

**Herbert Asbury**, an early 20th-century journalist, made a name for himself by documenting the gangs, pimps, prostitutes, and thieves that thrived in the underbellies of New York, Chicago, San Francisco, and New Orleans. His works, still in print after seventy-five years, are often hailed as the best snapshots of their time period. *The Gangs of New York* was the basis of Martin Scorsese's 2003 film.

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**Maria Peterson:**

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