American Murder: Criminals, Crime, and the Media

Scurrilous Cutthroats, Marauding Desperadoes, Demented Psychopaths, Deluded Assassins, Serial Widows, Ruthless Gangsters, Angels of Death, and Hardened Hitmen from Colonial Times to the Present, and the Songs, Books, Plays, and Films They Have Inspired

By Mike Mayo
AMERICAN MURDER:
Criminals, Crime, and the Media

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Abbott, Burton W.
The thing about Burton “Bud” Abbott is that he wanted to be caught.

On April 28, 1955 in Berkeley, California he kidnapped and killed fourteen-year-old Stephanie Bryan. Somehow, this unassuming married college student persuaded the girl to get into his car and drove her up to his cabin, little more than a shack, in Weaverville, almost 300 miles north of San Francisco. They fought on the way. Two people saw them but were not able to reach Abbott’s car and could provide no useful identification. Two weeks after the kidnapping, Stephanie’s French textbook was found, but beyond that, nothing. The case attracted nationwide attention.

On the night of July 15, while rummaging through some boxes of old clothes in the basement of her house, Georgia Abbott found a purse and wallet with Stephanie’s identification. Naturally, she was shocked and took the things upstairs to her husband and some visiting friends. Abbott was curiously uninterested. Even after they had called the police, he appeared to pay little attention to the matter, playing chess while the cops conducted their initial search. They came back the next day for a more thorough examination of the house and found more of Stephanie’s stuff—books, brassiere—buried in the sandy floor of the basement. Abbott claimed he had no idea how they got there. His garage had been used as polling place in May; anyone could have gone down there and planted the evidence. The cops didn’t buy it and arrested him.

The police learned about Abbott’s cabin and searched the area with dogs. They found Stephanie’s body, panties tied around her neck, up a steep slope from the place. The circumstantial case against him was strong, and Abbott admitted having driven to the cabin on the day of the kidnapping. But why? What was his motive? Because the body was so badly decomposed, there was no evidence of a sexual element. Was Abbott, a slight man who had suffered tuberculosis, physically capable of such a crime?

At his trial, the final piece of evidence that persuaded the jury was the testimony of criminologist Dr. Paul I. Kirk, who found four matching samples of hair and fabric fibers from Stephanie’s clothes in the back seat of Abbott’s car. Even so, it took more than 50 hours of deliberation to find Abbott guilty of kidnapping and murder, and because of the lengthy time frame, many people believed he might be innocent.

Before Abbott’s execution, though, something else emerged. During the trial, Abbott had shared a
cell in the Alameda county jail with John Douglas Cober, who was serving a stretch for writing bad checks. They talked a lot about the case. According to Cober, Abbott said that he simply wanted to be famous. The best way he could see to do this was to commit a pointless crime, allow himself to be arrested for it, and then be found not guilty. To accomplish this goal, Abbott deliberately left the purse in the basement where he knew his wife would find it. During the commission of the kidnapping, he created false, contradictory evidence, burying the body first in one location and then moving it to the grave near the cabin. There was no sexual motivation, he allegedly said—though he had tied the dead girl's panties around her neck to create that impression.

Cober's story not withstanding, Abbott never confessed. The day before his execution, he did tell a psychiatrist he couldn't confess because he knew how hard that would be on his mother. He went to gas chamber on March 14, 1957.

Abbott's story has never made it to the small or large screen, though elements of it have been appropriated in countless formula mysteries. San Francisco Chronicle reporter Bernice Freeman Davis wrote about Abbott's trial in detail in her book The Desperate and the Damned.

Abbott, Jack

Norman Mailer probably regretted the day he learned about Jack Abbott.

Abbott was a jailbird who had first run afoul of the law as a kid. He came from an unstable home and had been in and out of foster care. He worked his way up from juvenile detention to reform school to the Utah State Prison where he stabbed a fellow inmate to death in 1965. Six years later, he escaped and robbed a bank in Colorado before they caught him again and sent him back.

In the late 1970s the self-educated Abbott learned that Norman Mailer was working on a book about murderer Gary Gilmore. Abbott wrote to the famous literary lion and offered to help with the book, providing details of his extensive involvement with the penal system.

Impressed with Abbott's language, Mailer corresponded with him. Their letters eventually formed Abbott's book, In the Belly of the Beast. As it was being readied for publication, Mailer supported Abbott's efforts to obtain parole. In June 1980, they were successful.

Abbott's book was published to universal critical acclaim and a high-powered publicity campaign including an appearance on the Today Show, a People magazine story, an interview in Rolling Stone—the works. To meet the terms of his parole, Abbott lived in a halfway house in New York.

On July 18, 1981 Abbott went out drinking and picked up a couple of girls. Early in the morning, they stopped off at an all-night restaurant, Binibon, for breakfast. Their waiter was Richard Adan, a young writer and actor who was also the son-in-law of Binibon's owner. When Abbott asked to use the men's room, Adan told him it was for staff only. Abbott became angry and they argued about it.

Abbott asked Adan to step outside and the argument continued on Fifth Street. It ended when Abbott pulled a knife. Adan turned and tried to run but the ex-con reached around and stabbed him in the chest.

Racing back inside, Abbott told the girls they had to leave—he had just killed a man. He picked up his stuff and caught a bus out of town. He made it as far as Mexico, but returned to the United States. He went to work in the Louisiana oil fields, where U.S. marshals caught him in September.

At his trial, Abbott attempted to claim self-defense and blamed the prison system and society in general for everything he had done. Not a single bit of it was really his fault, he said. That didn't fly: he was found guilty of manslaughter, given 15 years to life, with the sentence to be served after he had finished the eight years left in Utah.

To date, no one has expressed any interest in adapting his second work to the screen.

**Abu-Jamal, Mumia**

The facts of the case could hardly be simpler.

Around 4:00 a.m. December 9, 1981 veteran Philadelphia police officer Daniel Faulkner pulled over a light blue Volkswagen driven by William Cook. It had been going the wrong direction on a one-way street. The stop took place in a rough part of town, so Faulkner called for backup. Even at that hour of the morning, there were a number of eyewitnesses to what happened next.

As Cook got out of his car, he sucker-punched Officer Faulkner. Faulkner fought back, striking Cook with his flashlight. Cook’s brother Wesley, aka Mumia Abu-Jamal, was watching from his cab, parked nearby. He pulled his .38 from a holster and ran over. He shot Officer Faulkner once in the back.

Faulkner turned, pulled his service revolver and, before he fell to the sidewalk, shot Abu-Jamal in the abdomen. Abu-Jamal stood over him and continued to fire. Though he missed with three shots, he killed
Curiously, throughout his career as one of the mob’s top executives, Adonis maintained an involvement with jewelry theft and fencing. He just wanted to keep his hand in and, according to Luciano, Adonis always liked flashy rocks.

Officer Faulkner with a bullet to the head. Police found the wounded Abu-Jamal at the scene and took him to the hospital where he angrily boasted of what he had just done.

Six months later, Abu-Jamal went to trial where, for a time, he served as his own lawyer. Neither he nor his brother testified. A jury of two blacks and ten whites found him guilty. In a separate sentencing phase, they sentenced him to death.

That might have been the end of a sad story but the combination of Abu-Jamal’s striking dreadlocked appearance and his experience as a radio reporter made him “mediagenic,” so he managed to persuade many on the left that he not only had been the victim of racism but that the “real killer” was still out there. A federal judge overturned the death penalty in 2001, and this decision is being appealed. As of this writing, legal wrangling continues.

Rallies and marches have been held to refocus attention on Abu-Jamal’s case, and filmmaker John Edginton made a documentary about the murder and the trial called *Mumia: A Case for Reasonable Doubt*. The answer to the question posed in the subtitle, however, is a resounding “Guilty! Guilty! Guilty!” The film may be the least persuasive bit of propaganda ever produced. It ignores or discounts the overwhelming evidence of Abu-Jamal’s guilt, focusing instead on less reliable testimony and the minor contradictions found in any investigation.

Adonis, Joe

Even though he was one of the founding members of the Syndicate, Joe Adonis remains relatively unknown compared to his friends and contemporaries Charlie “Lucky” Luciano and Bugsy Siegel.

Born Giuseppe Antonio Doto in Italy, he stowed away on an ocean liner and snuck into America in 1915. He went to work as muscle for mobster Frankie Yale in Brooklyn. He found his greatest success through Luciano. At first, Doto was completely loyal to Charlie Lucky.

It was some time in the 1920s that Doto decided to change his name to Joe Adonis because he found himself so physically attractive. Not everyone shared that opinion. In 1922 he was arrested for rape and always had a reputation as a womanizer. By the late 1920s Adonis controlled bootlegging in Brooklyn, having taken over after Frankie Yale was rubbed out in a drive-by shooting.

In 1931 when Luciano decided to consolidate his power and end the Castellamarese War by killing his boss Joe Masseria, Adonis was part of the handpicked four-man hit team put together to do the job. The others were Albert Anastasia, Vito Genovese, and Bugsy Siegel. After they got rid of another old boss, Salvatore Maranzano, five months later, Adonis took a place on the Board of Directors of the newly formed Syndicate. He and the other new bosses prospered. They paid off the cops, judges, and politicians to leave them alone, and made millions in booze, drugs, prostitution, loan sharking, protection, the numbers, and union racketeering. Life was good.

Adonis stayed in the background. When Luciano was deported to Italy after World War II, he looked after his friend’s interests. He didn’t really come to the attention of the law until Abe “Kid Twist” Reles decided to leave the mob’s assassination bureau, Murder, Inc., and tell all he knew to the New York D.A. in 1948. By then, Adonis had expanded into New Jersey.
Curiously, throughout his career as one of the mob's top executives, Adonis maintained an involvement with jewelry theft and fencing. He just wanted to keep his hand in and, according to Luciano, Adonis always liked flashy rocks.

In the early 1950s Adonis was called to testify before the Kefauver Committee on Organized Crime and was charged with violating New Jersey gambling laws. He was facing a federal perjury rap, too, when they learned Adonis was an illegal alien. On August 5, 1953 he was deported to Italy and moved to Naples where he lived near Luciano. By then, the two men were no longer close. Luciano thought Adonis had sided, at least tacitly, with his rival Vito Genovese. Charlie Lucky died in 1962, Adonis a decade later when he suffered a heart attack while being questioned by Italian police.

Befitting his low public profile, Adonis appeared in only one mob movie, *Lansky* (1999), as a minor character.

**Allen, Floyd**

The 1912 murders in the Carroll County, Virginia Courthouse remain the most deadly ever to occur in an American courtroom. The shootout took more lives than the 1970 hostage incident in Marin County, California.

Today, almost a century later, people in the mountains of Southwest Virginia still argue over and dispute key details of the matter. Those details are wrapped up in a sticky web of family loyalties, politics, and long-simmering personal animosities. This much is reasonably certain: the Allens were Democrats in a solidly Republican county.

Floyd Allen was suspected of being a moonshiner. He was hot tempered and had stated publicly that he would never spend a day in jail. Two of Floyd's nephews, Wesley and Sidna Edwards, had been involved in a fight with some other youths over a girl. When charges were filed against them, they fled to neighboring North Carolina where they were caught.

Deputy Sheriff Thomas Samuels brought them back. On the way to Hillsville, Virginia they passed a store run by Sidna Allen, Floyd's brother. Floyd was there. Objecting to the way his nephews were being treated, he pistol-whipped the deputy and took custody of the boys. Floyd turned the boys in later that week, and eventually, they served short jail sentences.

Floyd was also charged in the beating of the deputy. The situation in Hillsville was so polarized that a jury could not be seated. Rather than move the proceedings, the Commonwealth of Virginia decided to import a jury from outside the region. Floyd was promptly found guilty. On March 14, 1912 court reconvened for sentencing, with Judge Thornton L. Massie presiding. A large crowd gathered in the courtroom, including various Allens and other family members. Several of them were armed, Floyd and Sidna Allen among them.

When Judge Massie announced the sentence of one year, Floyd stood and replied "Gentlemen, I ain't going." That's when the shooting started.

Who fired first?

Some say it began when Floyd pulled a pistol, or a brace of pistols, from his pockets. Others say Sheriff Lewis Webb accidentally fired a .38 automatic which he had borrowed and was not familiar with. It really makes little difference.

The place erupted in gunfire as more than a dozen men fired more than 100 rounds. When the gunsmoke had cleared, five people were dead or dying, including Judge Massie, the Commonwealth's Attorney and Sheriff Webb. Many more were wounded. Floyd and Sidna Allen were among the most seriously hurt. Others who had been involved ran for the hills and beyond.

Due to a quirk in Virginia law, after a Sheriff has been killed, his deputies lose their legal authority. The governor had to hire the Baldwin-Felts Detective Agency in Roanoke, the largest city in that part of the state, to restore order and, as a local newspaper account put it, to "take charge of the whole situ-
Former CIA agent Aldrich Ames leaving court after pleading guilty to espionage and tax evasion charges, 1994.

 usar and handle it in a way to save the honor of Virginia and bring the desperados to justice.”

Within a few months, the detectives had round- ed up everyone who had taken part in the court shooting. Floyd Allen and his son Claude were sentenced to death and were electrocuted a year later. Four others were sentenced to long prison terms but were pardoned in the 1920s.

At least one film project has been talked about in recent years, along with a full-length book, but none have come to fruition.

**Ames, Aldrich**

He was the most murderous traitor ever to work against America, or at least the most murderous we know about. His work led directly to the deaths of at least 25 people, probably many more. Perhaps the worst part is that Aldrich Ames was born to the business. His father had been a spy in Burma in the 1950s for the CIA. When the family returned state- side, young Aldrich attended Langley High School in Virginia.

After college, Ames used his family connections to find a position at the Agency. He was a poor recruiter in his overseas postings and was passed over for promotions. At the same time, his marriage was falling apart and he was drinking heavily.

While on assignment in Mexico City, he met Rosario Casas Dupuy, a Colombian working for her embassy there. They became lovers and when he finally got a promotion and a transfer back to head- quarters in 1983, she followed. In short order, Ames divorced his wife and the lovely Rosario embarked on an epic spending spree. In less than a year, she had maxed out all his plastic.

What to do?

In his new position in Soviet counterintelligence, Ames had access to the names of all the CIA’s “human assets,” including Russians and others who were working for America.

On May 17, 1985 Ames made contact with a Soviet agent in Washington and started selling names. Before it was over, he would be paid $2 million with the promise of more and a riverside dacha after he retired to Mother Russia.

When all of their double agents disappeared, the CIA became suspicious, but for more than a year refused to believe they had a mole in their midst. In November 1986 they assigned veteran Jeanne Vertefeuille to look into the matter. One of her mole whackers noticed Ames was driving a Jaguar XJ6 that cost more than he made in a year, and that he had just paid more than half a million in cash for a new home Rosario was refurnishing top to bottom.

Hmm?

When asked, Ames lied and said Rosario came from a wealthy Colombian family. Even though
Ames had flunked three polygraphs, he somehow managed to explain those away, too. The mole whackers kept digging and found more problems with Ames’ explanations. In 1993 they bugged his house and got the dirt they needed.

Ames and Rosario were arrested on February 21, 1994. Rosario sang like a canary but still got five years. Paroled in 1999, she took a powder back to Colombia.

Ames remains locked up in the Federal Corrections Complex in Butner, North Carolina.

Several books have been written about Ames and one fairly well-regarded film was made for television in 1998, *Aldrich Ames: Traitor Within*. It starred Timothy Hutton, who also played another much less important Russian spy in *The Falcon and the Snowman* in 1985. The Ames film was directed by John Mackenzie, who also made *Ruby* about Oswald assassin Jack Ruby in 1992.

Anastasia, Albert

He was called the “Lord High Executioner” and the “Mad Hatter,” and nobody doubted he deserved the nicknames. Albert Anastasia was one of the most murderous of the old-school gangsters. He killed a lot of people, and generally seems to have enjoyed killing. He also ordered the deaths of many more.

Born in Italy, Anastasia jumped ship in New York sometime around 1920 and went to work on the Brooklyn docks. He rose to power in the longshoremen’s union and killed one of his fellow workers. He served 18 months for the murder in Sing Sing, but was released early after he was granted a new trial. It never happened. Four key witnesses vanished, establishing a pattern that would follow Anastasia and his crimes for years to come.

In 1931 when Charles “Lucky” Luciano decided it was time for a changing of the guard, he chose Anastasia to be part of the four-man hit team that killed their boss Joe Masseria. Anastasia knew Luciano had the brains and the leadership skills to run things, so he always followed Charlie Lucky’s lead as the Syndicate or Commission was formed to keep gang members from killing each other whenever they wanted. The bosses would decide who was to be killed, and so they established Murder, Inc. as their enforcement division. When they put the Mad Hatter and the equally sadistic Louis “Lepke” Buchalter in charge of it, they knew what they were doing. If aptitude tests had been available for assassins, Anastasia and Lepke would have scored off the charts.

Murder, Inc. was in operation for almost a decade and got rid of hundreds of hoodlums who stepped too far out of line, witnesses who were willing to testify about mob crimes, and the occasional honest citizen who somehow got in the way. In 1940, when high-level hitman Abe “Kid Twist” Reles realized he was being set up for elimination, he agreed to talk to New York District Attorney Burton Yurkus.

Reles made the details of Murder, Inc.’s operations public and testified against a few of his fellow mobsters before Anastasia had him thrown out a sixth floor window—while he was supposedly in police protective custody.

When World War II started, Luciano was in prison but was still running things. Anastasia came up with the idea of causing trouble on the New York docks and then convincing the feds the only way security could be guaranteed was through the mob. His brother “Tough” Tony Anastasio (different spelling) set fire to the *Normandie*, a French liner being turned into a troop ship. After it burned, the feds, fearing it might have been sabotage, agreed to accept Luciano’s help in securing the New York docks. In return, he was moved to a country club prison for the duration of his sentence. After the war, he was deported to Italy but still remained top dog.

By then Anastasia had taken control of the Mangano family operations, much to the displeasure of longtime rival Vito Genovese. One Mangano brother, Vincent, disappeared; the other, Phil, was killed. Luciano and boss Frank Costello reasoned that the Manganos had been planning to kill Anastasio and so he was merely acting in self-defense. Case closed.
In the mid-1950s the feds went after Anastasia on income tax evasion charges. One trial ended in a hung jury. Before the second trial, one witness and his wife vanished from their blood-soaked Miami home. Another’s body was found in the trunk of a car and a third witness disappeared. Anastasia copped a plea and served one year.

Finally, Anastasia went too far. First, he ordered a hit on a tailor’s assistant who recognized bank robber Willie Sutton and told the cops. When the man was killed, the other bosses were horrified. Civilians who didn’t threaten them in any way were off limits. Sutton was a freelance thief with no mob connections. Anastasia had ordered the killing simply because he didn’t like squealers. A serious breach of mob etiquette.

The capper came when he tried to muscle in on Meyer Lansky’s Cuban gambling operation. Meyer, Luciano’s right-hand man, had a rock solid agreement with Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista. Meyer ran all of the gambling on the island and split the proceeds fifty-fifty. There was no room for Anastasia, but he wouldn’t take “screw off” for an answer.

The next time Genovese wanted to get rid of the Executioner, Meyer agreed.

On October 25, 1957 Anastasia went to the barbershop in the New York Sheraton Park Hotel for a shave. Somehow, his bodyguard was otherwise occupied. When the barber wrapped Anastasia’s face in a hot towel, two masked men slipped in, shoved
the barber aside and opened up. The Mad Hatter went down in the proverbial hail of gunfire.

Because he remained so unrepentantly old-school throughout his long career, Anastasia has always been a secondary character in mob books and movies. He figures more prominently in documentaries.

Anderson, William

“Bloody Bill” Anderson never commanded a force as large as William Quantrill’s, and he didn’t slaughter as many defenseless victims, but, pound for pound, he was just as sadistic and dangerous.

Like Quantrill, before the Civil War Anderson was a thief and murderer. He greeted the outbreak of hostilities in Kansas and Missouri as a career opportunity. He led a band of about 65 cutthroats in attacks on antislavery towns. They also engaged in ambushes against Union troops. For a time, Jesse and Frank James rode with him.

They fought the war on a personal level. In 1863 two of Anderson’s sisters, Mary and Josephine, were rounded up by Union forces. Accused of assisting the Confederates, they were imprisoned with nine other women at a building in Kansas City, Missouri. When the building collapsed on August 13, Josephine was killed and Mary was crippled. Thereafter, Anderson claimed the incident as justification for his crimes.

He and his men were famous for not taking prisoners. They killed everyone they encountered, scalped many of them, and displayed the scalps on their horses’ bridle. Anderson himself was a fearsome figure with a full beard and long tangled hair.

On September 27, 1864 he and his men attacked the town of Centralia, Missouri. They stole everything they wanted, raped, murdered, and burned. When Anderson learned a train was due at noon, he ordered a barricade be erected across the tracks at the depot. The train was forced to stop and Anderson’s men ordered everyone off—including 28 Union soldiers heading for leave in Iowa and northern Missouri. Anderson spared one, Sgt. Thomas M. Goodman, saying he planned to use him in a prisoner exchange for one of his men who had been captured. The rest were shot, scalped, and mutilated. That night, Anderson’s outfit attacked a larger but less experienced Union force that was following them. They killed more than 120 men. A few days later, Sgt. Goodman escaped and told Union forces what had happened.

About a month later, Anderson’s men came up against a more seasoned Union militia unit under the command of veteran Col. Samuel P. Cox. Using Anderson’s own tactics, Cox sent a few of his troops on horseback to engage Bloody Bill. After firing a few shots, the Yankees turned and fled, appearing to be panicked. Anderson ordered his men to mount up and give chase. He led the charge himself, racing in pursuit at full gallop. Straight into a trap.

The bulk of Cox’s force was hidden in a grove of trees. As soon as their fellow soldiers reached them, they opened fire. By then Anderson was close and he was hit. His bullet-riddled body fell from his horse behind the Union lines.

According to one version of the story, the Yankees found a silk cord with 53 knots on Anderson’s body. It was thought to be a count of his personal kills.

Anderson is a minor character in some of the Jesse James films. He also shows up in Clint Eastwood’s The Outlaw Josey Wales (1976). The film is based on a novel by Forrest Carter, the pen name of Asa Carter. In the 1950s and ’60s, Asa Carter was an active racist who wrote speeches for Governor George Wallace.

Annan, Beulah

Today, nobody remembers Beulah Annan, but everybody knows her fictional incarnation Roxie Hart, the heartless but still sexy and somehow lovable killer. To date, Roxie has been seen in two moderately successful Broadway plays, one smash hit revival, two touring shows, and three films, one of them picking up a Best Picture Oscar. Not bad for a gal who plugged her lover in 1926.
Roxie was the creation of Maurine Dallas Watkins. In Jazz Age Chicago, newly liberated women, many of them “flappers,” created a virtual female crime wave. The Cook County jail really did have a “Murderess Row” for these lethal ladies. The Chicago Tribune decided it needed a woman’s perspective on the courts, and so they brought in the young Ms. Watkins. She covered two stories that particularly struck her.

One was Beulah Annan. When her lover Harry Kalstedt told her he was moving on, she shot him. As he lay bleeding on the floor, she spent a few hours listening to her favorite jazz record, “Hula Lou,” and drinking cheap gin before she called her husband Albert, a mechanic, and told him she had killed a burglar. By the time the cops arrived, she was so soused that she told them the truth.

In jail, Beulah met Belva Gaertner, another dame who, a few weeks earlier, had killed her lover. Maurine Watkins had covered that case too and labeled them “the prettiest” and “the most stylish” inmates on Murderess Row. Soon after she was locked up, Beulah and her lawyers came up with the lie that she was pregnant, leading to the famous headline: “Beulah Annan Awaits Stork, Murder Trial.”

Maurine Watkins’ fresh, funny stories about the two, along with all the other newspaper and radio coverage turned them into minor celebrities. Coincidentally, at the same time that the murders and the trials took place, Chicago was also transfixed by the kidnapping and murder of Bobby Franks by Leopold and Loeb. Maurine Watkins covered their trial, too, though her stories were more serious, analyzing the psychology of the two young killers.

Beulah and Belva made dramatically effective courtroom appearances and were acquitted by all-male juries. After the trials, Watkins left Chicago and went to the Yale Drama School where she turned the material into a play, originally called The Brave Little Woman, but soon retitled it Chicago.

Beulah and Belva became Roxie Hart and Velma Kelly. The lawyers morphed into Billy Flynn and Maurine herself became columnist Mary Sunshine. In 1927 the play had a good run on Broadway and was filmed for the first time. The silent version has never been released on home video. The only known print appears to be in the UCLA film archives, and it reportedly sticks close to Watkins’ original story. When it was filmed again in 1942, under the title Roxie Hart, Hollywood was under the strict rules of the Hays Office which forbid anyone portrayed on the silver screen from getting away with a crime. So, Ginger Rogers’ Roxie was innocent.

Maurine Watkins continued to work occasionally in the film business, but her later years were marked by poor health. She also found religion, and came to be ashamed of the bracing gallows humor that drives Chicago. When choreographer Bob Fosse and dancer Gwen Verdon first approached her about transforming the story into a musical in the 1950s, Watkins rebuffed them. Fosse never lost interest and continued to ask. It was only after her death in 1969 that he secured the rights.

Fosse collaborated with songwriters John Kander and Fred Ebb to create the 1975 show. It was a hit, but not as big a hit as another musical that opened about the same time, A Chorus Line. The 1996 revival of Chicago was much more successful and led directly to the 2002 Oscar-winning film. By the mid-‘90s, everyone understood the strong connections between crime and entertainment in American culture, and so the story’s jaundiced appraisal of our justice system found a larger and more appreciative audience.

Arbuckle, Roscoe “Fatty”

Though his name conjures up images of Hollywood decadence and depravity, Roscoe “Fatty” Arbuckle was never convicted of a serious crime. Two juries could not reach a verdict. A third acquitted him and even added a lengthy statement to their verdict calling the comedian “entirely innocent and free from all blame.” Not that it mattered; by then, the damage had been done.

In his day, Arbuckle was one of the silent screen’s most successful stars, right up there with Charlie Chaplin and Harold Lloyd. He invented the pie in