

ENGLISH LEARNING FOR CURIOUS MINDS



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Episode #221

Al Capone

21st Dec, 2021

[00:00:00] Hello, hello hello, and welcome to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English.

[00:00:12] The show where you can listen to fascinating stories, and learn weird and wonderful things about the world at the same time as improving your English.

[00:00:22] I'm Alastair Budge, and today is part two of our four-part mini-series on [gangsters](#)¹ and [robbers](#)².

[00:00:30] In Part One, we talked about The Real Peaky Blinders and the criminals of late 19th century and early 20th century Birmingham, England.

¹ members of an organised group of criminals

² people who steal

Al Capone

[00:00:40] In Part Two, today's episode, we will be talking about Al Capone, the Italian-American [prohibition](#)³ era [gangster](#)⁴ with the nickname of Scarface.

[00:00:51] In Part Three, we'll talk about the [notorious](#)⁵ [gangster](#) and bank [robber](#)⁶ John Dillinger, the man called by the FBI "Public Enemy Number One".

[00:01:02] Then in Part Four we will [zoom over](#)⁷ to London, perhaps not a city that you automatically associate with [gangsters](#) and criminals, and talk about The Kray Twins, a pair of identical twins who [terrorised](#)⁸ the East End of London in the 1950s and 1960s.

[00:01:22] OK then, let's learn about the real story of Al Capone.

[00:01:28] If you were to ask 100 Americans who the first person they'd think of when they heard the word [gangster](#), there's little doubt that the name "Al Capone" would be right at the top of the list.

³ related to the period from 1920 to 1933 when the sale of alcoholic drinks was prohibited in the United States

⁴ a member of an organised group of criminals

⁵ famous for something bad

⁶ a person who steals

⁷ move quickly

⁸ filled with terror

Al Capone

[00:01:42] His name is [synonymous](#)⁹ with organised crime, violence, and corruption, and the [legacy](#)¹⁰ he left behind is a mix of fear and admiration.

[00:01:54] To understand how Al Capone managed to achieve what he did, we must first remind ourselves of what life was like in the US at the turn of the 20th century.

[00:02:07] The American Civil War had ended in 1865.

[00:02:11] Immigrants were arriving [in their droves](#)¹¹ from Europe, with New York as the first stop for almost all of them.

[00:02:20] These immigrants came from all over Europe, but there were particularly large numbers from Ireland and southern Italy, areas of the continent where economic opportunities were not [plentiful](#)¹².

[00:02:34] Gabriele and Teresa Capone were two such people.

[00:02:38] They were Italians who had left their home outside Naples, got on a boat and sailed across the Atlantic, in hope of a better life.

[00:02:47] On arrival in America in 1893, the pronunciation of their surnames would have been Americanised, from Capone to Capone.

⁹ having the same meaning

¹⁰ the things had left behind after he died

¹¹ in large quantities

¹² many

Al Capone

[00:02:59] Gabriele and Teresa settled into American life, living in Brooklyn, New York City.

[00:03:06] Although they were respectable [law-abiding](#)¹³ citizens, life certainly wasn't easy for new Italian immigrants, and they, like the Irish, were treated as [second-class citizens](#)¹⁴.

[00:03:20] They had a large family, with Teresa giving birth to nine children, one of them being the [protagonist](#)¹⁵ of today's story.

[00:03:30] Alphonse Gabriel Capone was born in 1899.

[00:03:35] The Brooklyn he would have been born into was an [unruly](#)¹⁶ one, one of street gangs, [dock](#)¹⁷ workers, prostitution, crime, [gambling](#)¹⁸, and all sorts of [vices](#)¹⁹.

¹³ following or obeying the laws

¹⁴ citizens who are not given the same rights as other people

¹⁵ main character

¹⁶ uncontrolled, lawless or disorderly

¹⁷ the area in a port where goods are loaded or unloaded

¹⁸ playing games of chance for money

¹⁹ criminal activities

Al Capone

[00:03:48] It didn't take Al long to be influenced by his [surroundings](#)²⁰. He joined small street gangs of young boys that were involved in [petty](#)²¹ crime, and he was [expelled](#)²², he was [kicked out](#)²³ of school at 14 years old after hitting a female teacher.

[00:04:07] The world that Capone lived in was an [unfair](#)²⁴ one, and the young Al realised this from early on.

[00:04:15] As the child of Italian immigrants, he was treated as a [second-class citizen](#)²⁵, it was harder for him to [get ahead](#)²⁶ in life than it would be if he wasn't of Italian [heritage](#)²⁷.

[00:04:27] He looked to the Americans making fortunes in business, people like JD Rockefeller who lived in grand houses in New York City, and he wanted the same thing.

[00:04:39] The only problem was that [the cards were stacked against him](#)²⁸.

²⁰ environment, the place where he was living in

²¹ not important, small scale

²² officially made to leave school

²³ officially made to leave school, thrown out

²⁴ not treating people in an equal or fair way, not right

²⁵ a citizen who is not given the same rights as other people

²⁶ become successful

²⁷ origin, descent

²⁸ he wasn't given a fair chance, he was disadvantaged

Al Capone

[00:04:43] It would be very difficult to make his way in the world honestly, given the prejudice against Italian immigrants.

[00:04:52] So, what did Capone do?

[00:04:54] Well, we both know what [route](#)²⁹ he took.

[00:04:58] Shortly after being [kicked out](#) of school he met a man called Johnny Torrio, another Italian immigrant who had become a local [mob](#)³⁰ boss, a local organised crime boss.

[00:05:10] Torrio became a bit of a [mentor](#)³¹ to Capone, and he [showed him the ropes](#)³², he taught him how to run an organised crime business.

[00:05:21] Torrio had shown that a life of crime could look like a semi-respectable business. Torrio seemed like a respectable businessman. He owned [legitimate](#)³³ businesses—nightclubs, bars, and restaurants—but he would operate [illegitimate](#)³⁴ businesses from inside them.

²⁹ way or direction

³⁰ organised crime, mafia

³¹ someone who gave him advice and help

³² showed him how to do things

³³ allowed by law

³⁴ not allowed by law

Al Capone

[00:05:40] From prostitution to [gambling](#), illegal loans, drug dealing, you name it, Torrio was involved with it, and therefore would make money from it.

[00:05:50] But from the outside it looked semi-respectable.

[00:05:54] Torrio recognised Capone's [drive](#)³⁵ and abilities, and introduced Capone to his other business associates, who were [inevitably](#)³⁶ Italian-American [gangsters](#).

[00:06:06] One such man was Frankie Yale, and Capone's first semi-[legitimate](#) job was working as a [bouncer](#)³⁷, a person on the door at a nightclub that Yale worked at.

[00:06:20] Capone was a big man, especially for a southern Italian immigrant in the early 20th century. He was 180cm tall and weighed almost 100kg so he wasn't the sort of person you'd like [to pick a fight](#)³⁸ with.

[00:06:36] When he was working on the door of this nightclub he [allegedly](#)³⁹ shouted out something not particularly nice about the bottom of one of the young ladies visiting the club.

[00:06:48] What he didn't know is that this lady was the sister of another [gangster](#), who, when he heard about Capone insulting his sister's honour, came to find him with a knife

³⁵ desire, ambition

³⁶ certain to be

³⁷ a person on the door at a nightclub

³⁸ start a fight

³⁹ supposedly, according to what was said without giving proof

Al Capone

and made two very large cuts across Capone's cheek, earning him the nickname "Scarface".

[00:07:09] Capone, by the way, reportedly hated this nickname, and hated the scars.

[00:07:16] You almost never see these scars in photos of Capone, because his face is always turned the other way, and when he was asked about the scars he claimed he got them fighting in World War I, which wasn't true as he never served in the war.

[00:07:33] And the nickname that he actually liked?

[00:07:36] "Snorky", which was Italian-American [slang](#)⁴⁰ at the time for someone with nice clothes.

[00:07:43] By the time he had got involved in this criminal underworld, the young Al had also fallen in love, and had a child with his girlfriend, an Irish-Catholic girl two years older than him.

[00:07:56] After she had their child, they married, and it was reportedly a happy marriage despite the life that Capone would go on to lead.

[00:08:06] Shortly after getting married, his [mentor](#) Johnny Torrio offered Capone a job in Chicago, as a [bouncer](#) at a business he was involved in, a business that was actually a [brothel](#)⁴¹, a place where men would go to have sex with prostitutes.

⁴⁰ informal language, spoken by particular groups of people

⁴¹ a place where men would go to have paid sex

Al Capone

[00:08:23] Capone **jumped at**⁴² the opportunity, and in 1919, aged only twenty, moved his wife and young child to Chicago, a city he would forever be associated with.

[00:08:36] Capone worked on the door of the **brothel**, allowing people in and out, but it seems that he was also a frequent customer himself.

[00:08:46] It's thought to be in this brothel where he **contracted**⁴³ syphilis, the sexually transmitted infection.

[00:08:53] Syphilis is now something that is relatively easy to cure, and even when Capone would have first got it it's thought that he could have been cured of it.

[00:09:04] But, he never actually got treatment for it, and it was an infection that **plagued**⁴⁴ him for the rest of his life.

[00:09:12] The **relevance**⁴⁵ of this will become clear later on in our story.

⁴² accepted gladly

⁴³ caught or developed (for a disease)

⁴⁴ caused him worry and difficulty

⁴⁵ relation or connection

Al Capone

[00:09:17] Now, in Chicago opportunities started to [open up](#)⁴⁶ both for Torrio and Capone. Torrio's boss, a Mafia [don](#)⁴⁷ called Big Jim Colosimo, was murdered in May of 1920, and Torrio took his place.

[00:09:35] It's thought that Torrio and Capone could have been involved in his murder, and that Capone might have even arranged for his ex colleague from New York, Frankie Yale, to shoot Colosimo.

[00:09:48] Whether Capone was involved or not, Colosimo being out of the way was very convenient for him.

[00:09:56] Torrio took his place, [inheriting](#)⁴⁸ Colosimo's large [portfolio](#)⁴⁹ of criminal businesses, and Capone, as Torrio's right hand man, was now in an incredibly powerful position.

[00:10:10] There was something else that had happened at the start of 1920 though that was to prove to be even more important for the story of Al Capone, and this was actually nothing to do with murders or [gangsters](#), but actually to do with a change in the law.

⁴⁶ appear

⁴⁷ high-ranking member of the Mafia

⁴⁸ receiving something from him after he had died

⁴⁹ range, variety

[00:10:28] On January 17th 1920 the US government passed the Volstead Act, which banned the production, importation, transportation and sale of alcohol. This period, known as the Prohibition Era, went on from 1920 to 1933.

[00:10:49] The idea behind it was to reduce crime and corruption, solve the problems that had [plagued](#) American society and to improve the health of the American population.

[00:11:01] Certainly in terms of reducing crime and corruption, it was not successful, and suddenly there was a huge opportunity for organised criminals to control the production and sale of alcohol.

[00:11:16] Given that Torrio and Capone controlled large parts of the Chicago [underworld](#)⁵⁰ through their businesses, bars, clubs, and brothels, they were in a unique position to sell and distribute alcohol, making [vast](#)⁵¹ profits in the process.

[00:11:33] Business was good, and Torrio and Capone started to grow rich, but they were not the only crime gang in town.

⁵⁰ world of criminals

⁵¹ extremely big

Al Capone

[00:11:41] There were [feuds](#)⁵² with other Chicago crime gangs, both Italian and Irish, and after several attempts on his life, Torrio decided that he [wanted out](#)⁵³ of the world of crime, he wanted to retire.

[00:11:56] He didn't quite manage to retire completely from the criminal world, and he later spent some time in prison, but he left Chicago in late 1925, moving back to Italy to be with his wife and mother, and removing himself from the dangers of the Chicago criminal [underworld](#).

[00:12:15] He knew that Capone would be able to [handle](#)⁵⁴ it, and reportedly said to him "It's all yours, Al. Me? I'm quitting. It's Europe for me".

[00:12:26] The 26-year-old Capone was [handed the reins](#)⁵⁵ to a criminal empire, a huge business that made around \$70 million dollars a year in 1926, which is the equivalent of over a billion dollars a year in today's money.

[00:12:43] This business empire was wide and [vast](#).

⁵² states of hostility or fighting that lasted for a long time

⁵³ wished to leave this life behind

⁵⁴ deal with, manage

⁵⁵ given the leadership

Al Capone

[00:12:47] It involved prostitution, illegal alcohol production, [smuggling](#)⁵⁶ and sales, [gambling](#), [extortion](#)⁵⁷, protection, [racketeering](#)⁵⁸, and drugs.

[00:12:58] To allow all of this to happen without [interference](#)⁵⁹ from the authorities, Capone and his associates would [threaten](#)⁶⁰ and [bribe](#)⁶¹ local officials, politicians, judges and police officers, they would influence elections, they controlled vast amounts of how the city was actually administered.

[00:13:19] Capone didn't do much to try to hide what [he was up to](#)⁶².

[00:13:24] While other criminals [shunned the spotlight](#)⁶³, they tried to hide from attention, Capone actively [sought](#)⁶⁴ it, he looked for it. He had his own press agent, he arranged interviews, he wanted to be photographed, he wanted to be known.

⁵⁶ illegally moving goods into and out of a country

⁵⁷ getting money by force or threats

⁵⁸ making money from illegal activities

⁵⁹ involvement, disruption

⁶⁰ tell them that they would hurt them if they didn't do what they wanted

⁶¹ give them money in order to make them do things for him

⁶² he was doing

⁶³ tried to hide from attention

⁶⁴ looked for

Al Capone

[00:13:41] He wasn't embarrassed [in the slightest](#)⁶⁵ of how he made money, saying "I'm like any man - I supply a demand".

[00:13:49] He wanted to be thought of as a businessman and [philanthropist](#)⁶⁶, someone who gave back to the community.

[00:13:57] He financed soup kitchens for the unemployed during the Great Depression, and wanted to be known as someone who supported the poor.

[00:14:06] Capone certainly did arrange for soup kitchens for the Chicago poor, but there are now question marks about whether he actually paid for this himself - it's believed by some historians that he would have [extorted](#)⁶⁷ local restaurants into providing the ingredients, so despite making literally hundreds of millions of dollars a year, he might not even have paid a cent towards these himself.

[00:14:32] He was also a [ruthless](#)⁶⁸ killer.

[00:14:35] Although he was never convicted of any murders or violent crimes himself, it's believed that he wasn't afraid [to roll up his sleeves](#)⁶⁹ and kill people himself, and he certainly arranged for the murders of hundreds more.

⁶⁵ at all

⁶⁶ someone who promotes human welfare, who helps other people

⁶⁷ made them do it by force or threats

⁶⁸ having no pity or compassion, cruel

⁶⁹ to get ready to do something difficult or intense

Al Capone

[00:14:50] And it was one particular murder, or mass-murder really, that changed things for Al Capone.

[00:14:58] Capone was in control of the South Side of Chicago, but the [lucrative](#)⁷⁰ North Side was controlled by another gang, ran by a man called Bugs Moran.

[00:15:09] There had been an [ongoing](#)⁷¹ [feud](#)⁷² between Capone and Moran for several years. They were both involved in the selling of [bootlegged](#)⁷³ alcohol, illegal alcohol, and they hated each other.

[00:15:23] In February of 1929, Capone had a plan to [get rid of](#)⁷⁴ his [rival](#)⁷⁵ for good.

[00:15:30] He had arranged for a contact to offer Moran a [truckload](#)⁷⁶ of illegal whisky at a very low price.

[00:15:38] Moran accepted, and ordered for it to be delivered to a warehouse on February 14th, Valentine's Day.

⁷⁰ producing a lot of money

⁷¹ continuing to exist

⁷² a state of hostility or fighting that lasted for a long time

⁷³ illegal

⁷⁴ do away with, be free of

⁷⁵ the person he was in competition with

⁷⁶ an amount of goods that can be transported in a truck

Al Capone

[00:15:46] When the whisky arrived, men dressed as police officers **burst**⁷⁷ onto the scene, **lining up**⁷⁸ Moran's men against the wall, telling them that they were being arrested.

[00:15:58] But they weren't police officers, they were Capone's guys.

[00:16:02] They pointed their machine guns at Moran's men and fired, killing six of Moran's men immediately, and one would later die of his wounds.

[00:16:13] **Crucially**⁷⁹ though, Moran wasn't there. He had decided to sleep in that morning.

[00:16:19] Moran was furious, blaming the killing on Capone.

[00:16:23] He even broke the **unwritten**⁸⁰ criminal code of never speaking to the police, and told them it was Capone who did it.

⁷⁷ appeared quickly and suddenly

⁷⁸ arranging in a straight line or row

⁷⁹ in a way which was very important

⁸⁰ generally accepted even though not formally written

Al Capone

[00:16:32] Capone, of course, denied it, but now public opinion was turning against him - there was little doubt that Capone had [ordered](#)⁸¹ the [hit](#)⁸², which by this time had been given the name “The Valentine’s Day Massacre”.

[00:16:47] This was one step too far. It was one thing making some money through prostitution and [gambling](#), but [lining 7 people up](#)⁸³ against the wall and murdering them in cold blood, with their pictures [plastered](#)⁸⁴ all over the Chicago newspapers?

[00:17:04] Capone was called to court to [testify](#)⁸⁵, but he said he was in Florida suffering from pneumonia and couldn’t get out of bed.

[00:17:13] He was in Florida, that was true, and indeed nobody thought that Capone would have [pulled the trigger](#)⁸⁶ himself.

[00:17:20] But he certainly didn’t seem ill - he had been [spotted](#)⁸⁷ at a race track and even out in the Bahamas.

⁸¹ instructed, commanded

⁸² attack

⁸³ arranging 7 people in a straight line or row

⁸⁴ shown or displayed widely

⁸⁵ speak officially about it in court

⁸⁶ shot them

⁸⁷ seen

Al Capone

[00:17:29] Eventually the authorities did manage to get him to return to Chicago, which he did on March 20th of 1929, just over a month after The Valentine's Day Massacre.

[00:17:41] The police weren't able to charge him with involvement in the massacre, as he denied it and they couldn't find anyone who would [testify](#) that he had anything to do with it, but they did manage to convict him of "contempt of court", the crime of not appearing in front of a courtroom when asked to.

[00:18:01] The maximum punishment for this was a year and a \$1,000 fine, but Capone didn't serve a day in prison, not for this crime at least.

[00:18:11] Instead, he was arrested a couple of months later, in May of 1929, for carrying a pistol. Capone was given a one year sentence, but only served nine months of it.

[00:18:23] While in prison he lived a [luxurious](#)⁸⁸ life.

[00:18:27] He was still in control of the gang from prison, and his associates made sure that the prison guards were sufficiently [compensated](#)⁸⁹, that they were paid enough money, for Capone to have anything he wanted in his prison cell.

[00:18:43] When he got out of prison, in March of 1930, he found that the [tide had turned](#)⁹⁰, that public opinion was not on his side.

⁸⁸ comfortable and expensive

⁸⁹ paid in exchange for their services

⁹⁰ things had changed

Al Capone

[00:18:53] What's more, the FBI, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, knew exactly who he was and what he was doing. They knew that he was going to return to exactly what he had been doing all of his life, they just needed to find a crime that they could charge him with.

[00:19:10] He was [listed⁹¹](#) as "Public Enemy Number One", literally the biggest enemy of the people in the entire country.

[00:19:19] The country was also in the middle of the greatest economic crisis in its short history. People were suffering, and for all Capone's reportedly [philanthropic⁹²](#) activities, after the Valentine's Day Massacre a light had truly been shone on the kind of person he really was.

[00:19:37] If the authorities couldn't get him on any of the violent criminal charges that they knew he was certainly guilty of, there was another way they thought they could take him off the streets: financial crime.

[00:19:51] Al Capone didn't try to hide his wealth at all.

[00:19:54] Quite the opposite - he [flaunted⁹³](#) it, he showed it to the world.

⁹¹ included in the list of criminals

⁹² relating to helping poor people

⁹³ showed or displayed

Al Capone

[00:19:59] He wore a \$50,000 diamond ring on his little finger, on his [pinkie⁹⁴](#), he wore suits that would cost today's equivalent of tens of thousands of dollars, he would travel everywhere in a [custom-built⁹⁵ armoured⁹⁶](#) Cadillac, he would [spare no expense⁹⁷](#).

[00:20:17] But where did this money come from, at least what did he tell the tax authorities?

[00:20:24] Well, he said he was a businessman [engaged⁹⁸](#) in a variety of small businesses, including being a used furniture dealer.

[00:20:32] The problem was that Capone's reported income, the money that he told the government he had made on his tax returns, was tiny compared to how much he was clearly spending.

[00:20:46] And he was arrested in June 1931 on charges of tax evasion, of failing to pay the required taxes.

[00:20:56] After a [lengthy⁹⁹](#) trial, in October of 1931 Capone was convicted of tax evasion and sentenced to 11 years in prison, the longest sentence ever for tax evasion.

⁹⁴ the little finger

⁹⁵ made especially according to his wishes

⁹⁶ having a protective covering

⁹⁷ pay any amount of money in order to do what he wanted

⁹⁸ involved

⁹⁹ continuing for a long time

Al Capone

[00:21:10] He was initially sent to a state prison in Atlanta, but his men had managed to [bribe](#) guards so that Capone lived a pretty [privileged](#)¹⁰⁰ life in prison.

[00:21:21] Three years later, [in a bid to](#)¹⁰¹ properly [punish](#)¹⁰² Capone and show the country that crime didn't pay, he was transferred to a new, high-security prison on a rocky island in the bay of San Francisco: Alcatraz.

[00:21:37] The prison at Alcatraz had previously been a military prison, but was converted to a federal prison, a prison for civilians, in the early 1930s. When it opened in August 1934, it welcomed some of the country's most dangerous and [highest-profile](#)¹⁰³ criminals.

[00:21:57] Bank robbers, [gangsters](#), murderers.

[00:22:00] And Al Capone was one of its first [inmates](#)¹⁰⁴.

[00:22:04] Now, the life of Al Capone after he arrived at Alcatraz was sad and certainly not glorious.

[00:22:11] His syphilis, which remember he had [contracted](#) while working at a brothel after first moving to Chicago with his wife and young child, his syphilis was getting

¹⁰⁰ having advantages

¹⁰¹ in an attempt or try to

¹⁰² make him pay

¹⁰³ most well-known

¹⁰⁴ people who are kept in prison

Al Capone

worse, and had [progressed](#)¹⁰⁵ to something called neurosyphilis, where the infection affects your mental capacities.

[00:22:31] Syphilis, if left [untreated](#)¹⁰⁶, permanently [rots](#)¹⁰⁷ and damages your brain.

[00:22:37] His last years at Alcatraz were spent in the prison hospital, and by the time he was released, which was in November of 1939, doctors reported that he had the mental capabilities of a 12-year-old child.

[00:22:52] After being released, he spent the rest of his life at his [mansion](#)¹⁰⁸ in Florida, before dying of complications from a [stroke](#)¹⁰⁹ in 1947.

[00:23:02] Now, after Capone had been put in prison, the Chicago gang he had been the boss of was thrown into [disarray](#)¹¹⁰. There was no immediate big boss to take his place, unlike when Johnny Torrio had taken the place of Big Jim Colosimo or when Al Capone had taken the place of Johnny Torrio.

[00:23:22] Organised crime certainly didn't go away, but without Capone at the top it became less violent.

¹⁰⁵ developed

¹⁰⁶ without medical care

¹⁰⁷ brings it in a worse state, makes it start to fail

¹⁰⁸ a very large, expensive house

¹⁰⁹ sudden loss of brain function caused by a change in the blood supply to the brain

¹¹⁰ chaos, confusion or disorder

Al Capone

[00:23:30] What's more, the Prohibition era ended in 1933, and that put a large [dent](#)¹¹¹ in the business model of the gang.

[00:23:39] Now, when it comes to the legacy of Al Capone, he is probably the most famous [gangster](#) in American history.

[00:23:47] He was a [larger than life character](#)¹¹², a man who knew what he wanted and how to get it, and a man who seemed to like the idea of being seen as having achieved The American Dream, of having gone from nothing to being one of the richest men in the country.

[00:24:05] But he was, of course, like everyone else in this mini-series, a violent murderer.

[00:24:11] There are terrible stories of him [brutally](#)¹¹³ murdering rivals with baseball bats, or arranging for [hideous](#)¹¹⁴ assassinations, and he was no doubt responsible directly and indirectly for the deaths of dozens if not hundreds of people.

¹¹¹ a noticeable negative effect

¹¹² very impressive, attracting special attention

¹¹³ violently and without feelings

¹¹⁴ extremely bad

Al Capone

[00:24:26] And for all of the stories that he put out about him being a generous [philanthropist](#), it appears that these were also complete lies, and he had threatened hardworking shopkeepers and restaurant owners to [go into their own pockets](#)¹¹⁵.

[00:24:42] He might have claimed to have just been a businessman, giving the people what they wanted.

[00:24:47] But it's hard to contest that there have been few people more deserving than Alphonse Gabriel Capone of the title of "Public Enemy Number One".

[00:24:58] OK then, that is it for today's episode on Al Capone.

[00:25:03] As a reminder, this is part two of our four-part mini-series on famous [gangsters](#). Part one was on the Real Peaky Blinders, the street-gang that terrorised Birmingham in the late 20th century.

[00:25:16] Next up will be the [infamous](#)¹¹⁶ bank robber John Dillinger, and after that we'll be looking at two identical twins who [terrorised](#) the East End of London in the 1960s, Ronnie and Reggie Kray.

[00:25:29] As always, I would love to know what you thought of this episode.

[00:25:33] Did you know much about the life of Al Capone before this?

¹¹⁵ take the money for himself

¹¹⁶ famous for something bad

[00:25:37] Why do you think we look back on these kinds of criminals and often forget many of their most terrible crimes?

[00:25:44] I would love to know.

[00:25:45] You can head right into our community forum, which is at community.leonardoenglish.com and get chatting away to other curious minds.

[00:25:54] You've been listening to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English.

[00:25:59] I'm Alastair Budge, you stay safe, and I'll catch you in the next episode.

[END OF EPISODE]

Key vocabulary

Word	Definition
Gangsters	members of an organised group of criminals
Robbers	people who steal
Prohibition	related to the period from 1920 to 1933 when the sale of alcoholic drinks was prohibited in the United States
Gangster	a member of an organised group of criminals
Notorious	famous for something bad
Robber	a person who steals
Zoom over	move quickly
Terrorised	filled with terror
Synonymous	having the same meaning
Legacy	the things had left behind after he died
In their droves	in large quantities
Plentiful	many

Al Capone

Law-abiding	following or obeying the laws
Second-class citizens	citizens who are not given the same rights as other people
Protagonist	main character
Unruly	uncontrolled, lawless or disorderly
Dock	the area in a port where goods are loaded or unloaded
Gambling	playing games of chance for money
Vices	criminal activities
Surroundings	environment, the place where he was living in
Petty	not important, small scale
Expelled	officially made to leave school
Kicked out	officially made to leave school, thrown out
Unfair	not treating people in an equal or fair way, not right
Second-class citizen	a citizen who is not given the same rights as other people
Get ahead	become successful
Heritage	origin, descent

Al Capone

The cards were stacked against him	he wasn't given a fair chance, he was disadvantaged
Route	way or direction
Mob	organised crime, mafia
Mentor	someone who gave him advice and help
Showed him the ropes	showed him how to do things
Legitimate	allowed by law
Illegitimate	not allowed by law
Drive	desire, ambition
Inevitably	certain to be
Bouncer	a person on the door at a nightclub
To pick a fight	start a fight
Allegedly	supposedly, according to what was said without giving proof
Slang	informal language, spoken by particular groups of people
Brothel	a place where men would go to have paid sex

Al Capone

Jumped at	accepted gladly
Contracted	caught or developed (for a disease)
Plagued	caused him worry and difficulty
Relevance	relation or connection
Open up	appear
Don	high-ranking member of the Mafia
Inheriting	receiving something from him after he had died
Portfolio	range, variety
Underworld	world of criminals
Vast	extremely big
Feuds	states of hostility or fighting that lasted for a long time
Wanted out	wished to leave this life behind
Handle	deal with, manage
Handed the reins	given the leadership
Smuggling	illegally moving goods into and out of a country

Al Capone

Extortion	getting money by force or threats
Racketeering	making money from illegal activities
Interference	involvement, disruption
Threaten	tell them that they would hurt them if they didn't do what they wanted
Bribe	give them money in order to make them do things for him
He was up to	he was doing
Shunned the spotlight	tried to hide from attention
Sought	looked for
In the slightest	at all
Philanthropist	someone who promotes human welfare, who helps other people
Extorted	made them do it by force or threats
Ruthless	having no pity or compassion, cruel
To roll up his sleeves	to get ready to do something difficult or intense
Lucrative	producing a lot of money
Ongoing	continuing to exist

Al Capone

Feud	a state of hostility or fighting that lasted for a long time
Bootlegged	illegal
Get rid of	do away with, be free of
Rival	the person he was in competition with
Truckload	an amount of goods that can be transported in a truck
Burst	appeared quickly and suddenly
Lining up	arranging in a straight line or row
Crucially	in a way which was very important
Unwritten	generally accepted even though not formally written
Ordered	instructed, commanded
Hit	attack
Lining 7 people up	arranging 7 people in a straight line or row
Plastered	shown or displayed widely
Testify	speak officially about it in court
Pulled the trigger	shot them

Al Capone

Spotted	seen
Luxurious	comfortable and expensive
Compensated	paid in exchange for their services
Tide had turned	things had changed
Listed	included in the list of criminals
Philanthropic	relating to helping poor people
Flaunted	showed or displayed
Pinkie	the little finger
Custom-built	made especially according to his wishes
Armoured	having a protective covering
Spare no expense	pay any amount of money in order to do what he wanted
Engaged	involved
Lengthy	continuing for a long time
Privileged	having advantages
In a bid to	in an attempt or try to

Al Capone

Punish	make him pay
Highest-profile	most well-known
Inmates	people who are kept in prison
Progressed	developed
Untreated	without medical care
Rots	brings it in a worse state, makes it start to fail
Mansion	a very large, expensive house
Stroke	sudden loss of brain function caused by a change in the blood supply to the brain
Disarray	chaos, confusion or disorder
Dent	a noticeable negative effect
Larger than life character	very impressive, attracting special attention
Brutally	violently and without feelings
Hideous	extremely bad
Go into their own	take the money for himself

pockets

Infamous

famous for something bad

We'd love to get your feedback on this episode.

What did you like? What could we do better?

What did you struggle to understand?

Let us know in the forum community.leonardoenglish.com