

John dillinger: a biography



John Dillinger was one of the Midwest and our nations most elusive and notorious bank robbers. Many thought of Dillinger as a modern day Robin Hood that stole from the very institutions that were foreclosing on broken farmers. (Life, 2003). The truth is that John Dillinger was a career criminal that led a life of crime that started with Deviance in his youth. Some described his behavior as just kids being kids, but in Dillinger's case this was just the beginning.

John Herbert Dillinger was born June 22, 1903 in Indianapolis, Indiana to John Wilson Dillinger and Mary Ellen Lancaster. He was the younger of the two children from his father's first marriage. John Jr was best described as a well behaved child leading up to his mother's death when he was just four years old. This was a difficult time for young Dillinger and alloted for him to take in at a young age. John's older sister took on the responsibilities of the mother figure in the house hold while his father ran his grocery business, but this lasted only a year when his sister moved out and John was left with only his father. (Materra, 1955).

In 1912, John Dillinger's Grandfather Mathias passed away and his father met John's stepmother at the funeral. When John was nine years old his father remarried and John was left to adjust yet again to another change in his environment. (Materra, 1955).

As Dillinger got older he was involved in more and more deviant behavior that started as pranks and escalated to juvenile court. He was best described by his peers as a bully and a juvenile delinquent that frequently defied authority. (Materra, 1955).

By the time that Dillinger was in the sixth grade he was the leader of a neighborhood gang called The Dirty Dozen. This was composed of numerous children from the neighborhood in which Dillinger grew up, but only a select few participated in the theft of coal from the rail yards in Indianapolis.

Dillinger and some of the more prominent members of the gang managed to steal tons of coal and sold it to neighbors at a discounted price, until a railroad detective caught members of the gang that told on Dillinger. This would be Dillinger's first encounter with the law that brought him to juvenile court. (Toland, 1963).

This could have been said to be the first step in Dillinger's criminal career. These were early signs that Dillinger was on his way to a life of crime. The earliest sign was obvious when he was labeled as the ring leader of a gang in the sixth grade that was found guilty of coal theft. No one could have predicted that Dillinger would go on to capture the attention of the nation and make history as one of the nations most notorious outlaws. The public both feared and idolized Dillinger. Some called him a Tommy gun wonder that was swift and gracious in his robberies.

When John was twenty he committed his first major crime that put him in the Indiana state prison for ten to twenty years. In the 1920's leading up to his arrest his father decided to sell his grocery store and move to the country and take up farming in Mooresville, Indiana. His father hoped that John would take up farming, but Dillinger was not partial to the country life having been raised in the city. Dillinger never held steady work having dropped out of school he did odd jobs and helped on the family farm. At twenty John stole a car, and to avoid prosecution Dillinger fled and joined the Navy. His days in

the Navy lasted only 5 months before he deserted. He then returned home and married a young bride that was sixteen years old. (Girardin and Helmer, 1994).

When Dillinger was married it was about the same time that he met Ed Singleton on a local baseball team that they both belonged to. Singleton, who was an ex convict presented the idea of robbing the local grocer to Dillinger. The local grocer Frank Morgan was to be Dillinger's first victim in an armed robbery. Morgan just happened to be a very good friend of Dillinger's father. Dillinger attacked him on the street with a bolt wrapped in a handkerchief. After struggling with Morgan John pulled a gun and fired it in the air, he then fled out of fear. Weeks later the local sheriff figured things out and brought Morgan out to the Dillinger farm to identify John Jr. Dillinger's father was assured that the court would be lenient if he confessed and plead guilty to assault and armed robbery, so Dillinger admitted to committing the crime. When his day came in court there was no leniency and he was sentenced to fifteen to twenty years in the state prison. After 5 years Dillinger's wife asked for a divorce and this added to his bitterness and caused him to request to be transferred to the Michigan City State penitentiary where he would be schooled by hardened criminals on how to carry out a successful bank robbery. (Materra, 1955).

Nothing could explain how John Dillinger learned to become a professional bank robber than the hard time that he had served at Michigan City with other notorious criminals. Michigan City state penitentiary was the turning point that changed John Dillinger's course in life to a criminal career.

From John Dillinger's progression from his childhood of deviance and minor criminal activities such as stealing coal and leading a local gang of kids he progressed into the first criminal in history to be known as public enemy #1. (Girardin and Helmer, 1994). The robbery of his local grocer and family friend that put him in prison for ten to twenty years could be observed as the turning point that made Dillinger into a career criminal. In his time at Michigan City he took to education on how to rob banks. Before meeting his tutors he managed to gain quite a reputation in prison. In letters that he wrote his wife in the first ninety days read things such as I'll be home for Christmas... (Materra, 1955). In the first ninety days John Dillinger managed to receive another six months added onto his sentence due to two attempted prison breaks. In 1929 John was up for a parole hearing that quickly was turned down due to the size of John's file. After being denied parole he merely shrugged it off and requested a transfer to Michigan City state penitentiary, according to John because they had a better ball team. At twenty six years old Dillinger was about to embark on his criminal education. (Toland, 1963).

When Dillinger arrived at Michigan City he was given a job manufacturing clothes where he met his three mentors; Harry Pierpont, Charles Makley, Russell Clark, and Jack Hamilton. All three had been convicted of bank robbery and were more than willing to share their plans and expertise with Dillinger. This gang didn't only share their expertise they shared a list of banks with the weakest security in the Midwest. (Materra, 1955).

In 1933 Dillinger was facing yet another parole hearing. By this time Dillinger got smart and discontinued getting in trouble for petty offenses and focused

on the possibility of being released. This time Dillinger was successful in being released receiving two out of the three votes for parole. (Repetto, 2004) John returned home to Mooresville not to be greeted joyfully, but with the grief that his stepmother had passed away. (Materra, 1955).

It wasn't long after Dillinger was released that he went right back to his old ways that gave him 10 years. In late may of 1933 Dillinger teamed up with Noble Claycomb and nineteen year old William Shaw. The trio planned out a job and carried out the first criminal act that John Dillinger had committed since his release. The trio entered a grocery store and made off with \$100 in bills after Dillinger assaulted the store manager with the barrel of his hand gun knocking out his teeth. The very next day Dillinger kept his meeting with his parole officer lying to him and stating that he was seeking employment and helping his father on the farm. (Materra, 1955).

It wasn't long after that Dillinger embarked on another criminal adventure with William Shaw also known as The Kid and Paul Parker. The three headed out for Indianapolis where they carried out the robberies of a drug store and a Kroger grocery store. Dillinger and Paul Parker scouted some banks that were on the easy jug list, but they had been hit by a much stronger force already. The Great Depression had taken its toll on many banks of the time causing them to go out of business. (Materra, 1955)

After a number of robberies Shaw was captured leaving Dillinger with only one other member of what was known as the White Cap gang. After Shaw and the rest of the gang where captured by police Dillinger and their wheel man Copeland decided to carry out the planned bank robbery in Daleville

Indiana. Dillinger entered the bank alone and a six-foot cage separated Dillinger from the clerk. In a daring leap Dillinger cleared the top of the wall and ordered the clerk to open the second cage and she did. This leap earned John the famous nickname of Jackrabbit. Dillinger managed to go into the vault and score diamond rings that were in safe keeping and handfuls of cash. Shortly after this successful hoist police cornered Shaw in a cell forcing information out of him until he finally gave up the others in the gang. This was the end of Dillinger's first serious gang, but other plans were in the making. Dillinger was back in the recruiting process looking to aspire to bigger takes.(Toland, 1963)

Dillinger's successful robbery in Daleville Dubbed the Jackrabbit job was quickly linked to Dillinger by authorities, and wanted posters were printed out and dispersed throughout the state. This was the start of Dillinger's fame.(Toland, 1963).

Dillinger carried out a number of robberies through out Indiana and was captured in Dayton Ohio where john was visiting his girlfriend at the time. Dillinger was taken to the local jail where he was booked and held for trial. While Dillinger was in jail, his mentors where in the process of escaping from prison with weapons that Dillinger had smuggled in for them. After breaking out they returned the favor by getting Dillinger out of jail. This marked the start of Dillinger's famous fourteen month career. (Materra, 1955).

After the gang was reunited they choose to hit a near by town police station and rob them of their guns and ammunition. For fourteen months these criminals terrorized the nation's banks as just bank robbers. On January 15th

Dillinger and gang decided to rob the First National Bank of Chicago where things took a twist for Dillinger. This was the day that Dillinger went from a bank robber to a cop killer. When the gang entered the bank the president hit the silent alarm button that was connected directly to the police station a block and a half away. When the officers arrived they found themselves staring down the barrel of Dillinger's Tommy gun and quickly retreated out of the bank. One heroic officer tried to take Dillinger down with four shots from his .38 caliber service revolver that all struck Dillinger in the chest. Disoriented Dillinger regained balance and returned fire with his Tommy gun sending eight bullets into the officer's body killing him instantly. (Materra, 1955).

Dillinger was now known across the United States as not just a bank robber but also a murderer. As Dillinger fired short bursts from his .45 caliber Tommy gun he pulled his wounded associate into the get away car as police fired a barrage of bullets in their direction. (Toland, 1963).

With Dillinger's fame growing he was growing less popular with the director of the FBI, J. Edgar Hoover and other authorities that he managed to humiliate. After Dillinger and his gang made their get away they all choose to leave the Midwest for a new area. Soon the gang was in Tucson Arizona and up to no good. They wound up drawing alot of attention to themselves by authorities and locals wherever they went with their flashy cars and jewelry. The fall of the gangs bloody reign of terror was the clever work of the Tucson police department who managed to do what the FBI and police departments in the Midwest failed to do time and time again. Without even firing a shot the Tucson police department managed to trick the gang into a

<https://assignbuster.com/john-dillinger-a-biography/>

trap that put them all in jail and seized more than \$27, 000 in cash, and a large stash of guns and ammunition. This made the police in the Midwest look even more incompetent. Dillinger was sent back to Indiana where he was to face trial for murder and multiple counts of robbery and assault. While in jail Dillinger managed to craft a gun out of a piece of wood and used it to spring himself to freedom after putting his captures into the very cell in which he was in. (Materra, 1955).

When Dillinger fled from the Jail he stole the sheriff's car and drove into Illinois. When he crossed state lines he violated a federal law and now Hoover had all the authority he needed to launch the nation's largest man hunt in U. S. History. The man hunt leads authorities to the far northern town of Mercer in Wisconsin where the Dillinger gang was hiding out at a lodge. The lodge named Little Bohemia became the sight of yet another humiliation for Hoover and his G-Men when they did not manage to capture Dillinger. After this the heat was on for John and he returned to Chicago and went into Hiding. He changed his appearance and was hiding out with a call girl named Anna Sage.

Anna Sage led to Dillinger's fall when she contacted the FBI and told them where he was going to be. Her plan was to avoid deportation by cooperating with authorities. She lead authorities to an air conditioned theater in Chicago where she viewed a movie with Dillinger. She told authorities to look for a lady in a red dress. When they exited the theater the FBI was waiting outside. As Dillinger walked down the side walk he heard some one call his name and he ran down the alley way. As Dillinger ran he was followed by a barrage of bullets that killed him instantly. This was the end of Dillinger's life, <https://assignbuster.com/john-dillinger-a-biography/>

but the beginning of a legend and many myths about his life. (Girardin and Helmer, 1994).

Dillinger will always be remembered in the history books as the first bank robber to challenge authority and rob police stations. He may have been gunned down in that Chicago alley, but his legend will live on throughout the Midwest. Dillinger was the first and last of his kind. His style has never been duplicated and never will be. Many legends of Dillinger still live today. There is still a legend of a lost hoard of cash that only Dillinger knew the location of in northern Wisconsin and many other myths of his notorious career. No one knows if there is any truth to these myths, but there is truth in his actions and his crimes. (Toland, 1963)

John Dillinger's life was proof that the system and its prisons act as universities for criminals. The question remains whether Dillinger's path would have been different had he never gone to Michigan City. His life was an early indication that our prison systems needed to implement correctional programs rather than giving them an education to more criminal activities. Dillinger is one example product of the system, since his time there have been many that go in the system and come out worse off than before entering it.

References

Girardin R. and Helmer W. 2005. Dillinger: The Untold Story. Copyright 2005

William J. Helmer

Matera, D. 2004. John Dillinger: The Life and Death of the First Celebrity Criminal. Carroll and Graf 2004.

<https://assignbuster.com/john-dillinger-a-biography/>

Toland, J. 1963. *The Dillinger Days*. De Capro Press Edition 1995. Copyright John Toland 1963.

Repetto, T. 2004. *American Mafia*. Henry Holt and Co. New York, New York. 2004.