

Who was eliot ness?
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accomplishments in Cleveland when he went up against Al Capone. Most also know Capone eventually went to jail for tax evasion, but what happened to Ness and his Untouchables? Did they merely fade away into quiet life? The fate of Ness was quite the opposite, he continued doing what he fell in love with. Taking down corruption on any level. He carried on his war on the mob for an entire decade after Capone, staging daring raids on bootleggers, illegal gambling clubs and generally putting organized crime on the run. Ness exploits in Chicago were chronicled in his book *The Untouchables*, but if he had carried on against the mob, why wouldn't he publicize such exploits? He actually intended to do so but his life was cut short by a heart attack before he was able. Eliot Ness was born on April 19, 1903 in Chicago. He was a lucky boy born into an almost storybook type of American family. His parents, Peter and Emma Ness, were Norwegian immigrants who had earned a comfortable middle class life for their family by very hard work and practical living. Over the years, Peter had made his wholesale bakery into a thriving business. It is supposed that Ness gained his father's work-aholic traits that drove him so hard later in life. Eliot was the youngest of the five Ness children. There was a huge age difference between Eliot and his siblings. His brother whom was closest to Eliot in age was none the less thirteen years older. Hence Eliot received a great deal of individual attention from his parents who were well into middle age when he was born. Due to this Eliot was a remarkable well-behaved boy, full of integrity and enthusiasm. Eliot was an excellent student who preferred his studies to rowdier activities. It is supposed that Eliot's older brother in law fueled his need for adventure, which eventually drove him to civic duty.

Young Eliot Ness attended the University of Chicago and earned a degree in business and law. When he graduated in 1925 he greatly upset those he loved by choosing a career in credit investigation rather than his planned path of business. During his short lived credit investigator career he studied criminology at night. Two years later Ness managed to be transferred to the Prohibition Bureau with some help from his brother in law. Here the staggering level of corruption stunned him in his office. In his book he writes that he may have expected this fact were it not for his walk home one night. He was with his partner at the time and by some trick of fate they passed none other than Al Capone on the street. To his amazement his partner tipped his hat and all but bowed as they passed.

By late 1928 Al Capone was the most flamboyant and successful criminals in the United States. His power was arguably unmatched by any criminal to date. Capone's

influence was so amazingly strong that Frank Loesch, the president of the Chicago Crime Commission literally had to ask Capone's help in securing an honest election in Cook County. Considering the level of corruption spread from mere patrolmen all the way up to the Illinois Governor, Loesch was forced to turn to the most powerful man in the city. In the spring Republican primary earlier that year candidates and party members were openly murdered and voters scared away. Hence Loesch needed Capone to prevent violence. Loesch later admitted " It turned out to be the squarest and most successful election day in forty years. There was not one complaint, not one election fraud and no threat of trouble all day."

In order to take down Capone it was surmised that a special team would be installed, but who should be on this team? Corruption was rampant in the prohibition bureau at the time and honest men were few and far between. Once again with some help from his brother in law Ness was recognized for his integrity and granted the task of assembling and leading a team to go directly after Al Capone's breweries and other illegal operations. In Ness's book he estimates that Capone had at least twenty breweries in operation, each producing at least a hundred barrels a day. Ness was given records of the entire US prohibition bureau, from which to assemble his small team. Above all he demanded honesty and integrity, hoping to keep his crusade secure from inside leaks.

“ I ticked off the general qualities I desired: single, no older than thirty, both the mental and physical stamina to work long hours and the courage and ability to use fist or gun and special investigative techniques. I needed a good telephone man, one who could tap a wire with speed and precision. I needed men who were excellent drivers, for much of our success would depend upon how expertly they could trail the mob's cars and trucks and fresh faces from other divisions who were not known to the Chicago mobsters.”

After reviewing the bureau's records for some time he came up with a list of fifty men, he quickly brought this down to fifteen. After that he whittled it more still, until only nine names remained on his list.

1. Marty Lahart: an Irish sports and fitness enthusiast

2. Sam Seager: a tough but unobtrusive looking man who was a death row guard
3. Barney Cloonan: a giant muscular Irishman
4. Lyle Chapman: brilliant problem solver, ex Colgate University football player
5. Tom Friel: a former state trooper from Pennsylvania
6. Joe Leeson: arguably the greatest urban driver ever to live
7. Paul Robsky: telephone expert with extraordinary courage
8. Mike King: unobtrusive man with a talent for analyzing facts
9. Bill Gardner: an enormous former pro football star of Native American decent

Even with his team of specialists Ness was not without human fears. It was well known that Al Capone was the greatest criminal ever to walk the earth and every honest

cop who ever went after him wound up dead. Not only cops for that matter but rivaling gangsters, such as Bugs Moran who was executed in the famous St. Valentines Day Massacre. Dispite the obvious danger Ness ripped into Capones illegal activities with unmatched zeal.

The first skirmish Ness had with Capone was an unparalleled success. He split his team so that each would make two raids that night for a total of

eighteen stills. It was a complete success, fifty-two men were jailed and thousands of dollars in equipment was confiscated, and the product of this equipment poured down the sewers. In the months that followed Ness led raid after raid, and although Capone adapted his defenses, Ness adapted his attacks as well. Wire tapping was their most useful ally and helped them meet success time after time. At first Capone thought against assassinating Ness, seeing as the death of a prominent federal agent would only worsen his troubles. However Capone truly believed that every man had his price and tried to bribe Ness with two thousand dollars a week. At the time Eliot made a mere three thousand dollars a year, yet his integrity forbade him to take the bribe. He similarly attempted to bribe Ness Untouchables Seager and Lahart. One of Capones men threw an envelope of money into the agents car as he passed. Seager and Lahart caught up to the man and threw the

money back at him, such was their dedication to Ness. Eliot made sure this event was publicized, it was in this story that one newspaper coined the term The Untouchables. After this Capone no longer cared about further federal involvement and became obsessed with the idea of killing Ness. Several attempts were made from car bombs, to shootings, to running him down with a car, however Ness always escaped unscathed through what seemed to be pure luck.

Capone struck those he cared about next killing Frank Basile, Nesss friend. This encouraged Ness to humiliate Capone as the gangster had never been humiliated before, Ness planned a parade. Throughout his raids Ness had confiscated over 70 trucks from breweries, these trucks needed to be moved <https://assignbuster.com/who-was-eliot-ness-nearly-anyone-knows-ness-ac-essay/>

to a larger storage facility and Eliot intended to make a show of it. He called Capone's headquarters at the Lexington Hotel and bullied his way into getting Capone himself on the line. He merely told the notorious villain to look out his window, at that exact time the trucks passed by, moving at an agonizingly slow pace. This inspired Capone to plant another car bomb aimed at Ness however once again he escaped through sheer luck.

Finally Ness and his team had collected enough evidence for the federal government to make its case against Capone. However in June of 1931 Capone's lawyers

struck a deal with U. S. Attorney Johnson with a deal, Capone would plead guilty to a sentence of two and a half years. Johnson agreed and recommended the sentence to Judge Wilkerson. This put Capone in rather good spirits when he entered court on June 16th however Wilkerson quickly changed his mood. The judge said he would consider Johnson's recommendation but was not bound by it. October 17th 1931 a jury convicted him of tax evasion, (they were not convinced by the majority of Ness evidence) he was sentenced to eleven years jail and \$50, 000 fines as well as another \$30, 000 more in court costs. Ness made special arrangements to ensure Capone was led to his last train ride by The Untouchables. That was the last Ness saw of Capone who was infected with syphilis and died in prison, the world's greatest crime boss died a near vegetable.

In July 1934 Ness was promoted and continued his war on bootleggers, in less than a year he and his team made it too expensive to bootleg liquor in

Ohio. In November of 1935 Mayor Harold Burton of Cleveland elected Ness to safety director. This entailed cleaning up the corrupt fire and police departments as well as ridding the city of rampant mob activity. Ness immediately made it clear that good police work would be rewarded while bad police work would be severely punished.

Ness fully intended to clean up the force prior to making war on illegal gambling and mob activity however an opportunity came up he could not ignore. A county

prosecutor by the name Frank Cullitan was hell bent on closing down a gambling club known as The Harvard. He prepared a raid on it but was unable to get backup from nearby station that were on the take to protect the club. Hearing of this Ness collected volunteers from his office to come help Cullitan. Due to jurisdiction problems Ness and his volunteers had to act as citizens rather than police but none the less offered what they could. The building was quickly surrounded and raided upon his arrival. This was an important victory to Ness; it showed the Mayor and the people of Cleveland that under Ness the city would be cleaned with haste.

Then there was The Blackhawk Inn. After hearing of its existence from one of his informants Ness put it under surveillance. To his dismay it seemed as though a precinct captain of the police actually owned this illegal gambling operation. He lead a raid on the Inn and was confronted by a cocky young man who claimed his father was the precinct captain, Ness laughed and introduced himself as Eliot Ness, " and I run the police in the entire town." A scapegoat took the young mans place in jail but Ness was now on to Captain

Michael Harwood. Who attempted to resign a few days later but Ness was able to take him to court, destroying his pension. This reinforced Ness idea of getting rid of the bad apples in the force and inspired him to make a new group of Untouchables. These six were never unmasked and were charged with policing the police.

Another similar incident dealt with a club called McGintys. Although this club was not owned by a police chief, no action was made against this club which fell in the jurisdiction of two precincts. This ended in the closing of McGintys for good and the extream reprimand of Chief Matowitz and Captain Lenahan.

During this time Ness also crushed the Mayfield Mob and cleansed much of Clevelands police force. He also cleaned up traffic, updated both police and fire equipment and built schools for police training. In short he made being a cop in Cleveland a respectable position again. However there was one major thorn in his side that ravaged his reputation every time it surfaced, The Mad Butcher. In 1934 The Butchers first victim was found. Deemed the lady of the lake a young womans body was discovered, after an autopsy the cause of death was found to be decapitation. The body was also quartered; all cutting was done with a heavy blade with obvious skill, indicating a butcher, hunter or possibly a surgeon to be the culprit. Every few years another body would be found bearing the same grotesque signature, some were found mere feet from police stations suggesting the murderer was playing with them. A total of ten victims were discovered, each bearing evidence to a single, twisted, killer. Finally near the end of Ness career a substantial suspect was uncovered. Dr. Frank E. Sweeney, a large man capable of the brutal strokes used in the killings. He was also an alcoholic

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who frequently checked himself into clinics. However it was found that whenever he was absent from these clinics another victim was found. He was finally brought in for questioning and was subject to a polygraph test, this was one of the first uses of the polygraph in police work. After hours of questioning Keeler, an expert on polygraphs, firmly believed Sweeney to be the killer. Ness asked to be left alone in the hotel room with Sweeney to ask some questions. What followed was one of the most frightening experiences of Ness career.

“ Well? Sweeney asked. Are you satisfied now? A huge grin spread across his face. He stood up and looked out of the window.

Yes, Ness said thoughtfully, I think youre the killer.

Sitting on the bed Ness became even more aware of the mans hulking size. Sweeneys bulk covered most of the window. He whirled around toward Ness. The smile had become a menacing sneer. You think? He advanced toward Ness, who steeled himself for an attack. He leaned down and put his face a few inches from Ness. Then prove it! he hissed.

Shaken Ness got up from the bed and opened the door. Cowles, he called. No one answered. Grossman? he called louder. Still no one answered. His words seemed to echo in the empty parlor. He was alone with a madman.

Sweeney smiled knowingly. Looks like they all went to lunch.

Ness went to the phone quickly, tracked down his colleagues in the coffee shop, and suggested that Cowles get back to the suite immediately.”

(Excerpt from The Untouchables)

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Unfortunately all evidence against Sweeney was circumstantial, and it was impossible to make a case against him. Another murder has never been attributed to The Mad Butcher; a case that remains unsolved to this day.

Soon after the Sweeney incident Ness was involved in a car accident involving alcohol, this severely damaged his reputation and he resigned from his position. Although he did not merely fade away, he owned a large lock and safe company for some time but it finally did fail. He also ran for mayor of Cleveland in 1947, it is surmised that had he run earlier in life, he would have had a good chance of winning, however this late in life he was beaten in a landslide. Soon after his defeat he, his third wife and adopted son moved to the sleepy town of Coudersport, Pennsylvania. He was having financial problems at the time but hoped the publication of *The Untouchables* would solve that once and for all. However just before its publication he passed away of a heart attack at the age of 54.

Ness left several contributions in his passing. Among them, the use of the polygraph in police work, and the first successful two way radio networking of police in a city. He also left an undeniable mark upon the city of Cleveland, virtually ridding it of corruption on all levels. The downfall of Capone was the most obvious of his great achievements. Yet Ness left behind one contribution which few men have managed to leave. A legend.

Ness aspired to become a hero in the true sense of the word. Throughout history true tales of heroes are few and far between. He became an idol not only for the people of

Chicago, Cleveland and Ohio but for the entire nation. His name to this day stimulates a fascination with the mob, corruption and the men who stood against it. He was also the man who hunted down one of the first documented serial killers in history. Ness left behind a living legend of integrity, honesty, and indomitable spirit. Even though he no longer lives his legacy will carry his memory on in the form of stories, movies, novels and the like. Perhaps Ness is the exemption to the phrase, " Heroes dont die, they merely fade away." For Eliot Ness is one hero, who never faded away.