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### Buchalter, Louis; Einstein, Albert; and Guggenheim, Meyer

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Great Lives from History

# Jewish Americans

## LOUIS BUCHALTER

### Criminal

*An unassuming but ruthless criminal, Buchalter was prominent in labor racketeering in New York's garment district and in the organization of contract killers known as Murder Incorporated.*

**BORN:** February 6, 1897; New York, New York

**DIED:** March 4, 1944; Sing Sing Prison, Ossining, New York

**ALSO KNOWN AS:** Lepke Buchalter; Louis Buckhouse

**AREA OF ACHIEVEMENT:** Crime

### EARLY LIFE

Louis Buchalter (BOOK-ahl-tur) was born on New York City's lower East Side. His parents, Barnet and Rose Buchalter, were Russian Jewish immigrants, and his father managed a hardware store. The family had seven children, six of whom became upstanding citizens, counting among them a dentist, a pharmacist, a teacher, and a rabbi-university professor. However, the youngest child, Buchalter, known by the Yiddish diminutive "Lepke," resolved on a life of crime. There was an underside to life in the Jewish tenements of New York City in the 1910's and 1920's. Most children of the predominantly Russian, Polish, and German Jewish immigrants of the Williamsburg neighborhood in Brooklyn, the lower East Side in Manhattan, and the Grand Concourse in the Bronx worked diligently to improve their status in life. However, in many of America's poor ethnic neighborhoods, a small criminal element emerged, coalescing into the notorious Jewish gangs of the period. Arnold Rothstein was the first Jewish racketeer of national significance. He was

followed by a more vicious type that looked to profit from opportunities made by Prohibition, when the sale of liquor was banned, and by the rise of the heavily Jewish garment industry. Growing up in the Jewish Williamsburg neighborhood, Buchalter was first arrested at fifteen for his involvement in a gang fight. Arrests for burglary soon followed, and on May, 18, 1916, he was sentenced to his first term in prison. Upon his release in 1917, he resumed his criminal ways, serving two more terms in Sing Sing Prison in Ossining, from January, 1918, to January, 1919, and June, 1920, to March, 1922.

### LIFE'S WORK

In and out of prison, Buchalter was recognized as a thug with ambition; he became associated with Jacob "Gurrah" Shapiro, a criminal partnership that would see great profits for both gangsters and the death of both in Sing Sing prison. They joined the gang of Jacob "Little Augie" Orgen, killing him in 1927 to take over his lucrative business. The gang of Buchalter and Shapiro made inroads into New York's garment industry, running the labor rackets, profiting from labor-management strife, and extorting money from unions and businesses. By 1932, Buchalter had established illegal control over a wide range of businesses in New York and a lucrative drug trade. The national criminal syndicates tapped Buchalter to manage the Brooklyn-based Murder Incorporated, a vicious outfit of legendary status that contracted out murders to hit men across the country. It is estimated that in the 1930's Murder Incorporated carried out more than one thousand murders.

At the time, special prosecutor Thomas Dewey made inroads into organized crime. The notorious criminal Dutch Schultz proposed assassinating Dewey. For fear that this act would focus the public's wrath on the mobs, the crime bosses were reputed to have assigned the murder of Schultz to Buchalter.

On March 20, 1931, Buchalter married a young widow by the name of Betty Wasserman. She was from a Russian Jewish family and had one son, Harold. Buchalter has been portrayed as a faithful Jewish husband and a loving father to his stepson, whom he adopted in 1934. When Harold celebrated his Bar Mitzvah in 1935, Buchalter invited leading Jewish gangsters from throughout the New York area, including the flamboyant Bugsy Siegel. The Buchalter family lived in a luxurious apartment in Central Park South, and Buchalter spent most nights at home, enjoying a quiet domestic life with his family. Nevertheless, law enforcement pursued him. On November 12, 1936, he was convicted of racketeering and sentenced to two years in prison. Buchalter went into hiding, surrendering himself on August 24, 1939. To his surprise he was then sentenced to a lengthy term in Leavenworth Federal Penitentiary for his criminal activity. To his even greater surprise, he was convicted of the murder of garment worker Joe Rosen on the testimony of a Murder Incorporated hit man, Abe "Kid Twist" Reles. On December 7, 1941, Buchalter was sentenced to death. Despite appeals all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, Buchalter was executed in Sing Sing's electric chair on March 4, 1944. He was buried in the Mount Hebron Cemetery in Flushing, Queens.

#### SIGNIFICANCE

Buchalter, a prominent member of New York's Jewish gangs, was involved in the professionalization of organized crime. He systematically infiltrated and corrupted the garment industry, extorted money from a swath of industries, and managed a group of killers, providing their services to crime chieftains for a fee.

Buchalter is commonly reputed to be the only modern crime boss ever to be legally executed in the United States. His demise presaged the end of Murder Incorporated and the dissolution of the Jewish gangs of New York City.

—Howard Bromberg

#### FURTHER READING

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- Fried, Albert. *The Rise and Fall of the Jewish Gangster in America*. Rev. ed. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993. Chapters 4 and 5 chronicle the rise and fall of Buchalter as a labor racketeer and criminal boss.
- Joselit, Jenna. *Our Gang: Jewish Crime and the New York Jewish Community, 1900-1940*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983. Analyzes the complex interactions between the Jewish community and Jewish gangsters of twentieth century New York.
- Kavieff, Paul. *The Life and Times of Lepke Buchalter: America's Most Ruthless Labor Racketeer*. Fort Lee, N.J.: Barricade Books, 2006. Biography of Buchalter in the context of New York City's Jewish rackets.
- Rockaway, Robert. *But He Was Good to His Mother: The Lives and Crimes of Jewish Gangsters*. New York: Gefen, 2000. This portrayal of the dual lives of Jewish gangsters includes an account of Buchalter's happy and devoted domestic life.

**SEE ALSO:** Leo Frank; Meyer Lansky; Abraham Reles; Arnold Rothstein; Bugsy Siegel.

## ALBERT EINSTEIN

### German-born scientist

*One of the greatest scientific minds in history, Einstein revised classical notions of matter, energy, light, gravity, time, and space. His equations gave rise to the two most important advances of modern physics, the theory of relativity and quantum mechanics.*

**BORN:** March 14, 1879; Ulm, Württemberg, Germany

**DIED:** April 18, 1955; Princeton, New Jersey

**AREAS OF ACHIEVEMENT:** Science and technology;  
social issues

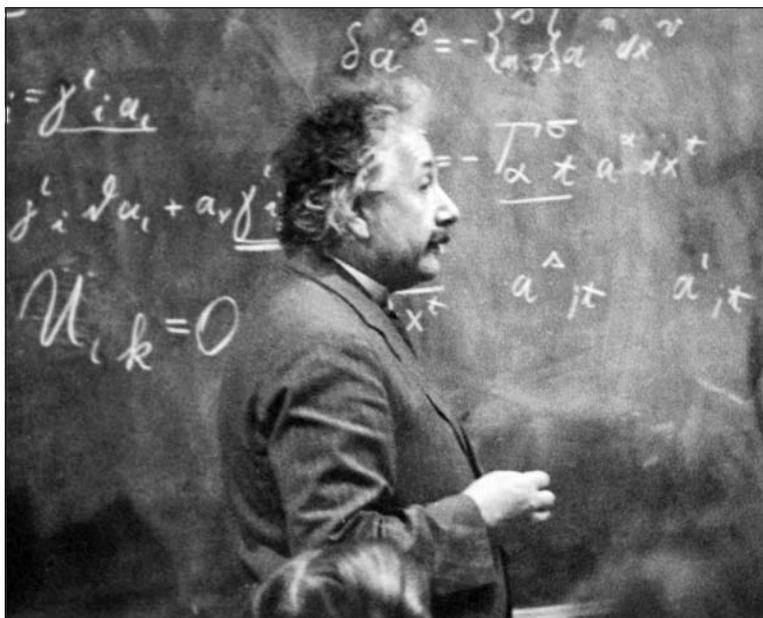
### EARLY LIFE

Albert Einstein (IN-stin) was born into a Jewish family in Germany in 1879. His father, Hermann, was a businessman; his mother, Paulina Koch, came from a wealthy family that provided financial assistance to the Einsteins as needed. Einstein showed interest in geometry and in mechanical and magnetic objects. Undoubtedly these early preoccupations, similar to those of Sir Isaac Newton at a young age two hundred years earlier, were important factors in preparing the minds of Newton and Einstein for the great conceptual breakthroughs they would make as adults. Einstein also studied the violin, which would become his lifelong hobby. His family was not observant, and Einstein, skeptical of the tenets of traditional Judaism, decided against a Bar Mitzvah when he was thirteen. He also found the authoritarian German gymnasium system of education stifling. In 1895, he finished high school in Aarau, Switzerland and then graduated from the Zurich Polytechnic Institute. Although he had been fascinated by the paradoxes of modern physics since his teenage years, he did not excel as a student. In 1900, he graduated with the lowest ex-

amination scores of any of the Polytechnic graduates. In 1903, he married Mileva Marić, who had also been a student at the Polytechnic Institute; they would have three children. Unable to obtain an academic position, Einstein became a clerk in the Swiss patent office, which allowed him time to contemplate scientific questions. In 1905, he was awarded his Ph.D. in physics.

### LIFE'S WORK

In a burst of scientific brilliance that is paralleled in the history of physics only by Newton's discoveries in the year 1666, Einstein published five papers in 1905 that transformed modern science. His March paper solved the riddle of the photoelectric effect by proposing the quantum photon theory of light. His April and May papers advanced the theory of the atom, solving the mystery of Brownian motion. His June paper proposed the



Albert Einstein. (Archive Photos/Getty Images)

### THE THEORY OF RELATIVITY

The summit of Albert Einstein's scientific achievements was his theory of relativity. It is one of the pivotal intellectual conceptions of humankind, revising fundamental principles of space, time, and gravity. Einstein had a great appreciation for the physicists who preceded him, and his theory can be seen as systematizing Galileo Galilei's relativity of motion, Isaac Newton's gravitational theories, Ernst Mach's inertial principle, the tensor analysis of Carl Gauss and Bernhard Riemann, and the electromagnetic field equations of Hendrik Lorentz and James Maxwell. Einstein formulated the theory in two parts: special and general relativity. His special theory of relativity described uniform motion in an inertial system without reference to a gravitational field. His general theory of relativity accounted for gravity not as a force, as conceived by Newton, but as the geometrical curvature of space-time by the presence of matter. As Newton's breakthrough on gravity is traditionally attributed to his observation of a falling apple, Einstein attributed his insights to imagining an object seeming to fall in a nongravitational field due to mechanical acceleration. Einstein called this concept—the principle of equivalence of gravity and acceleration—the happiest thought of his life. The theory of relativity was confirmed by calculations of the Perihelion precession of Mercury and the curvature of light due to the sun's gravitational field. Einstein's theory of relativity is a bedrock of modern physics, essential to understanding gravity and the effects of mass on the space-time continuum.

special theory of relativity, postulating that while motion is relative to an observer's frame of reference, that is, the observer's position and velocity, the speed of light is the same, regardless of the direction or velocity of either its source or its observers. To reconcile this paradox, Einstein reevaluated traditional notions of space and time. His fifth paper, in September, proposed the equivalence of matter and energy according to the famous formula  $E = mc^2$ , paving the way for the later development of atomic energy and weapons. It took the world several years to realize that in these papers, an obscure clerk from the Swiss patent office had revised Newtonian physics. Einstein was rewarded with prestigious professorships in Germany and the Nobel Prize in Physics. In 1916, Einstein published his greatest achievement, the general theory of relativity, incorporating gravity into a four-dimensional model of space-time. When observations during a 1919 solar eclipse confirmed his theories, he became world famous. In Germany, however, Einstein was exposed to increasing anti-Semitism. Paul Weyland, a German nationalist, organized the Study Group of German Scientists for the Preservation of Pure Science,

which held a vitriolic meeting in Berlin's Philharmonic Hall on August 24, 1920. The Nobel Laureate Philipp Lenard advocated for a Germanic science untainted by Jewish influence. Even a little-known rabble-rouser picked up on the controversy, complaining in a January 3, 1921, article in the *Volkischer Beobachter* newspaper that "[s]cience, once our greatest pride, is today being taught by Hebrews." The author of that article: Adolf Hitler.

In 1919, Einstein and his wife divorced, and Einstein later married his cousin Elsa. In the spring of 1921, Einstein took a two-month tour of the United States, where he was celebrated as a great physicist and a hero of modern Judaism. However, his visit aggravated a tension in the Jewish establishment. On the one side were European Zionists, such as Chaim Weizmann, who accompanied Einstein to raise funds for the planned Hebrew University of Jerusalem; on the other side were leaders of American Jewry, such as Louis Brandeis, Felix Frankfurter, Bernard Baruch, and the Guggenheim family, who emphasized success and even assimilation in the United States. Amid the rancor, Einstein tried to stay aloof. He came away from the trip more deeply committed to a Jewish homeland and also impressed with the enthusiasm of Americans.

Where Einstein had once been the scientific revolutionary, he became ambivalent about making startling discoveries in quantum physics. Einstein was alarmed by the challenges that quantum mechanics posed to notions of causality and the determinate nature of the universe. A spiritual man, Einstein found repugnant any theory of physics that seemed to deny a rational, orderly conception of the universe.

With the ominous rise of Nazi power, Einstein and his second wife immigrated to the United States in October, 1933, where Einstein accepted a position at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey. The newly installed Nazi regime reacted angrily. Einstein's works were included in a book burning, and his bank accounts were confiscated. Nazi aggression caused Einstein to rethink his commitment to absolute pacifism. In 1939, he cowrote letters to President Franklin Roosevelt, advising him of the possibilities of developing an atomic bomb. In the postwar period, Einstein strove to formulate a unified theory of relativity, electromagnetism, and particle physics. Although he never achieved this objective, he pioneered efforts to find a unified field theory. He became

outspoken in favor of internationalism, pacifism, and his bond with the Jewish people. He spoke in favor of equal rights for African Americans, and he advocated nuclear disarmament. He favored a Jewish homeland in Palestine and insisted that Jews and Arabs be treated equally; he cosigned a December 4, 1948, letter to *The New York Times*, denouncing the U.S. speaking tour of Israeli militia leader Menachem Begin for his violent and ultranationalist methods. Einstein retained his bond to the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, serving on its board and donating his collected papers to the university. In 1952, he declined the presidency of Israel. He died of heart failure in 1955.

### SIGNIFICANCE

One of the greatest scientific minds in history, Einstein revised classical notions of matter, energy, light, gravity, time, and space. His equations gave rise to the two most important advances of modern physics, the theory of relativity and quantum mechanics, foreshadowing modern discoveries of an expanding universe, gravitational lensing, displacement of spectral lines, and black holes. Einstein has become an iconic figure throughout the world representing scientific progress and genius. In addition, Einstein promoted peace, internationalism, and civil rights. A theoretical scientist on the level of Newton, and a humane and advanced social thinker, Einstein is one of the most significant figures of modern history.

—Howard Bromberg

### FURTHER READING

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- Isaacson, Walter. *Albert Einstein: His Life and Universe*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2007. Full-length biography based on Einstein papers released in 2006.
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- Jerome, Fred. *Einstein on Israel and Zionism: His Provocative Ideas About the Middle East*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2009. Controversially argues that Einstein's support for Israel as a home for the Jewish people is a myth.
- Speregen, Devra. *Albert Einstein: The Jewish Man Behind the Theory*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 2006. A young-adult book emphasizing Einstein's Jewish roots and his commitment to Israel.

**SEE ALSO:** Richard P. Feynman; J. Robert Oppenheimer; Carl Sagan; Edward Teller.

## MEYER GUGGENHEIM

### Swiss-born industrialist and philanthropist

*Guggenheim built a worldwide mining and smelting empire. He became patriarch of one of the world's wealthiest families, and the Guggenheim dynasty left its legacy through numerous philanthropies.*

**BORN:** February 1, 1828; Lengnau, Switzerland

**DIED:** March 15, 1905; Lake Worth, Florida

**AREAS OF ACHIEVEMENT:** Business; philanthropy

#### EARLY LIFE

Meyer Guggenheim (MI-yur GEWG-ihn-him) was born in the Jewish ghetto in the Aargau canton of Switzerland. His father, Simon, was a tailor; his mother, Schafeli Levinger, died in 1836, leaving Simon to raise Guggenheim and his four sisters. Meyer took up work as a peddler, selling odds and ends throughout Switzerland and Germany. Under the laws of the Jewish ghetto, Simon was restricted from marrying a widow, Rachel, who had seven children. In 1848, Simon and Rachel decided to immigrate to the United States to marry and to start a new life. They settled in Philadelphia with their combined twelve children.

In 1852, Meyer Guggenheim married Rachel's daughter, Barbara. He resumed his work as a peddler, selling household goods to Pennsylvania Dutch miners and farmers. Guggenheim's fluency in German was an advantage; to their credit the Pennsylvania Dutch showed him no discrimination as a Jew and readily purchased goods from this enterprising merchant. Guggenheim ingeniously discovered a better way to make black stove polish and introduced coffee essence—a forerunner of instant coffee—to his product line. In 1854, he had accu-

mulated enough capital to buy a grocery store in a Philadelphia suburb.

In the years that followed, offspring and new lines of business came quickly. From 1854 to 1873, Guggenheim and his wife had eleven children. Guggenheim made money selling spices, Swiss lace and embroideries, lye, and railroad stock. Not a particularly religious man, Guggenheim gave little Jewish education to his seven sons, but he prepared them to take over his enterprises, sending them to prestigious preparatory schools. His daughters were educated at a Jewish finishing school in Paris. In 1877, he formed M. Guggenheim's Sons, allotting each of his sons an equal share in the partnership. It was a close-knit brood, and with seven energetic sons under Meyer's focused leadership, the Guggenheims were an impressive business force. When Guggenheim's shares in Colorado silver mines soared in value in 1881, he was launched in the business he would come to dominate—worldwide mining and smelting.

#### LIFE'S WORK

Guggenheim and his sons began accumulating mining, smelting, and refining operations throughout the world and especially in Mexico. In 1888, Guggenheim built the largest smelting operation in the world at Pueblo, Colorado; it was soon generating annual profits of more than \$600,000. In 1899, he established the Guggenheim Exploration Company (Guggenex) to consolidate and extend Guggenheim control over mining copper, zinc, lead, silver, and gold. In 1901, after an epic business battle against Henry Rogers and other rival capitalists, the Guggenheims took control of the American Smelting

and Refining Company (ASARCO). The Guggenheims formed one of the largest trusts in the United States, with mining interests extending to Mexico, Canada, Chile, Bolivia, Australia, and Africa. In an age of business combination and consolidation, the Guggenheims ferociously pursued their financial interests and also tried to develop a reputation for integrity and fair treatment of their employees, in part to deflect any anti-Semitism aimed against their business success. With the help of Jacob Schiff, of the investment firm of Kuhn and Loeb, the Guggenheims established yet another mining company, American Smelters Securities, capitalized at \$77 million. With Guggenex, ASARCO, and American Smelters, the Guggenheims dominated worldwide copper mining and other metals. With the backlash against trusts in the administration of President Theodore Roosevelt and later administrations, the Guggenheims were subjected to scrutiny and to congressional hearings but escaped relatively unscathed. Under Guggenheim's leadership the family's companies were laden with debt as they sought rapid expansion, but they brought in even greater revenue and were able to pay substantial dividends. Later generations of Guggenheims were less successful in business.

With their wealth, the Guggenheim clan relocated from Philadelphia to New York City, the patriarch settling into a brownstone mansion at 66 West Seventy-Seventh Street in 1888. Guggenheim had become one of the nation's leading industrialists; as a family of Jewish wealth, the Guggenheims were second in the world only to the Rothschilds. They joined Temple Emanu-El, then located on Fifth Avenue and Forty-third Street, the richest and most prominent Jewish synagogue in the world. The father and his sons gathered at Guggenheim's mansion every Friday for a Sabbath dinner, as much to discuss their business interests as to express Jewish devotion. For Guggenheim business was everything, and he cared little for ostentation. He did, however, develop certain attributes of wealthy gentlemen of New York. He had a stable of horses and carriages, for pleasure trips in Central Park. He contributed to New York charities. He spent winters in Florida.

Guggenheim died in 1905. His funeral at Temple Emanu-El was attended by the other leading Jewish families of New York. Guggenheim's personal estate was valued at more than two million dollars. His fortune was

### INITIATING THE GUGGENHEIM LEGACY OF PHILANTHROPY

Although a titan in business, Meyer Guggenheim is well known for instituting a legacy of philanthropy. Guggenheim was a benefactor of his family's synagogues, Jewish hospitals, the Hebrew Education Society, and the Hebrew Benevolent and Orphan Asylum. In 1903, he helped raise more than \$100,000 to support Jews of Kishinev, Russia, suffering under czarist pogroms. He founded the *Schweizerisches Israelitisches Altersyl* home for aged Jews in Lagnau, Switzerland. Guggenheim's descendants expanded their giving beyond Jewish charities and established charitable foundations. Where Guggenheim put business before philanthropy, later generations put philanthropy before business. They donated their spectacular Sands Point estate in Port Washington, New York, for public purposes. The Murray and Leonie Guggenheim Foundation provided free dental clinics. Daniel Guggenheim's foundations funded annual concerts in New York and the growth of aeronautics. The Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation funds social science research. The prestigious Guggenheim Fellowships are awarded to scholars and artists by the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation. Several of the world's leading art museums, including the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain, the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice, the Deutsche Guggenheim Museum in Berlin, and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York City, were founded and endowed by the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation.

passed on to his seven sons, who were already multimillionaires and whose combined wealth was estimated at more than seventy-five million dollars. During his life and in his will, Guggenheim donated \$200,000 to Mount Sinai Hospital of New York City, a large sum to the Montefiore Hospital for Chronic Invalids in New York, and \$110,000 to the Jewish Hospital in Philadelphia, in memory of his wife, who died in 1900.

### SIGNIFICANCE

Guggenheim was one of the great industrialists of American history. He arrived in the United States from a European ghetto, his only skill being the persistence of a peddler. With ingenuity and hard work, he achieved one business success after another, until he controlled the world's leading conglomerate of mining, smelting, and refining operations. A large part of his success was his close-knit Jewish family, M. Guggenheim's Sons, proving a formidable rival to any other industrial combine. Guggenheim remained concerned for the Jewish community as he rose to the highest levels of American busi-

ness, providing for needy Jews in Switzerland, Russia, Philadelphia, and New York. He wanted a reputation for enlightened management of his employees and of his business—perhaps attained. What can hardly be disputed is that Guggenheim founded one of America's great entrepreneurial dynasties, which would distinguish itself even more for its civic and cultural benefactions than for its accumulation of wealth.

—Howard Bromberg

#### FURTHER READING

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author of books on the fortunes of other wealthy families such as the Vanderbilts and Morgans; depicts Guggenheim as an aggressive industrialist and reluctant philanthropist.

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Weld, Jacqueline. *Peggy Guggenheim: The Wayward Guggenheim*. New York: E. P. Dutton, 1986. Recounts the flamboyant life and art patronage of Guggenheim's granddaughter.

**SEE ALSO:** Walter Annenberg; David Geffen; Peggy Guggenheim; Larry Page; Sumner Redstone; George Soros.