

**2025 National History Day: Documentary Script**  
**The St. Valentine's Day Massacre: A Bloody Valentine**  
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May not exceed 10 minutes in length

We all know Valentine's Day, a holiday that is meant to be all about love and affection, and this theme is true in most years, with the exception being February 14, 1929. A tragedy and a horrific crime that would go down in American history forever. This day, instead of conveying its intended meaning, was about death and the extreme violence of Chicago gangs during the Prohibition Era. On that day, there were hundreds of shots fired, 7 deaths, 2 gangs, 2 fake police officers, and 1 dog with a miraculous story.(0:35.98)

This complicated story starts with the beginning of the temperance movement, all the way back in 1851, when Maine banned all alcohol within its borders. This was the result of a group of mostly women and children pushing for an end to the sale of alcohol. Over time, support for temperance grew until it impacted even the national government, which then created the 18th Amendment, which is now more commonly known as Prohibition. The Volstead Act was passed in late 1919 and was enacted across the United States in 1920. This was the start of Prohibition, a long and stressful era for the citizens of the US. During Prohibition, tensions rose along with the crime rate. A classic example of crime in the Prohibition Era is the Saint Valentine's Day Massacre of 1929, a gruesome and tragic tale. On that day, two men dressed as police officers entered gangster Bugs Moran's headquarters on North Clark Street in Chicago, lined seven of Moran's henchmen against a wall, and shot them to death. The Massacre was the culmination of a treacherous gang war between arch rivals Al Capone and Bugs Moran.(1:14.91)

The massacre took place as follows: Capone's men, dressed as police officers, told 7 of Moran's men near the 2122 (twenty one twenty two) North Clark Street Garage, in the Lincoln Park area to line up on a wall. There, Capone's henchmen shot hundreds of rounds of bullets into the backs of the North Side Gang. Today, the wall is actually on display in the Mob Museum in Las Vegas!

Unfortunately, there were no survivors who lived to see the next day, but there were two who remained alive for a few hours just following the massacre, one human and one dog. Miraculously, a member of the North Side Gang, Frank Gusenberg, was alive when the police arrived, but died 3 hours after the massacre as he succumbed to his 14 bullet wounds in his chest. When the police found him he said "No one shot me. I was shot in the back". He recognized the southern Italian phrase of omertá (Om-er-tA). To sum it up, you do not snitch on the other gang, in this example, the South Side Gang.(0:59.41)

The other victim, who survived longer than Frank, was a German Shepherd named Highball. He belonged to the occasional mechanic, John May, who was another victim. Highball was found fettered to a truck, and was either taken in by a journalist or police. Either way, he was said to be so distraught, he had to be put down only 6 hours later

However, one mysterious and puzzling question remains: why was Moran's gang at the scene of the massacre in the first place?(0:27.38)

The massacre was the result of a deal gone wrong. Supposedly, Bugs Moran really wanted some Canadian Whiskey, but had no way of getting it. So he reached out to the Purple Gang, who was based out of Detroit. There was one problem. The Purple Gang sided with Capone's gang, meaning that Moran's actions could have led to a bigger gang war, or a massacre.

Moran knew the risks, but despite that, he communicated a plan to the Purple Gang and Capone's men. The plan was as follows: First, the Purple Gang would smuggle whiskey out of nearby Canada, then give it to Capone's henchmen, who would meet the North Side Gang, Moran's Gang, at the infamous garage.(0:47.53)

Everything we know about who and what killed the members of the Moran gang is thanks to a man named Calvin Goddard.(God-ard) He is commonly known as the father of ballistics, and through the evidence, he figured out that the bullets an

h2d the casings were from a tommy gun. Fortunately, both guns ended up being seized by police officers in Stevensville, Michigan, a small town 90 minutes away from Chicago. (In today's speed of course) The police arrested Fred "Killer" Burke, who was on the run for killing a police officer in the area. Killer Burke had connections to the massacre and could be tied to other gang violence.(0:40.59)

These events led to another question: How did the massacre demonstrate the government's failure to keep the public safe?(0:08.14)

Well, it shows the fact that one of the main causes of all of this, of course, is the creation of the 18th amendment, commonly known as Prohibition, and frequently referred to as the worst amendment made to the United States Constitution in the entire history of our country. It was the only amendment to be repealed after massive backlash from the public, and one of the few

amendments to form national organizations such as the Association Against the Prohibition Amendment.

Another reason could be the corruption in police officers at the time, and according to the Bismarck Times in 1929, President Herbert Hoover appointed George W. Wickersham, an attorney from New York, to investigate the entire national law enforcement. The commission, officially called the National Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement, or unofficially known as the Wickersham Commission, was started by Hoover in 1929. His job was to find out the root cause of the gangland violence. The main theory was prohibition, and after a quick investigation, was confirmed.(1:12.09)

As we said earlier, there was massive public backlash after the massacre, as many people were enraged at the government for allowing violent crimes such as this to happen right under their noses, especially when those crimes were affiliated with notorious gangsters such as Bugs Moran and Al Capone. The investigation was a media sensation, as mass media had come into being around this time, primarily through the invention of the radio. However, as the FBI archives reveal, for many years, FBI director John Edgar Hoover refused to release any detailed information about the events of the massacre to media outlets. As a result, the general public knew only vague details about the event. According to a letter from former Judge Edward Tamm, the FBI advised that the Director (J. Edgar Hoover) had issued a denial that any statement about the massacre was given and wanted to emphasize that denial and the fact that absolutely nothing more should be said about the St. Valentine's day massacre.(1:11.07)

The suspect of the crime was originally Al Capone himself, but, after being questioned by the police, it turned out that he had a surprisingly good alibi. He was in Florida being tried for another murder. The only reason we know what gang did it was because of Fred “Killer” Burke.(0:17.03)

You would think that people would have the right not to be murdered even if they were part of an illegal alcohol deal. You would think that the people of the United States would have the right to know what happened. You would think that the government would punish those responsible for killing and dealing out illegal alcohol. But no, none of these things happened. The government did not punish either gang for the illegal acts they had committed. The government could have stopped this all by cracking down on organized crime, getting rid of corrupt officials, or just enforcing the Constitutional Amendment that banned alcohol. (0:37.13)

In all, the St. Valentine's Day Massacre was a crucial point in American history. The massacre showed how the government would protect people only sometimes, not *all* the time, including in crucial life-or-death situations. The massacre later showed that the government wasn't *always* right in its ways of protecting the people of the United States, and it helped the government learn from its mistakes to ensure the public safety of American citizens in the future.