

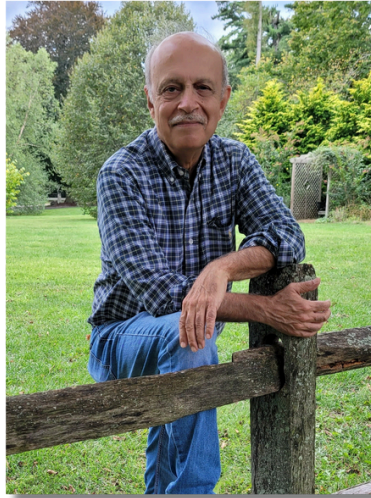
## Summary

The definitive, jaw-dropping account of the Jazz Age con woman, escort, speakeasy owner, and racketeer Vivian Gordon, whose sensational murder – and the damning list of powerful politicians, gangsters, and businessmen left behind in her diary – captivated Prohibition-era New York, obsessed its then-governor Franklin Delano Roosevelt, ensnared its mayor, and exposed the city’s dark underbelly of police corruption.

Indiana-born Vivian Gordon came to New York in 1920 looking for fame and fortune. Before long, the flame-haired chorus girl parlayed her youth, beauty, and ambition into more profitable means as a tough and glamorous symbol of Prohibition-era excess. She was a speakeasy owner, blackmailer, high-end escort, extortionist, racketeer, and con woman. But given her dangerously intimate associations—from ruthless underworld gangsters to corrupt high-ranking city officials—Vivian was also a woman who knew too much and who rightfully feared for her life.

On February 26, 1931, Vivian’s body was found dumped in Van Cortland Park in the Bronx. Now, in the first in-depth biography of its kind, Pulitzer Prize and Emmy Award-winning journalist Anthony M. DeStefano unravels her tumultuous life and the headline-making murder that became an obsession for many, including then-Governor Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

The evidence Vivian left behind was damning: a diary with more than 300 names implicating powerful officials, philanthropists, businessmen, and every major gangland figure in collusion and corruption. The probe eventually resulted in the career-ending investigation of James “Jimmy” Walker, disgraced mayor of New York City. Ultimately, *Broadway Butterfly* finally finds a place in history for Vivian Gordon, a woman with a rare legacy in gangster lore.



## About the Author

Anthony M. DeStefano is a bestselling true crime author and national expert on the American Mafia, has been widely recognized for his work. His ten books on the subject, including bestsellers such as *The Deadly Don* and *Top Hoodlum*, have garnered him a reputation for his in-depth knowledge and meticulous research. DeStefano's expertise is not limited to writing about organized crime; he is also an award-winning journalist, covering legal affairs and law enforcement in New York for Newsday.

At Newsday, DeStefano has reported on a long list of sensational stories in the nation's most-populated city where newsworthy events are a daily occurrence. He played a role in covering the 1986 Mafia Commission trial, and soon afterward, he was the lead reporter for the trial of subway gunman Bernhard Goetz. He also contributed to coverage of the Gilgo Beach serial killings. His work has been honored with numerous awards, including a Pulitzer Prize and an Emmy, in 2020, for a film on the tenth anniversary of the first Gilgo Beach body discoveries and the resulting investigation.

*Courtesy of the author and The Mob Museum website*

## Discussion Questions

1. What did you know about the Jazz Age before reading this book? How does the book capture the glamour, excess, and decadence of the Jazz Age? What specific details and anecdotes contribute to this portrayal?
2. How did the speakeasy scene and corrupt politicians in New York City contribute to the rise of organized crime? How did these connections affect ordinary New Yorkers?
3. How did Vivian Gordon's experiences growing up in Indiana shape her ambitions and choices when she came to New York City? Did her ambition ultimately lead to her downfall, and if so, how?
4. How did societal expectations and limitations shape women's involvement in organized crime during the Prohibition era?
5. What role did the media play in shaping public perception of Vivian and other high-profile figures of the time? Are there any similarities between the media during Vivian's life and today's media?
6. What role did the Black Book play in Vivian's life and death?
7. Discuss the different theories about who killed Vivian Gordon. Which theory do you find the most convincing?
8. How does the story of Vivian Gordon challenge the idealized image of the American Dream during the Jazz Age? What were the darker realities of this era that the book exposes?

## Reviews

In this entertaining true crime account, Pulitzer winner DeStefano paints Jazz Age fixture Vivian Gordon as both victim and criminal. Eighteen months after escort and aspiring actor Gordon—born Benita Franklin and nicknamed the “Broadway Butterfly”—was found dead in a Bronx park in 1931, New York City mayor Jimmy Walker resigned, and the political influence of the once unassailable Tammany Hall came to an end. The key was Gordon’s diaries, in which she meticulously catalogued the secrets she’d learned from her high-end clients and recounted being extorted by corrupt judges and cops to pay for dropped prostitution charges. DeStefano wrangles the sprawling implications of Gordon’s still unsolved murder into an entertaining package and paints an alluring portrait of Prohibition-era New York and the mobsters and millionaires who ran it. (Publishers Weekly)