Etymology of the word *shyster*, extracted from:


*shyster* \(\text{ˈʃɪʃtə(r)}\) n -s [prob. after *Scheuster* fl1840 Am. attorney frequently rebuked in a New York court for pettifoggery]: one who is professionally unscrupulous esp. in the practice of law or politics . . .

*Webster’s Third New International Dictionary* (1961)

*shyster* (ˈʃʌstə(r)) . . . [Of obscure origin.

It might be f. SHY a. (sense 7, disreputable) + -ster; but this sense of the adj. is app. not current in the U.S.]

. . . ‘A lawyer who practises in an unprofessional or tricky manner; especially, one who haunts the prisons and lower courts to prey on petty criminals; hence, any one who conducts his business in a tricky manner’ (*Funk’s Stand. Dict.* 1895). Also attrib. or adj. Orig. and chiefly *U.S. slang*. . .


*shyster*. An unscrupulous lawyer (note that the definition presumes the existence of scrupulous ones) . . .

The term does not come from—as suggested in various dictionaries—the surname Scheuster, supposedly a lawyer noted for shyster-like practices; from the name of the Shakespearean character, Shylock; . . . or from any of the various meanings of shy (e.g., to be shy of money). Rather . . . shyster evolved from the underworld use of *shiser*, a worthless fellow, which derived in turn from the German *scheisse*, excrement, via *scheisser*, an incompetent person (specifically, one who cannot control his bodily functions) . . .

Hugh Rawson (1991)
*A Dictionary of Invective*