



# Gangsters in Popular Culture

T, Th, -- 12-1:50 – 300 VIL – CRN 16453

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Office hours: by appointment

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This class will explore the genre of the gangster film and will survey the changing representations of the gangster in popular culture, alongside the moral panic and cries for censorship that the gangster figure has elicited—beginning with the early sound films of the 1930s, moving through the “classic” depictions of the Mafia from the 1970s and 1980s, to present-day controversies over “gangsta rap,” and ending with the recent revisions of the gangster genre from both within and outside of Hollywood. The class will use race, ethnicity, class, and gender as lenses through which the ideas of the gangster, gangs, and “the family”—American and un-American—are examined.

Required texts:

Articles on E-Reserve – [http://libweb.uoregon.edu/acs\\_svc/reserve-index.html](http://libweb.uoregon.edu/acs_svc/reserve-index.html)

You will also be responsible for watching the following films OUTSIDE of class. They are on reserve at the Knight Library and are readily available at most movie stores:

*Public Enemy* (1931)

*Key Largo* (1948)

*White Heat* (1949)

*Bonnie and Clyde* (1967)

*The Godfather\** (1972)

*The Godfather II\** (1983)

*Scarface* (1983)

*Boyz N the Hood* (1990)

*Goodfellas* (1990)

*Menace II Society* (1993)

*City of God* (2002)

*Tupac: Resurrection* (2003)

a Quentin Tarantino film of your choice

\* If you elect not to watch these two films, please read Mario Puzo's *The Godfather*

WARNING: The materials for this class contain graphic violence and sex. If you cannot watch this (or cannot watch it maturely), please do not take this class.

Assignments and Grading:

Participation: 20%    Presentation/Response Paper: 15%    Exams: 40%    Term Paper: 25%

Participation:

This class will require a significant amount of time and energy. If you can't commit to it, don't bother taking this class. While I have no formal attendance policy per se, I do expect you to come to class prepared—do the readings, watch the films, and be ready to discuss the material. “Participation” in my mind is a combination of attendance, attentiveness, and engagement (and any in-class assignment or pop quiz, I suppose). Your participation counts for one-fifth of your final grade, so behave accordingly.

Presentation:

Students will be responsible for 10 (or so) minute presentations on the topic *du jour* and will help facilitate the class discussion on the assigned readings and films. I will circulate a sign-up sheet with spaces for 3 or 4 students per topic. Feel free to bring additional resources to class—film clips and the like. On the day of your presentation, you will also submit a 1-2 page paper summarizing your thoughts and analysis.

Term Papers:

You know the routine—pick something interesting that you come across in this course and write a 8-10 page (double-spaced, typewritten) paper on it. While I encourage you to look beyond the assigned readings and films, you are of course welcome to develop ideas from your presentation. Papers due Finals Week – no later than 5pm on Wednesday, December 7.

Tentative Schedule:

Please complete the readings by the date listed. Films listed on a class day will be screened in class; those listed as "weekend assignments" must be viewed outside class. All readings are available on e-reserve (unless otherwise noted).

Week 1

9/27 Introductions  
9/29 Film: *Little Caesar* (1930)

Weekend assignment: Watch *Public Enemy*

Week 2

10/4 Film: *Scarface, the Shame of a Nation* (1932)  
10/6 Reading: Munby, Ch 2

Weekend assignment: Watch *Key Largo*, *White Heat*, and *Bonnie and Clyde*

Week 3

10/11 Film: *Asphalt Jungle* (1950)  
Reading: Munby, Ch 5 \*\*on Blackboard\*\*  
10/13 Reading: Hoberman

Weekend assignment: Watch *The Godfather I* and *II* (or read the Puzo novel), *Scarface*, and *Goodfellas*

Week 4

10/18 Student Presentation: *The Godfather* series  
10/20 Student Presentation: (Italian-American) Auteurs  
Reading: Braudy

Week 5

10/25 Student Presentation: (Italian-American) Stars  
Reading: Dyer  
10/27 Reading: Nochimson  
Film: *Sopranos* (Episode TBA)

Week 6

11/1 Exam 1  
11/3 Film: *Black Caesar* (1973)  
Reading: Reid

Weekend assignment: Watch *Boyz N the Hood*, *Menace II Society*, *Tupac: Resurrection* and listen to NWA's *Straight Outta Compton*

Week 7

11/8 Student Presentation (Gangstas in film)  
Reading: Boyd, Ch 4  
11/10 Student Presentation (Gangstas in music)  
Reading: Boyd, Ch 3

Weekend assignment: Watch the Tarantino film of your choice

Week 8

11/15 Film: *Youth of the Beast* (1963)  
Reading: Schilling  
11/17 Student Presentation (Tarantino)  
Reading: Botting and Wilson

Week 9

11/22 No class -- conferences  
11/24 No class -- Thanksgiving

Weekend assignment: Watch *City of God*

Week 10

11/29 Conclusions  
12/1 Exam 2

**Paper due no later than 5pm on Wednesday, 12/7**