

FROM THE SILENTS TO THE SOPRANOS:
Organized Crime in American Culture

American Studies

Spring, 2009

Instructor: Bruce Chadwick

Phone: (O) 201-200-2224, (H) 973-366-4526

Email: Bchadwick@NJCU.edu

Class meets from 9:15 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. each Monday.

Goals of the Course: 1) to understand why movies and television shows about organized crime have been successful, 2) how these medium have changed as the American viewing audience has changed, 3) the effect of real crime and media coverage of it on film and television depiction of crime 3) the prominent role these movies, and organized crime figures, have come to play in American culture, 4) the rise of street gangs.

Texts: *The Great Gatsby*, by F. Scott Fitzgerald; *Inventing the Public Enemy: The Gangster in American Culture, 1918-1934*, by David Ruth; *Pump 'Em Full of Lead: A Look at Gangsters on Film*, by Marilyn Yaquinto .

Week One: Introduction

Screening of *The Godfathers* documentary

Assignment: begin *The Great Gatsby*, *Inventing the Public Enemy*, *Pump 'Em*, Chapters 1-2.

Week Two: Organized Crime: the early years

Screening of *Public Enemy*

Assignment: finish *The Great Gatsby*, *Inventing the Public Enemy*, magazine accounts of crime

Week Three: Organized Crime: the early years

Screening of *Little Caesar*

Discussion of *The Great Gatsby*, the rise of the gangster in the Real world and in film and literature

Assignment: *Pump 'em*, Ch. 3-4

- Week Four: Discussions of mobsters as pop icons, discussion of student papers
First paper due (glamorization of gangsters)
Assignment: *Pump 'Em*, chapters 5,6, 7.
- Week Five: Screening of *On the Waterfront*
Assignment: *Pump 'Em*, chapters 8, 9, 10
- Week Six: Discussion of the Pump 'Em chapters
Assignment: *Pump 'Em* (rest of book)
- Week Seven: *The Godfather* Marathon (class begins at 8:45 a.m.)
Screening of *Godfather I*
Assignment: articles on street gangs
- Week Eight: Comparative papers discussion / Street Gangs
Comparative papers due
- Week Nine: Guest Speaker. Lee Seglem, Assoc. Director of the State Commission of Investigation / Class discussion of the street gangs
- Week Ten: Screening of *Bugsy*
- Week Eleven: Screening of *Scarface (1982)*
Discussions of contemporary street gangs; gangsta rap
- Week Twelve: Screening of *Donnie Brasco*
Assignment: Articles about *The Sopranos*, Street Gangs
- Week Thirteen: Screening of episodes of *The Sopranos*
Assignment: *Sopranos* Discussion
- Week Fourteen: Screening of episodes of *The Sopranos*
Term papers due
Discussion of term papers
- Week Fifteen: Wrap-up
Return of term projects

Papers: 1) the glamorization of the gangster, 1880-1935 (4 pages), 2) comparisons between any two literary or film works (4-5 pgs), 3) term project: any theme involving organized crime and its role in American culture or any aspect of our studies (7-8 pgs). The term project should reflect what you learned in the course in addition to what you learned in research for the term project. The term project should be footnoted and have at least three sources. ***Important: discuss your term project topic with the professor.***

Attendance: Mandatory

Guest Speakers: Lee Seglem, Associate Director of the New Jersey Commission of Investigation