

Introduction

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Our common purpose in this collection of essays is to help clarify a time, a place, a problem. Each author addresses a different aspect of “Organized Crime In the City and On the Screen – The United States, 1929-1951”. Our overall objective is to orient the reader amid the coherent multiplicity of this question. To begin: a review of issues and era, on studying offences contrary to law, the choice of a positive or a negative slant, the expertise of criminal and cop, the mix of organized crime movies and real life, the dynamic of mass culture and popular culture, the bridge of social veracity and the function of artistic parables, the concepts of *public* and *audience*, the big business and organized crime comparison, gangster movies and the Top 10 criterion, the era's triumvirate of newspapers, radio, and movies, gangsters and gangster movies as expressions of both decay and progress, principles of revenge, democracy and reform. And finally a few lead-ins to our articles themselves.

The 1920s through the early 1950s period was a different America, a similar America. The nation ran a chart of peaks and troughs: the Jazz Age 1920s, the Great Depression 1930s, the time of the “Fighting Forties” – WWII, and the post-war economic boom that burst into the Fifties. The USA was big and small in different ways. By 1920, as never before, more people lived in urban rather than rural places in America. To “make it big in the big town” was a common dream. An urban-rural contrast was a vital part of most people's lives. But these lives were lived alone and all together; with strong ethnic, racial, gender, economic separations. Segregation, *de facto* and *de jure*, was in force. But it was a nation in a state of extreme difficulties for black and white, rich and poor, off-the-boat immigrant and long-time resident, the rural and the urban citizen, farmer and factory worker, the employed and the jobless. The prewar years were rife with social tensions and lack of resolution, during and after WWII was a traumatic time of new adjustments.

The crisis of the 1930s severely limited social and economic advancement. Where was that promised “Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness” for all? The Great Depression brought to the fore a great

contention and a hunger for answers. Conflicting ideologies were loud and clear. Strong leaders were wanted. Franklin Delano Roosevelt was elected for four consecutive terms. To date, no US president has ever been elected so many times. He carried on till he died in office. As did in this turmoil many a big-city gangster, factual and fictional, who rose to dubious fame.

And who were these urban outlaws, these renegade businessmen? Where did they come from, how were they counted, and what did they do? The FBI's "Ten Most Wanted" list did not even start until 1950. National statistics on crime and correction were spotty at best; collated from convicted prisoners rather than suspected criminals and known networks, aggravated by a chronic lack of cooperation and shared information between the various levels of local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies. And, as with many a Civil War battle, reports of the numbers engaged and casualties suffered varied widely according to who reported them.

How can you understand a thing if you cannot count it? Criminals would deny there was a battle going on; one of their prime tactics was deceit. Even in the best of cases, statistics about organized crime are debatable. They concern illegal businesses. Since illegal, how can one be sure if the count is right or why which names and numbers go public? Plus, back then was a period when law enforcement was far more difficult and erratic than it is now. A big city could have The Boss, The Machine, and all the irregularities which entrenched cronyism entailed¹.

Generations of dependence were built up. Urban corruption in some places was like the parasite plant that slowly wraps itself around, shapes itself around, the tree – until it was hard to tell the tree from the parasite that grew on it. Consider Tammany Hall in New York City. The force of the Pendergast machine in Kansas City. Harry Bennett's links to the mob in Detroit. It was a complicated, dirty business. States' rights and eloquent lawyers could work both ways.

1. *Boss*: the autocratic and often irresponsible leader of a political machine in a State, county, or city whose power rests on devious or corrupt methods of controlling the electorate and the processes of nomination and election.

Machine: an organization controlled by a boss, or a small coterie of leaders, which subjects party organization and public officials to its will and operates efficiently and ruthlessly in exploiting governmental activities of nearly every sort for the private gain of its members. Generally an older, autocratic form of American political order subsequently replaced by the American 1970s principle of the *coalition* (which, in turn, had been anticipated by the occasional practice of *fusion*). See: E.C. Smith & A.J. Zurcher, *New Dictionary of American Politics*, New York, Barnes & Noble, 1949; Jay M. Shafritz, *The HarperCollins Dictionary of American Government and Politics*, New York, HarperPerennial, 1993.

Introduction

Around the time of WWII in the US criminal law enforcement and a uniform measurement and analysis of crime of all kinds would be improved. But far from perfected. Improvement was due to multiple factors. One of which was government response to loud, popular complaint about crime and political corruption; visible in, e.g., Boston with Mayor James Curley (1863-1958) – whose extravagant corruption inspired the bestseller *The Last Hurrah* (book: 1956; movie: 1958, Columbia / J. Ford) – and in Kansas City with political boss Tom Pendergast (1872-1945). In the mid to late 1950s law enforcement was also beefed up in many communities in response to fears of juvenile delinquency among the lower and middle classes. Very important for all improvements in law enforcement from the late 1930s through the early 1950s in the USA were fundamental changes in the US infrastructure brought about by the venture into war.

The great symbol of this change was the Pentagon. For the age this meant “the triumph of order, science, reason,” and the “achievement of unity, purpose, morale”; though with time it came to mean the home “of the atom bomb and a frightening bureaucratic structure, the beginning of a brave new world of anxiety¹”. For policing the gradual change toward greater bureaucratic order meant the growth of city, state, federal law enforcement coordination. This was often done under the umbrella of the FBI, led by America's most famous bureaucrat J. Edgar Hoover (head: 1924-1972). The nation-wide strength of the FBI grew with successive presidential directives issued in 1939, 1943, 1950, became a model and resource for police departments with its banks of files and sophisticated technology, and its carefully-molded public relations (as with the movie *G-Men* [Warner, 1935]); though the FBI only took over from local crime control agencies if the crime involved was explicitly federal².

But pause a second. Ask a question, think a proverb, work a cliché. Was the glass half empty or half full? What *was* the problem? That is: what was being communicated with the irritant of organized crime as it became increasingly visible and of great concern both in public debate and in the movies: fact or fear, history or hysteria, a condition of clear, amenable errors or a situation of fundamental cracks in the American system? How do you take it? Does this problem inherently have a positive or a negative slant, or both?

1. Warren I. Susman, *Culture As History: The Transformation of the American Society in the Twentieth Century*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1984, p. 209-210.
2. Miriam Ottenberg, *The Federal Investigators*, New York, Prentice Hall, 1962, p. 8-9.

By 1951 the lid exploded off organized crime. Eight days of Kefauver Committee hearings on TV station WPIX, New York City, in March 1951 gave millions of city viewers: “the whole vague feeling that corruption was moving through all American life like a swarm of maggots”. Not that they hadn't seen it all before in the movies. Polonsky's 1948 *Force of Evil* concluded with the supplicating words: “[...] and I decided to help” – in the fight against crime. But the Kefauver exposure was live on TV, delivered to Americans' living rooms, not communally dreamed in the flickering comfort of the picture palaces. Yet in 1931 famed opinion leader Walter Lippman had argued that most Americans had known about organized crime for a long time, thank you very much, and had conveniently chosen to ignore the problem. Why? Because “bootleggers, panderers, fixers, and many racketeers have a social function and perform services for which there is some kind of public demand²”. That public demand seemed essentially straightforward during the absence of alcohol; but once Prohibition ended in 1933 the persistent nature of organized crime became rather more knotty. It wasn't there just for the booze.

So why was it there? Who ran it and why? Listen to imaginary and real criminals give their explanations. “Yeah. Money is all right. But it ain't everything!” – Rico Bandello snarls to Joe Massara in the opening scenes of *Little Caesar* (Warner, 1931). “Yeah. Be somebody!” Or: “This isn't my kind of law. I started out to be a corporation lawyer!” “Harvard” Lloyd, the temporarily-corrupt attorney, exclaims to his gangster buddy Eddy in *The Roaring Twenties* (Warner, 1939). Crime is the wrong track, Lloyd argues, they should be honest, upright citizens. But Eddy – James Cagney – gives Lloyd a friendly, fiery, deliciously conspiratorial look. “This *is* a corporation. Making money!”

The fight against crime, the other side of this twisted coin, seemed endless to many, like spraying for roaches once again in a house never entirely cleaned up. To combat organized crime became a US myth of Sisyphus action. Hear this string of dialogue between the police captain (played by the young Robert Mitchum) to his precinct sergeant at the very end of the movie *The Racket* (1951) – delivered in the grey

1. Eric F. Goldman, *The Crucial Decade – And After: America 1945-1960*, New York, Vintage-Random House, 1960, p. 198. The full, official term for these 1950-1951 hearings was: *The Special Committee to Investigate Organized Crime in Interstate Commerce*; with its short, vernacular name: *The Kefauver Committee* or *Kefauver hearings*. In French or “franglais” one comes across Kefauver commission or its like; but the US official and vernacular terms are the most accurate.
2. Walter Lippmann, “The Underworld as Servant,” 1932; as anthologized in Gus Tyler, *Organized Crime in America*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1962, p. 58-69, quote: p. 59.

morning sunlight soon after the police caught the town's major hoodlums Turk and Welsh.

Sergeant: "Anything more Captain?"

Captain: "Yeah, a lot more for Welsh and Turk. The machinery finally caught up with 'em."

Sergeant: "Machinery?"

Captain: "*Justice*. It's a kind of machine. Slow machine. People like Turk and Welsh always throwing sand in it. Getting it out of gear. Why do we let 'em? You. Me. The public. Get mighty sick and tired of it. Constant fight. Constant struggle."

Sergeant: "Better get some rest, Tom."

Captain: "*Rest?* Yeah. But tomorrow it starts all over."

Sergeant: "Good night, Tom."

Captain: "Good night¹."

At which point the captain's wife shows up, takes the tired officer home, and *The End* hits the screen. But the struggle goes on.

To play crime well from either side took a strength, a vision of life, a sense of position, knowing how to handle a private and public role. Real-life, American racketeers knew this well. Meyer Lansky (1902-1983) chose a role of discretion and behind-the-scenes power. "There's no such thing as a lucky gambler," said syndicate chief Lansky. "There are just the winners and the losers. The winners are those who control the game²". He lived to a prosperous, ripe old age. And this crafty discretion was mirrored in fiction films by such gangsters as Diamond Pete Montana in *Little Caesar* – who gets his name in the papers, but wisely disappears before the newspaper photographers can take his picture. Unlike foolishly well-known Rico Bandello. As, in real life, was Al Capone (1899-1947), who chose fame, flamboyance and animal energy. *Le Journal de Paris* sent their famous crime expert George London to Chicago in 1930 to interview Capone. He and Capone captivated one another (through an interpreter). M. London reported that Capone said to him: "Vous êtes venu voir celui qu'on appelle le gorille. Eh bien, regardez le gorille." – about which assessment London noted: "On ne peut guère croire que c'est un monstre ayant à peu près cinquante crimes sur la conscience³". Just a swell guy.

1. Quote transcribed from the film, italics added on the basis of spoken intonation. See: *The Racket*, dir. John Cromwell, with Robert Mitchum, Robert Ryan, Lizabeth Scott, adapted from a play by Bartlett Cormack, RKO, 1951.
2. Robert Lacey, *Little Man: Meyer Lansky and the Gangster Life*, Boston, Little, Brown and Co., 1991, p. 33.
3. John Kobler, *Capone: The Life and World of Al Capone*, New York, G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1971, p. 317-318.

American women reporters dealing with Big Al could be embarrassingly affected. An interview with Capone by Miss “Cissy” Patterson offered a close study of his hands – seen as: “Enormous. Powerful enough to tackle – well, almost anything”; or a close look into his eyes, which had the purring, “stirring of the tiger” in them, so that for just a second (the reporter continued): “I went a little sick. I had to fight the impulse to jump up and run blindly away.” And so, summed up Miss “Cissy” Patterson of the *Washington Herald* newspaper: “It has been said, with truth, that women have a special kind of sympathy for gangsters. If you don't understand why, consult Dr. Freud!”.

Yet Capone was really neither so sympathetic nor successful. He constantly worked to improve his image in the press through cajolery, charm, corruption or violent coercion. Newspapers were specially valuable as the makers and measurers of public opinion. To this day Capone is probably the best known of all 20th Century American gangsters not because he was the best at his trade but because he drew the best press. The medium makes the legend and sometimes the medium gets it wrong. Capone was in jail by 1931. He was the sap, the fall guy for the big boys in the mob, wasting away with neurosyphilis and incarcerated until he was paroled as a permanent sick case in 1939; a physical wreck who steadily deteriorated until he died of a brain haemorrhage and bronchial pneumonia in 1947. Capone's celebrity status served other mobsters much better than it helped Capone. The most effective, long-lasting criminals had an insidious, hidden quality – were known yet unknown.

The gangsters ran a strange territory of twisted glamor, public performance and private deceit that both depended upon and corrupted the straight world. They played on a strong sense of fantasy and fear in American folklore and legend for the Bad Man – who might act good, who would do bad, who played the roles of satanic savage, jester-trickster, priapic diety², Robin Hood, mad dog and tormented psychopath, and whose life was always a great tale. There was always a story. Hero and villain do not exist without a story.

Movies were tellers of tales. They had a bardic power to relate, prophesy, and probe within the tribe. This provokes the question: what happened when real life and movies were mixed? At issue analytically is the social veracity of art. To analyze this phenomenon means to compare a story about something that actually happened and the actuality itself. Examine their relationship. For example, in other

1. John Kobler, *Capone*, 1971, p. 319.

2. Echoed by the vulgar American proverb: “a stiff prick has no conscience”.

contexts, what was at play between Melville's *Moby Dick* (1851) and the wreck of the whale ship *Essex*, the real rogue whale "Mocha Dick"; or what was the relation between Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind* (1936) and plantation life in the Old South at the time of the American Civil War; or what were the parallels between James Jones' classic war novel *The Thin Red Line* (1962) and the actual mopping-up campaign of World War Two's Guadalcanal battle after which this novel was fashioned? And vice versa. Analysis is honored in the bridge.

This technique obviously allows for a great deal of leeway, room for freedom of intellectual action. The bridge of social veracity for organized crime in fiction and fact is built of many substances. Movies and real life get interfused and confused; mutually enlightened and obscured one another. Art mirrors life, is not life itself, but helps the viewer know what is there. But *how much* of what is there? To answer this question one need know the thing itself. What was organized crime back then, or, for that matter, now in America? A solid definition of organized crime is a crucial investigatory tool for the student since it defines the area; serves to instruct him of this question about where to go, and why.

Organized crime is one specific type of US crime. In the USA organized crime "is best viewed as a set of shifting coalitions, normally local or regional in scope, between groups of gangsters, business people, politicians, and union leaders¹". Movies in the Prohibition to early Cold War period pinpointed certain crimes like bugs to a display board: illegal liquor trafficking during Prohibition (bootlegging), gambling, kidnapping, a whole bloody bouquet of physical violence (murder, mugging, and general mayhem), prostitution and sexual violence with women (but never with children), corruption of public officials (politicians, police, but never a schoolteacher, priest, or nun), barely a hint of drugs, little attention given to union corruption (that classic comes later: *On The Waterfront* [1954]), and surely a few more crimes this list missed. Plus more the movies missed.

Organized crime both in fact and in fiction was an industry of limited variety. The nexus of the problem itself – organized crime in real life – was an interdependence of social and economic levels and functions. With fiction: did the movies elucidate this mesh? Style helped. One part of the bridge was that Hollywood gangster movies developed an aesthetic of cinematic naturalism, realism, a form of cinematic *littérature engagée* which existed because, as the postscript

1. Anon., "Other Models of Criminal Activity – Organized crime," in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* on CD Rom: EB CD 99.

to *The Public Enemy* declared: the producers wanted to “depict honestly an environment that exists today in certain strata of American life, rather than glorify the hoodlum or the criminal”. The content of realism in cinema traditionally has a moral basis. The style of “being there” (which gets stronger as style develops towards the “street style” of the 1940s in movies like *Force of Evil* and *The Naked City* [1948, Universal]) intensified the call to action, the ethical focus.

Reluctant waves of overt social criticism, which genuinely tried to expose the factual nature of organized crime in American life, would surface and recede in Hollywood cinema or in individual movies. But, in the end, amusement and diverting performance would be more visible than outspoken, ideological, social criticism. Movies can be “the seventh art”. But this does not mean, as Mexican artist Diego Rivera claimed, that: “if art is not propaganda – it is no art.” Social veracity and social criticism were strands amid the total narrative weave in the art of Hollywood cinema, in individual movies. Study of the constitution, evolution, and phenomenon of organized crime in American society was a deadly serious business not always compatible with the nature of the American movie industry.

In the USA, movies are, and were, a blend of *popular culture* and *mass culture*. In the United States, *popular culture* is populist, outspoken, questioning, Lockean, driven by people's current worries and constant pleasures, driven more by the consumer than by the producer. While *mass culture* is consensual, occasionally quite mind-numbing, Hobbesian, driven more by the producer than by the consumer. Movies express this paradoxical dynamic¹.

Which is one reason why organized crime on the screen *versus* organized crime in the real-life city. On-screen crime is set against real-life crime as an illuminating contrast and complement, a contradiction, an evolution of experience into knowledge and product. Not the thing itself. So what did the movies see, say, and sell? In American cinema from the 1920s through the early 1950s, a few organized crime movies were consistently accusatory and didactic regarding community partnership in wrongdoing. This minority trend in movies comes late in our period and walks a fine line amid entertainment, education, propaganda. Polonsky's *Force of Evil* (1948)

1. Popular culture is the earthly vein of gold. As its best popular culture is “Culture” in the making, neither already made nor following assembly-line, copy-cast production methods. For a more extended explanation of the popular versus mass culture difference, see: John Dean, “American Gangsters in Fact and on Film: the Social Construction of an American Popular Hero,” in Pierre Lagayette, Dominique Sipièrre, *Le crime organisé à la ville et à l'écran (États-Unis, 1929-1951)*, Paris, Ellipses, 2001, p. 115-137.

treats illegal numbers gambling as a form of ordinary urban pollution which worsens to moral cancer that eventually destroys the sacred culture of family. The message: capitalism corrupts. Huston's *The Asphalt Jungle* (MGM, 1950) singles out America's rich, white, fat upper crust with the exemplary character of “the big fixer” lawyer Emerick. The populist message: get the rich. Robert Wise's excellent *The Captive City* (UA, 1951) is the crucial, cinematic bridge in this late period between cinema as entertainment, propaganda, and paranoid intrigue; between US movies and TV shows that blend Cold War, organized crime and communist intrigue (notably the TV show: *I Led Three Lives*, 1953-1956)¹; that bridge cinema and propaganda – since this “fiction” of *The Captive City* actually concluded with a speech by Senator Estes Kefauver expressly made to support this movie's reform intentions. The message: fight crime, cooperate with your government. The USA was on war alert.

The interdependence between social cause and narrative fiction in the gangster films of this era was heightened by the effects of censorship and civic pressure. Popular culture is collaborative. It takes dozens to thousands of people to finally get an American work of popular culture to market. Popular culture is rarely a solitary production. This is one reason why the European-based *auteur* theory for movies is highly suspect (who makes a movie *alone*?). This is another reason why the censorship-inspired intrusions of written commentaries and even scenes in *Public Enemy*, *Little Caesar*, and *Scarface* intensified the cooperative element of Hollywood cinema and US society. Whether they liked it or not, motion pictures and civic groups worked together. And, if many Americans of that time found these moral intrusions outrageous (as some critics suggest), if the average American wanted their popular movies as undiluted as straight bourbon – then where were the loud voices of protest?

On the other hand, suspicion about money, power, and the American value of iconoclasm played a part in this kind of cinema. These movies mirrored larger worries but were not saying that all American barons of business were really gangsters. Yet were they not both social texts of accusation and examples of the public's divided mind? Thus their love-hate relationship to American law and order, American government – which resulted in various stories where Cagney, Robinson, Bogart could played both sides of the moral fence.

1. *I Led Three Lives*, syndicated, produced May 1953-mid 1956 (117 episodes), starring Richard Carlson as “Herbert Philbrick” – member of the US Communist Party and counter-spy for the FBI; casting was excellent: Richard Carlson in *I Led Three Lives* was a dead ringer for lead John Forsythe in *The Captive City*.

Complications abounded. A movie was also a product, out there in an American entertainment market to make money, to be produced and reproduced and bring in the revenues. But product talks problem. Problem sells product. Meaning these movies discussed how to fix this problem as well? Yes, in so far as they fully addressed the problems, the realities, of organized crime in America. Yet, as just noted, where is the interlinked collusion between white collar and blue collar crime, between the slums, the Babbits, and the rich bankers – the lower, middle, and upper classes of America? Frankly, this mesh gets skittish attention. The process is a bit how Zola gave quick, jumpy attention to the potent embarrassments of the Paris Commune of 1871 at the very end of his novel *La Débâcle* (1871). Every society has its touchy matters and taboos. The elite of Wall Street got visibility in *Bullets or Ballots* (Warner, 1936) and *Force of Evil* (MGM, 1948). But where else? As noted, it comes late. While fear of the gangster is transformed into fear of the foreign, red, Soviet, anti-American communist amid Age of Anxiety fears. Does the gangster ever lose his dark, exalted position in American popular culture? Does he ever really disappear as an American popular hero? As a movie trailer for *Dillinger* (AIP, 1973) announced: “They were called public enemies. In fact, they were public legends¹”

Infiltration of certain unions (building trades, teamsters, culinary trades, theatrical employees, the needle trades, longshoreman) was massive – but here was another taboo². As shown in Hollywood movies from the 1920s through the early 1950s organized crime was mainly an ethnic parade of accents and bad manners limited to a few groups – poor Irish and Italians mostly, with a smattering of Jews, an occasional Brit (echoes of syndicate chief “Owney” Madden [1892-1964]) – and the bastard hoi polloi of the American lower depths. Actual crime figures and events were certainly echoed at times, but mainly there to flesh out the realism, not because these movies were factually precise, nonfiction films.

The widespread social and economic discontent of the Great Depression provided a popular attitude of sympathy for the critical mirror of US business – one creatively distorted to reflect the feelings of the time, gather audience attention based on public discontent. A similar pattern in a very different vein can be seen in the movies *2001: A Space Odyssey* (MGM / Kubrick, 1968) and *Star Wars* (Fox / Lucas,

1. Trailer for *Dillinger on Boxcar Bertha* (AIP, 1972) videocassette; Virgin Video-Orio videocassette, c. 1989 Virgin Vision Ltd.
2. For excellent coverage of this see: John Hutchinson, *The Imperfect Union: A History of Corruption in American Trade Unions*, New York, E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1972. Two movies in this era that dealt with union troubles: *Black Fury* (Warner, 1935), *The St. Louis Kid* (Warner, 1934).

1977) which reflected and refracted the success of NASA's American space programs in the 1960s and 1970s. Again, mass media, whether it be newspapers, radio, movies, or TV, has this bardic, visionary role in society. It provokes, provides, reflects communal dreams.

The solutions proposed for organized crime in these different cinematic stories are too easy. This is deliberate. These movies are no more outlines for social policy than Herman Melville's novel *Moby Dick* was a guide to how to go whaling. Reality was the object of their inspiration. The stories raised the issues involved in the topic. The best of the US gangster films at this time – excellent examples of the popular culture – functioned as a grassroots constitution. They gave attention to a problem, structured out social-political-economic relationships. They raised a red flag, interacted, participated, helped the people judge. But they were not court, police power, or an exercise of the right of suffrage. When good guy shot down bad guy at the end of *The Roaring Twenties* (Warner, 1939), or the ex-perfect cop easily infiltrated and eradicated his city's biggest crime mob that extended from Wall Street to poverty row in *Bullets or Ballots* – actual, viable strategies were not displayed.

These movies called for social progress. They were public parables that pointed the way. The rest was up to politics, legislation, policing, and individual civic choice – when *audience* became *public*. In the fact and fiction debate between organized crime in real life and “reel life” the audience was the element that changed debate to *dialectic* – where contradictions could be synthesized yet maintain their mutually contradictory character, where meaty dialogue with the subject really took place. “The People” can be *the public* (a civic virtue) or *the audience* (an entertainment market). One does not exclude the other; they complement and overlap.

The American decade in which business leaders were the least popular was the 1930s. But they were of two kinds. Henry Ford (1863-1947) lost enormous popularity when he did not cooperate with Roosevelt's government, conspired with underworld forces in Detroit – by way of his personnel director Harry Bennett (1892-1979) – in order to keep out unions and to preserve his fading business interests in his own eccentric ways¹. The elder Ford, John D. Rockefeller (1839-1937), and the likes of Richard Whitney, the head of the New York Stock Exchange deposed for embezzlement soon after the New Deal began, were common objects of scorn for the way they tried to single-handedly

1. Harry Bennett, *We Never Called Him Henry*, New York, Gold Medal-Fawcett Publs. Inc., 1951.

run the country under control of their own private rules. Franklin Delano Roosevelt explicitly drew the analogy in 1936: “Government by organized *money* is just as dangerous as Government by organized *mob*!” The Depression particularly questioned the social utility of big business for urban people whose lives depended on this newly expanding beehive of capital, the American city, and where the percentage of unemployment was significantly higher.

Had the business civilization extolled by President Calvin Coolidge – famous for his statement: “the business of America is business” – failed? The likes of some businesses and the plot lines of some gangster movies might make one think so. But, in contrast, another kind of businessman had appeared. This new breed was typified by Henry J. Kaiser (1882-1967) who rose to new fame and fortune when he cooperated with Roosevelt's New Deal government, showed great suppleness when he paralleled his beneficent entrepreneurship in the public and private sectors: construction of the Hoover, Bonneville, Grand Coulee dams, establishment of America's first prepaid health plans for workers. All US business leaders then redeemed themselves spectacularly in the public eye in the 1940s when business battled the Axis.

There is a parallel here. One way to read the gang leaders and organized crime films is to see them as analogous readings of big business, as reflection and refraction of America's up and down economic growth, US consumerism, management techniques, the conflicts between human resources, productivity, and profit. The bad guys reflect the business guys, not detail for detail – but in style and content. It is striking that *G-Men* (Warner, 1935), about a tough East Side kid who became a government law-enforcement agent, became popular at a time when some business leaders were learning how to pull double harness with the government. It is striking that when business redeemed itself in public opinion during World War Two, gangster films either disappeared or became, well, happy: as in Sherman's *All Through the Night* (Warner, 1942) in which the organized criminals are little more than tough, helpful rascals. As Bogart said in *The Maltese Falcon*: “Don't be so sure I'm as crooked as I'm supposed to be.”

With this civic mindedness in mind, it is impressive to see how lyrical, existential, narcissistic, and expressionistic the gangster film

1. F.D. Roosevelt, October 31, 1936, Madison Square Garden, on last day of his 1936 presidential campaign; as quoted in James MacGregor Burns, *Roosevelt: The Lion and the Fox*, New York, Harvest-Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1956, p. 283.

became after the inter war and early post war period. Coppola's *Godfather* trilogy (Paramount, 1972-1990) was a study of the soul of Michael Corleone. Kubrick's *Killer's Kiss* (UA, 1955) an extended, oneiric blues riff on corruption in the hearts of men and women. Penn's *Bonnie and Clyde* (Warner, 1967) a pleasurable, self-indulgent romp in the imaginary playing fields of hot guns and penetrating bullets. By the 1970s in American movies even the theme of jealousy declined as themes of self-interest increased¹. The nature of public passions and self-awareness changed over time. After its earlier period the American gangster film turned from ego to id, the world of the city to the womb of the self-absorbed, civic mindedness to me-ism, from street, night club and office to home, living room and bedroom. The 1920s through the early 1950s period is more about anger, the creative space thereafter is more about power.

Did most people want a cinema of civic lessons? Some of the movies hit hard on this. Hawk's *Scarface* (Hughes, 1932) declares right off: “[...] and the purpose of this picture is to demand of the government ‘What are you going to do about it?’ The government is your government. What are YOU going to do about it?” Not all Americans were, or are, civic minded. Far from it. Examine the voting rolls. The percentage of eligible voters who voted in US Presidential Elections in the 1928-1952 period was approximately 58 %²; in comparison to the 1974-1988 elections when it was 53 %³. In short, neither a large amount then nor toward the end of the 20th Century. A low degree of social consciousness has been a consistent element. Like any genre, gangster movies had, and have, a special attraction. Some people saw them for the fun of the violence, the voyeuristic ability to get intimate in a dark room of fantasy with people one would never associate with in public daylight. And some saw them for the social message. But how many?

One practical gauge of their importance for the American movie-going audience of the 1920s through the 1950s is the Top 10 scale – derived from movie theater rental receipts in North America (USA and Canada). Many in the American film industry believe “rental fees remain the most satisfactory index for comparing the success of one

1. Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism*, New York, Norton, 1979, p. 192.
2. Norman Cousins, Ed., *Reflections of America – Commemorating the Statistical Abstract Centennial*, Washington, D.C., US Department of Commerce Bureau of the Census, 1980, p. 178.
3. *Statistical Abstracts of the US 1991* edn., chart 450, page 268, percentage reported voting, 1974-1988.

film against another¹.” Why? Americans vote their subject interest with their tickets. And, by decade, no US gangster movies of the 1920s, 1930s, 1940s and 1950s was in the Top 10. There is reason to believe that *Scarface* and *I Am a Fugitive From a Chain Gang* made the lower rungs of the Top 10 list in 1932 and 1933 respectively². But their success did not linger. Most movie goers of that time chose not to focus on gangster films. The student of this subject has good reason to wonder what was at work here. Limited civic mindedness? Imposed limits on the distribution and circulation of morally dubious films? Or was *audience* attention drained away by competing media with similar ingredients – media which also served the *public* interest?

Movies were then part of a key triumverate of public attention and debate which included newspapers and radio. Movies, newspapers, radio were together the most widespread adult media that worried out the problem of organized crime. Concern filtered down from newspapers and radio into movies – which medium basically had more space and expertise to work out the problem. But how movies were replete with *entertainment* in the two-fold English language sense of “to entertain”: to think about, to *entertain* an idea; to divert or amuse. Movies occupied an advanced, refined stage of understanding. The best movies about organized crime were books of the screen: narratives that took time, distance, and thoughtful refinement to create, that lasted and became classics because they got it right the first time.

Stand back and consider the nature of communications media back then; it was different from and similar to nowadays. Communication, as ever, was a major factor in American life; but of other kinds, in other tempos. The student may not be fully aware of the disparity with the present and the dynamic of the past.

In the mid-1940s there were 43 telephones per 1,000 population in Alabama, 161 per 1,000 population in New Jersey. Communicating by telegraph was a normal way to send a message (often hand delivered). The amount of telephone messages per day would not exceed the amount of telegraph messages per day until 1950. And, of course, there was no fax and no Internet. Messages moved, but slower, in a more deliberate fashion than today. There was more time to savour the account. Most news came from old-fashioned newspapers; in the cities these were seriously spiced up into the tabloid “yellow journalism” form which, whenever possible, made an exciting, lurid story out of the

1. Russell Ash, *The Top 10 of Everything – 1992*, London, Macdonald-Queen Anne Press, 1991, p. 141-142.

2. See: Thomas Doherty, *Pre-Code Hollywood: Sex, Immorality and Insurrection in American Cinema, 1930-1934*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1999.

day's events. Yet, even though not as fast or as saturated as today, an unprecedented media explosion was fully underway by the American 1920s, generated by the mass media of the cities.

With newspapers, radio and movies Americans had mass produced and popularly meaningful dreams delivered to them with an intimacy, with an unprecedented abundance and scale, which no civilization had ever before experienced. Illiteracy was still high, so oral and visual conveyance of information was even more powerful. By 1930 only 50 % of the US population 14-17 years old were enrolled in school. As person-to-person telecommunications was dominated by the telegraph, so the airwaves were ruled by the radio. Only 9 % of US households had TV by 1950 – though it would be 64.5 % by 1955¹. The Kefauver Committee (1950-1951) got “on the box” at the start of a new communications phenomenon, just before it marched out full stride. The only nation-wide network – in the modern sense of a coast to coast, expeditious information web – was the movies. The release pattern was arranged and scheduled for maximum profit and interest; the films with “good legs” had a long run and good box office, conveyed the same communal dreams countrywide.

Note how newspapers functioned as primary, *local* witness in the movies of that time. The newspapers were the big, immediate mirrors, with full-blown tabloid splash and glare. Medium makes the legend in America – and newspapers attested to this power. They could be used to conclude a movie, as in the pivotal night club scene in *Force of Evil* when the protagonist realizes his plan to escape the crime game is ruined when he sees the tabloid headline (*sic*): “TUCKER-FICCO WAR! 1 DEAD; 1 KIDNAPPED” – that tops an ugly, Weegee-like head shot of the mangled dead Judas bookkeeper who betrayed the protagonist's brother². Or follow the plot of a major gangster movie like Hawks' *Scarface* which claimed veracity to fact from the beginning: “Every incident in this picture is the reproduction of an actual occurrence”. Scene one: see the killing of “Big Louis” at First Social Ward headquarters. Scene two: cut to headquarters of the town's major newspaper which spreads the word that Big Louis is dead.

1. Statistics: Anon., *Bicentennial Edition – Historical Statistics of the United States Colonial Times to 1970*, Part 1, Washington, D.C., US Dept. of Commerce, Sept. 1975; Norman Cousins, Ed., *Reflections of America – Commemorating the Statistical Abstract Centennial*, Washington, D.C., US Dept. of Commerce, 1980.
2. Weegee (real name: Arthur H. Felig): 1898-1969, was a professional New York City photographer. The visual aesthetic of “street style” in US crime movies, beginning in the 1940-1950s (Weegee's prime period) is much indebted to him. See: Weegee, *Naked City* (1945); the movie biopic *The Public Eye* (1992, dir. Howard Franklin, with Joe Pesci).

Little Caesar follows the same shift from scene one action to scene two newspaper. Angry protagonist Rico Bandello immediately gets the word in the local rag that Diamond Joe is the big crook to emulate. We know at movie's end that Rico is reduced to nothing. Not just because he dies – “Mother of mercy! Is this the end of Rico?” – but because he has left the news' loop altogether. Even the bums in the flop house show him no respect. Then, movie's last shot: flash to the huge poster of Olga and Joe Massara. Look who has public attention now. Losers and winners; how the heroes come and go. Times change. And the media let us know.

Radio offers another part of the popular frame of understanding and interpretation. It was more present in American lives than movies. Radio was an empire of the air made of sound – the wireless telephone that made America a land of listeners, which “entertained and educated, angered and delighted Americans of every kind and age and class¹”. This is noted not to diminish the importance of cinema, but to locate the place of movies within the culture, to put them in the perspective of their time and see which media complemented and dealt with the same subjects in different ways.

Take a sample year, 1946, with US Population 142 million, with approximately 60 million radio sets in use in the USA. In the 1940s an average of 90 million people went to the movies each week². Yet in 1946 there was a weekly average of more than 500 million radio listeners, per radio. Some of the best-known, most-listened-to, top rated, adult serials were about organized crime. This included: *The Shadow* (1930-1954); *Gangbusters* (CBS, 1935-1957), *Mr. District Attorney* (1939-1954), *Boston Blackie* (1944-1950), *The FBI in Peace and War* (1944-1958), *This Is Your FBI* (1945-1953), *Casey, Crime Photographer* (1945-1950), *Man Against Crime* (c. 1950-1951), and *Dragnet* (1949-1956). Plus, children's serials with crime-fighting superheroes like: *The Lone Ranger* (1933-1955), *The Adventures of Dick Tracy* (1935-1948), *Terry and the Pirates* (1937-1948), *The Adventures of Superman* (1938-1951), *The Green Hornet* (1938-1953), and *Captain Midnight* (1939-1949).

How did radio at the time read crime? First, it stressed the competence of the crime-fighting system and individual initiative in the ceaseless war against law breakers. Ironically: the war was ceaseless. The fact these entertainment shows were entertainment

1. *Empire of the Air*, dir. Ken Burns, Florentine Films, 1991.

2. Blanchard, *History of the Mass Media in the United States*, 1998, p. 402; in: Rita M. Csapo-Sweet, “Motion Picture Propaganda,” p. 401-402.

series carried a pessimistic meaning. Here was an on-going struggle against the forces of darkness overheard in the shadowy recesses of radio land. While movies occasionally glorified the criminal via their handsome good looks and debonair ways (e.g., Gable in *Manhattan Melodrama* [MGM, 1934]), radio demoted the criminal to sinister voices and awful explosions in murkiness. The American poet Leroi Jones (1934- ; aka: “Amiri Baraka”) insisted on this power for a whole generation in his remarkable poem *In Memory of Radio* (1961), quoting the spine-tingling tag lines from *The Shadow*: “Heh, heh, heh, Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men? The Shadow knows¹.”

Second came radio's continuous narrative pattern: seek one leader to fight against crime (detective, DA, FBI, superhero, journalist, soldier). The 1930s, 1940s were probably the single greatest age of authoritarian leadership in Western culture. In the United States this was a media pattern which was more consistent on the radio than in the movies – ranging from crime buster programs through FDR's and Father Coughlin's pronunciations. Taboos existed in US radio advertising agencies which forbid criticism that attacked Hitler or Father Coughlin².

Third, though despised, crime fascinated; worry about crime filled the “theater of the mind” that was radio. Gangster stories provided a worrisome entertainment that lacked social policy, social reform programs (aside from the almost-always potent superhero, the individual initiative, or the crime-fighting institution). Radio worked its wonder in people's living rooms, the intimacy of the home; inevitably sparked discussion and reflections within inner circles. It got into American heads using aural force, heard, not seen, visual images.

Fourth, radio shows also presented crime as an international, universal problem; less exclusively domestic and national than movies; less exclusively urban than movies. Reasons for this were scriptwriters, directors, radio policies and producers – the various gatekeepers at work. Another was downright practical. Radio formats could easily, cheaply, believably change scenes and settings (unlike movies); evident, for example, with radio shows that had exotic settings like *The Shadow* or *Terry and the Pirates*. US radio was more cosmopolitan in its approach to organized crime than were US movies.

1. Amiri Baraka (Leroi Jones), *In Memory of Radio*, in A.W. Allison *et alii*, *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*, New York, W.W. Norton & Co., 1983, p. 1356-1357.
2. Erik Barnouw, *A History of Broadcasting in the U.S.*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1968, Volume II, p. 387. Roman Catholic priest Charles Coughlin (1891-1979) was a Detroit-based political commentator on US radio who had a nation-wide following in the 1930s, denounced the New Deal and Jewish bankers, and favored fascism.

The mind of the radio medium was far more inclusive and equally, if not more, subtle. Orson Welles (1915-1985), not an idiot with movies, thought it as great a medium as cinema. Compared to radio, were movies too domestic, too inward-turning back then? Does one find in movies a native Tiresias, a blind soothsayer that gets to the truth – though all it sees is confined to inner visions of its American self?

Fifth, the switch from fighting crime to fighting the evil Axis forces was first initiated by radio's and comic strip's superheroes; with shows like *Captain Midnight*, or *Terry and the Pirates*. Probably US radio, rather than movies, paved the way for the popular idea of a totalitarian conspiracy of crime; which prepared the way for the Kefauver hearings (1950-1951) – which would use the newer, initially smaller, but radio-based medium of television to launch its hysterical warnings.

Which is all to say, in light of the problem, that the careful media and culture student of the period should be aware of the power newspapers and radio shared and complemented with movies¹.

US gangster movies from the Prohibition to the early Cold War period may ultimately be understood as expressions of both decay and progress, revenge, democracy and reform. They were a potent cocktail in fiction and fact that would leave one hell of a hangover. Fundamentally, they were a sign of larger changes in how mankind had come to think about themselves. Consider the American gangsters' place in the greater scheme of things, be inductive with our materials and go from practice to principles.

Gangsters as real-life American kin and reel-life cinema heroes are the end result of many strains: a logical evolution from the older to the newer chain of being, from an exalted spirituality to a newer realism, and a recognition that intelligent values come in different forms on American soil. Remember that the first two citizens of America envisioned by Shakespeare in *The Tempest* – “O brave new world, that has such people in 't!” – were Ariel and Caliban, the pixy and the man-beast. The new world's people are beasts with souls; Caliban and Ariel, like Tolkien's dwarf Gimli and elf Legolas, the earthly and heavenly incongruously blended.

In the American scheme of things, the US repertoire, they also had their place – this human type, the American kind, the gangster. He

1. Along with US pulps, detective novels, and comics as well; and along with such plot lines as the hero who switches from causing crime to fighting it. See, e.g.: Les Daniels, *DC Comics – Sixty Years of the World's Favorite Comic Book Heroes*, Boston, Bullfinch Press-Little Brown and Co., 1995.

was the cunning misfit, the outcast, US society's permanently discontented one alive in his own subculture of Cains. Forget the character whom James Dean played in *Rebel Without a Cause* (Warner, 1955), that handsome, disturbed young fellow who romanced the cute Natalie Wood character and would one day settle down and make that nice middle-class home and family his own mother and father could not provide. The gangster was an adult who lived in a permanent state of rebellion; the organized crime venturer who was up to something much more corrosive than any American teenage rebel could personify. In real life, Capone, for one, repeatedly reduced all businessmen to his level, threw acid in the face of American middle-class values, appealed to the vein of cynicism, to the hard-boiled in human attitudes: all business of any kind was a racket in his book. And in the environment of the Great Depression it was easy to feel this way. It was revenge.

The gangster destroys. But that is not all. He is unsettling. And he creates. He is an extreme expression of *The Declaration of Independence's* democratic principles of "Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness." Remember how in that curiously libertine, 18th Century document of *The Declaration of Independence* the self-evident truth of "Happiness" precedes the creation of government. And with some gangsters – some of Cagney's criminal characters can suggest this, as in *Angels With Dirty Faces* (Warner, 1938) or in *The Roaring Twenties* – there is a pungent touch of the unbridled reformer at work. With time some of America's legal customs would change in the direction which gangsters had pioneered. Activities that were once illegal in the 1920s to 1950s period, alcohol and numbers lotteries for instance, became legal in much of the USA.

As times got tough, the gangster got tougher, and survived. For all his bad traits he also had some good ones which some Americans believed they could learn from. The figure remained a vital part of the culture from the writings of the first generation of beats and hipsters in the late 1940s, early 1950s – through HBO's prime time, highly rated, cable TV gangster and prison shows *The Sopranos* (HBO, 1999-) and *Oz* (HBO, 1998-). One prism of this dark jewel of the gangster is that it functioned as a role model figure. However dark and diabolical, there was something to learn here. Forget the old clichés about America as a Puritan culture. How about the subversion of the gangster? By the 1990s America's *gangster du jour* was John Gotti. But there was nothing startling about the man. Americans by then, as

The Economist recently wrote, simply felt “not exactly safe, but at least familiar with him and his kind¹”.

Why? Myriad are the answers. At one extreme is the fact that no society ever eradicates all the roaches and silverfish in the kitchen. At the other extreme is an uncomfortable sense of higher purpose – perhaps not unlike the way in Christian mythology Satan remains ineradicable. In the words of the American socialist Eugene Debs (1855-1926) resistance, opposition, discontent may help the social body. “Intelligent discontent is the mainspring of civilization. Progress is born of agitation. It is agitation or stagnation. I have taken my choice²”. American culture chose to keep the gangster. This happened for a reason.

Our articles go from the general to the specific. These texts are also arranged by order of their emphasis on social sciences, then on cinema. Hopefully, they speak for themselves – as most of the authors did when all but the Dean-Dessere article were presented in October, 2001, as part of a *journée d'étude* on this topic at the *École normale supérieure* of Cachan. Honed in practice, they are now presented in writing.

By way of introduction, Sophie Body-Gendrot's “Du rifici et des hommes : les villes américaines entre 1929 et 1951” is a closely packed historical and sociological study which details the context of Prohibition which gave birth to the American criminological concept of organized crime. She then works out the correlation between ethnicity, organized crime, and American urban political machines. Her reading of the flourishing production of alcohol both in America's borderlands and the US itself at that time is reminiscent of New York City Mayor Fiorello La Guardia's 1930 line of attack against prohibition: “It is impossible to tell whether Prohibition is a good thing or not. It has never been enforced in this country.” The exorbitant wealth won by gangsters via alcohol sales during prohibition fostered great urban political corruption, the imbroglio between illegal profits, political graft, and violent power maneuverings well exemplified by Al Capone in Chicago, Lucky Luciano and Waxey Gordon in New York City. The power bases established by ethnic groups in her chosen US cities were far more a reflection of the demands of the American way of life than of any inherent criminality within these groups. Most troubling of all: the contradictions between the ideal and the practical in American life as illuminated by the dark problem of organized crime.

1. “John Gotti and the American Dream of Crime,” *The Economist*, December n°7, 1991, p. 58.
2. Eugene Debs, “The Issue,” 1908, in: *American Social Thought*, New York, Hill and Wang, 1961, p. 165-182; quote: p. 175.

Divina Frau-Meigs in “De la ville à l'écran : passerelles et fossés” dares unleash the early hornet's nest of critical historical neglect which confronted organized crime in the United States, a subject considered too hot to handle until well into the 1960s by most university-level researchers. At the same time, could it have been that the crime fiction of cinema and its kin existed only to shield Americans from the unpleasant realities of the interwoven links between the under and upper worlds of crime, and that when crime was addressed it was done not to uncover the causes of crime but to morally reinforce the established moral order? She notes that an “un-American” quality of organized crime was seen to be in its non-protestant sense of organization, another element being the cultural transmission of older, European traditions, hardening into fear of alien conspiracy and ethnic succession. These issues thus invite the student to consider the cinema of the 1920s through the early 1950s about organized crime as a sort of problem play, take these movies as a grand repertoire of “problem films” – dealing with certain social problems and actual character types in a realistic manner designed to worry the problems out and effect public opinion, each film a dark mirror of its time and place. Divina Frau-Meigs concludes with dark but brilliant reflections between the movie screen and the city.

Robert Skippon provides a spirited review of the contradictions between American ideals and American realities in: “Strange Bedfellows: The United States Government and Its Use of Organized Crime in World War II”. His particular objective is to analyze the complex and morally ambiguous collaboration between US and Italian crime interests and the United States Office of Naval Intelligence in World War II in order to facilitate the Allied landing in Sicily. The Allied success in these battles also facilitated the reestablishment of the Mafia as a force in Sicily and eventually in all of Italy itself. There is good historical reason to believe this victory would not have happened without a deal brokered with the direct participation of Italian-American crime syndicate chief Charles Lucky Luciano, his colleague Meyer Lansky, and various civilian and military officials of the time in both Italy and the United States. Did the end of Allied success in the Italian campaign justify the means of gangsters? At what cost did the US win this campaign? Was moral cause forfeited?

John Dean and Gérard Dessere in “The Blind Spot: Women in Urban American Organized Crime, in Fact and on Film, from Prohibition through the Early Cold War” first try to place their subject in a socio-

historical context of American values and gender issues, specially as experienced in the wake of the Nineteenth Amendment (which gave US women the right to vote) and in the context of the Great Depression. They then seek to elucidate matters with a cinematic focus which concentrates on the contrasted portrayal of urban and rural women, American women both as victims and figures of sustenance, the character of the moll, on why and how *film noir* style skirts the gangster genre, along with consideration of two of the period's key dramatic actresses Bette Davis and Joan Crawford. They then aim to show how substantive changes in female gangsters in film did not break through until the American independent cinema of the mid 1950s – at which point a development began which, by 20th Century's end, resulted in female criminals undreamt of in the earlier manly worlds of the gangster film. Disturbing parallels abound: women's positions in the world of organized crime paralleled their places in real life.

In “Le Bien et le Mal dans *Manhattan Melodrama* (Woody S. Van Dyke, 1934)” Francis Bordat argues for three initial cycles of the 1929-1951 gangster movies: the hard-boiled kick off with *Little Caesar*, *The Public Enemy* and *Scarface*; the second phase when the criminal became cop, as in *G-Men* or *Bullets or Ballots*; and a third phase of moralism and sociology, as in *Angels With Dirty Faces*. The films follow an interesting trajectory between determinism and free will; wherein choice becomes increasingly a possibility when an individual is faced with crime. His article culminates with a dense reading of *Manhattan Melodrama* which synthesizes and transcends the authoritative critical readings of Andrew Bergman and Jonathan Munby – Bordat assesses the main figure of the gangster as someone who must remain a bundle of attractive contradictions.

Dominique Sipièrè in “James Cagney, gangster,” exposes the legibility, toughness, and charisma that makes the compact intensity of James Cagney's gangster figures work. As Paul Newman said: “Acting is a question of absorbing other people's personalities and adding some of your own” – an ability, which Sipièrè shows, Cagney had in abundance. Specially intriguing are his points about how Cagney's youthful face could recall for the audience their own youth, the cruel irony of the adulthood which Cagney portrayed; how the audience participated in the American gangster's distortions of the Alger myth and sympathy for the Cagney gangster who became a criminal not by birth (as did many of Bogarts 1930s gangsters), but by

default; the potent, degenerative way the city shaped its poor children – as typified by Cagney; and the evolution of his gangster portrayals culminating in the thoroughly disturbing Cody Jarrett of *White Heat*.

Reynold Humphries in “Jules Dassin: Crime and the City” endeavors to show how the representation of crime, as in *Naked City*, either masked a political reading of post-war American society or directly emphasized such a reading, as in Dassin's *Thieves' Highway* and *Night and the City*. This characteristic is exhibited in *Naked City* with the rather Marxist contrast between the dull, go-nowhere-fast, workaday world of average Joes and Janes versus the honeyed world of the moneyed elite and criminals. Questions of labor, money and profit govern *Thieves' Highway*, not so much in the city (San Francisco) as in the issue of economic domination – taprooted in the life of the city. While *Night and the City*, Humphries argues, is both quintessential *film noir* and an allegory of the witch-hunting and blacklisting of the time. Plus Dassin's London offers a vision of a city as seen from an American viewpoint: a corrupt, fallen, Sodom and Gomorrah world replete with Richard Widmark the cold-eyed psycho as guide.