

Dr. Todd Boyd

The Gangster and American Culture (CTCS 464)

Thursdays 1:00-5:50 pm/SCA 108/Fall 2019

Dr. Boyd's Office Hours

Wednesdays 12:00pm-12:45pm

Thursdays 12:00-12:45pm

Appointments for Dr. Boyd's Office Hours *must be made in advance* through the Cinema and Media Studies Office, SCA 320 (mediastudies@cinema.usc.edu/213.740.3334)

Teaching Assistants

Marquise Mays, mmays@usc.edu Office Hours: 11:00am – 12:00pm Thursdays, SCA 118

Jade Miller, jadeemil@usc.edu Office Hours: 6:00pm – 7:00pm Mondays, SCA 118

Course Description

With the release of Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather* in 1972, the gangster genre took on a new cultural significance. Though the gangster film has a long history in Hollywood, the remaking of the genre as a venue for post 1960s commentary on history, cultural identity, race, masculinity, and the "American Dream" elevated this genre in ways both popular and political. Over time the gangster would displace the cowboy as one of America's favorite fictional characters, becoming an especially important symbolic figure across the cultural landscape in the process. This course is interested in analyzing what we might refer to as the "modern American gangster," from the 1970s through the present. In addition to focusing on several cinematic gangster classics, the course will also observe the influence of the gangster film relative to other forms of media and popular culture. This will involve studying both the image of the *gangsta* in hip hop culture and the mainstreaming of gangsters/gangstas in the transitional moment of television highlighted by programs such as *The Sopranos*, *The Wire*, and *Breaking Bad*.

Books:

- **The Godfather* (BFI Film Classics), Jon Lewis
- **The Godfather*, Mario Puzo
- **Pimp*, Iceberg Slim
- **Heat* (BFI Classics), Nick James
- **Wiseguy*, Nicholas Pileggi
- **Casino*, Nicholas Pileggi
- **Mr. Untouchable*, LeRoy “Nicky” Barnes and Thomas Fulsom
- **Parental Discretion is Advised: The Rise of N.W.A. and the Dawn of Gangsta Rap*, Gerrick Kennedy
- **Scarface Nation: The Ultimate Gangster Movie and How it Changed America*, Ken Tucker
- **Difficult Men: Behind the Scenes of a Creative Revolution: From The Sopranos and The Wire to Mad Men and Breaking Bad*, Brett Martin

Reading/Screening Schedule**8/29:**

Screening: *The Godfather*, Francis Ford Coppola (1972)

Reading: **The Godfather*, Lewis

**The Godfather*, Puzo

9/5:

Screening: *Super Fly*, Gordon Parks, Jr. (1972)

9/12:

Screening: *The Mack*, Michael Campus (1973)

Reading: **Pimp*, Iceberg Slim

9/19:

Screening: *The Godfather Part II*, Francis Ford Coppola (1974)

Reading: **The Godfather*, Puzo

9/26:

Screening: *Heat*, Micheal Mann (1995)

Reading: **Heat*, James

10/3:

Screening: *Scarface*, Brian DePalma (1983)

Reading: **Scarface Nation*, Tucker

10/10:

MIDTERM EXAM

Screening: *Straight Outta Compton*, F. Gary Gray (2015)

Reading: **Parental Discretion is Advised*, Kennedy

10/17:

FALL RECESS (NO CLASS)

10/24:

Screening: *Goodfellas*, Martin Scorsese (1990)

Reading: **Wise Guy*, Pileggi

10/31:

Donnie Brasco, Mike Newell (1997)

11/7:

Casino, Martin Scorsese (1995)

Reading: **Casino*, Pileggi

11/14:

Screening: *Dead Presidents*, Allen and Albert Hughes (1995)

**Mr. Untouchable*, Barnes and Fulsom

11/21:

Screening: *American Gangster*, Ridley Scott (2007)

Reading: **Mr. Untouchable*, Barnes and Fulsom, cont.

11/28:

THANKSGIVING (NO CLASS)

12/5:

Screening: *The Sopranos*, David Chase (1999-2007)

The Wire, David Simon (2002-2008)

Breaking Bad, Vince Gilligan (2008-2013)

Reading: **Difficult Men*, Martin

12/17: FINAL EXAM 11:00am – 1:00pm SCA 108

Course Requirements:

Midterm Exam – 50%

Final Exam – 50%

The midterm and final exams must be taken at the established date and time. The class cannot accommodate requests to alter the established date and time of the exams based on the personal schedule of individual students. There are no makeup exams. If there is an unexpected illness or other emergency that would prevent you from taking the exam at the established date and time, you must request an exception. Appropriate documentation must be submitted **PRIOR TO** the beginning of the exam. Please note acceptance for such a request involves following appropriate procedure. Simply declaring an emergency and/or submitting material does not mean automatic acceptance of the proposed request. The legitimacy of unexpected illness and/or other emergency requests in this regard will be determined as acceptable or unacceptable at the discretion of the Professor.

Attendance Policy

Class attendance is required and will be monitored. A sign-in sheet will be made available during the break between the end of lecture and the beginning of the screening. It is your responsibility to sign-in as proof of your attendance each week. You can only sign-in for yourself. There are no retroactive sign-ins.