“Down these Mean Streets a Man Must Go Who is Nether Tarnished Nor Afraid. He Must be the Best Man in His World and a Good Enough Man for any World.”

From “The Simple Art of Murder,” Raymond Chandler on the American Detective

“It’s the Stuff That Dreams Are Made Of”

The Maltese Falcon

“I’ll Make Him and Offer he Can’t Refuse,”

The Godfather

“If 007 says he saw Derval last night at Shrublands and he was dead, that's enough for me to initiate enquiries”

Thunderball

“What is it with you people? You think not getting caught in a lie is the same as telling the truth”

Three Days of the Condor

In this course we will look at heroes and villains in American culture and how books, plays, and films of particular genres, including the Detective, the Gangster, and the Spy impacted worldwide audiences- and how great directors, actors, and writers and authors influenced and were influenced by American culture, history, and mythology. We will also look at how classic and popular literature and film reflect our notion of heroes and villains and good and evil the lines that define and blur them: Who we who we are and have become as people- and why good people do bad things and the goodness and compassion of villains in books and film. How has the mythology influenced us and inspired us?

Movies are a true American art form. They have been inspired by and in turn inspired, influenced and shaped American society and culture for over 100 years. By analyzing movies thematically, by topic and genre, we can learn about our own history, goals and vision, and about how specific American archetypes and themes are perceived and articulated- from the rugged individualist in the Old West, to the underdog who perseveres to become the hero in the boxing ring, to the perceptions of government over various decades, to the uncertainty that The Cold War generated that created a generation
of celluloid superspies. The insights gathered and lessons learned from these movies are inspiring, uplifting, and entertaining.

Students will watch two to three films per week (two the entire class will watch and then one assigned to subsets of students) and do assigned readings for class discussion, along with weekly homework assignments and three research papers.

Course Outline:

I. The American Detective- The “Private Eye”

Session 1. Overview

The session will discuss good and evil in America and the concept of the Hero. Using The Western as a metaphor for The New Frontier- specifically an analysis of the end of the Old West through two films: “The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance” and “Shane” as the gateway for the three other genres of self-reflection, analysis, and exploration.

We will focus on the development of a genre- why a genre is significant to story development- development of themes and subsequent variations on themes. The Hero's journey and adventure: Our relationship with heroism; heroism as an integral part of cultures. Why mythology is important to a culture: The message of the myth and how artists develop and keep the myths alive. How myths establish societal norms and meet our needs; and heroes and villains- and its significance to storytelling, and the underlying development of character, themes, and story structure.

Viewing: The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance (1962)

Session 2. The Original Consulting Detective

The detective as the agent of social order in the world. The person who can see things that other people cannot see and derive solutions and solve crimes and problems with flair and style: Sherlock Holmes and his progeny, including Edgar Allen Poe’s C. August Dupin, Agatha Christie’s Miss Marple and Hercule Poirot, Rex Stout’s Nero Wolfe.

Reading: Joseph Campbell, The Hero With a Thousand Faces, Arthur Conan Doyle, The Speckled Band

Viewing: Sherlock Holmes (2010), The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes (1940)

Session 3. The Detective and Film Noir: The transition from the parlor to the back alley: The detective as the new frontier Dashiell Hammett- The original “Hard Boiled” detectives: Sam Spade, The Continental Op, The Thin Man’s Nick and Nora Charles, and Mike Hammer, and relationships between men and women in the genre.

Reading: The Maltese Falcon, The Continental Op, The Simple Art of Murder
Viewing: The Maltese Falcon, The Thin Man, Tony Rome, Gone Baby Gone

Session 4. Raymond Chandler’s Phillip Marlowe

Chandler’s influence on the American voice ("When I split an infinitive, God damn it, I split it so it stays split.") An analysis of the development American voice- Farrell, Fitzgerald, Hemmingway, and Chandler, and Chandler’s influence on the genre and on American literature

Reading: Raymond Chandler, The Big Sleep, Red Wind, and Trouble is My Business
Viewing: Murder My Sweet, The Big Sleep, Farewell My Lovely, Marlowe

Session 5. The Contemporary Detective as the Outsider

The session focuses on the modern detective and contemporary morality, often the outsider, who has to battle the system he or she is part of as well as the villains to attain justice, including Spenser, Bullitt, Columbo, Dirty Harry, and Jim Rockford

Reading: Robert B. Parker, God Save the Child
Viewing: Bullitt, Dirty Harry, episodes of the Rockford Files and Columbo


Comic books started out modestly seven decades ago printed on pulp paper- there was so much pulp paper at the time, there needed to be a creative use for it. The early stories were geared to appeal to a very young audience. Today, comics have become one of our most enduring archetypes- American mythology, with legendary characters and stories that have transcended time and inspired generations of artists in all different mediums. With movie companies issuing bonds in order to finance the purchase of rights to comic book characters, it has become an international multi-billion dollar industry.

This session provides an overview of the heroes and villains, with particular focus on a comparison of two enduring characters- Batman and Hamlet. Both had many and varied incarnations; both are exceedingly troubled young characters who deal with issues of parental loss, darkness, vengeance, and redemption.

Reading: The Psychology of Superheroes, Ch. 1-5, Fingeroth, Superman on the Couch, Ch. 1-4, Hamlet- selections.
Viewing: The Dark Knight, Hamlet/selections (Ethan Hawke version)
II. **Wiseguys- The Gangster in American Culture**

**Session 7. Early Urban America and its Gangsters**

The session will explore 19th and 20th century immigration patterns and how the rise of criminal organizations based on nationality and religion and the subsequent romanticizing of the gangster in America and the gangster as a tragic figure, including actors who portrayed them: James Cagney, Edward G. Robinson, Paul Muni, and Humphrey Bogart and an analysis of and comparison to William Shakespeare, who created some of the first tragic gangster characters.

**Reading:** Excerpts from Julius Caesar and Macbeth, Joseph Campbell, The Power of Myth- Chapers I. Myth and the Modern World, II. The Journey Inward, and III. The First Storytellers

**Viewing:** Angels With Dirty Faces, Key Largo, White Heat and excerpts from The Public Enemy and Little Caesar

**Session 8. The Godfather and its Progeny/The Modern Greek Tragedy- The Development of Modern Tragic Characters**

The session will discuss and analyze the quintessential gangster film set the tone for not only the genre but for subsequent filmmaking and literature.

**Reading:** Mario Puzo, The Godfather, The Annotated Godfather- The Complete Screenplay

**Viewing:** The Godfather, Goodfellas, The Untouchables The Departed, scenes from Once Upon a Time in America

**Session 9: Modern Villains and More Tragic Character**

The session will explore the villain in modern film and literature and why the flawed villain is often heroic and finds redemption.

**Reading:** Tarrantino- Pulp Fiction Script

**Viewing:** Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, Pulp Fiction, The Usual Suspects

**Session 10: The Caper: The Con Man/Picaroon- Living on the Fringe**

The session will explore the fascination/appreciation of the ingenuity of the well-constructed caper- why do we root for the people to “get away with it?”

**Reading:** Bellow- The Adventures of Augie March, Thomas Mann- Confidence Man, Frank Abignale, Catch Me if You Can, Matchstick Men

**Viewing:** The Sting, Ocean’s 11, Catch Me If You Can, The Grifters, Fitzwilly
III. Spies

Session 10. The Spy Tradition-

The spy as the quiet agent provocateur who quietly prevented wars. The history of the Cold War and the artists and their fictional characters who provided intrigue and suspense.

Reading: Hitchcock/Truffaut, Conversations, The Manchurian Candidate
Viewing: 13 Rue Madalaine, Casablanca, North by Northwest, The Manchurian Candidate

Session 11: - Shaken not Stirred

Bond, James Bond- the history of longevity of the glamorous spy saving the world in a tuxedo

Reading: Ian Fleming: Live and Let Die, Greene, The Spy Who Came in From the Cold, Michael Kackman, Citizen Spy, Chapters 5 and 6
Viewing: Goldfinger, Thunderball, The Man from UNCLE, Avengers and I Spy Episodes

Session 12: Parody: From Get Smart to Derek Flint to Austin Powers- An examination of the lighter side of the various genres and what it teaches us about the genre.

Reading: Caesar’s Hours, Chapter 12, Satire and Parody, SJ Perelman, Farewell My Lovely Appetizer
Viewing: Our Man Flint, Austin Powers, episodes of The Beverly Hillbillies and My Favorite Martian

Session 13. “How Do You Know They’ll Print it?” The Tarnished Warrior/The Modern Spy- Three Days of the Condor, Jason Bourne, Jack Ryan and Jason Bourne and the new Bond- The modern spy versus not only the villain but the corruption and indifference of his or her own institution

Reading: Richard Condon, Three Days of the Condor; The Bourne Identity, The Hunt for Red October

Session 14. Course Summary/Reflections and Student Presentations

Class Assignments: Three Papers/ Presentation:

1. Paper 1: Interview an older relative/friend about a book, television show and/or movie that they were influenced or moved by, and/or a program that they shared with their
own parents- discuss something you learned about them that you did not know and that they did not know about themselves. Was there any drama that connected them to their own parents- and to their political and social ideology? The goal is to connect memory to meaning and establish the evocative and visceral effects of these genres on your own/family life (2 pages). (15 percent of the final grade)

2. Paper 2: Select two characters, movies, or television shows from different periods and analyze its/their social significance. Choice one should be a personal favorite and choice two should be specifically out of your “favorite” zone (5-6 pages). (25 percent of the final grade)

3. Paper 3: Select a character, book, or film and analyze how it influenced and in turn influenced that period. (10-12 pages). (40 percent of the final grade)

Class participation will count toward 20 percent of the final grade (see below).

Topics and source materials should be submitted no later than three weeks before the due date and will be reviewed and discussed individually. Drafts for assignments 2 and 3 should be submitted no later than two weeks in advance of the due date and will be reviewed and commented on for the following week.

Grading:
Paper 1- 15%
Paper 2- 25%
Paper 3- 50%
Class Participation- 10%

Attendance and class participation will be a factor in the final grade. For each class a few students will be "on call" for each class, to be responsible for leading class discussion and doing a little extra reading for that class. Every student will get a chance to express themselves and have their ideas be subject to their classmates’ analysis. Each student will be required to do an 8-10 minute PowerPoint presentation in front of the class of one of their papers with clips, and will integrate their presentations into the lecture.