

THE PAX ROMANA OF
THE AMERICAN
GANGSTER GENRE

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Pax Romana of The Gangster Film Genre

The gangster film genre is a fascinating collection of films that have been around for close to 100 years. Brutal acts of violence are seen as the film's depiction of real-life gangsters and the lawless reign that shapes society is what defines this genre. Audiences are drawn to these films as they have such a big scope on the world with the blending of romantic themes, cultural identity, masculinity, violence, gambling, and crime. One of the main questions in the study of the gangster genre is just how the use of excessive violence is rationalized by the plot. Violence is common in the gangster genre as well as the horror film genre, yet horror films do not get the same recognition cinema gives to the gangster genre as *The Godfather*(1972), directed by Francis Ford Copolla, received an Oscar for best picture and actor in 1973 and again in 1975's, 47th Academy Awards. The Horror genre of film has many masterpieces and yet would not see the same praise as a Cinema genre until 20 years later with best picture and actor in *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991), directed by Jonathan Demme. This comparison is only brought up because without a prestigious award like best picture in a film genre, it is hard to cement infamy, which is something that for more than fifty years held the horror and gangster genre of Cinema back from highly acclaimed reception. Both horror and gangster film genres were viewed in the same light because the violence they would portray would be seen as an aim to make people scared or disgusted.

The reason many directors change their styles and approaches to make their films engaging and diverse, but most genres stick to repetition in camera shots, musical choices, and themes. Gangster films have truly taken every direction in style and storytelling, and this has captivated audiences since the early 1930's with *Scarface (1932)*, directed by Howard Hawks, as it is considered one of the earliest films in gangster cinema. Howard Hawks use of imagery towards cinematic foreshadowing as seen with the X marks placed throughout the film using different objects. The X marks foreshadow character deaths and started the reoccurring trope in the gangster film genre that would be seen in *The Godfather* with oranges doing the same as they were placed in scenes right before the character's deaths. *Casino(1995)*, directed by Martin Scorsese and *Goodfellas(1990)*, also directed by Martin Scorsese use voice-over narration to talk about how characters know they will die from certain assigned jobs given to them mid conversation. The genre was falling out of the spotlight as the gangster film genre was not winning awards until the late 1980's and early 1990's to 1995, the genre would experience a Pax Romana as their films put them back on the map by winning awards and taking the spotlight back within cinema.

What makes this period so intriguing to explore is not only the effect it made on its own genre but how it changed new media. The Gangster film genre changed all media as more crime induced plots came to television and theatres, the use of violence for cinematic purpose will reach new heights with horror films receiving its first best picture and actress for the first time in this era. It also made inspiration to more anti-hero stories that would come later that would feature dual narrative crime plots similar to the CIA and the mafia in *Untouchables(1987)*, directed by Brian De Palma, series like *The Sopranos'(1999)*, directed by David Chase and

Breaking Bad (2007) by Vince Gilligan. For example, most horror films try to use as much plot to rationalize violence, where the gangster genre does not need to do that as it is already understood.

“Gangster films are often morality tales: Horatio Alger or 'pursuit of the American Dream' success stories turned upside down in which criminals live in an inverted dream world of success and wealth. Often from poor immigrant families, gangster characters often fall prey to crime in the pursuit of wealth, status, and material possessions (clothes and cars), because all other "normal" avenues to the top are unavailable to them. Although they are doomed to failure and inevitable death (usually violent), criminals are sometimes portrayed as the victims of circumstance, because the stories are told from their point of view (16. Zelotrov)”

These stories affect everyone as at one point everyone was an immigrant to America. The obsession with having comes from a long time of never owning. With wealth and class crises being a recurring issue in capitalism, heritage and job opportunities are correlated as immigrants can have harder times getting jobs as they are considered a lower status. Rationalizing for these criminals is the soft spot of empathy all people have as hard work does not always pay off. Gangsters tragically find themselves as the victim as they have no other outlet for success besides crime. `In finding the answer the criticism and reception of audiences is key, but more important using studies of criminology to further this understanding can help understand why it is put in the first place. History is important in understanding any field of research and the history being unveiled here is that of the gangster genre from the late 80's into the mid 90's. Brian De Palma's *Untouchables*, Martin Scorsese's *Goodfellas* ,and Martin Scorsese's *Casino*

are the main focus as they not only represent such a critical point for the genre, but each of these films innovated the genre by making changes to narrative, perspective, song choices, and pacing. The birth of the genre in the 30's with *Scarface* both disgusted and excited audiences. The genre saw a massive revival with *Godfather*; which is considered one of the best films ever to elevate the genre to a Pax Romana. One film helped define a genre, while the other took it to its highest point. The cycle of the gangster genre has a huge correlation with cultural influences, which will create another high point in the late 1980's. The gangster genre has been one of the most influential film genres that the world has even known for the allure of crime. Tracing back to the early 20th century, gangster films have seen many changes in their production. There are common elements that were introduced in the earliest films that have lasted to modern times such as symbolism in objects, exaggerated dialects, and the rise to power from nothing.

The idea of living the American dream, gaining power and authority, having a sense of control over one's fate, manipulating the capitalist system, and misogynist gender structures have all been important aspects of gangster films. The gangster character can be seen as an extreme manifestation of the male viewers' desires to gain these traits upon which our society places so much emphasis on. Most rational men are detached from the protagonist because of their crime but some males see these characters as role models as their high fashion, fast cars, and pretty women can be seen as a sign of success amongst men. Gangster films create a sense of connection with the world around it as it draws in the desires of people and similarly the answers are all in researchers' questions. This field of research is not just for the gangster genre lovers, but really for anyone who has a passion for film and is fascinated with how genre's become a cornerstone for its viewers ideology and societal effects. There is no doubt that capitalism is a

motivating factor for many gangster films produced. The idea of using the system to gain financial security and wealth is an embedded idea into modern culture. We, as a society, have placed much emphasis on gaining financial security through our free market economy. Gangster films play off this idea for many motivations of their characters. A film's lead role is many times motivated by getting rich because he or she came from nothing and saw how money ran the world.

"It's interesting to me that a major gangster film is coming out at a time when we are in a recession," says Michael L. Stephens, author of "Gangster Films." "In the 1930s, those films reflected the sentiment of the time, which still exists today, and we still identify with that anti-Wall Street, anti-establishment feeling(2. Beale)"

This anti establishment mentality directly affected the audiences as they related to the financial depravities that had motivated the film protagonist to commit crimes. The idea of the government failing its people financially made viewers more inclined to accept the only way to financially make it in America was to be a gangster or criminal as living without taking was becoming harder to do in America. Directors were aiming to create this sense of relativity towards capitalism as financial gain was all the immigrant crowds were focused on attaining wealth. Seeing the gangsters ride in the newest cars, wear the fanciest clothes, and be around the prettiest women created an impression that any man would want as making a decent living during this time was impossible with discrimination and established wealth controlling the market.

The ideas of capitalism, living the American dream, gaining power and authority, and generally being in charge of one's own life are still some of the most important themes in any gangster movie presented to today's audience. American gangster films can be dark and serious

while having humorously lighthearted moments that tell a rich story about the criminal world. The elements that these movies portray still fall to some of the original themes that were prevalent in the gangster movies of the 1930's. . The very character drive of the gangster character was in line with the character drive of the average working man and their promise of freedom through enterprise.

“The American Dream seemed the perfect immunization against the dangers of a militant class consciousness. It promised a common vision to all Americans workers and bosses, the poor as well as the rich. In an open America, class struggle would be unnecessary. Discontent with one's position would inspire workers to change their positions within the system, rather than trying to change the system itself (14. VANNEMAN, REEVE)”

In line with Vanneman's argument, all gangster films follow the ideology of the American dream as class structure is the catalyst for all crimes as it comes from a sense of need. This theme was stronger in the 1930s era of American gangster films as it was a direct influence from the transition to a country where Italians are at the bottom of the class structure. The shifts of the genre have been noted from the 1930's to the 2010's as the gangster genre as a whole has come a long way since the early silent movie era films featuring Al Capone. Some of the most famous films of the time are even being remade to retell the stories that were so popular back in their original time of creation. For example, *Scarface* which took place near 1930 was remade in the early 1980's by Brian De Palma and has become one of the most iconic gangster films made in the modern era.

Studying films from the late 80's to early 90's is important for the way that they redefine the genre and keep the magic of it alive. Immigration of Italians really helped create a relatability as the poverty-stricken communities' root for these characters but with these films moving past the late 19th century and early 20th century, De Palma and Scorsese had to establish these struggles which are the backbone of the genre. To determine the effectiveness of the gangster genre, two lines of research are commonly talked about being the film's viewers fascination with crime, anti-heroes, and violence, as well as the cinematic styles and approaches a filmmaker takes to further the value of these elements. *The Godfather* revived the genre's market with its reputation as one of the best films within it winning best picture. Directors such as Martin Scorsese and Brian De Palma, would be responsible for redefining the genre. The history of the genre is important in understanding how it evolved as violence was what made this genre have such a major influence on all films.

“The coming of the Hays Production Code in the early 1930s spelled the end to glorifying the criminal, and approval of the ruthless methods and accompanying violence of the gangster lifestyle. The censorship codes of the day in the 1930s, notably the Hays Office, forced studios (particularly after 1934) to make moral pronouncements, present criminals as psychopaths, end the depiction of the gangster as a folk or 'tragic hero,' de-glorify crime, and emphasize that crime didn't pay. It also demanded minimal details shown during brutal crimes (16. Zelotrov)”.

This very reaction was counter action of these films being too impressionable as without the banning of gratuitous violence on film, the moral compass of the audience would be corrupted as they would relate crime with positive rewards. The genre has a history of showing its work

directly affects the masses as Brian De Palma and Martin Scorsese were focused on the hysteria these gangsters had created in their respective time periods. The 80's and 90's were no stranger to gratuitous violence in films so the two directors were determined to create the same reactions, as seen with films like *Scarface* when first played in theatres. Bigger changes need to be made to the typical static male troupe set by the genre as there needed to be a new way to tell the story without having action be forced in every scene especially towards the innocent. The change of protagonist to more dynamic anti-hero is seen as Scorsese and De Palma's change of narrative created a moral compass which would rationalize the violence to the viewer.

Masculinity's effect on the male audience is key in the gangster genre, as the majority of the cast and protagonists are men as only about two to three women play either mothers, sisters, and sexual desires as it worked in the stereotypical chauvinistic logic and the patriarchal system. The undercasting of women in Gangster films is astonishing as even when casted would not have full character arcs or drives. Women in these films were treated as objects and only plot progression towards the males success. For so long women were the shadow of the gangster men that were with them as their actions never rippled or signified anything greater. The lifestyles they lived reward chauvinistic behaviors as they mistreat women mentally and physically with no punishment for doing so by the law or their peers as they are actually applauded by other men. Crime in these films have a direct effect on attraction as the man that does the most crime, gets more women in return. The correlation between domestic violence in and out of the home is clear with so many progressive female movements such as The Girl Power Movement, after the era of time that these films were based on ranging from 30's in *Untouchables*, 1950's and late 1980's in *Goodfellas*, and the early 1970's and 1980's in *Casino*". It is important to understand

the female's role in the genre but specifically these movies as the director's mirror the males dilemmas with their spouses endeavors. Their long suffering and positions of power in the movie tackles bigger issues of feminism as they seek independence, freedom and equality.

1. Women Characters

With World War II in the late 1930s and early 1940s, women filled the workplace and many shifted to head of the household. Although the conservative system was not a fan of them women started to transition their independence and voice. The 70's and late 80's had the women's rights movement that showed America that women no longer will accept inequality due to gender being the second wave of feminism. Although bigger moves and changes were coming, many women did not identify as feminist as the ongoing problems saw no real solutions.

“While most American women support the basic concepts of feminism, they tend to shy from the feminist label. For instance, in a 1989 study, only 33 % of women surveyed indicated that they considered themselves to be feminists despite overwhelming support for the issues the movement addresses and the widely-held perception that it has helped the status of women overall (Wallis, 1989). "I'm not a feminist, but . . ." is a common refrain among women who reject the label. The "but" is usually followed by expressions of support/ concern for the issues championed by the movement, such as equal pay (94%), day care (90%), job discrimination (82%) and abortion rights (74%)(3. Beck)”

In lines with Beck's argument it can be seen although there is more vocal support in the ongoing gender issues, only 33 percent of women labeling themselves as feminist shows feminism still struggles to have women stand with their cause. Being 1989 when this study took place is the

same period of time these films were released. Although the female characters were not directly in the same time period as the films released, Scorsese and De Palma rooted the modern day issues into the writing of their characters as Karen and Ginger's character arcs reflect freedom and independence as they grow apart from their dependency from their male partners. Their character's mirror the flaws in their spouses, as their relationship ups and downs show the error of the male protagonist as they lose control of these women. The controlling of women in these films is symbolic of the males' control over their own lives as Ginger and Karen's characters branch out from the control these men put on them using money and power.

The control of money and power used by the male protagonist directly affects the mental health of the two characters of the film, Ginger from Casino and Karen from Goodfellas. Slowly they lose their mental sanity as it is fading from the actions of the men. Ginger is the most toxic out of the two but her obsession with money and jewels slowly deteriorates her mentality as her actions become more reckless and dangerous. At the beginning of the film there is a minor complication of trust that Rothstein states is the most important thing in a marriage. That trust keeps being put on the line with the recurring relationship of her past lover Lester Diamond, whose last name interestingly symbolizes wealth. The audience is fully aware he has none as he steals from Rothstein repeatedly through his ongoing affair with Ginger. Lester's character being a con-man adds to his pseudo identity as he is approaching Ginger with the same methodology Rothstein had done which is to win her over with money.

“In the second part, the trios accession to a life of privilege and excess gradually leads

into their inescapable downfall. Increasingly unhappy in her marriage to Rothstein, Ginger turns to alcohol and drug abuse, and looks for comfort in adult relationships, first with her former pimp, Lester Diamond (James Woods) and then with Rothstein's protector, Santoro. The latter puts them in a bizarre love triangle, one that queers Rothstein's relationship with Santoro, and triggers events that bring down the empire built around them. Scorsese emphasizes the tragic and religious dimensions of his mob mortality play, describing it as an "Old Testament story:[one of] gaining paradise and losing it, through pride and greed(13. Silver)"

Ginger is the one that connects all of the male character's demises and uses all of their greed against them as she uses Rothstein love to manipulate his money, Nicky's ego problem to make him feel more masculine and betray his best friend, and Lester's obsession with hustling. Ginger is a hustler before and during her marriage and never stops as it is the only way a woman like her can gain power or attention in Las Vegas. The film is treated very similarly to a documentary where the ins and outs of the casino business are explained, yet the only time a female works in any of the scenes is as a showgirl. A woman like Ginger has no other outlet for success so just like how the mafia exploits people for their demands of power, Ginger adapts the same mentality. This later escalates to Ginger tying up her daughter at home to sneak out with Lester where Rothstein unties his daughter in complete fear and exhaustion. Lester and Ginger later become accomplices in the kidnapping of the same daughter as she is not rationally thinking and is willing to put her own kid's life in danger just to get Rothstein's attention. With all the ordeals she already brought on she takes it further by sleeping with Rothstein's best friend Nick as she looks for a new more powerful man to seek protection as she is scared of the repercussions of her

actions. This all escalates with her stealing the safe box with millions in fortunes as a final sign that there is no trust in their loveless marriage. This shocking plot twist symbolizes the flip in control that women have as they can take actions over their own fates. Ginger's character's actions are a direct response to Rothstein treating her like an object or trophy wife. What Scorsese is showing is that marriage is a serious commitment as women can no longer be won over with money and power as they are individuals that deserve the same respect as their spouses. As Rothstein progresses through the casino business his attention and love to Ginger spirals out of control as she craves the life she once lived. His love displacement towards his daughter is foreshadowed with the business agreement they made about the marriage in that Rothstein made him agree to have the kid first before being married. The underlying problem is Rothstein being a gangster treated love just like his business with rules and contracts. Rothstein's controlled character mirrors Ginger's free spirit and the loveless marriage existed because Rothstein fell in love with Ginger for only the money and power his marriage would give him. Ginger was a woman not willing to play with the construct of being a housewife as her depression and substance abuse grew with every passing minute of the film. She continually plots revenge anytime she sees a vulnerability in Rothstein's actions. Scorsese was showing that a new type of woman was emerging. Women like this are the same predator that men were in the past, as men like Rothstein become the prey. Scorsese creates Ginger as a femme fatale and in her own way just like a male gangster as she uses intimidation repeatedly to get what she wants. From Rothstein's money, to later his image, his trust, and finally his most important love, his daughter, she corners him in every way knowing that for the decade that they are together he would have to play along with her every step of the way. Her shrieking hatred is seen when

Lester gets beaten up by Rothstein's men as she states, "you never let me have anything" Ginger feels as if Rothstein clipped her wings by accepting the housewife role and that complacency led to her getting freedom in any way possible.

The role of females in the gangster film is so limited as genre innovations such as Lorraine Bracco in *Goodfellas* having a voice over narration was so groundbreaking as what a woman said or even thought was not crucial in prior gangster films. Scenes where Lorraine's character commentary can be heard such as when Henry Hill pistol whips a neighbor for sexually harassing her, giving a new perspective that normally is never touched on. "Forewarned that the characters were not representative of any ethnic group, a nationwide television audience then watched the violent, multi-generational saga of the Corleone (4. Cortes)" After witnessing violence from Henry for the first time in public daytime in front of her parents house, Lorraine's voice-over narration says "I know there are women like my best friends who would have got out of there the second their boyfriend gave them a gun to hide, but I didn't. I got to admit the truth, it turned me on." To hear this tells the viewer that she feels in this new wave of gangster films have more depth than the linear character troupes set before for women. For one it shows her personal take on the situation which normally in a gangster film would not use screen time to do. It also shows that she has control over her fate as she relates to her friends as a moral compass and indicates right there she was fully aware that she should have walked away and not supported Henry's crimes. Karen Hill's commentary expresses that although she is being an accomplice to this act, she is aware of the male dysfunctions of violence by relating herself to her best friends who are also women. By using her best friend who is a woman as a moral compass, shows that in the 50's a young woman her age would be the voice of reason for the trauma she

witnessed. Since she is standing in front of her parent's house it is even more interesting that she does not simply say my father would never tolerate this or a comment about if her mom were to find out as only women her age would be independent enough to walk away. Even the comment about how she was turned on can be seen in two ways, one being the attraction to power, and the other can be Henry's unconventional method of violence for a gangster as normally the gangster is the one beating the women, not beating a woman for sexually harassing a woman.

Vivacious, aggressive, and hysterical, Karen is forced to socialize with mob wives- their entire being exclusively bound to people linked in their rackets. She views them as vulgar (although her taste is more pretentious and artistic) badly dressed, and incapable of controlling their children, but she is turned on by Henry's gun and adopts the mob lifestyle without any qualms. Despite being strongly linked to her mother, the film's brief sketch of Karen's suburban home-nagging mother, passive, silent father, and a smug ex-boyfriend who sexually attacks her- makes the straight respectable world she was brought up in less appealing than the mob (10. Quart)"

Quart is implying that Karen although she is a housewife she has it much worse than Henry or the Mafia. The breaking of her home life and values as just a regular woman in the mafia entails the bigger issue of conforming and accepting how the mafia completely controls her life. A Stockholm syndrome bond is set up as she seeks Henry's protection by telling him about the sexual assault. It shows how no man in this age bracket is good as both men are criminals who have hurted Karen physically and mentally. Gangsters can be seen hurting men for coming for their women but what makes this unique is not that Henry does it, but that Henry chooses this to be his action to reveal his criminal life to Karen.

Scorsese is playing on both aspects here as Henry was a different type of gangster for his hesitation to kill and his eventual escape from the gangster life. Even the fact that there is a voice-over narrative and not Karen's dialogue, shows that not all women of this time had the power to express their thoughts in a similar manner to Stockholm syndrome, where the hostage knows the wrong being done, but cannot help feeling attached to the kidnapper. Like Ginger her mental state also starts to deteriorate but from Henry's intimidation of her family. Karen is a grounded family girl who lived with her parents until her mid 20's and slowly has to let go of her parents to adapt to Henry's moves in the mafia. This divide is first seen as Henry comes home drunk early in the morning and has a complete dismissal for her parent's comments. Karen even goes further to defend him by saying that their comments are the reason he goes back out and does not stay home. An amazing scene is when she meets the other mafia wife's early into their marriage and is repulsed in her voice over at how cheap and immature these women act. Karen was conscious that this was foreshadowing the life she was about to live as scenes like bringing her daughter's to jail to visit Henry start to really put into light how his family life is not just deteriorating but affecting their kids. The most traumatic scene for Karen is when the cops invade their house and she frantically dumps the cocaine down the toilet along with a pistol down her underwear. The scared and desperate look on her face is the realization that she is no different than the other mafia wives she judged earlier on in the film. Henry's macho incompetence falls apart as he cries on the bathroom floor with his wife as he is not clean in the sense that he has no mafia work coming in and does not respect Paulie's words as he is doing and dealing cocaine. The frantic crying and screaming seen as the drugs are flushed down the toilet shows Karen's psyche deteriorating as she can no longer deal with the consequences of her husband's actions. Her final pushing point is at the end of the film when she realizes that she will never be able to see her parents again if they move due to witness protection which leads to

her divorcing and taking her kids. This full circle in her character arc of leaving her parents to find a family, to later leaving Henry to unite with her family, shows how the women in the end are the true victims but can walk away and not drown in the same misery and false promises that the mafia life brings to them. Karen has some progression in her character as she attains everything Henry wanted being close to a family, living in a community surrounded by family, and even eating authentic Italian food as he stated the meals he gets in relocation are ketchup and noodles as he craves for not just the life he once lived, but the life Karen currently lives. The ongoing trauma Karen's character faces through the dilemmas Henry puts her and her family through will never go away as she becomes a victim through her love. What progresses Karen's character past other mafia wives is how the viewer sees every layer of her suffering as she slowly loses her identity as Henry's wife. Enjoying the luxuries that come with Karen was not fully aware of how their money was being made until the very end. One scene shows her showing off her lavish living room as she is concealing her happiness with money displacement as she needs to show her neighbors that she is a success. It is not until the end that Karen realizes her success is her family and the memories they have together. Karen's character symbolizes the changing domestic environment where a woman does not need to have a man to have a family and happiness as her character envelopes that any woman in any suffering can attain independence.

2. Capitalism/ American Dream

Gangster films, like many genres, have operated in cycles of highs and lows in terms of box office sales largely because of its source material's negative effect on society. The three gangster films mentioned are so critical in understanding the gangster genre as a whole because it was an upswing in time where it revived what made it so memorable in that it was based from real sources. The transition from linear plots redefined the genre in the way it used dual

narrative, change of perspective, stronger use of female roles, and its societal effect. These questions together are the very root in understanding not just the gangster genre, but really the psychology behind what the directors are trying to say, and what the audiences are understanding from these films. Their drive throughout the film is to get to a higher status in society by acquiring the most money in the shortest time possible. This is usually done by unconventional means that delve into illegal activities. Viewers can use the actions of the gangster to relate to their own life in a sense through this. Most viewers of a gangster film would never actually perform the activities that the movie's characters perform such as murder, contributing to the drug culture of America through drug trafficking, or prostitution, however the viewer can see the consequences that getting involved in these trades have. By manipulating vices that attract an addictive crowd, the gangster is able to accumulate a large amount of money very quickly through his or her own cunning and careful planning. Viewers with escapist fantasies can see themselves in the character as they will feel they too could rise to such power with their own cunning and planning if they truly wanted to go into such a business as crime. The film's realistic structure points out exploits in security and business that the protagonist will use to attain wealth. The films rationalize these actions as the mafia shields the character's from real life consequences creating a delusion that anyone can imitate this. This idea of manipulating the capitalist system is also tied to another important element of the gangster genre as it is seen that making money and establishing success by any means is the true American dream.

In gangster films the mafia's version of the American dream often seen as the character will be introduced to a criminal figure that shows him or her just what can be achieved in working outside the law in order to attain their dreams. The character will quickly begin to make

much more money and rise through the ranks of the criminal world. Basically, the character's achieve the American dream promised, but they are achieving them by working in illicit activities. This allows the viewers to almost live out a sort of fantasy for themselves as they would never do the crime but are being influenced to think in the same way as these criminals. The films, therefore, provide a means for seeing a physical manifestation of their wildest fantasy and it is why it is analyzed for its role in cinema as a whole and for its effects on film viewers. How this genre influences films as a whole can be seen in the ways films adapt stylistic choices such as French new wave cinema and film elements from the gangster genre such as symbolism through objects for foreshadowing, but how these three films green lighted many similar violence heavy films to receive reception for the content that lies behind the stains of blood, the real essence of trauma and film storytelling. Tied to this idea is one of the other root causes for actions within gangster films. Gaining power and authority are usually outcomes that gangster film characters work toward. The films tend to show the corruption that the system has in it. Those that have power through legitimate means are not ones that usually give up what they have achieved. It makes for an incredibly difficult means for a person that starts from nothing to get power or authority if those in power do not want them to succeed. The gangsters are portrayed as sort of modern Robin Hoods in this sense. Scorsese stated in an interview,

“Basically I was interested in what they do. And, you know, they don't think about it alot. They don't sit around and ponder about [laughs] “Gee, what are we doing here?” The answer is to eat a lot and make a lot of money and do the least amount of work possible for it. I was trying to make it as practical and primitive as possible. Just straight ahead.

Want. Take. Simple. I'm more concerned with showing a lifestyle and using Henry Hill as basically a guide through (9. Murphy)"

Scorsese is talking about the excessive needs of the mafia men and how their whole structure is gravitated around their desires without effort. Their whole structure is based around as long as they can live like kings, there really is nothing else to think about. This moral detachment from excess comes from the backing that these gangsters feel that since they are in a position of power they are their own authority. Essentially as long as they have what they want they are creating their own capitalism structured around crime. Henry being a guide is also seen as a guide for males during his time as the film tells the ups and downs as showing the consequences. The end dialogue of the film has Henry safe and away from the mafia, but depressed as he would do anything to live his lifestyle out again. The mafia life is like capitalism where one can risk it all and net off of people beneath them for their own gain, or live a good honest life with no flare or excitement. As Henry is seen as a teenager when the film starts as a grown man in his forties he experiences for the first time a mid-life crisis, one in which he will never bounce back from. This same dilemma is seen everyday as men live a high life of excess to later fall back from their mistakes. The mafia can be seen as the market where one's wealth and financial gain is all part of a factor that they have no power over. The demasculinization of Henry's rise and fall to power parallels the average man's life who is not in the mafia similarly to the legend of Icarus who flew too close to the sun and had his wings burn up. The economic patterns and cycle reflect an economy built on credit, pyramid schemes, and real estate markets with the collateral being the domino effect that brings down a business. Paulie's gang was the very business Henry was

involved with and as every character's own take on the American dream to their own life crumbles when their leader can not live his anymore.

In connection to the topic, arguments about film viewers liking disorder and grotesque violence provide correlations to the viewers intent in choosing the genre. Mafia films were returning to the same premises that started the genre being the excessive violence as cultural acceptance is the catalyst. Film makers in the gangster genre had to start creating more effective ways to convey these acts of violence by creating more character arcs to make the violence more weighted. The audience was excited and waiting for plot points leading up to these big blowouts as they are invested into the character's life such as their family. The cheap thrills of action films were burning away like a dwindling candle and writers had to look for more non-fiction content to explore and recreate the action. Gangster films work with this formula as Rafter states,

“Psychologically, they encourage viewers to identify with victims and offenders—even serial killers—whose sexualities, vulnerabilities and moralities may be totally unfamiliar. Ethically, they take passionate moral positions that would be out of place in academic analyses. Crime films constitute a type of discourse different from academic criminology, one with its own types of truth and its own constraints (11. Rafter)”.

In this reading, Rafter states that a viewer can sympathize with criminals as even if they do not have anything in common, people are conditioned to rationalize the suffering of almost anyone, completely different from studies that criminology provides. Interestingly, the research also concludes that viewers can have this perspective towards films as opposed to crime literature as

people enjoy crime films more. The one-way viewing glass film presents to viewers is how overtime the gangster film genre has received reception as viewers overtime can detach themselves creating a much personal level as the viewer gets to experience as much of this as they want, while snipping out the portions of the character they do not like. Rafter's research ends¹ with the views of psychologists and sociologists who define all of this as mentally people having a frame of ideologies, but the frame breaks down to templates that are constructed of social norms, morals, ethics, and assumptions. Once the main frame is broken down, the viewer is left with the smaller sections, thus are more vulnerable to relate or even respect an offender or victim. *Casino* and *Goodfellas* both have Joe Pesci portray a ruthless gangster but behind his sadistic views is a man who cares deeply about his friends and family. Tommy DeVito's death is rationalized by his friends for killing a "made" man but is ultimately a loss as Tommy was the only one from their crew who was fully Italian and can be a "made" man. His death coming on the day he is supposed to be bestowed the ultimate honor he is shot in the face and Henry comments about how his mother cannot have an open casket funeral for him. Scorsese choosing his own mother to portray Tommy's own mother adds to the sentiment as the scene contrasts what the crew is doing in burying the made man Tommy killed, with Tommy really cares about his mother and that he has the roots of a good person despite his actions. Nicky Santoro being his other character, is much more relentless in his violence but is shown to make his son breakfast everyday no matter what is going on, a point put into to sympathize for the villain as he is viewed as a good father. The blending of social norms with gangsters creates more human characters that the viewer can relate to.

¹ Pg.420

Scorsese views on criminology in his own films is similar to Rafter's ideas about how the audience can find empathy through characterization or relatability in their own life. Scorsese uses family core values to heighten the empathy felt towards these criminals as they are just regular people with families at the end of the day. Nicky, dying next to his younger brother begging for life, clings onto these values while rationalizing the loss of the character as their own actions are to blame. To make a connection with a criminal and the audience by having the audience as close to the one way window without entering the room. This does not justify Nicky's crimes as he flew too close to the sun and had to have his wings clipped, or else the story would not feel real since there needs to be a consequence. By choosing to show these family values lets the viewer see every side of a criminal as not just the excessive violent nature of their crime that audiences might want.

In viewing literature on both crime and Mafia stories, a connection is seen as both Rafter and Madison J. Davis points out how film has a much larger representation in these fields for the very same detachment.

“When we watch a film, we observe the characters' behavior. We do not have to become the character as much as we do when we read, though we may identify with certain aspects of a bad character. The arc of a great villain's rise and fall-*Richard III*, *Little Caesar*, *Scarface* (in either movie versions) – can be fascinating to watch, but we don't have to identify with the demented pleasures of drowning someone in a butt of Malmsey or

pounding them into a hamburger with a baseball bat, as Al Capone is alleged to have done(5. Davis)”.

Davis and Rafter both allude to the fact that people have a level of detachment to violence and viewing it has less of an effect as seeing a criminal does not enforce someone to act like one. *Wise guys(1985)* for example is known as a book because of *Goodfellas* and even after knowing this people would much rather view the film than read the source. When the reader has to become these sociopathic gangsters by reading as opposed to viewing their strengths and weaknesses through the separation of a screen. This argument can also be interpreted as saying that violence is more accepted viewing than imagining as it is necessary for the latter. Davis takes this further by explaining the roles reality has on films such as *Goodfellas* and *The Untouchables*, as the films are grounded to the real life stories.

In line with the argument, Davis points out how Al Capone has been portrayed by over fifty different actors and would lead one to think that people would stop paying to see the same story about the same villainous gangster. Despite this people will continue to engage in Capone based films such as *Untouchables*, as it is not what Capone does, but how he does it and how it is depicted that brings audiences back continuously. These elements mirror the character’s power and influence so much so that he can only be brought down through tax evasion as every cop and judge is on his payroll, which in a way makes him a victim. The viewers know the outcome and the wrong he does, yet they will watch with anticipation and bewilderment to see just how he is detained in *The Untouchables*. The inevitable being set as viewers know the history, make all the violence and crime just part of the ride as it fuels the content and feels purposeful as it reflects

the already known demeanor of these gangsters. Other film genres have trouble meeting this because a story has to be told along the way as opposed to knowing the end is going to be tragic. The tragedy comes in the empathy and if a viewer can not relate or feel to a villain or anti-hero, then the violence is gratuitous and purposeless.

This acceptance of violence did not happen overnight in the media as *Scarface* broke a lot of film conventions in American cinema by showcasing a plot that's protagonist showing excessive public violence, and by using common societal depravities as motivations for crime. The difference between films like *The Great Train Robbery*(1903), by Edwin Porter, where the villains are the protagonists, is how it was based on a true story and grounded more to realism. Jonathan Munby connects² 1930's gangster films to current day ones and shows how the genre changed. According to Munby, the release of the film was controversial simply due to the urban ethnic groups these gangsters represented. Historically since the Great Depression was going on urban ethnic groups became more common with increased immigration and the benefits ethnic Italian groups had sticking together in the impoverished areas of cities. In the readings the people are able to empathize with these criminals as their motivations are the same since everyone is an outsider trying to get in. In comparing the 1930's gangster genre to the 1970's through 90's Munby feels the gangster genre lost what gave it so much purpose.

“The early 1930's gangster film is significant to the extent that it was the studio system's *enfant terrible*. That is, from within a space of ostensibly limited aesthetic and co-opted ideological value, these films were

² pg. 110

consistently (and definitively) able to pose awkward questions about the terms and condition of living in urban America. While Hollywood may never offer it as a weapon of agit-prop, its gangster products displayed the extent to which it could foster what Michael de Certeau has termed as a “tactical” resistance to power.... it is a maneuverer within the enemy’s field of vision (8. Munby)”.

So, as opposed to Rafter and Davis, Munby's argument is that people used to be drawn to the gangster film genre out of societal poverty and imbalance, as opposed to accepting the violence. In this reading the decline of resistance and opposition is seen as it is replaced by violence and not what fundamentally got viewers into the genre. The censorship Munby explains was in 1935 was not due to the criminal nature, but because of the ethnic urban groups these gangsters were made up of, and the fear that the masses would develop the same view toward authority as oppressed people. As Munby states in his reading the driving force for gangster films had gone past 1935 and were losing what made audiences drawn to them. This was a pivotal point for the genre as studios had to find new ways to bring back not just the audience, but the real fans who connected so much to these films.

The approach taken was about changing the way in which the story is told, as Gaylord Brewer describes *The Untouchables* main character Officer Malone as brutal male authority flipping the script giving to the gangsters. Malone slowly has to become the evil that he is combatting in order to bring it down. As Al Capone increases his crimes to historic heights with the Valentine’s day massacre, Malone has enough as he assembles his own team and takes law

into his own hands. While Malone is the moral compass, his character rivals the persona of Al Capone as he is willing to play on his level, and his game. By choosing to switch the narrative by following the actual protagonist who may be a male authoritative figure but is the better of two evils and not the villainous, or anti-hero protagonist, Gaylord Brewer argues that although it is a battle of good and evil, the character Malone is based off is a fictitious reach from the real person.

“The Untouchables” set in a mythologized American past, Malone, and even Capone- with his charisma, chutzpah, and criminal audacity- belongs to an older world, anachronisms living both in a recalled and fictionalized past and, appropriately, fully realized only in conventions of the genre. For as *“The Untouchables”* blurs the distinction between gangster film and western... *“The Untouchables”* ends with Ness lamenting “so much violence” and admitting hell “have a drink” when prohibition is repealed. He walks away into a gleaming, hyperreal Chicago landscape, enveloped by Mamet’s simultaneously satirized and romanticized hope of national progress (1. Brewer)”

Brewer is getting at the characters reflecting this overexaggerated macho persona that is layered in reality but coated with gangster film genre conventions. By acknowledging the relics of the genre, while creating a new perspective that still gets to enjoy a mobster character in its full experience, and creating a fictionalized reality, David Mamet being the screenwriter, was able to create a new type of gangster film and experience as it broke conventions by showing exposure can be given to both the good and bad guys in this genre, but with Al Capone being humorous

yet frightening, and Malone being honorable yet dark, Mamet succeeded in blending and mirroring these two character drives. Demonstrating violence is one of the most important factors in the film. An important part of the film that shows this, is when Elliott Ness is trying to catch the bookkeeper at the train station. It then turns into a shootout scene between the Mob and Ness. In this scene, at the beginning, slow motion is critical in understanding the focus and tension Ness's character is going through. It symbolizes the importance of each shot, second, and decision made and is crucial for gangster films because it adds more depth to the character and environments. If shot in regular speed the viewer would miss the scope of the area, the angles of both shooters, and what the public is viewing. Without this the weight of what is at stake is lost as if it heavily enforces how the mafia actions are rippling into everyone's life and how a split second can be someone's last. When things are in slow motion, it helps to bring about the detail and gore that is unfolding before our eyes. It also lets the viewer see just how quickly Ness needs to act before innocent lives are put at stake. As the lower level with Ness and the higher level with the mafia it is quite clear in symbolism that the FBI is fighting an uphill battle against Capone's gang as they are ahead and just getting stronger and bigger.

“By the time he was a teenager he had been a member of two different gangs. Stealing, in one form or another, quickly became his career. But it was the Prohibition era that defined him. In 1920s Chicago, Capone became the symbol of the organized crime that controlled the city. As he noted, “This American system of capitalism, call it what you like, gives to each and every one of us a great opportunity if we can only seize it with both hands and make the most of it.” Capone didn't see himself as a criminal. Instead, he thought of himself as a businessman giving people a product they wanted(6. Gange)”

Capone's corrupted view of capitalism has no remorse for the people that he hurts making his profits as he reflects corporate greed as monetization is his only concern. The capitalist system works in his favor as people get what they want and anyone who opposes him gets paid. The mother and baby are perfect symbols of life, one that creates, and one that was just created and full tension is at hand when the stroller comes in between the shootout. They act as an apparent tribute to "Odessa Step" sequence in Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin*. Ness tries to prevent this scene by showing he is affected by the trauma in the Valentine's day massacre as if he acted faster he could have prevented those officers deaths by helping the women up the stairs but as the stroller drops so does Ness's operation as so much more is at stake. There is even a Navy soldier in full uniform adding to this tension as it can be seen that he just got back from his service since he is at a train station, as other people who protect their country are affected by gangsters like Capone taking it away. After this, the shooting unfolds, and the slow-motion stops. Next, it was filmed with a wide screen which was effective for showing intricate movements, like this shootout scene. Throughout this part, quick cuts were used to convey that things are out of control and this brings out the intensity of the violence. The camera pans over to the baby numerous times as his facial expressions are happy and unaware as the baby represents the can not see what is going on as he is facing the ceiling. The youth in this scene being unaware can be how many citizens of Chicago are acting as if Al Capone's crimes are taking place. Elliot Ness's victory and saving of the citizens is a real turning point as this impossible battle seems so much closer with real action finally taking place. This scene conveys the whole theme of the movie in that Elliot is a man who is forced to play the same game as the criminals as the crime is so bad it escalated to an open shoot out with many lives at stake.

Crime literature may have not been as accepted as gangster movies, but is crucial in the making of gangster films as it is the source material and inspiration for making films like *Goodfellas*. Maurizio Viano's³ review similar to Munby's article of *Goodfellas* also gives insight to the director's style as the voice over narration's mirror the book *Wise Guys (1985)*. Rafter and Davis expressed no one would want crime literature as a film, but Martin Scorsese thought otherwise, and with Henry Hill's monologue modeling *Wise Guys*, Viano's connections that the film allowed audiences to understand the gangster's mind the same way the book did. All the conventions of dialogue and action still exist, but scenes do not linger as the monologue means that scenes can just cut out. With Henry's optimistic voice and Italian dialect creates for a more fluid presentation where the plot is always being established, and the next scene can unravel with no pretense. This contrast is why the tragedy aspect works so well as most films would not normally sell if they had featured a major death. Films are more relatable on screen because good or bad the viewer can empathize for almost any character for simple things such as the actor who plays them, a person in their own life they can relate the character to, or simply aesthetic were seeing the crime mirrored with comedy is a lot more suiting than reading line after line immoral crimes with a black and white mug shot being the only thing they can identify a character. Scenes that are recurring like the bar scene helps understand the social construct and moral compass of each individual leading the viewer to rationalize different behaviors depending on the character's life. Henry is a man so deep into the Mafia that watching his marriage, two daughters being born, and then eventual divorce, makes you rationalize his ideology switch at the end in which he rats out the mafia as opposed to Jimmy who stays true to the Mafia, but has no family to show for it.

³ Viano 15 pg.45

Scenes like the long stare in the court house when Henry rats out Jimmy makes the viewer almost feel bad for Jimmy even after he attempted to kill Henry and his wife for the principle of Jimmy's loyalty, and never cracking or dying in the mafia for over forty years.

Every production of mass culture is a conscious public act, and if that act does not align with the public good, then the message will not be accepted. The changing ideologies of the gangsters and law enforcement towards their establishments reflects how these films are more character driven then plot based. Jimmy was a man who was similar to Elliott Ness were these are law abiding citizens who play by their own rules, even if it contradicts their organizations. Ness was not in the favor of really anyone as his war dealt with the temperance act with the "wets" vs "the dries." With every police officer and judge on Al Capone's payroll, as well as the common people not in favor of prohibition, Elliot Ness becomes the villain as the public is not in favor of his end goal. Corruption rules as Capone owns the town with his money as the people do not realize the very danger they are supporting as they continue to support his bootlegging operations and crimes. Many scenes like the popping of champagne by the wealthy celebrating prohibition with illegal alcohol just furthest the disinterest in Elliott's work. All of this is done to make light of how Malone's actions are going against the norm and he is not willing to conform to corruption as even his own department has workers being paid by Capone. Capone's gangster even threatens Ness and wife at their home and Capone himself gives Elliott an envelope of 2,000 dollars, the equivalent of Ness's annual salary. Bribes like this would happen every week meaning Ness would have never had to work again and like many others would bow down to Capone's tyranny by nullifying his determination to stand up. With no one on Elliot Ness's side

he was upset at how the FBI could just let a man get away and even flaunt heinous crimes on a daily basis pushing him into playing Al Capone's game and operating parallel to the mafia with his own crew and gun. A very macho imagery earlier on in the film has the crew riding through the desert with their horses and guns giving the viewer as western cowboy scenario in which Elliot must be a sheriff that plays by his own rules. Even getting Al Capone on tax evasion was not enough as he started to have shootouts and more physical interactions leading up to Capone's capture. The reason they had to get him on tax evasion was because the IRS was the only branch that Capone did not corrupt or bribe. Jimmy similar to Ness, operates on his own terms as earlier in the movie he cooperates and assist in a murder of a mafia captain to help his fellow gangsters, later on he plays by his own rules as he feels operating under the boss or crewmates was not worth his time. His first act of rebellion leads to him and Henry being arrested in a Florida Zoo, which is the mission they have done since the passing of Tommy Devito. It is a complete failure as they get arrested and this will start a bad streak in not just their own life's but also in big Paulie's gang and operation. It also shows that these men's egos are deflating as they are operating outside of the Mafia and get punished for it. This power complex leads to him asking Henry to go on a suspicious gig at the end of the film, where Henry instantly knows that gig would be his last. This is taken even further with Henry's wife earlier in the film as Jimmy sets her up to almost die window shopping for dresses. Hauntingly the camera keeps panning back to Jimmy as almost like a dog trainer keeps trying to persuade and wave her to her demise. This was the decline of Jimmy's respect as now the limelight of the Mafia was now turning into a hard light on what a criminal truly is down to their core. The whole film ripples the idea of killing just being an outlet for male insecurity as every financial or ego related problem relates to

the killing of a character. Earlier on Joe Pesci's character kills a captain over the fact that he teased him about a past nickname and the fact he used to shine his shoes in order to attain respect in the Mafia. This is the first time we see the delicate ego of Joe Pesci's character unravel as he tries to stand his ground with the situation escalating into murder.

“He is inventing the Italian American screen human, revealing to the public the ostensible savage psychological complexity and high degree of civilization. Just as Callo sees Scorsese's anti-heroes trying to continually redeem themselves, I see Scorsese himself trying continually to redeem both the stereotypical characters he is using and his own use of these characters. (7. Guida)”

Scorsese gangsters maintain the high life that they live, outlash an inner aggression due to a history of social rejection and a longing for acceptance. Tommy's position being belittled and his past life as a shoe shiner being brought up releases this trauma as he thought he had finally reached a point of maturity in crime where no one can tell him what to do as if he is the leader of the mafia he works for. His character is breaking outside of the rules of the Mafia as his fatal flaw is he lives by his own ideology. Later over ten people are murder in the span of two minutes over the mistakes they made in the Laugaurdia heist as it defeats the whole message they had in the bar after the heist on Christmas about how the wealth is shared and their is respect amongst men. Even Morris Kessler gets murdered over the fact of never getting paid by the Mafia and continues to ask Jimmy for his money in which Morris and wife die in a cadillac. The lines are always blurred as murder is always rationalized in the sake of one man's success. It is easier and more rational for the mafia to kill a family then to pay a debt. These characters' ideology changes

are that of a changing world, one where capitalism and a man's desire changes their outlook on authority in pursuit of their own American dream.

3. Music/ Directorial Choices

Through *Goodfellas* and *Casino* the transition to song choice not only does not have to be all original score, but can use modern songs to not just create cultural relevance like the song choice of Mrs. Robinson in *The Graduate*(1967), directed by Mike Nichols but can create further meaning in contrasting the song choice to what is expected from the scene as seen. *Reservoir Dogs*(1992) directed by Quentin Tarrantino, being in the same time era as the three films uses “*Stuck in the Middle With You*” in the iconic ear cutting scene as the contrast in song to content foreshadows the end of the criminal syndicate and its high days. This use of song choice is the same tone that “*Layla*” is used in *Goodfellas* two years prior and is used with the reveal of numerous mafia members found dead throughout the city as it also represents the end of an not just the gangster era in the film’s lore, but the cinematic gangster genre itself ending as characters such as “wise guys” or “goodfellas” to create such content off of, do not exist anymore, as this way of living is truly gone forever.

In his essay, Viano talks about choice in music as each song had heavy implications such as “*My Way*” reflecting both a gangster’s persona, as well as Scorsese’s views on how he, as a director, is not limited to tell the story the same way the genre did before. His unique way also incorporated French New Wave techniques in freeze frames, time dates, locations, and zoom-ins all to make note of Scorsese influence and existence as a director. “*Layla*” , another song Viano brings up, takes a greater purpose aside from using a romantic song to convey a grim scene and how much symbolism is behind it.

“Eric Clapton’s *Layla* can remain indifferent at Scorsese’s use of the song’s piano exit in the last portion of his film. We first see a group of street children interrupting their ball game and stare at something we don’t see. We then cut and the haunting piano starts to what they see, a slow, high-angle tracking shot over the pink Cadillac with a dressed-up couple in *rigor mortis* and dry blood. Cut to Frenchy’s body rolling in the garbage truck’s compactor and then to another slow track in the refrigerator truck, at the end of which we see Frankie Carbone’s frozen body: a hyperrealist nightmare. *Layla* is an emblem-song of a period forever gone, a period for which Scorsese has occasional spurts of nostalgia (15. Viano)”.

In this reading it can be determined that the song was not only the end of the mob crew, but of the gangster era of film that Scorsese symbolized through repulsive deaths. This offset of nostalgia is bittersweet as this is Scorsese’s first ever true mafia film, yet it is reminiscing on the glorious days of the gangster film genre that is fading away. Frankie Cabone’s frozen body is not just an indicator of how the mafia in the film will stop progressing, but for how long the gangster film genre would take to reach its full execution. To pioneer so many different directorial choices, as well as only enhancing the story telling with narratives without taking away from it, *Goodfellas* signifies a film that not only pays homage to the gangster film genre, but expands its limitations in song choice by using more vocal songs, and incorporating love songs to convey heavier themes that only original scores and instrumentals did before with other films in the genre. The contrast a song can provide in the film can deter the viewer from feeling what they

are seeing as the viewer is reminded that they are detached from their character's lives yet feel so relatable to their everyday mannerism and dialogue the crew can have.

Martin Scorsese's innovations in music did not stop at *Goodfellas* but continued the American-Italian gangster genre themes in *Casino*. According to author Silver Alain of *The Gangster Film Reader*, *Casino*⁴ is also based on real story but switches certain events, characters, and adds more to the plot. In the article, Scorsese is drawn to the story of the inevitable rise and fall of the mafia in Las Vegas. Silver and Viano agree on the point that these films also symbolize the end of the mob genre. The author describes how the opening of the two films are the same as they announce their downfalls. Ace Rothstein's opening dialogue tells the whole story before flashing the viewer back ten years. Mob movies always hint at bad endings, but to give the whole plot away, and expect people to stay, was a choice Scorsese knew would work as the audience is not there for the ending. What really set this movie apart Silver sums up to the commitment to making it as close to reality as possible. Scorsese actually shot during the operational hours of the Riviera Casino, making what is described as a non-fiction documentary that focus was finding out how the Casino worked, and the nature of the operation the mafia was running in Las Vegas. Though called one of Scorsese's most artificial films in the reading, it fits the theme of Las Vegas being greed through monetization. This clash of flashy mixed with authenticity really gives the film a unique feeling as it both reflects on the vanity of the mob, while also giving a more personal view on the unseen mafia owned casinos. If *Goodfellas* ' is the end of an era of great men, Scorsese's choice was to make *Casino* the end of not just the hidden

⁴ Pg.220 *The Gangster Film Reader*

society that runs Las Vegas, but of society as a whole. The F.B. I's increased security as a plot point symbolizes how the mafia as a whole was no longer able to keep up with law enforcement and the times. These effects weigh down on the character's as their freedom and pride are stripped to secrecy and lies. In relation to the argument of directors' choice, it comes down to how the events were changed. Nicky Santoro and his brother were never beaten in a cornfield by the old dons. The purpose of changing this was for Scorsese to acknowledge he is telling stories about men who do not exist anymore. The old man can be seen as the gangster at the gangster film genre's beginning, with Nicky Santoro's death being how the gangster left at the end of the genre. The article says that if *Goodfellas* was modern day Babylon, *Casino* would be Gomorrah as there are no rules, just chaos. The biggest change directorially was finding a way to not just create disorder in a group of people but make the very setting mayhem itself.

“Scorsese adds that at the end (as in the beginning), it was essential to communicate the sense that something grand had been lost: “I’m not asking you to agree with the mortality- but there was a sense of an empire being lost, and it needed music worthy of that ... Even though you may not like the people or what they did, they’re still human beings and it’s a tragedy. Here, as in *Goodfellas*, the lament is for the loss of a lifestyle, the passing of a (Gangster) way of life. At the same time, the end of *Casino* is a culmination of summation of Scorsese’s own life or auteur style: a blistering and haunting last word on the culture of American Violence, criminal enterprise, and civic life mined since *Mean Streets* (14. Silver)”.

The difference here was making a mob film that was bigger than just the mafia as it symbolized America as a whole. Scorsese tackled a much bigger meaning with the destruction of America by consumerism. The tourist paired with the song *Theme De Camille* by Georges Delerue creates a twisted irony that truly an empire is lost not just in the film, but in the World. The choice to make a final debut to not just the Mafia, but the legacy he started with *Mean Streets'* (1973), directed by Martin Scorsese, his directing choices to use on set shooting, flamboyant wardrobe, as well as a mockumentary look at how Las Vegas use to run, sums up the smoke and mirrors behind the genre by giving a more honest ending. To conclude the fate of not just a mob crew, but to destroy a whole dynasty is arguably the biggest step the genre had ever taken. All of these are done in pursuit of the quest to have the ability to be in complete control of their life. The irony in this is that by wanting to be in control of their own fate, the character is for a time a puppet of someone else's desires and ambitions. In many cases, the character eventually will rise to the top of the criminal organization and have complete control of their own fate only to realize that they have lost their identity along the way. What began as essentially a good person trying to make their own way has been buried by the criminal act in which they have taken part, fundamentally changing their character. Though the life of a gangster may seem as a way to gain freedom, wealth, and security, the cost of actions cannot be undone and will weigh heavily upon the person forever.

The typical gangster film featured original scores of high paced action soundtracks and the transition was made with *Casino* song selection featuring a huge selection of genres and ultimately merges film score with classic American hits. The unorthodox use of pre-recorded

songs saved Scorsese time in production and led him to create the shots first, and then edit the music after to make the songs more fitting to the movie. This technique is nothing new to Scorsese as other directors say it is niche, and his prior film *Goodfellas* featured the same formula. A huge inspiration for Scorsese was how well Stanley Kubrick used the song choice for *2001 A Space Odyssey* (1968) directed by Stanley Kubrick, as the scenes were not orchestrated to the music rather vice versa.. Scorsese states “I wanted to get a visual counterpart to the power of the music, again by listening to the music and envisioning the camera moves (12. Scorsese)”. Scorsese's inspiration came from sitting at home late at night and hearing a song on the radio and then later seeing something on television that would match that song. This moment would lead him to write these ideas on sticky notes which later came to his advantage when he had an array of songs over the last 16 years he started doing this. This led Scorsese to have such a tailwind in shooting the film as all he needed to get was the footage. *Casino* was the first film Scorsese made using digital editing tools. This more flexible, faster, and accurate process as the songs would integrate to the clips seamlessly giving Scorsese more room to fine tune the decibels of each song to make the emphasis of a song does not overweigh the narration. This transition makes music feel more attuned with the scene as it can set the mood without taking away from the dialogue. Its range in style also tells the viewer how to feel in certain scenes as some songs can incorporate romantic themes while others incorporate the blues. These changes to music score differentiated what a mob movie has to be as it can accompany a wide range of emotions, and does not have to be stuck with the same themes of tragedy and struggle. Digital editing allows for the image and sound tracks to be simultaneously created and stored. Complex work done on the soundtrack during image editing does not need to be redone, putting the

interaction between sound and image more concretely into the hands of the editor and director as opposed to a composer which also saves a lot of money in production as funds are not needed for scoring. 178 minutes from start to finish, including end titles. Three quarters of *Casino's* run time is scored with about 129 minutes of music in total meaning that almost all of the movie is accompanied by a soundtrack that conveys a message about the theme of the scene. An expression of then new digital filmmaking, *Casino* captures a new way of sound recording and it certainly leaves an impact as no song feels out of place, and yet even with genres ranging from love songs, to rock and roll, to even orchestra, no two songs in the movie feel out of place when compared.

The gangster film genre is a complicated story of ethnic background, working class struggles, violence, crime, and tragedy. The gangster film genre has changed purpose throughout the decades, but has reached its golden age, as well as its end with the late 80's and early 90's. Films like *Casino*, *Goodfellas*, and *The Untouchables*, all mark a turning point for what was an oversaturated, as well at times an underrepresented genre as Brian De Palma and Martin Scorsese reinvented the wheel while remaining true to the genre.. From people's acceptance and understanding of graphic content, to how a director chooses to tell a story that was already told, gangster films will forever surprise and entertain the masses. Researching how gangster films will always be ongoing study as they reflect how films can tackle more modern themes, and have better representation of women. With over 100 years of Italian's immigrants settling into America, the chase of the American dream is always changing as the mafia becomes less of a problem with better opportunities and increased crime control. The stories and characters created

within the gangster genre will always reflect America's changes throughout a capitalistic society where class problems exist in the current day and are a constant reminder of how these films represent America's economy throughout the decades. Gangster films will always inspire new media as their lasting dialects and references are still used in all media. The gangster genre came a long way since Howard Hawkes but the next 100 years the genre will continue to innovate not just its own films, but evolve as films become more acceptant and more progressive. Although the gangster film genre fluctuates in popularity and sales, the genre will forever stick to its lore, while remaining open to whatever cinema has in store for it.

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