



**THE CLASSIC
GANGSTER FILM**

Scarface

(Howard Hawks, 1932)

APPEAL OF THE GANGSTER FILM TO STUDIOS

- Organized crime and Prohibition
- “Brand identity” in Hollywood
 - Paramount: European elegance
 - MGM: spectacular family entertainment
 - Universal: horror films
 - Warner Bros.: crime films
- Warners and gangster films
 - cheap to make
 - exploits new sound technology

APPEAL OF GANGSTER FILMS TO FILMMAKERS

- Headline sensationalism in newspapers → public enemies as public icons
- Meaty roles for ethnic actors
- Real gangsters' actions → script ideas for screenwriters
- Technical cinematic innovations: transition to sound
 - car chases and squealing tires
 - terse, gritty dialog
 - rattling machine-gun fire (started in *Scarface*)

APPEAL TO AUDIENCES

- Ripped-from-the-headlines
- Public stereotypes about gangsters
- Vicarious access to the trappings of success
- Prohibition: buying and drinking alcohol not illegal

GENERIC CONVENTIONS IN 1930S GANGSTER FILMS

- Urban setting; night action
- Organized criminals
 - recent immigrants
 - harsh accents; gangster slang
 - Protagonist's rise and fall
 - Protagonist's family
 - stock characters (friend, moll, henchmen)
- Law enforcement
- Journalists
- Few "civilians"

THE PRODUCTION CODE AND *SCARFACE*

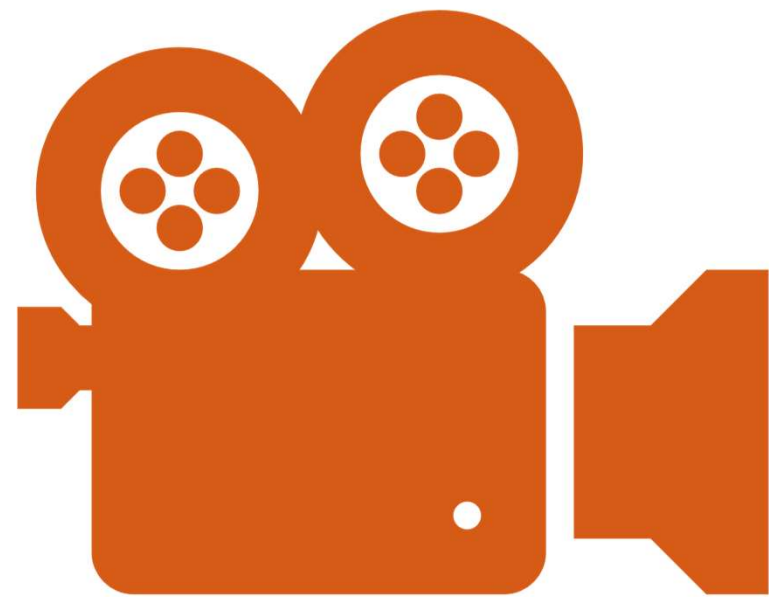
- Reality of actual gangster violence and gangster films' popularity
- Politicians and religious leaders → Hollywood self-censorship
- Emphasis on gangster films (versus westerns and history films)
- *Scarface* meant to be the most violent film ever made (28 deaths)
- Release delayed for two years
- Two new scenes with police and newspaper editor
- Subtitle "Shame of a Nation" and intertitle scrolls
- Hawks's ending changed
- Film pulled from circulation; re-released in 1979 → Brian DePalma's 1983 version

SCARFACE: SHAME OF A NATION (1932)

- Directed by Howard Hawks
- Written by Ben Hecht, W. B. Burnett, and others

- Key characters *(and the actors who play them)*
- Tony “Scarface” Camonte *(Paul Muni)*
- Cesca, Tony’s sister *(Ann Dvorak)*
- Guino Rinaldo, Tony’s best friend *(George Raft)*
- Johnny Lovo, Tony’s *capo* *(Osgood Perkins)*
- Poppy, Johnny’s girlfriend *(Karen Morley)*
- Newspaper Publisher *(Purnell Pratt)*
- Chief of Detectives *(Edwin Marshall)*
- Gaffney, successor to the O’Hara mob *(Boris Karloff)*

LET'S WATCH
THE MOVIE



AL CAPONE

- Pop-culture hero status
- Turned to crime at 14, after father's death
- Worked for Johnny Torrio (Johnny Lovo), a mentor
- Capone equated himself to Rockefeller, Carnegie, Morgan, and Vanderbilt
- Capone courted publicity; generous to community
- Capone's success: before he was 26, over 1,000 employees, \$300,000 weekly payroll
- Capone's larger-than-life persona

PROBLEMATICS OF THE GANGSTER FILM

- Violence and morality
- The gangster protagonist: Tony's positive qualities; pleasures of watching him?
- Depression-era audiences and the gangster
- The gangster as tragic hero
- Attachment strategies and spectatorship
- From gangster to G-man