Chapter 7
Media and Film Influences on Popular Culture

Influences on Popular Culture

The image of Italian-American organized crime in particular has been largely shaped by a Mafia mystique which is currently being challenged by new generations of scholars and writers who confront the legacies of ethnocentric bias and cultural prejudices upon which parts of the entertainment industry thrived (Kelly 2010). The scurrilous stereotypes and clichés which were formed over decades about Italian-Americans and Italians and insinuated into pop culture imagery that flatten and distort the realities of complex lives and cultural styles are still with us, unfortunately. And because pop culture is driven by market forces, mass media is molded by its dynamics and are likely to continue depicting mobsters as Mafia hoodlums.

Putting it bluntly, what facilitated theories of Mafia dominance by a self-perpetuating nationwide conspiracy of sinister La Cosa Nostra crime families was in no small measure the media. Its power to form opinion, and manipulate it cannot be overstated. And like most people, even social scientists can be stampeded into views driven not by empirical study and analysis but by hyperbole, rhetoric, and substantial media pressure. In 1951, Senator Estes Kefauver conducted nationwide senatorial hearings on the problem of illegal gambling around the country. In the course of his investigations, he inadvertently uncovered evidence of organized criminal conspiracies throughout the United States. These investigations, which were televised for the first time, were followed by government-sponsored hearings into labor racketeering where the sensational testimony of a small time gangster, Joseph Valachi, put the La Cosa Nostra into the national psyche. Valachi mesmerized the senators with his remarks about "crime families" across the nation, about oaths of secrecy (omerta), about murder as a means of gaining entry into this conspiracy that regarded only those of Italian heritage as eligible for membership (Maas 1968).

The Valachi revelations were sensational: a secret, deadly nationwide conspiracy of foreign criminals. Public reactions aroused law enforcement agencies.

R. W. Rieber and R. J. Kelly, *Film, Television and the Psychology of the Social Dream*, DOI: 10.1007/978-1-4614-7175-2_7,

In 1967, a national Task Force was formed to study the problems and in 1985, President Reagan created a Task Force to evaluate how the problems of organized crime were being addressed. Throughout this period the names of prominent underworld figures surfaced such as Frank Costello, Sam "Momo" Giancana, friend of Frank Sinatra, and some women tied to the President of the United States, John Kennedy as well as many others with interests in both legitimate and illegitimate businesses. The testimony of experts and the appearance of gangsters taking the Fifth Amendment as a defense against self-incrimination shocked the nation and led to many books, films, and TV series on the mafia and underworld. But the Mafia was the real thing. Along with sensational arrests and prosecutions, accompanied by disclosures of political corruption which some described as a "political/criminal nexus," it is not surprising that the idea of a dominant Mafia empire would eventually fill public discourse and even seize the social scientific imagination.

What was needed were clear, concise narrative accounts that put events into comprehensible language. In the 1950s, mainstream media tended to embrace conspiracy theories about huge Mafia plots controlling national crime syndicates. With the spread of TV later on, fears were magnified by other paranoid stories engendered by sensational media coverage of a daunting Soviet communist threat spreading across Europe and threatening the United States. An Italian mafia conspiracy was neither unusual nor was it thought implausible in a political climate of McCarthy Hearings uncovering enemies of the State in every branch of government. Public apprehensions of alien conspiracies of Mafia criminals in immigrant ghettoes were fostered in an atmosphere of xenophobia fanned by fear of dedicated Communists enemies. The public had experience with a manufactured psychological climate of vast, secret threats against public interest. Many of the 1930s films instilled fear of the foreigner—especially the Italian who was alien in religion, language, and culture. Also, and no less importantly, mob movies in the 1930s and through the war years and early aftermath were well-made with credible plots about issues that concern everyone: family, sex, romance, education, power, and violence (Kelly 2007a, b).

Most mob movies and TV presentations are not just about cops and robbers, street shoot-outs, and general mayhem, but are thinly disguised moral dramas exploring conflicts and familiar contingencies and exigencies that surround everyday life with its endless struggle to earn a living, and make decisions about right and wrong in terms of the ethical expediencies individuals and communities work out in order to survive. The emotional engineering of *The Godfather* offered compelling scenes where Vito Coreleone's taut, bitter, and angry explanations to his sons about their business and life created a stir of controversy among viewers. So too did the TV series, *The Wire*.

The popular *Sopranos* series prepared the way for *The Wire* series. Though the moods of the Sopranos are tragic-comedic—a family drama laced with amusing scenes, *The Wire* ran from 2002 to 2008, and it was a crime drama that looked under the hood of ghetto life in an African-American community in Baltimore, Maryland. The story lines and themes of the 60 broadcasts derive their plots from

the lives of street-corner drug dealers, big time traffickers, the police, political elites, ambitious businesspeople in the black community, union leaders, housewives, kids of all ages, rehab centers, caring social workers, churches and their ministers, the failing schools with their heroic and also indifferent schoolteachers, and politicians who seek opportunities to move up in the power structure at any cost.

The key weapon of law enforcement agents is "the wire"—electronic eavesdropping devices that monitor telephonic communications throughout the complex street drug networks. Narcotics traffickers and street dealers utilize sophisticated cell phones to frustrate detection by narco-police. Over the course of six seasons, *The Wire* series connected the various groups, gangs, and institutions in their working and living habitats with the skill of field anthropologists (Potter and Marshall 2010). The show's entertainment appeal stems in part from its documentary, cinema-verite style that pits the good guys (the police) against the bad guys (drug dealers) in their efforts to cleverly elude and mislead each other. There is also periodic violent gun play which adds tension to the episodes. The only major film at the time that focused on African-American organized crime in ghetto settings involving drug trafficking was *American Gangster* (2007). The film is based on the life of Frank Lucas, a career criminal and an associate of Mafia traffickers with whom he competes violently and successfully for a while through real ingenuity and guts. Lucas is eventually caught and gives up his organization, his family, associates, and Mafia partners.

The world of drug dealing in a Baltimore public housing project, shows significant differences in lifestyles between African-American gangsters and Mafiosi. What could be more telling than in one of the early episodes of the series, when a drug kingpin, who yearns for legitimacy, and whose determination to succeed is still wrapped up in the Horatio Alger myth is seen attending business classes at the local community college while running his drug rackets. More significantly, however, are the portrayals of women in *The Wire*.

Unlike *The Godfather* and other films in its style and genre, the women in *The Wire* are mainly single mothers, not especially heroic persons, who are not confident in their capacities to protect their children from the evils of the crime-drenched streets. On the other hand Mafia women, in films at least, tend to be portrayed as naïve and indifferent and this behavior may stem from the codes of omerta which circumscribe what they might know and what they are forbidden to know, about their husband's and male relatives' criminal activities. In *The Wire,* a few women whose shocking behavior may be attributable to the horrendous circumstances of their lives—seem on occasion inclined to urge their reluctant children onto the streets to sell dope. No doubt they are deeply wounded by prejudice and indelibly marred, and so psychologically mutilated by crushed hopes and ambitions, that they see drugs as a way out of hopelessness. In such emotionally difficult roles, the female actors are often scintillating and brilliant; they eat up the screen when they flash a hard, bitter look. And they, unlike Mafia women, are more deeply exposed to the nauseating realities of crime as a way of life and it takes a terrible toll.

Women encouraging and urging their children into desperate acts of drug dealing expose them to the ancillary risks of prostitution; they come across as monsters that are too enslaved to addiction to help themselves and clearly cannot protect their children from the temptations of the streets. These unsettling scenes compel viewer interest but do not provide viewer comfort. The centrality of some ghetto women in crime scenes and the faint presence of others committed to the eradication of drugs which perpetuate the poverty is reassuring but hopelessly impotent in the face of such massive squalor that deepens a collective sense of defeat and despair. The episodes relentlessly present scenes of unholy bargains and deals between the presumptive good guys and the bad guys that culminate in widespread corruption which is the undertow of the social injustice infecting these African-American communities.

As a sociocultural excursion into the structure of ghetto life, each season of *The Wire* explored an institution hollowed out by bureaucratic gamesmanship and its attendant corruption dynamics. An entire season of shows was devoted to dockworkers in the Port of Baltimore and their clandestine links with narcotics traffickers who move huge loads of cocaine, marijuana, and heroin. Another season introduced the ineffable, self-absorbed, political hustlers of all colors, career ambitions, sexes, who operate single-mindedly in serving their egocentric needs. Another panel of episodes deals with the hapless schools, their embattled teachers, and the children that they failed to educate. Season five in the series concentrated on the press and its diminished role as guardians of public interests. Compromised journalists were constantly betraying each other and their readers by manufacturing stories of the ghetto, of the homeless, and of those living in other forms of social distress. They saw themselves as recipients of prize-winning awards that would enhance their careers. When exposed, some journalists confessed that the layers of cronyism and favoritism contaminated their professional lives and ruined their motivations to write truthfully about public issues.

More than other organized crime dramas, *The Wire* systematically examined the loss of integrity within a big city that is emblematic of our social system. *The Godfather*, *The Sopranos, Goodfellas*, Scarface, and others treat, quite effectively, specific issues, groups, and historical eras. *The Wire* offers a more comprehensive picture of society from the standpoint of an African-American ghetto experience as witnessed by its inhabitants who are in many cases trapped and forced to live there. Also, the ghetto is depicted through the eyes of public servants who are legally obliged to manage its precarious safety, security, health, education, and economic solvency. The series episodes document with skill the elaborate schemes and conspiracies by public officials and exploitative, opportunistic private entrepreneurs that intrigue and alarm viewers with the accuracy of stories illustrating how all sorts of public statistics are juked; how the heroic notion of speaking truth to power has degenerated into self-serving chatter and lofty discourse that is pleasing to those in power. One message among a multitude of viewpoints sustained dramatically and factually in the series is how attempts to buck the elusive "system" are punished, often severely. Accommodation translates into craven survival at the most basic levels.

The Wire series surges occasionally with emotional high and low points; its lugubrious motifs involve steadily deepening scenes of life and death betrayals and failures; and in the case of slum communities inundated with drugs, the simplicity of the plangent title theme serves to offset, or rein in, the multiple subplots concerned with the particular horrors of murders, dying junkies, dissolute mothers, and deadbeat dads. In each unfolding episode an atmosphere pervades where nothing changes except more death, illness, and violence.

The stark realism of *The Wire* might persuade viewers that little or nothing could have turned out differently: it would be hard to believe that rehabbing street junkies would succeed; or that the ex-con prize fighter attempting some community organizing around boxing would get off the ground; or that the star struck junior high school teacher is not doomed to failure and a loss of commitment. How can they change? The ghetto streets of Baltimore are flooded with narcotics, abject poverty, and political corruption that is sustained by some elements in the police forces that routinely violate their sworn duty. It is not a question of good will prevailing, or the forces of law and order overpowering iniquitous conditions; or intractable racial attitudes inherited from a sordid past being suddenly swept aside. That is a species of wishful thinking that *The Wire* does not subscribe to. What the series obliges its viewers to confront is the disquieting idea that a broken, costive world full of fallibilities may not be capable of redemption, or of being mended and healed through some miraculous interventions by society. The series leaves us where we came in—in a fallen world to be endured rather than overcome or saved.

Mass Media and Law Enforcement

Films and TV productions along with relevant police and prosecutors shape public perceptions of organized criminal behavior, organizations, and some of the principal individuals involved in these activities (Websdale 1998). Within police organizations, there is widespread use of surveillance cameras in buildings, on streets and thoroughfares, and in patrol cars that are a means of observing public behaviors; they also capture to some extent the practices of police officers and citizens alike, and the video footage—at least some of it—finds its way to broadcast news shows and "Reality TV" programs. The policing of a post-modern world emerges as a complex set of practices which– for good or bad–help to shape the nature of mediated social control (Manning 1998, 1999).

Since the 1970s criminologists have devoted attention to motion pictures about organized crime, especially when *The Godfather* broke records in movie theaters across the nation. Until then, an attitude prevailed that film could hardly provide little more than anecdotal evidence in the scientific study of the phenomenon when compared with news reportage (Hayward 2010). However, what emerged was the time frame and the technology for the cinematic construction of organized crime in its manifold dimensions (Yar 2010).

Criminal Representations

Crime films often contain surreptitious political or ideological messages either by inducing political conformity to some institutional system or by promoting alternatives to extant political regimes. In any case, many political leaders recognized early on the immense power of moving images and their capacity to affect viewers through their interpretations of real societal issues. One has only to remember the vivid imagery the Nazis produced about the glories of the Third Reich and the ominous threats that Jews posed for Hitler's visions of a greater Germany. During World Wars I and II the warring states did not hesitate to slander and mislead their peoples through propaganda films. Indeed Goebbels, Minister of Propaganda in Nazi Germany, mobilized brilliant German film makers such as Leni Rifensthal and others to create powerful visual images that heroicized the Third Reich and its charismatic leader Adolph Hitler, and films that dehumanized their enemies (Rieber and Kelly 1991).

Other film analysts take another, perhaps more nuanced approach to the potentials of film as a political tool in ideological warfare. Much of this work is based on Antonio Gramsci's Marxist hermeneutics. In this perspective, the production of political authority (hegemony) is seen as intrinsically contested terrain: alongside images, narratives, and texts that encode dominant interests, there are also counter-hegemonic understandings offering critical and alternative understandings of societal activities and structures. In the United States, "underground filmmakers" have produced antiwar movies during the Vietnam struggle. However, film makers in the communist scare years of the 1950s were intimidated by the US government which bullied Hollywood's movie industry into political conformity and which ignominiously ended many professional careers in the film industry (Kellner and Ryan 1988). Now, however, contemporary Hollywood and independent film makers have given voice to competing constituencies within American and European political culture. In the same decades as *The Godfather* and *Goodfellas*, and *Scarface* other films such as *The Untouchables* (1987), and *Reservoir Dogs* (1992) were also produced. These highly stylized movies critiqued organized criminality in terms of its moral and social consequences. In this way, popular films about organized crime, and the Mafia in particular, are contested terrain in which conservative, liberal, and radical voices were free to propose alternative points of view on questions that entail moral issues, problems concerning the administration of justice, the management of social institutions, and issues of social order and security in general.

Many crime movies are structured as quasi-biographical stories about good guys and bad guys—with the latter always generating more audience interest. One of the more popular films of earlier decades was recently remade, *Public Enemies* (2009). It is a story about the ill-fated bank robber and bandit, John Dillinger who in the 1930s during the great Depression, evaded police in many states as he robbed and emptied banks in broad daylight, and escaped helter–skelter (much like Bonnie and Clyde) in a hail of machine gun fire. Dillinger, Bonnie and Clyde, Alvin Karpis, "Pretty Boy" Floyd, "Machine Gun" Kelly, "Baby Face" Nelson,

and other less colorful bandits appear to have shown some degree of deference and courtesy to ordinary citizens whom they rarely violated even with all the shooting and mayhem. It would seem that segments of the public lived vicariously through these "Robin Hood"—type criminals many of whom were from the same backgrounds as many citizens who witnessed their crimes. Dillinger and his like stole from banks and other financial organizations (mortgage companies) that operated dubiously and were seen by many ordinary citizens as if they were the "enemies" of the people.

In crime films of this sort, the audience was made aware of the breakdown of the complex social order and how, in the turmoil of an economic depression, vulnerable people—the young, the uneducated, the poor, and working classes—are cast into a criminal lottery of sorts where some turn to crime, others try to bear the burdens of poverty with stubborn pride and fortitude, and others retreat into lives of quiet desperation.

Prohibition produced some of the toughest crime films in Hollywood's history. Crime and organized crime are expressions of social unrest and conflicts. During Prohibition, the cultural tastes of the American public were drastically restricted regarding the manufacture, dissemination, acquisition, and consumption of alcoholic products. Government agencies clashed with large segments of the American public who, by using alcohol at their dinner tables or in saloons and taverns, were transformed into criminals. The conflict between public demand for alcohol and the government restrictions which made alcohol an illicit product created the grounds for the growth of organized crime and produced something of an outlaw temperament in the public at large.

In *Public Enemies* these realities are examined as subtle changes in the underworld which, as always, functioned as a barometer of the broad currents of public opinion and the condition of the economy at large. Dillinger and other rural-type bandits maintained loose connections with more established syndicates like Capone's organization in Chicago. In the film, Dillinger seeks Capone's help when he is being hunted by federal agents as his bloody career roared across the Midwest. Then, with headlines demanding Dillinger's head, his links with the Capone syndicate which had been mutually respectful seemed to have grown suddenly and unexpectedly frosty; Capone could not jeopardize a cordiale detente with the political establishment, and should exposure of a friendly relationship between the two gangsters become publicly known it might destroy Capone's carefully wrought liaisons. Dillinger needed the sort of help that a man like Capone could furnish: a doctor for a gunshot wound; a safe hideout, or just some cash. In the past, Capone could depend upon men like Dillinger to carry out delicate assignments involving murder or assault; in return, Capone would reciprocate with protection of one kind or another, by providing a safe, criminal cocoon or a hideout across the border. Now Dillinger was simply "too hot to handle" and any hint of an association between the two would no longer be viable. According to Nitti, Capone's chief lieutenant, Dillinger was a "public enemy" and as such he was stigmatized and discredited because his presence would threaten the delicate alliances Capone nurtured with upperworld figures. The label of "public enemy"

was more than a publicity stunt, it was a brilliant device in labeling a criminal bandit in the dawn of modern communications technology. Ironically, Dillinger gets caught, trapped, and assassinated after leaving a movie theater (he loved films) about a doomed convict (Clark Gable) faced with death in the electric chair or life in prison. Gable chooses death. Within half and hour Dillinger lay dead in the street outside the theater shot by government agents who had stalked him.

As with many gangster films of the 1930s and 1940s, criminals were typically portrayed as individuals from impoverished backgrounds and usually from immigrant families. Blinded by greed and prey to a topsy-turvy version of the American Dream and Horatio Alger myth, it was because of social rejection that the legitimate ladder of success was unavailable to them. Thus, with the normal "pathways" closed off because of their lack of education, or race, ethnicity or religion, some sought criminal ways to wealth and status. Although movie viewers expect criminals to fail which means prison or death, the bad guys are seen somewhat sympathetically as victims of circumstances as much as they are perceived as psychopaths or social misfits. The public could not be easily fooled about gangsters and the times in which they flourished. The viewing public could certainly be informed, and indeed cherished new information and insight into issues of national concern. It knew of course that ghettos and slums functioned as criminal nurseries, and that impoverished ethnic neighborhoods and dreadful slums were places where grievances against society at large were born and festered and that prison was scarcely the solution. As movies dramatized the plight of convicts and ex-cons, they left prison confinement harboring a deep, deep hatred of society for what it had done to them. And movies provided a powerful setting that highlighted these painful issues. Apart from actually entertaining audiences, organized crime films offered the public not only information about the probable precursors and causes of crime, they also shed light on how scandalous criminal justice agencies, corrupt police, and prosecutors contributed to rampant crime and chronic violence.

Early Gangster Films and Their Legacies

In 1912, D. W. Griffith produced *The Musketeers of Pig Alley* a movie featuring organized crime activities, and 3 years later Raoul Walsh showcased *The Regeneration* about violent lawlessness on the streets of New York City prompted by the rise of Irish-American slum boys into gangsters. The film offered some sociological insights: it suggested that oppressive social conditions contributed significantly to a criminal orientation.

By 1927, Josef von Sternberg, a renowned German film director, produced a gangland melodrama, *Underworld*, which is now considered the first modern organized crime film. Following Sternberg's success was Lewis Milestone's 1928 classic, *The Racket* which focused on big city corruption and an urban environment virtually controlled by the mob. The movie had the distinction of being banned in Chicago, the headquarters of Al Capone—presumably because of the

movie's depiction of systematic police corruption. After World War I improvements in sound technology made gangster movies truly entertaining with the sounds of tough guy talk, molls, and the shrill thrills of gunfire. Mob movies attracted audiences in the era of Prohibition that was filled with urban violence, and the deleterious effects of the economic depression. Movie theaters were flocked with people who obviously enjoyed seeing in film portrayals what they witnessed in everyday life on the streets.

In the 1920s and 1930s, three movie actors achieved stardom in gangster films: Edward G. Robinson, James Cagney, and Humphrey Bogart. *Little Caesar* (1930) starred Edward G. Robinson as a coarse, ruthless killer named Caesar Enrico Bandello (a caricature of Al Capone) who rose to prominence in gangland and then fell ignominiously in a hail of gunfire and treachery. Following that box office success was William Wellman's *The Public Enemy* (1931) with James Cagney as a cocky, fast-talking brutal bootlegger. In 1932, Howard Hawks brought to the screen, *Scarface: The Shame of the Nation* (1932). Paul Muni played the role of a vicious hood in Prohibition Chicago—another thinly disguised portrayal of Capone—with great success, as his character displays poignant feelings despite his reputation as a psychological monster.

Film Censorship

The early 1930s saw the stunning successes of organized crime films. During this period an effort was launched that would spell the end of what was seen as the glorification of organized crime and the criminal. What emerged was the Hays Production Code and the Legion of Decency sponsored by the Catholic Church which compelled studios to generate scripts that would make moral pronouncements to the affect that crime does not pay (Potter 1998).

The idea was to characterize career criminals as mentally disturbed, even psychopathic. The Hays Office demanded that organized crime and criminals in general should not be treated as tragic heroes. Many studios and citizen groups supported these prescriptions for any number of reasons. Numerous groups feared the glamorization of gangsters whose rise could be attributed to the economic chaos of the War and the deepening Depression whose end could only be dimly perceived.

Widespread criminality and the ambivalent posture of Hollywood movie studios created a puritanical backlash over America's ripening "shame." It became important to shift the emphasis from the criminal to the crime buster, the "good" guys, in order to relax the pressures for even more censorship, and to curb the proliferating opinion that America was a crime-ridden empire out of control (Munby 1999). Thus, in 1935 Hollywood offered the public *G-Men* starring the screen villain of the recent past, James Cagney, whose previous street experiences facilitated his infiltration of criminal gangs. Edward G. Robinson, another tough guy, had the lead role in *Bullets or Ballots* (1936) where he goes undercover and joins

racketeers in order to gather evidence of crime; and in *Angels With Dirty Faces* (1938) two young slum kids pursue different lifestyles—a Cain and Abel contrast—where the bad guy (James Cagney) ultimately relents and disavows his criminal ways to his friend (Pat O'Brien) now a priest, who persuades Cagney, a defiant hero in the streets of the slums, to rectify matters with a dramatic public denunciation of his life of crime which he does convincingly on his way to the electric chair. The movie was a box office sensation.

Post-World War II

As the 1940s and World War II passed from the scene organized crime films became more brutal, cynical, and violent though many gangsters began to camouflage their illicit businesses beneath the protective canopy of legitimate enterprises. Under the cover of legitimacy, gangsters ran vice rackets, extorted legitimate businesses, and infiltrated trade unions. Changes in the underworld were in stark relief in *I Walk Alone* (1948) when Burt Lancaster plays an ex-con named Frankie Madison who had been double-crossed by a partner and spent 14 years in prison. When released he discovers that his former partner whom he protected won't help him despite promises made. The ex-partner bluntly tells him "This is big business now; we deal with banks, lawyers, and have a Dunn and Bradstreet rating. The world passed you by, Frankie."

The 1950s continued to present organized criminals as part of mob organizations including syndicates, gangs, and ethnic gangs with occasional allusions to the mysterious Mafia. The film plots were simplistic depictions of society as immoral and corrupt. The best of the genre was *On The Waterfront* (1954) which was a gritty look at New York's waterfront racketeering among the longshoreman's union. Presented in a raw, black-and-white documentary style, the film starring Marlon Brando won major awards. It served as an expose of work conditions and the consequences of mob influence.

While films about organized criminality, including TV cable series, focus on the social conditions individuals confront in their communities, very few films treat minority participation in organized crime beyond the standard approach of minorities being dependent upon the more powerful white criminal groups. *New Jack City* (1991) examines ghetto conditions and the origins of the crack cocaine trade in a big metropolitan area. Interestingly, many of the scenes and actions resemble crime films about white groups, so the only significant differences are the racial composition of the criminals and the locales of the action. Another film, this time about the Spanish ghetto in New York City *Carlito's Way* with Al Pacino looks at the heroin trade and the failed attempts of a former dealer to rehabilitate himself and go straight. The plot lines are familiar with corrupt police, mafia murderers, deceitful partners, and how together these factors derail Carlito's sincere efforts to be crime free. On the other hand, Tito, the villain in *New Jack City*, is a cunning criminal unrepentant when caught and full of contempt for his

victims when with an inconclusive court proceeding against him erupts in mayhem after a desperate neighborhood resident shoots the haughty druglord as he leaves court.

Big City Crime Fighting

In most large metropolises of the world, slums function as franchised solutions to problems of warehousing this century's surplus humanity. And slums breed not only disease and despair but all sorts of crime even though city dwellers like to think of themselves as enlightened and avant-garde. New York City, Chicago, Los Angeles, and other urban mega zones are reputedly glittering cesspools of crime, corruption, and immorality which the rest of the country views with a mixture of salacious envy and pious contempt.

The context for most movies involving organized crime are the city its slums and the impoverished ethnic ghettos. The immigrant ethnic ghettos also tend to be run-down depressing habitats which also are likely to be disconnected from the sociocultural life of the larger, more affluent urban complex. In the modern world, cities furnish the toxic ingredients that may lead to crime. Indeed, most of the five Cosa Nostra crime families in the USA and many of the more prominent Mafias in Europe and Latin America are named after mob bosses and urban locations, which is indicative of the power and influence of territorial identities and loyalties. Such facts pose conundrums for researchers.

In a study of an African-American slum in Philadelphia identified by law enforcement as "crime ridden," its residents although statistically more vulnerable to robberies and assaults than other groups of residents, displayed the least fear of crime (Merry 1981). In Bensonhurst, a working-class ethnic community in Brooklyn, New York which is believed to be at one time the center of La Cosa Nostra's power, police report comparatively low-street crime rates when contrasted with the rest of the city. It may be supposed that residents in crime-infested areas attempt to manage their apprehensions about crime by making certain that they do not openly show distrust, suspicion, or hostility toward known criminals (Kelly 1996). Apparently, somewhat non-hostile reactions to criminals may reflect a shared anger over injustices mutually felt and experienced by criminals and poor neighbors alike. The injustices that lead some to crime while others endure the consequences of poverty may, at the least, create a meaningful neutrality among criminals and non-criminals. In Bensonhurst, young street criminals—potential inductees into Cosa Nostra—are disinclined to steal from neighbors who acknowledge their existence as persons growing up in the neighborhood. In this connection, many mob movies demonstrate fairly well-grounded political sociological instincts when they deal with the conditions that affect organized criminality in these environments. There are a variety of responses to deprivation and structural neglect in the lives of criminals ranging from charismatic churches, prophetic cults, ethnic militias, and more prosaically, organized crime (Davis 2006).

In films like *Carlito's Way* (1993) the resilient residents of Spanish Harlem created an urban subsistence economy operated by street gangs, narco-traffickers, and Cosa Nostra crews connected with criminally compromised and tainted attorneys in the criminal justice system. The film captures a set of adjustments shaped by the interplay of gangsterism, trafficking, and extortion rackets mixed into local cultural norms and folkways. It must be said that the majority of residents remain law-abiding, but it is the crime—notably violent crime—that creates the public sensations that movie-makers crave.

Impression Management and Public Behavior

As noted above, many career Cosa Nostra criminals including most recently, John Gotti, Michael "Gaspipe" Casso, and Sammy Gravano looked to movies for behavioral models. And yet many of these signature productions like *The Godfather*, *Goodfellas*, and the series *The Sopranos* examined anticrime themes and did not constantly heroicize the principal characters. Bogart, Cagney, and Capone in his various cinematic reincarnations served as models but all fell from power; ironically the top organized crime films challenged the norms of the criminal subculture, the betrayal of the criminal code, enshrined in "omerta", and presented very clearly the reasons for many hoodlums to turn their backs on the criminal way of life that so many had feverently embraced since childhood. Casso, a mob boss, and Gravano a powerhouse in the Gambino crime family second to Gotti, explicitly pointed to screen gangsters as examples of what it means to be a "wiseguy."

Another public stage for the depiction of mobsters was made by the United States government in the 1950s when the televised Kefauver Committee held hearings on corruption and illegal gambling in New York City. They proved so popular that their market share of viewers threatened Bishop Fulton Sheen's religious talk show, a popular variety showcase, The Ed Sullivan Show, and the Milton Berle ("Mr. Television") comedy variety hour. The Kefauver "show" featured the gravel-voiced Frank Costello known affectionately in the New York underworld and the city court system as "The Prime Minister." Also, appearing in starring roles were the gambler and political fixer, Joe "Joe Adonis" Doto, and Joe "Crazy Joe" Gallo who appeared in dark glasses, a black shirt with white tie as a costume appropriate to his impersonation of Richard Widmark who played a role in a popular crime drama as a psychopath who throws the crippled, helpless grandmother in a wheelchair is one of his adversaries down a flight of stairs. Among the assortment of lesser known characters was the redoubtable Virginia Hill, not a gun moll, but a money mover who also conducted "romances" with top mob bosses in the country. She proudly announced to a stunned panel of senators and investigators that her rapid rise into the upper echelons of the national syndicate had nothing to do with her ability to keep her mouth shut. On the contrary, she majestically averred: "I'm the best cocksucker in the mob!" Needless to say the coarse obscenity scandalized the viewing audience and left the cherubic senator from New England, Charles Tobey, utterly speechless (Jennings 1967).

The Mafia's Monopoly of Mob Movies: Emotional Engineering

The seductive power of mob movies became unmistakably clear with the success of *The Godfather* and other kindred films. Some mob movies are very popular while others with substantial production qualities (good scripts, actors, etc.) are abysmal failures. Film failure is an intriguing issue: is it the result of an inept script, poor direction, lousy actors, inadequate publicity, or some mixture or permutation of such factors? Similarly, film success is equally mysterious. What makes for success, however, is intangible that haunts producers and backers of films.

When it was released in 1972, *The Godfather* was an instant success, later to become a landmark of American cinema. As a dramatic portrayal of post-World War II America as it emerged from the fog of global war, the film bridged many audiences. While a peripheral concern (though not to the production studio), the movie also financially invigorated Paramount Pictures Corporation. Artistically, the Mafia film earned ten nominations at the 45th Academy Awards ceremony.

The success of *The Godfather* artistically has been attributed to the clever interweaving of several story lines that would become explicitly interconnected in *The Godfather Part II* and *Part III*. In essence, the films chronicle the generational struggles of an immigrant and his family as they confront the intricate, multifaceted American Dream. What is remarkable about these films is that their plots and story lines are authentically situated in a subcultural world of crime and violence as a way of life. It is a trilogy that works on the grand level of epic, with brilliant cinematography, and as a touching, tragic family narrative.

With *The Godfather's* resounding success, television got back into the production of crime dramas. Much earlier TV had shows like *The Untouchables* and *Wiseguy*. *The Untouchables* touched upon Al Capone's Chicago and Melvin Purvis, an FBI agent who hounded Capone's organization. Some other short-lived melodramas of good guys versus bad guys much like the Cowboy and Western thrillers of the 1940 s appeared periodically on TV. Then came *The Sopranos* on cable tv which fed off *The Godfather* in subtle ways. Tony Soprano, the lead character, purrs with admiration for the two Godfather films and laments how he has come into the business of organized criminality when respect is at an end. However, not all of Tony's crew are so sentimental. Chris Moltisanti, a cousin and Mafia wannabe, happens to be partial to more contemporary gangsters like Tony Montana in *Scarface*. "Lewis Brazi sleeps with the fishes," he exclaims. Big Pussy, a Soprano soldier, exasperatedly corrects him: "You mean Luca Brasi, Luca!" Soprano characters revere the movie, at the same time they are also sensitive to the implicit stereotypes it generates. In the vernacular of working-class Italian-American neighborhoods, Moltisanti's remarks are known as "breakin' balls."

Modern mob movies are often edifying and not always disappointing. Knowledgeable viewers find many of these productions entertaining because they do not reinforce a narrow view of the Mafia underworld as little more than a treacherous network of like-minded gangsters rather than a set of disconnected,

fragmented crews deeply suspicious of each other who are linked through ethnicity and a vanishing set of subcultural organizational norms. The notion of a "brotherhood" is not much more than an evanescent piece of a disparate mythic cultural reality. However, movie goers love the idea of a secretive, unified organization as seen in James Bond films where 007 confronts SMERSH—a super-type Mafia of loyal, dangerous criminals bent on world domination. Good mob movies including *Raging Bull*, *Casino, Mean Streets,* and *Donnie Brasco* are films that seem like "integrated spectacles" as Debord describes them (Debord 1993).

From the 1970 s onwards the films about organized crime promoted by Hollywood have dominated the popular imagination. A good example of film power to reinforce or create public opinion is Oliver Stone's *JFK* (1991). Oliver Stone's assassination theory of John Kennedy involves the possible collusion of the Mafia, the CIA, Lyndon Johnson and J. Edgar Hoover, FBI Director, among others. The filmmaker suggested that the 1963 murder of President Kennedy was nothing less than a coup d'etat (as argued passionately in the movie by Kevin Costner playing the role of Jim Garrison, the New Orleans District Attorney who brought to trial for conspiracy to murder the President Clay Shaw and several shady figures immersed in the Netherland of drugs, illicit sex, and tawdry business dealings. Pertinent to the case and trial was the fact that Clay Shaw had been an operative of the CIA in the past. Oswald, the accused murderer, was for Stone (and more than half of the American Public) a patsy, in the conspiracy. Mob bosses in New Orleans (Carlos Marcello), Tampa (Santos Trafficante), and Chicago (Sam Giancana) were presumed to have handled and arranged for the hit, escape routes, and vital intelligence needed to mount such a delicate operation.

In the film, the key characters float through many scenarios along with maverick elements in the CIA, the U.S. Army, veterans of the Bay of Pigs, and an array of malcontents. Stone tried to put together the vital parts of the jigsaw puzzle, but we may never know what really happened, any more than we will ever know the true identity of Jack the Ripper.

Stone's atmospherics mixed with Hollywood studio set pieces including newsreels gives the film an occasional grainy touch of toughened realism and also a malignant tone; in other words the feeling that something quite sinister was taking place before our eyes under the American veneer of prosperity and two car garages, something that ultimately brought disillusionment and cynicism into a world that had seemed shadowless and full of possibilities. And afterwards? Audiences left theaters dazed and angry; *JFK* set the historical sense on fire. In the aftermath of the event in 1963, Deleay Plaza there occurred, among other things, the expansion of the Vietnam War, race riots in major cities, more assassinations (Bobby Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Malcolm X); it saw the proliferation of the hippies, LSD, Kent State, Woodstock, Altamont, the Panthers, and a decade later Reagan/Bush for another 10 years.

The array of peripheral characters caught up in the confluence of events had to appeal to Stone's feverish imaginative capacities: homosexual businessmen, CIA agents masquerading in a variety of roles and masks as flight-school instructors, erstwhile attorneys, pedestrian gangsters, and slightly deranged nightclub

proprietors. The mob angle offered other fascinating, fateful motives. According to this scenario, Attorney General Robert Kennedy had been out to break up organized crime and imprison its partners like Jimmy Hoffa of the Teamsters Union. Bobby's brother President John Kennedy had done nothing to stop him. Furthermore, the Mafia pined for its lost casino empire in Havana, Cuba which it had hoped to win back when assorted bits of Miami-based flotsam of the Scarface variety washed up in the Bay of Pigs; but Kennedy failed to provide air cover and the effort to destroy Castro failed. Jimmy Hoffa wanted bobby Kennedy dead; Carlos Marcello wanted Kennedy dead so that his snarling pit bull, Bobby, could be removed. The Five families who controlled the tiles that make up that gorgeous mosaic, New York City, wanted Kennedy dead in a big way. *JFK* exposes all these wicked, baneful reasons. The film is a hefty lesson in political science and history and imaginative filmmaking. Another motive may be added that Stone acknowledges but does not explore in-depth—the desire of the Kennedy's to force Hoover's retirement as FBI Director. In the aftermath of the murder of the President, the government changed significantly in terms of policies: it became more imperial, secretive, and punitive. Elements of the government and the Presidency under Lyndon Johnson evolved, or matured, into a vortex of negative glamor. Stone's film, however flawed, deals upfront with a complacent, ignorant platitude that weak-minded people often resort to in a crisis: regarding JFK's murder some are inclined to dismiss the reasons for it as fortuitous—as something that sort of happened. For Stone, nothing bad just happens in America.

Some of the key writers, producers, and directors of mob films who deal with the Mafia, namely Coppola, Scorscese, Pileggi, and others share a quality that is a concern for reworking and representing as accurately as possible Italian-American subcultural experiences. In this sense they constitute an "autobiographical intelligentsia" who are truly unified by common passions and visions. For a time, however, they functioned as a firing squad without mercy or a sense of reprieve against the nonsense that preceded the serious treatment of the Mafia subculture in Italian-American life. They discovered that the social dreams of the struggling Italian-American ghettoes to be no different and no less desirable than the great bourgeois vision of the good life in a tamed, morally upright society. As a consequence of their efforts what emerged, what they introduced in films, was a new esthetic climate that was instrumental in revising elitist historical judgments girdled with xenophobic sensibilities.

While the basic nobility of the Italian-American experience has been to some degree ignored and needs to be justly restored, as with any ethnic group, its ethnographic history is dotted with social blemishes of one type or another. For example, through one great crime syndication after another, LCN (La Cosa Nostra) groups have looted America's "Little Italys." There were part of the initial stages of the massive immigration into the United States and faced no competing hierarchies of power within the immigrant communities with the clout to challenge the mafia, that had to wait on cultural assimilation where alternatives to mafia power could be articulated and implemented. Culturally sensitive film makers, as distinct from exploiters, have done good work in this era of a cinema boom and cultural

monumentality by reviving the grist and dynamism of Little Italys, in terms of their communal tragedies and triumphs. It seems that the modern La Cosa Nostra is no longer the ancient horror it was in the 1930s through the 1950s. Though Mafiosi are volatile and versatile, their cumulative impact has been weakened by RICO antiorganized crime statutes and by the availability of economic alternatives in legitimate society to mafia involvement.

Major film makers and their television counterparts especially, seem to communicate best with their audiences not by instructing them in what to make of what they see, but by inviting them to compare notes. This interactional style seems especially appropriate with crime films. Crime films, mob movies, are dialogical in spirit in the ways that Vigotsky envisioned the structure of communication processes to be. As with reader and text, the dialogical experiences of movies are between viewer and film. In line with the work of several Italian-American film makers and artists, *The Godfather Trilogy* was a form of cultural relief and rehabilitation from an imposed collective guilt and shame, from the obligation to be apologetic, from the apparent obligation to explain away the phenomenon of mafia and its sordid presence.

The movies *New Jack City* and *American Gangster* that focused on drug dealing and the type of organized crime that develops around it in the African-American ghettos reveals some of the underside of a stagnant, crippled American social dream, the myth that is still unfulfilled that has at present led to despair, and suffering for so many. In the eyes of unflinching realists in the Black world, many of whom are stone killers and criminals, the dream is meant for whites only. The rest who think it is a social and psychological recipe meant for all seem utterly and hopelessly deluded.

The War on Organized Crime

When *The Godfather* appeared followed by a rash of other similar films, many commentators felt that the movies glorified criminals. The process of demeaning or celebrating personalities, social, and political movements is nothing new in mass media. In the 1930s and early 1940s. (Potter 1998), Journalists such as Walter Winchell and entertainment impresarios like Ed Sullivan utilizing radio and later TV as an entertainment/information tool popularized many causes and persons including the "G-Men" (FBI, Treasury Agents) (Potter 1998). With the media's help, Hoover became a national celebrity as a crime fighter and later as a hunter of Nazi agents and communist espionage agents. Winchell aided Hoover with the capture of Lepke Buchalter, a notorious New York syndicate kingpin in the clothing rackets and drug trafficking networks. Both men saw mutual advantages in cooperation. Winchell found Hoover to be useful because he was a source of information about underworld personalities and other individuals with sensitive political views which Winchell exploited on his radio broadcasts. Both men understood that mass culture and society were rapidly changing and both appeared to

have an instinctive grasp of the potential power of mass communications technology. Hoover's publicity techniques included the invention of a "Public Enemies" list of wanted criminals, fugitives, who allegedly committed heinous crimes and crimes against the entire nation. And throughout a long career, Hoover permitted many quality films to be made by Hollywood movie studios about his agency, its work, its personnel, about himself as its boss, using top movie stars in the pictures, and productions that could compete with any of Hollywood's finest studios. And over time many of Hoover's communications technologies were duplicated by local law enforcement agencies (Gid Powers 1983). Several of these technologies and techniques were developed by Winchell who seized on new methods for distributing, collecting, and creating news; Winchell utilized the methods to launch with others in broadcasting a new mass culture of celebrity (which has developed cultic dimensions today) that was centered in New York, Hollywood, and Washington, D.C. The style of his broadcasts was fixated on personalities and less on news analyses (Gabler 1994).

The "war on crime" when seen as a cultural phenomenon has been long fought not only with guns but with pens, cameras, actors, films, and TV. The media bring to light details about crime fighting and also what legislatures and government in general do or fail to do. Such methods of gathering, distilling, and disseminating information transform society and the state. Obviously, there is a negative side to this: media can "create" news, destroy, or empower individuals that it favors or opposes, and in general sway public understanding of events and individuals. Put slightly differently, collectively the images and stories purveyed in media make up the packages of social dreams that constitute our culture.

In still other ways through public interest projects on Public Broadcasts systems, the public may learn in detail about national historical and political issues and problems. And with access to broadcasts public interests and government agencies as well as citizen groups, issues of national interests may be presented such as the implications of transnational organized crime for the public. Eventually, effective presentations can bring important problems out of the weeds and precipitate governmental action in the form of new agencies such as the Drug Enforcement Agency, the Environmental Protection Agency, and Homeland Security to combat terrorism and global drug trafficking.

By Way of a Conclusion

Films about crime cannot prescribe bromides to despair, but sometimes they can help us to learn how to live with the societal madness and its throbbing imperfections that threaten to engulf us and to recognize what is different about it and what has not changed at all.

It seems that every age appears to be dominated by a privileged form of expression, a genre which seems a fit expression of its special truths. In this era we have come to appreciate that culture itself is largely a matter of media: its older forms

of expression—print, sound, and video were and are, in different ways media products (Jameson 2003). Macluhan's thesis: "the medium is the message," rings even more true today than ever. Put another way, the intervention of the complex apparatus, "the Consciousness Industry" is now everywhere. Perhaps as Adorno suggested this was always the case (Adorno 1978). Film, mass media and the Internet show us what the world might look like in our own absence (Cavell 1979).

Appendix: New American Gangsters and Media

The contemporary scene in which the La Cosa Nostra is no longer the dominant force in the American underworld, ethnic and racial street gangs along with motorcycle gangs have been growing rapidly in size and influence in the inner cities and ghettoes of American urban areas and in the volatile border regions in the Southwest of the United States. The emerging gangs are localized metropolitan groups who have affiliates in prison systems and in urban ghettoes that stretch across international borders. Members are recruited to conduct illicit businesses in gun running, drug trafficking, and other criminal activities.

In 2005, on the front page of The Los Angeles Times, a shirtless young man covered in tatoos poses menacingly. The photo was part of an article on MS 13 (La Mara Salvatrucha), a Salvadoran criminal organization with formations in several US states and a predominant presence in major federal prison institutions (Lopez et al. 2005). The work of Lopez and others describes the ways in which the mass media have positioned such groups as part of the criminal nexus that links drug trafficking, illegal immigration, terrorism, and street crime in many American cities. By focusing on the illegal immigration of hardened criminals who play prominent roles in the leadership of international networks of transnational criminal activity, it seems that major media outlets have embraced the paradigms of emergent criminal structures the government has promulgated and adopted the rhetoric of government agencies such as the FBI and the satellite agencies making up the huge Department of Homeland Security. And over time journals such as *Foreign Affairs*, PBS (Public Broadcasting system) and *The New York Times* featured articles about Latino gangs in rhetoric and prose similar to the LA Times article. For Macek, the result has been the appearance in print and TV media a "discourse of savagery" where media vilify minority urban youth by deploying stigmatizing metaphors of "contagion" and "penetration" that tend to accompany discussions and presentations on TV, and Internet outlets of immigration and crime issues (Macek 2006; Santa Ana 2002). Santa Ana warned that "gangs are spreading into Mexico and beyond and that once ensconced, the gangs grow quickly" (Santa Ana 2005, p. 98). The impassioned language in which these issues are typically discussed suggests that the gangs—unlike traditional American youth gangs—are essentially malevolent, parasitic groups that seek to infiltrate the United States and promote a crime wave similar to that which saturates some Latin American societies. A *Newsweek* article, described an attack in which the victim was "repeatedly

stabbed and his head nearly severed." The piece went on to describe other incidents of violence where "gang members were armed with machetes and hacked away at members of other gangs" (Campos-Flores 2005, p. 22).

The texts of such articles stoke fears about criminal conspiracies fueled by illegal immigration. Many news agencies prominently feature photos of heavily tattooed gang members displaying firearms and belligerently "throwing signs" (using complex hand and finger movements to communicate secret gang information) (Gunckel 2007). It seems very likely that images and texts in a context of sensationalistic media coverage contributes to a climate of fear and intimidation that will encourage government suppression with little informed public support for a balanced approach to crime deterrence. The media-driven gang threat facilitates political campaigning based on xenophobia engendered by media with MS 13, for example, referenced frequently in connection with immigrant crime spreading out of the big urban areas into suburban communities (Reisman 2006).

Coverage of Central American gangs in TV journalism, documentaries, and news reports shows a similar range and style of sensationalistic imagery that emphasizes intensified law enforcement in lieu of an in-depth examination of the structural causes that precipitate criminal gang development, growth, and impact on communities. In too many media treatments of the problems the rhetoric in the media accounts and presentations appears to be dehumanizing where gang members are sometimes compared to a "virus" while warning that MS 13, for instance, is becoming an international menace, crossing borders at will, leaving its bloody mark from central America to the American heartland. And personal interviews with gang members dwell almost exclusively on criminal violence. In a documentary film entitled "Mara Salvatrucha 13" produced in Mexico, the Mexican border with the United States is seen as porous, a place lacking in police control, a Mafia territory, a habitat of Mexican/American lifestyles in which drugs and weapons are readily available. This species of media documentary is known as "border cinema" (Iglesias 2003).

Another species of current documentary-making—a sort of "shadow cinema"—is similar to conventional sociological accounts on gangs in that it is ethnographically sensitive to gang street life and to the gang notion of a "family." The gang sense of family does not refer to Mafia-type crime families; family in this sense is not the same as "family" in the criminological literature. For many gang members the gang itself functions as a surrogate family offering emotional support and a sense of belonging for members in the streets of the neighborhood. Filmmakers not only show how tough the street gang/family can be but also just how supportive it is. In short, the gang/family is a notion filled with ambiguities and complexities in the ghetto gang subculture. Clearly, it is not just a superficial factor in adolescent emotional development. Another way of putting this is to say that while the institutional realities of ordinary family life seem threatening, even for middle-class teenagers, the gang-as-family is a powerful motif/metaphor for gang life (Rodriquez 1998; Brown 2002).

Others have observed that Chicano cinema as well as ghetto underground filmmaking focus intensely on street life and penal institutions to the exclusion of

other aspects of gang members' lives (Noriega 2001). Major Hollywood productions about Chicano life in American cities, in particular, Edward James Olmos's *American Me* (1992) deal with the prison setting as a reconfigured site of the male Chicano's other home and family while the barrio itself seems little more than a place where disaffected, fractured families bide their time in exasperating economic circumstances.

Exploitation films might readily be explained by a popularity that thrives on themes of violence and gang solidarity. Such movies illustrate the eagerness of producers to capitalize on audience demands for gratuitous violence and sexually prurient scenarios. The line between a documentary and a salacious entertainment action thriller is blurred to such a degree that almost anything may be packaged as entertainment even though its original intent may be educational (Schaefer 1999; Faris 1992).

The news stories and docudramas about ghetto gangs and their threat has been popularized by interviews, on camera, with scarry violent felons telling harrowing stories of life in the 'hood. The appeal of such films goes beyond their informational and educational value. What is indeed provocative beyond the obvious ingredients of violence and street mayhem is that the sensational style is not merely acknowledged as a legitimate factor in films, but threatens the scientific validity of documentaries whose purposes are, or ought to be, purely informational. On the other hand, might not the unflinching gaze of sensational, exploitative docudramas about the complex narratives of gang life actually humanize their subjects as well as inform their viewers? Or will these communication/entertainment vehicles reinforce reactionary immigration policy and repressive law enforcement policies?

References

Adorno, T. W. (1978). *Minima moralia*. New York: Verso Press.

Brown, M. (2002). *Gang nation: Delinquent citizens in Puerto Rico. Chicano and Chincana narratives*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Campos-Flores, A. (2005) The most dangerous gang in America: They're a violent force in 33 states and counting: inside the battle to police mara salvatrucha. *Newsweek*, 28 March, p. 22.

Cavell, S. (1979). *The world viewed*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Davis, M. (2006). *Planet of slums*. New York: Verso Books.

DeBord, G. (1993). *The society of the spectacle*. New York: Zone books.

Faris, J. (1992). Anthropological transparency: Film, representation and politics. In P. Crawford & D. Turton (Eds.), *Film as ethnography*. Manchester: University of Manchester Press.

Gabler, N. (1994). *Winchell: Gossip, power and the cult of celebrity*. New York: Knopf.

Gunckel, C. (2007). Gangs gone wild: Low-budget gang documentaries and the aesthetics of exploitation. *The Velvet Light Trap (Fall)*, *6*, 37–46.

Hayward, J., & Presdee M. (Eds.). (2010). *Cultural criminology and the image*. London: Routledge.

Iglesias, N. (2003). *Border representations: Cinema and independent video* (p. 194). Postborder City: Cultural Spaces of Bajalta, California: Routledge.

Jameson, F. (2003). *Post modernism or, the cultural logic of late capitalism*. Durham: Duke University Press.
Jennings, D. (1967). *We Only Kill Each Other*. Englewood cliffs: Prentice-Hall.
Kellner, D., & Ryan, M. (1988). *Camera politica: The politics and ideology of contemporary hollywood film*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
Kelly, R. J. (1996). *African–American organized crime: A social history*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
Kelly, R. J. (2007a). Heartbreakers and bonebreakers: Women in the underworld. Journal of Social Distress and The Homeless, *15*, 2.
Kelly, R. J. (2007b). Sopranoland: Looking down on society from below in tv soaps. *Journal of Social Distress and The Homeless, 16*(1), 49–65.
Kelly, R. J. (2010). A new horizon on organised crime: Re-Locating organised crime in America. *Global Crime*, *11*(1), 58–66.
Lopez, R., Connell, R., & Kraul, C. (2005). Gang Uses deportation yo its advantage to flourish in the U. S. *Los Angeles Times,* 30 October, A1.
Maas, P. (1968). *The valachi papers*. New York: Putnams.
Macek, S. (2006). *Urban nightmares: The media, the right, and the moral panic over the city*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
Manning, P. (1998). Media loops. In F. Bailey, & D. Hale (Eds.). *Popular culture, crime, and justice*. Belmont: West/Wadsworth.
Manning, P. (1999). Semiotics and social justice. In B. A. Arrigo (Ed.), *Social justice/criminal justice Belmont*. West/Wadsworth: Palgrave/Macmillan.
Merry S. (1981) *Urban danger: Life in a neighborhood of strangers.* Philadelphia: Temple University.
Munby, J. (1999). *Public enemies, public heroes: Screening the gangster from "little caesar" to touch of evil*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Noriega, C. (2001). The end of Chicano cinema. In J. Lewis (Ed.), *The end of cinema as we know it: American film in the nineties*. New York: New York University Press.
Potter, C. B. (1998). *War on Crime: Bandits, G-Men and the Politics of Mass Culture*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
Richard Gid Powers. (1983). *G-Men: Hoover's FBI in popular culture*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University.
Reisman, L. (2006). Breaking the vicious cycle: Responding to Central American youth gang violence. *SAIS Review*, *26*(2), 47–152.
Rodriquez, J. (1998). *East side stories: Gang life in Eastern L. A.* New York: Cultural Entertainment, Inc.
Santa Ana, O. S. (2002). *Brown tide rising: Metaphors of latinos in contemporary American public discourse*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
Schaefer, E. (1999). *Bold! daring! shocking! true!: A history of exploitation films, 1919–1959*. Durham: Duke University Press.
The Wire, a TV Series (HBO). Potter, T., & Marshall C. W. (Eds.) . (2010). The wire: Decay and American television. New York: Continuum Press.
Websdale, A. (1998). Forensic journalism as patriarchal ideology: The newspaper construction of homicides-suicides. In F. Bailey & D. Hale (Eds.), *Popular justice, crime and justice Belmont*. California: West/Wadsworth.
Yar, M. (2010). Screening crime: Cultural criminology goes to the movies. In J. Hayward, & J. Presdee (Eds.). *Framing crime*: *Cultural criminology and the* image (pp. 68–82). London: Routledge.