
THE MOB AND THE MOVIES: A CINEMATIC HISTORY OF THE ALL-AMERICAN CRIMINAL

Andrew Graves

Week 5: Bloody Crime Scenes and the Vietnam Era

The Changing Times

The Moon is Blue (1953)

- Though essentially a tame film by later standards, it does feature a woman openly talking about her own virginity
- This element was considered too strong by the Production Code
- However, the film was released without the approval of the Production Code
- The Code had outlived its commercial usefulness

Some Like It Hot (1959)

- With its inclusion of issues like cross dressing and hints of homosexuality, it pushed boundaries and was released without the approval of the Motion Picture Production Code
- Some saw it as the end of the road for the Code

Sam Fuller (1912-1997)

- Specialized in making low budget genre movies with controversial subject matter
- Marginalized characters
- Intense close-ups
- Dutch angles/off-centre framing of shots

Shock Corridor (1953)

- Sam Fuller's boldly dark glimpse into a damaged national psyche, that felt like a war film, not so much in the classic sense, but one that at least examined the after-effects of Whitehouse foreign policy, in an unexpected setting.
- Not only did it suggest, both subtly and not so subtly that the following of the American dream can only ever lead to the confines of a lunatic asylum – in a literal and figurative sense, but it also gave us an ahead of its time take on the unspoken of topic of PTSD.
- The deluded Boden, (James Best), a brainwashed and broken Korean War vet, cut loose by the military to rot in padded cell hell, casts an uneasy shadow.
- His deranged flip-flopping between communist and right-wing patriot, oddly seem to mimic our divided 21st-century society, which is unable to find nuance in adult discussion and lurches between fascist raving and overly sensitive liberal knee jerk reactions. More importantly, the film's underlying examination of warfare and mental health, make it an off-kilter forerunner for many other alternative battle-torn affairs

The Naked Kiss (1964)**Sam Fuller**

- Directed by Sam Fuller
 - Written by Sam Fuller
 - Produced by Sam Fuller
 - Cinematography by Stanley Cortez
 - Edited by Jerome Thoms
 - Music by Paul Dunlap
-
- Just as *Shock Corridor* was, on some levels an alternative war film – dealing with the after effects of conflict, *The Naked Kiss* might be seen as an alternative crime film
 - Rather than concentrate on mob movements, heists or gangsters, instead *The Naked Kiss* deals with criminality in more general terms – examining the criminality of the American system, it's hypocrisies and its inequalities
 - Kelly, a prostitute arrives in town after being driven out of her old life by her pimp
 - She immediately turns one more trick with a detective
 - The detective recommends her to the local brothel but instead she rents a room with an old spinster and gets employment at a hospital where she looks after disabled children
 - Kelly's story though fairytale like on the surface, slowly unveils the dark underbelly of the American Dream
 - Though 'morality' is espoused by many of the characters, in reality, this morality is simply a way of maintaining the deeply unequal social order
 - Using an 'innocent' Julie Andrews style musical number, Fuller strips bare societies inability to celebrate difference or individuality, instead children are given 'roles' which they must fit into, exposing the racism and misogyny which perpetuates
 - When Kelly first comes to town she pretends to sell \$10 bottles of Champagne
 - This also seems to point to the fallacy of the American Dream – in essence it's nothing but cheap sparkle which doesn't really exist

The Killers (1964)**Don Siegel**

- Directed by Don Siegel
- Produced by Don Siegel
- Written by Gene L Coon
- Based on the Ernest Hemmingway story
- Cinematography by Richard L Rawlings
- Edited by Richard Belding
- Music by John Williams

Unlike *The Naked Kiss*, which carries a very 50s aesthetic, *The Killers* is very much a 60s piece in both look and style. However, in some ways it also harks back to the past, it being a remake of the 1946 version. It's smart, stylish and has a black sense of humour.

The Times They are a Changing

- As far back as 1948, old Hollywood began to lose its shine
- The Paramount case effectively ended the studio monopoly system, meaning companies could no longer block buy theater chains to distribute their movies
- This dealt a severe blow to the so-called studio system
- Fearing loss of income, studios initially turned to spectacle to maintain profitability

The End of the Studio System

Studios used techniques and new presentations to attract audiences

- Epics
- 3D
- Technicolor
- Cinemascope

Stagnation

- Though undoubtedly there were some significantly impressive films released in the 50s, Hollywood was largely dominated by musicals, epics and widescreen presentations that would benefit from larger screens and better sound
- However, audiences continued to decrease and several costly flops ensued
- By the mid-60s Old Hollywood was losing money

New Hollywood

- A new desperation led to innovation and risk taking
- New producers and young directors were turned to in an attempt to jump start the American movie business

Roger Corman

Mentored or discovered a number of directors/actors/writers and film makers including:

- Jonathan Demme
- John Sayles
- Jack Nicholson
- Francis Ford Coppola
- Ron Howard
- Martin Scorsese
- Corman was fundamental in the formation of 'New Hollywood'

Bonnie and Clyde (1967)**Arthur Penn**

- Directed by Arthur Penn
- Written by David Newman and Robert Benton
- Produced by Warren Beatty
- Cinematography by Burnette Guffey
- Edited by Dede Allen
- Music by Charles Strous
- *Bonnie and Clyde* undoubtedly kick-started what would become known as New Hollywood
- Violent, intelligent and controversial, it broke old taboos and established new cinematic ground, for what would follow
- It appealed to the counterculture, representing the violence of the Vietnam era and also the growing generation gap
- The film carries a very French New Wave influence
- Tonal shifts
- Humour
- Slapstick
- Gruesome violence
- A cool aesthetic

Production

- Writers Newman and Benton developed the idea in the early 60s
- They initially approached Penn to direct, however, he was involved with another project at the time
- Influenced by the French New Wave they next approached François Truffaut and though he was busy working on *Fahrenheit 451*, he suggested they approach Jean Luc Goddard
- Goddard refused the offer, (according to some sources), because he did not trust Hollywood
- However, other sources claim it was largely about a disagreement about location and weather
- Beatty heard about the project while he was in Europe, expressed an interest and when he returned to Hollywood he requested to see the script and bought the rights
- George Stevens, William Wyler, Karel Reisz, John Schlesinger, Brian G. Hutton, and Sydney Pollack were all approached but all refused
- Arthur Penn was pestered by Beatty a number of times before he finally agreed to direct the project
- Beatty had initially wanted the film to be black and white but the studio refused
- The writers had originally written Clyde as bisexual, however Beatty had shown reluctance to portray his character in that way.
- Studio execs were also worried about the depiction of (what was then) and illegal and 'deviant act' - believing audiences would be put off
- The final script has him as an impotent heterosexual