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

Andrew Graves

Week 7: An Offer You Can't Refuse

THE GODFATHER (1972)

FRANCIS FORD COPPOLA

- Directed by Francis Ford Coppola
- Screenplay by Mario Puzo and Francis Ford Coppola
- Based on the novel of the same name by Mario Puzo
- Produced by Albert S Ruddy
- Cinematography by Gordon Willis
- Edited by William Reynolds and Peter Zinner
- Music by Nina Rota

MARIO PUZO

- Puzo, had been struggling as an author
- Though two of his books had been critically well received, he had made little money
- By 1968, due to a continued gambling problem and other responsibilities he was around \$20,000 in debt
- He decided to put aside any ambitions of being 'the artist' and instead concentrated on writing a potential 'best seller'
- Puzo, was Italian, however his real experience of 'mafia types' was non-existent.
- He based his story on things he'd read rather than actual life experience
- The book was a huge success, selling over 9 million copies in 2 years
- Actual members of the mafia received the book well
- Puzo actually found his Las Vegas gambling debt was taken care of by a 'certain party'

"The mafia was pleased that someone had romanticized their past. Now the mob had its own *Gone With the Wind*. *The Godfather* was a nostalgic yarn harking back to the glory years of a racket whose best days were long behind it."

Tim Adler – *Hollywood and the Mob*

THE GODFATHER (1972)

- Paramount had wanted to adapt the novel as early as 1969
- They had originally wanted to do a contemporary story based on the book and produce it cheaply
- Paramount was struggling financially.
- They had had a number failures at the box office including *The Brotherhood*, another mafia inspired movie
- Paramount interviewed around 30 potential directors for the project
- Sam Peckinpah had shown an interest

THE GODFATHER (1972) CONT...

- Paramount vice-president Peter Bart, had initially suggested Coppola as director
- Though he had a reputation for being hard to work with, Bart argued that he would bring an authentic 'Italian sensibility' to the project
- At first, Coppola wanted nothing to do with the project, reasoning he wanted nothing to do with a 'secret society' which had blackened his Italian heritage
- However, after reading the book he found himself gripped and decided there was something in the story he could work with

Coppola told Paramount he would make the movie on two conditions

1. It would not mention the words Costa Nostra or gangsters
2. It would contain no violence

MICHAEL CORLEONE (AL PACINO)

- Michael is the outsider
- He does not crave a place in 'the family business'
- He is war hero
- His position as head of the family is somewhat forced upon him
- Where Vito is becoming increasingly out of step with modernity, Michael understands the new world
- Where Sonny is a hot head, Michael is calm, quiet, lethal – he brings to his role his considerable military experience
- He is an intelligent strategist – he understands he is to lead an army
- Sonny, on the other hand is a thug
- Fredo, though older than Michael, is weak and ineffective
- Michael's rise to the head of the family culminates in a crescendo of violence
- His becoming godfather and 'The Godfather' are mashed together in a bloody retributive power-grab

Backlash

'...there's nothing noble about them. They're quite loathsome. Rather than honour or loyalty, the underworld runs on betrayal and treachery...the romantic notion of that world is so far from the truth. It's a career filled with pain, much of it inflicted on others.'

Nicholas Pileggi

THE GODFATHER II (1974)

FRANCIS FORD COPPOLA

- Directed by Francis Ford Coppola
- Screenplay by Mario Puzo and Francis Ford Coppola
- Based on the novel of the same name by Mario Puzo
- Produced by Francis Ford Coppola
- Cinematography by Gordon Willis
- Edited by William Reynolds and Peter Zinner
- Music by Nina Rota

THE GODFATHER II (1974) CONT...

- *The Godfather Part II* explores Michael's continued rise to power
- However, the film also examines the links between corrupt authority and organized crime
- The hypocrisies of the system are laid bare
- Governments, authorities and age-old systems are exposed as being as criminal as the Corleone's
- Michael's desires to become 'legitimate' are hampered by betrayals and increasingly immoral societal organizations
- While this side of the story deals with Italian Americans, it is pure Greek Tragedy
- However, the 'prequel' side of the story goes back to origins of the family and Vito's induction into organized crime
- Again, it illustrates a romanticized view – it's difficult not to feel empathy with Vito
- The contrast of the two stories is clear; one shows how a lonely man became a powerful family, the other shows how a family becomes a powerful and lonely man

BRIAN DE PALMA

- Split screen techniques
- Unusual camera angles
- Long takes
- 360-degree camera pans
- Slow motion
- Often accused of being very 'gimmicky'
- Has been accused of being 'perverse misogynist'

SCARFACE (1983)

BRIAN DE PALMA

- Directed by Brian De Palma
- Screenplay by Oliver Stone
- Based on *Scarface* the novel by Armitage Trall and *Scarface* (1932) the Howard Hawks film
- Produced by Martin Bregman
- Edited by Jerry Greenberg and David Ray
- Cinematography by John A Alonzo
- Music by Giorgio Moroder
- Scarface went into development after Al Pacino saw the original film when it was playing in a theatre in LA
- He had expressed an interest in retaining the 1930s look and feel
- However, there was some resistance to this idea
- Sidney Lumet was initially attached to the project as director
- He apparently suggested switching the character to a Cuban and concentrating on the Mariel boatlift

THE MARIEL BOATLIFT

The Mariel Boatlift was a mass emigration of Cubans who traveled from Cuba's Mariel Harbour to the United States between April 15 and October 31, 1980.

THE MARIEL BOATLIFT CONT...

- After 10,000 Cubans tried to gain asylum by taking refuge on the grounds of the Peruvian embassy, the Cuban government announced that anyone who wanted to leave could do so.
- The ensuing mass migration was organized by Cuban Americans, with the agreement of Cuban President Fidel Castro.
- The arrival of the refugees in the United States created political problems for U.S. President Jimmy Carter. The Carter administration struggled to develop a consistent response to the immigrants.
- The Mariel boatlift was ended by mutual agreement between the two governments in late October 1980. By then, as many as 125,266 Cubans had reached Florida