

“Make Way for the Bad Guy”: Understanding Changing Social Anxieties Through the Gangster Film

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This paper will compare two classics from the canon of American gangster films, an “original” and its “remake,” in order to examine the ever-changing social concern over who is the current “public enemy” of white middle-class American values, and who therefore must be censored or rightfully condemned before the movie-going audience in order to maintain the established social order and privilege of that “public.” The gangster film is an especially useful genre for examining such mutable social concerns since the figure of the gangster, both in society and on-screen, has generally stood for the individuals, namely, the poor, ethnic immigrant, located at the margins of society. These individuals, because they are denied access to the “inside” of the “American Dream,” whether because of economic, social and/or ethnic differences from the “moral middle class,” create their own “inside,” which affords them justice, security, fame, wealth, and power. First I’ll be discussing Howard Hawks’ 1932 classic, *Scarface: The Shame of the Nation*. I argue that this film’s depiction of the gangster, Tony Camonte, and the film’s consequent censorship, exposes key social anxieties of the 1930s—namely class mobility, urbanization, changing moral values, and most importantly, immigration. Likewise, Brian DePalma’s 1983 remake of the film, simply entitled *Scarface*, addresses different social fears, such as communism and Reagan’s “war on drugs,” but still focuses on the figure of the uneducated, morally-bereft Other who strives for the “American Dream” despite his status as a Cuban “Excludable.”

The Meaning of the Gangster in American Society

As Robert Warshow explains in his seminal 1948 article, “The Gangster as Tragic Hero,” the “hero” of the gangster film, while revealing of America’s own xenophobic tendencies, also “speaks for us”¹ in that he “is what we want to be and

¹ The “us” and the “we” of Warshow’s article is never defined, though we can assume he is

what we are afraid we may become” (243). In other words, the figure of the gangster is appealing because he challenges the myth of the American (primarily middle class) work ethic, which demands long hours, sacrifice, deferred gratification, and taking orders from superiors in order to achieve financial and social success. In gangster films, this work ethic is mocked and derided as foolish, such as when Tony Montana, of DePalma’s *Scarface*, after rejecting his job as a dishwasher in favour of working for a drug dealer, explains, “I didn’t come to this country to break my back.” Montana, whose desire for money, power, and success drives him ever higher in the cocaine trade, is “the perverse alter ego if the ambitious, profit-minded American male” (Schatz 85). This discrepancy between ideal and reality was further accentuated in 1929 with the coming of the Great Depression, when a scrupulous work ethic no longer guaranteed a job, a home or even a meal. Hence, it is likely that a disheartened American audience enjoyed watching gangsters breaking the rules and succeeding in the process (Rosow 163-166).

Likewise, Warshow argues, the gangster’s life, and his appeal to audiences, is defined by his desire to “assert himself as an individual, to draw himself out of the crowd, and he always dies *because* he is an individual” (244). The gangster’s drive for power and his subsequent success separates him from the rest of the world, and yet it is precisely this separation and/or inability to rely on anyone but himself that always leads to the gangster’s demise. Thus, both Tony Camonte and Tony Montana die alone after killing off or alienating those who loved them and might have prevented and/or protected them from their brutal deaths.

Furthermore, because the gangster transgresses moral and social order and succeeds, we are led to assume that his violent death is inevitable in order to restore and reinforce that order. As Warshow explains, “we gain the double satisfaction of participating vicariously in the gangster’s sadism and then seeing it turned against the gangster himself” (243). Here we see the competing and complex audience reactions to the gangster. He is the hero who defies authority and empowers himself despite the alienating realities of urban existence and, more specifically, the Great Depression. He represents a hopeful alternative to accepting breadlines and unemployment passively. But the gangster also threatens the

referring to the white, middle class American movie going public of 1948, and more specifically, those individuals who hold steady jobs, obey the law, and raise families—the antithesis of the gangster hero.

comfort of the established order, not just because he breaks the law, but because he threatens the myth of the American success story and those who are entitled to it. As Jonathan Munby, author of *Public Enemies, Private Heroes*, explains: “In their blatant disregard for Prohibition and ironic mimicry of the laissez-faire capitalist ‘road to success,’ ethnic urban gangsters directly confronted key moral and economic precepts associated with an ailing nativist order” (5). Likewise, when the gangster, with his newfound wealth, attempts to mimic the trappings and rituals of “high society (such as when Tony Camonte and his entourage go to see a play in their tuxedos), he erases the sense of entitlement normally associated with such displays of culture and ceremony. He reveals that money can at least buy entrance, though not necessarily acceptance, into “cultured” society. Thus, our understanding of the first gangster film audiences² becomes more and more complicated—there are those who saw themselves in the gangster, there are those who saw the gangster as a threat to themselves, and there are those who wavered between these two sentiments.

The Censored Gangster and the Moral Middle Class

Of course, the treatment and depiction of the film gangster is not merely a product of audience desire and expectation, but also the product of industry censorship and fear over the effects of such “negative” images on the movie audience. Film historian and critic Lee Grieveson pinpoints the beginnings of film censorship, the growing public concern over the possible corrupting effects of cinema on the masses, and the moral middle class’ attempts to regulate morality for all of society with the 1906 Thaw-White scandal and its consequent theatrical and filmic adaptations, such as the film, *The Unwritten Law* (1907). At this time the nickel theatres were seen as, according to one Chicago Tribune editorial, “schools of crime where murders, robberies and holdups are illustrated” (qtd. in Grieveson

² My argument here specifically pertains to those audiences of the first “talking” gangster films (starting with *The Lights of New York* in 1928) because the depiction of immigrants in these films is more complicated and polyvalent than in the almost wholly stigmatizing depictions of immigrants found in silent gangster films: “When the gangster eventually spoke, he relocated the desires of his community in specific body politic and in a particular social space. The talking gangster, as it were, took advantage of one of the few places granted in the culture for the representation of lower-class ethnic American life” (Munby 4-5).

39). However, as Grieveson points out, not only was film content problematic at this time, but the very space in which films were watched were viewed as “‘dangerous’ spaces of heterosocial leisure” (41). The fear was that the “ill lit” space of the movie theatre could “corrupt” or compromise the morality of women and children and incite the latent criminality of lower-class and immigrant audiences, all of whom who did not have the sufficient strength of character to withstand the polluting effects of the unregulated space. This sentiment was further strengthened by the belief at this time that movies were a largely immigrant or working class pleasure. Implicit in these concerns is the fear that ethnic or lower class audiences might identify with the moral violations portrayed on-screen and aspire to transgress the moral and social order themselves. Therefore, given that film censorship is rooted in the fears of one empowered social class, or classes, about the flow of knowledge and pleasure to another class, it is not surprising that the MPPDA, established in 1927, found gangster films, with their portrayal of the success of the social underdog, to be particularly problematic. Thus, as Jonathan Munby argues, these censorship attempts became a way to enforce a particular definition of is what it is to be American (90).

Thomas Schatz explains that it is for this reason that the gangster film “enjoyed possibly the briefest classical period of any Hollywood genre” (82). The immense popularity of the gangster genre coupled with the public outcries surrounding the genre’s “overt celebration of the gangster hero and their less-than-flattering portrayal of urban life” (82) made it a particular target of the Code. The “public” concerned with these issues included a broad range of groups, mostly “nativist” middle class Americans, concerned about the maintenance of the myth of the moral middle class American ideal.³ However, the “public” with the loudest voice were religious groups, such as Protestant censorship groups, who were mostly concerned with the gangster’s status as transgressor of social, economic, and racial boundaries, and the emerging Catholic Legion of Decency, who were more preoccupied with the maintenance of Christian moral standards (Munby 90-

³ Generally, those who desired to censor gangster films, were the “Old Immigrants” from western and northern Europe, who had attained “middle-class” status and viewed the increasing wave of “New Immigrants,” from southern and eastern Europe, as a threat to their jobs, their racial character, and their moral and political hegemony. These “nativist” groups were concerned with maintenance of a specific understanding of the American Ideal (Thatcher 1-20).

94). Though the Production Code, written in 1930, was not enforceable until 1934, with the establishment of the Production Code Administration (Schatz 98), Hawks' *Scarface: The Shame of the Nation* bears the marks of the industry's attempts at self censorship. Some of these marks include: the subtitle, "The Shame of the Nation"; an apologetic prologue/disclaimer which instructs the audience to take action against criminals; the editing out of all on-screen deaths; and several added scenes featuring "pillars of the community," such as police chiefs, newspaper editors, and middle- to upper-class, white "citizens," denouncing the gangster and his lifestyle. However, as many critics have pointed out, the addition of these polemical scenes, partly because Hawks refused to direct them, appear to disrupt the narrative. Whereas the uncensored portions of *Scarface: The Shame of the Nation* make use of what later came to be viewed as the well-established style of the gangster film, such as dramatic chiaroscuro lighting, fast-paced editing, the use of high and low camera angles, and rapid-fire, vernacular dialogue, the added scenes were filmed with bright lighting, static camera angles, and with the slow, measured diction of "authentic" American culture (Munby 59, Rosow 189-203). Thus, ironically, these attempts to censor the film appear as exactly that—a lecture to the audience—and therefore likely failed in their attempts to affect their target audience (Munby 61).

Fear of the Immigrant

Whether "effective" or not, these added scenes, while motivated by the concerns of "nativist" groups, the Catholic Church, and government officials concerned about the glorification of the gangster/criminal (Schatz 92), also appear to be implicitly motivated by the gangster's overt Italian immigrant identity. When the police chief labels the gangster a "louse" and a "rat," two kinds of pestilence that propagate and "infect" a city and hence must be eliminated, one cannot help but think of contemporary society's fears over the "infestation" of America by immigrants. Between 1919 and 1930, the United States saw a resurgence in "nativism," which was characterized by the fear that the constant influx of immigrants would somehow lead to a diluting or compromising of "pure" American stock. For instance, the thesis of Madison Grant's popular book, *Passing of a Great Race* (1916, 1930) is that the entire race is divided into three

“progressively more superior” types—Mediterranean, Alpine, and Nordic—with Nordic being the most “superior.” Other books and popular magazines of the time, such as *Scientific American* and *Saturday Evening Post*, also addressed the threat of an influx of “inassimilable” immigrants. Thus, “[t]he immigrant [in America] in 1930 had reason to feel that Americans generally saw very little value in what he had brought with him as his heritage” (Thatcher 24-42).

Nowhere are these anti-immigrant sentiments more acutely articulated than during an added scene when a group of “concerned citizens,” marked both sartorially and vocally as middle- to upper-class Anglo Americans, complains to the publisher of *The Evening Record* that his newspaper “glorifies” the gangster by putting his exploits on the front page. The publisher’s response is that ignoring the gangster will not end his criminal actions, but rather, it is the duty of the “citizens” to vote for law that “puts the gun in the same class as drugs and white slavery. Put teeth in the Deportation Act. These gangsters don’t belong in this country. Half of them aren’t even citizens.” In this scene, the unwanted immigrant other to the American “citizen” is directly labelled a threat to the safety of the “nation” and its “children.” Deportation, along with gun control, is the solution to America’s crime problems (a sentiment which reappears in DePalma’s *Scarface* with the Mariel boatlift of 1980). Thus, the Code’s early attempts at censorship, personified by the ideological and filmic discontinuities found within *Scarface: The Shame of the Nation*, both reveal and reinforce current social anxieties, such as the multiple concerns over immigration. Later in this scene, a hunched-shouldered, modestly dressed Italian immigrant, who sits apart from the Anglo members of the citizens group,⁴ complains in a thick, Italian accent that gangsters “[B]ring nothing but shame to my people.” Here, the “acceptable” immigrant, who is working class, humble, concerned about his community, and yet does not expect to mingle with the “cultured,” middle- to upper-class members of his society (emphasized by their separation within the mise en scene), is contrasted with Camonte, who does not know his “place.”

Another contrast to the depiction of “transgressive” immigrants is Tony’s mother. When we first see Mrs. Camonte she is in the kitchen cooking a

⁴ Likewise, he does not appear in the scene until the phrase “Half of [the gangsters] aren’t even citizens” is uttered, though he has presumably been sitting in the room throughout the entire scene.

large meal of spaghetti for her son, wearing a generically ethnic peasant skirt, shawl, and bun. The Camonte kitchen, in contrast with the lavish apartments and dance halls of the underworld we see throughout the film, is shabby, humble, and cluttered with the tools of domestic life, such as pots, pans, and dishrags. Here we see the humble beginnings, the tweed suits, the bowls of home-cooked spaghetti and the dank kitchen that Tony aspires to move beyond. And yet, Mrs. Camonte appears satisfied with the life she has created for herself and her children purely through “honest work.” She will not accept Tony’s “dirty money,” nor will she allow her daughter, Cesca, to accept it. However, Cesca’s Anglo diction and stylish clothing (as well as actress Ann Dvorak’s sophisticated performance and mannerisms) belie that at eighteen-years-old she is already enchanted with the corrupting city nightlife of speakeasies, dancing, and men, whether or not Tony finances her tastes. She is pursuing the pleasures and delights of “America,” which in the hands of the immigrant, is depicted as dangerous, and even deadly. Mrs. Camonte also warns Cesca that such an excessive lifestyle, as opposed to the humble world of the Camonte home, will only lead her to “trouble,” a prophecy which is fulfilled when Cesca dies helping Tony fight off the police in the closing scenes of the film. Like the Italian at the concerned citizens’ meeting, Mrs. Camonte represents the humble, moral immigrant who is “thankful” for the opportunity to live in America and only aspires to a quiet, honest, and pious, if plebeian, existence. She may not enjoy the speakeasies or wear pretty dresses like her daughter; then again, she is still alive at the end of the film. Her excessive condemnation of her son’s behaviour (she says “he no belong to me no more. He’s a-no good”), demanded by the censors, further emphasizes the sub-human qualities of the immigrant gangster—even his own mother does not trust him and sees him as a moral contaminant.

Of course, *Scarface: The Shame of the Nation*’s depiction of the ethnic American as “social pestilent” does not occur solely in the scenes added by the censors. Rather, from the moment we meet him, Tony Camonte’s immigrant status is alternately mocked and criticized as uneducated, barbaric, and animal-like. As Aguinaga, et al. point out, Tony Camonte subverts established moral, social, economic, and ethnic codes, while simultaneously playing into that code’s conception of the immigrant: “[E]ven though he is representing that ‘other,’ he is constructed by the ideological instance and therefore is a stereotypical image of

the Italian gangster as seen from the WASP viewpoint, yet expressed directly by Scarface" (111). Though he is a potential image of immigrant rebellion, Tony's thick accent, street slang, and inability to command the vocabulary of "legitimate" society (he calls a writ of "habeas corpus" a writ of "hocus pocus"), is often played as a source of amusement to his white, middle class contemporaries, as well as the audience. This gap between Tony's attempts to mimic the trappings of WASP culture and WASP culture itself is best illustrated in Tony's relationship with his moll, Poppy, one of the many prizes he plunders along his climb towards success. When the two first meet in the apartment of his boss, Johnny Lovo, Tony is still the bodyguard, wearing rough tweeds and a bow-tie. Throughout this scene, as the two men discuss business, Poppy, blond, fair-skinned, and well-groomed, remains in the far background of the mise en scene, removed from Tony because she is still "too expensive" for him. However, once Tony upgrades his appearance, at one point even wearing the same expensive silk robe that Johnny Lovo dons in the aforementioned scene, Poppy consents to an affair. And yet, despite his outward appearance of WASP success, including a luxurious apartment and the boss' woman, Tony proves that he can only "imitate," rather than participate in, the dominant culture. Upon seeing Tony's new apartment, Poppy comments "Kinda gaudy, isn't it?" to which Tony replies, without a hint of irony, "Ain't it though? Glad you like it." The audience laughs along with Poppy at this comment.

We also see Tony attempt to teach his bumbling, illiterate Italian secretary how to "speak nice" when answering the telephone and taking messages. This scene is comical, not just because the secretary attempts to shoot the telephone in frustration, but because we see Tony, who is destined as a result of ethnic heritage and appearance, to remain "outside" of legitimate society, teaching another immigrant how to become a member of that society. Tony's project of assimilation is both hopeless and played for laughs.⁵ These scenes appear to affirm the belief that is constantly put forward by the film—that "success" is embodied by

⁵ Jonathan Munby has argued that these scenes of the gangster's social mimicry, common in many gangster films of the 1930s, express a more ambivalent message about social, economic, and ethnic boundaries. He cites a scene in *Little Caesar* (1930) in which Rico holds a formal banquet for all his friends, which eventually disintegrates into a food fight. Munby claims the humour in this scene arises not because we are laughing at Rico for trying to be like the "upper classes," but because Rico, in his bumbling, reveals the hypocrisy of elitism and its rituals (50-1).

successful assimilation into dominant WASP culture, and that the immigrant can only hope to “ape” this culture, rather than be accepted by it.

The Changing Face of the Gangster

The movie gangster of the 1930s both aroused and placated several different, but related, social anxieties of several different social groups: the need of the disenfranchised to see competing figures of American “success,” a Depression-laden audience’s desire for active, socially transgressive heroes, the middle- to upper-class WASP fear of these depictions upon the aforementioned classes, the “nativist’s” concern over urban crime and immigration, the Catholic Church’s desire to provide films with a moral message, and the reaction of the censors and the film industry to all of these competing concerns. However, after 1933, with the repeal of Prohibition, the beginning of Roosevelt’s New Deal, the establishment of the Production Code Administration in 1934, and Will Hays’ declared “moratorium” on the gangster film in 1935, the gangster film underwent a period of transformation (Munby 83-85; Schatz 98-99). The gangster character was displaced from the role of the “hero” with whom we sympathize, and was replaced with the hardened detective, or “G-Man,” who either stands alone or as a moral foil to the gangster character⁶ (Schatz 98-102). G-Men, though not very different in behaviour or demeanor from gangsters (in fact, the same actors, most famously James Cagney and Edward G. Robinson, were often used in these roles), now worked for the side of the “law.” Therefore, the acceptability of the violent and ruthless G-Man, as opposed to the outlaw gangster, clearly reveals that earlier censorship attempts, despite claiming an objection to violence, were more likely concerned with *who* was committing that violence and for what reason. As long as the G-Man was using violence to restore the moral order, rather than blur class and ethnic lines, he was acceptable. With the G-Man, the lower-class immigrant male’s violence is co-opted and neutralized as a tool for, rather than against, the State.

⁶ Another variation on this theme is the “middle man” character, who must choose between a moral and a criminal life: “Such a variation takes the supporting character from the classic gangster films (the subordinate partner of the gangster who eventually rejects crime for the values of hearth and home) and recasts him as the central character” (Schatz 102).

DePalma's Remake: Fear of the Immigrant Revisited

The prologue to Howard Hawks' *Scarface: The Shame of the Nation*, yet another addition imposed on the film by censors, begins "This picture is an indictment of gang rule in America and of the callous indifference of the government to this constantly increasing menace to our safety and our liberty. Every incident in this picture is the reproduction of an actual occurrence..." Here, the film's claim that it is based upon some verifiable truth, such as the exploits of Al Capone, provides the film with a moral justification of its own existence. Violent and immoral deeds will be reenacted as a way to "indict" the violent and immoral deeds currently taking place in America, and to make the public aware of its duty to "act" against these forces. Brian DePalma's 1983 remake of Hawks' film, simply titled *Scarface*, also begins with a prologue with similar claims to represent a historical reality; however, the audience is not invited to view the film as an indictment, or as a catalyst for political action. Instead, we are introduced to a peculiar moment in U.S. Immigration history:

In May 1980, Fidel Castro opened the harbor at Mariel, Cuba with the apparent intention of letting some of his people join their relatives in the United States. Within 72 hours, 3,000 U.S. boats were headed for Cuba. It soon became evident that Castro was forcing the boat owners to carry back with them not only their relatives, but the dregs of his jails. Of the 125,000 refugees that landed in Florida, an estimated 25,000 had criminal records.

This prologue is then followed by black and white documentary footage of Fidel Castro speaking to a cheering crowd about Cubans who are unwilling to "adapt to the spirit of our revolution." He then shouts to the crowd "We don't want them! We don't need them!" Thus, before the plot of the film even begins, the "Marielito" is posited as both unwanted by the United States and unwanted by Cuba. This scene then cuts to colour footage of boats leaving Mariel Harbor and arriving in Florida, a montage not unreminiscent of the now mythic photographs of hopeful but exhausted immigrants arriving at Ellis Island. People wave and

smile from the overcrowded boats, a crying child is comforted when his father points out the American flag, saying “Mira! Mira! [Look! Look!],” and an ailing, old woman is taken away in a stretcher by four fatigue-clad representatives of the U.S. Army. Next we are shown a crane shot of the over-crowded detention centres where Marielitos were made to wait indefinitely for their green cards. However, as much as these images evoke empathy for the Marielitos and their ambiguous position as either “political refugee” or “Excludable,”⁷ this empathy is nevertheless coloured by the film’s prologue, Castro’s speech, and our own historical knowledge of the event, so that we ask, with each haunting close-up, “Is this immigrant a criminal?” This shifting perspective of the Cuban immigrant as either hopeful pursuer or criminal exploiter of the “American Dream,” much like Hawks’ often ambivalent portrayal of Tony Camonte, is key to DePalma’s characterization of Tony Montana.

Prior to the Mariel boatlift, Americans had been primarily sympathetic and receptive towards Cuban immigrants as victims of political oppression, due in part, no doubt, to their perceived alignment with American politics, and the early immigrants’ privileged social status. The first wave of immigrants seeking asylum from Castro’s regime in 1959 were called the “golden exiles” because they were composed of mainly doctors, lawyers, judges, engineers, and managers. The second wave, which began in 1962, was composed of individuals with more modest occupations, such as artisans, clerks, shopkeepers, mechanics, and farmers (Soruco 5-9). Therefore, the Mariel boatlift of 1980 marked a shift in the public perception of the Cuban immigrant from empathetic political refugee to that of potential criminal thrust upon the United States by a devious Fidel Castro (Skoug 9-10). In addition, at this time there was a pervading fear that “the influx of refugees was only the most dramatic evidence that the United States was unable to protect its borders or enforce its laws against illegal aliens” (Skoug 9). Much like the “nativist” backlash in America in the 1920s and 1930s, the early 1980s marks a time when anxiety over the immigrant was once again a national topic: “If there was a Cuba-related objective which united all factions in the United States at the outset of the Reagan administration, it was to expel criminals included in the

⁷ The title “Excludable” refers to “criminals and mentally ill persons deemed ineligible to remain in the United States” (Skoug 57). In the press and in U.S. discussions with Cuba, the Marielitos whom the U.S. wanted Cuba to repatriate became known as the Excludables.

Mariel influx” (Skoug 10). It took four years for Castro to agree to “take back” the 2,746 Cubans that the United States deemed “excludable.”

Given the association of Marielitos with criminals, it is not surprising that the first time we meet Tony Montana he is sitting in a police station answering questions about his past. With a self-assured grin and large scar across his face, he is already marked as a criminal (which is later confirmed when the police discover a “true” mark of criminality, an “assassin’s tattoo,” on his hand), despite his attempts to convince the police otherwise. In response to the question “Where’d you learn to speak the English, Tony?” he explains, with an ironic smirk, “Uh, in a school. And my father, he was uh, from the United States. Just like you, ya know? He was a Yankee.” Here, Tony attempts to establish his right to live in the United States—just like his interrogators’ fathers, his father was a “Yankee.” Later in the scene, he further asserts this right to the “American way of life” when he declares “I’m Tony Montana, a political prisoner from Cuba. And I want my fuckin’ human rights now! Just like President Carter say!” Throughout the majority of this scene, the camera frames Tony in a mid-shot as he looks up at his interrogators, who we only see from the mid-section down. At times the camera circles around his head, thus emphasizing his entrapment; despite the stories he tells, the police will never believe him because he is viewed as a criminal, a toxic pestilent sent over from Castro. After Tony’s rousing and ostensibly convincing speech about the hardships of living under a communist dictatorship, the police chief, looking both bored and cynical, responds: “I don’t buy his shit... They all sound the same to me. That son of a bitch Castro is shitting all over us.”

Of course, the police chief is right—Tony Montana *is* a criminal and his “role models” are the stars of American gangster movies. Much as the censors of the 1930s feared, the gangster film has provided the disenfranchised with a method for obtaining wealth and success in America. Tony tells the interrogators, “[My father] used to take me a lot to the movies. I learn. I watch guys like Humphrey Bogart. James Cagney. They, they teach me to talk. I like those guys. I always know one day I’m coming here, United States.” Gangster films have taught Tony that the surest way for an immigrant to gain access to the “American Dream” is through violence and crime. Therefore, it is not surprising that in order to obtain his green card, Tony and his sidekick Manny, must kill a former Castro aid. Tony has no qualms about committing the murder, and like a true capitalist, expresses

his scorn for communism: "I kill communists for fun. For a green card, I'll carve 'em up real nice." In fact, in the hedonistic world of Miami in the 1980s, with its flashy clubs, neon colours, and appetite for cocaine, Tony reveals himself to be the very opposite of a communist. Everything he sees, he wants, and he knows exactly how to get it. For instance, when advising Manny how to pick up American women he says, "In this country you gotta have the money first. When you get the money, then you get the power, when you get the power, you get the woman." Like Tony Camonte, who believed the Cook's Tours advertisement, "The World is Yours," was speaking directly to him, so Tony Montana believes he deserves "The world, *chico*, and everything in it." In fact, Tony later marks his success by purchasing a large statue for the foyer of his mansion proclaiming "The World is Yours" (he originally sees this message flashing on a blimp).

Hence, for Tony Montana, the "American Dream" is defined by owning—expensive clothing, a mansion, a tiger, and most importantly, his boss' woman. Like her predecessor, Poppy, Elvira alternately sees Tony as a low-class "peasant" or simply "the help." Even after they are married and extremely wealthy, Elvira is critical of Tony's obsession with money and their decadent home. Apparently money has not bought Tony any taste and Elvira tells him, "Nothing exceeds like excess." However, appearing "excessive" or to use Poppy's word, "gaudy" does not concern Montana. Unlike Tony Camonte, who wanted to attend the theatre and "talk nice," Montana never aspires to be assimilated into the WASP world because he does not view it as "superior," morally or culturally. In fact, his fear, and the ultimate irony of his success, is that he is turning into a WASP himself. For Tony, money and success have, in a sense, eroded class and ethnic differences, since, if he lives long enough, he will inevitably become like all the other rich old "mummies" of "legitimate" society. In the first *Scarface*, Tony Camonte is killed soon after he reaches the pinnacle of his success. However, Tony Montana, since he has more time to "enjoy" his success before he is killed, also has the chance to experience the "after" of the "American Dream" that Tony Camonte never experienced. Tony Montana therefore comes to see that financial success, whether earned by the drug lord or the banker, has boiled down to the mere consumption of food, liquor, sex, and drugs, or as Tony calls it "eating, drinking, fucking, sucking and snorting." And the longer he pursues this lifestyle, the more he becomes like the WASPs around him.

Tony's cynicism also stems from the fact that everyone he encounters is corrupt—from the upstanding banker who launders Tony's dirty money (Tony calls him a "fuckin' WASP whore") to Mel Bernstein, a detective who has turned bribery into his primary career. In fact, in a reversal of previous gangster film conventions, it is Mel who railroads Tony into paying bribes. Whereas in *Scarface: The Shame of the Nation*, censors demanded that the police and the State be portrayed as upholders of the moral good to balance the immoral figure of the gangster⁸ and to maintain the authority of the State, DePalma's *Scarface* portrays the Chief Detective of narcotics as Tony's complicit double. This doubling is further emphasized in this scene by DePalma's use of multiple mirrors in the background, which reflect multiple images of Tony's face around Mel as he speaks (as vice versa). This juxtapositioning of one man's reflection with another man's presence eradicates the need for shot reverse shot (which would create a "distance"), and allows the viewer to see how one man is merely the reflection of the other. Mel dons the "legitimate," socially accepted, "white hat" of a cop, while Tony wears the "black hat" of the criminal, and yet they are same man after the same coke money. Here again, the gangster film parallels and equates the behaviour of criminals, the upper-classes, and the ruling forces of the State, only now this equation can be overt.

Brian DePalma, benefiting from fifty years of gangster films following *Scarface: The Shame of the Nation*, is aware of the conventions in which he is working and understands that Tony Montana, living in the 1980s, will be a different kind of gangster than his 1930s predecessor. Thus, by comparing Hawks' film with its 1983 remake, we can see not only how the image and character of the "public enemy" has altered, but also how the line between "legitimate" and "illegitimate," which censors and moral crusaders had attempted to rigidly define, has become even more blurred. Unlike Tony Camonte, Montana is much more aware of this blurred line and of the hypocrisy of labelling one person's method of exploitation for profit as legal and another's as corrupt. He too has seen way too many gangster films. This sentiment becomes apparent when Tony goes out for dinner at an exclusive black tie restaurant and discovers that he is the only "bad

⁸ The third "General Principal" of the MPPDA's Production Code reads "Law, natural or human, shall not be ridiculed, nor shall sympathy be created for its violation" (Schatz 95).

guy” and the only non-white in the room (except for Manny and the men in his entourage), which prompts him to make a speech to his dining companions. It’s worth quoting at length:

You all a bunch of fuckin’ assholes. Know why? You don’t have the guts to be what you wanna be. You need people like me so you can point your fuckin’ fingers and say ‘That’s the bad guy.’ So... what that make you? Good? You’re not good. You just know how to hide, how to lie. Me, I don’t have that problem. Me, I always tell the truth. Even when I lie.

Here, Tony exposes the social drive that Hayden White has labelled “self-definition by negation”: “It appears as a kind of reflex action in conflicts between nations, classes, and political parties... If we do not know what we think ‘civilization’ is, we can always find an example of what it is not” (152). Likewise, the only way to know who the “good guy” is, is by pointing a finger at the “bad guy.” In his speech Tony also uncovers the main difference between the gangster and “legitimate society,” a sentiment that had to remain hidden in films like *Scarface: The Shame of the Nation*. The gangster is “honest” about his life—his money comes from selling drugs and killing people. In contrast, the detective, the banker, and the “yuppie” citizens who appear legitimate and therefore garner respect, lie about their lives.⁹ The banker launders money, the detective solicits bribes, and young, hard-working yuppies buy Tony’s coke in secret.

Conclusion: The Remake and Social History

In response to why he does not view *Scarface* as a “remake,” producer Martin Bregman explains, “The underworld, like everything else, has changed radically since the Capone days of speakeasies and bootleggers... There are obscene amounts of money to be made, bringing in drugs from Central and South America, if someone is smart, ruthless and hungry enough. Someone like Tony Montana”

⁹ This contrast is the subject of a current film, *Empire* (2002), in which a Latino heroin dealer is swindled by a white investment banker.

(Malta). However, Bregman's statement only solidifies *Scarface's* status as a "remake," or as a new attempt to depict a previously told story. The constraints of Prohibition, and the public's consequent thirst for liquor, provided a fertile ground for the growth of the gangster. Likewise, Reagan's futile "War on Drugs" (which continues today), merely makes the drug trade more violent and more lucrative, as crafty dealers devise more dangerous and more expensive methods for transporting drugs to their customers. DePalma is working in a different era than Hawks, but the structures of ethnocentrism and classism, as reflected in the films, are basically the same. In both films, the gangster, as a member of an ethnic and economic underclass, by virtue of genetics or mentality, is doomed to a life of crime. This pattern, which structures many gangster films, exempts those who are not part of this underclass from responsibility for helping those who have been "preordained" to live a life of poverty or crime. This pattern is similar to the ideology behind the war on drugs, a war that assumes that drug sales and drug use are the result of "bad people" with corrupt morals rather than a problem that society as a whole must address. Hence, the war on drugs becomes a war on the inner city, the poor, and the ethnic minority. It becomes a matter of pointing out the "bad guy."

These two films tell the same story, and that it still works as well in 1983 as it did in 1932 is revealing of the United States' inability to break down social, economic, and ethnic barriers. The main difference between the two films, and I would argue, these two periods in American history, is who has been deemed the "public enemy" or the "bad guy" and which drug, whether it is bootleg liquor or cocaine, is currently forbidden by the government. These two films are, as I have attempted to argue, an important vehicle for understanding the ever-changing conceptions of "America," the American Dream, illegal drugs, and the criminal. And given current pro-war concerns over "American pride" and the presence of "threatening" immigrants in the United States, I believe the issues posed in this paper require further investigation and concern. For instance, what films and modes of speech are currently viewed as dangerous and thus require censorship? And what are media images currently telling us about the definition America and who is the current public enemy?

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