

COMM 324 – Film Genre: Noir

SOC 014, Tuesdays 4:15-6:45 p.m.

Professors Aaron Greer (agreer1@luc.edu) and David Kamerer (dkamerer@luc.edu)

Office hours: Wednesdays and Thursdays, 2:00-4:00 p.m. or by appointment

Course Objective

This course will investigate the cinematic and literary roots, cultural impact, and evolving aesthetics of the film noir genre, by exploring classic film noir texts from the 1940s to today. Following the course, students will better understand the role that genre plays for both film audiences and filmmakers; be able to identify the structural elements, dominant themes and aesthetics associated with the film noir genre; examine the relationship between social mores, politics and popular film; and be able to better apply critical, historical and theoretical lenses to the evaluation of cinematic texts.

Policies

Accommodations. Any student with a learning disability who needs accommodation during class sessions or exams should provide documentation from Services for Students with Disabilities to the instructor during the first week of class; this information will be treated in complete confidence. The instructor will accommodate students' needs in the best way possible, given the constraints of course content and processes. It is the responsibility of each student to plan in advance to meet their own needs and assignment due dates. Details are available at www.luc.edu/sswd.

Students are excused for recognized religious holidays. Please let us know in advance if you have a conflict.

Academic Integrity. Each student is expected to do his or her own work in the course. Allegations of academic misconduct will be forwarded immediately to the office of the Dean of the School of Communication for possible disciplinary action. Loyola regards academic dishonesty as an extremely serious matter with consequences ranging from failure of the course to probation to expulsion.

Academic misconduct includes:

- Cheating on exams or aiding other students to cheat. Any effort to gain an advantage not given to all students is dishonest whether or not the effort is successful.
- Stealing the intellectual property of others and passing it off as your own work (this includes material found on the Internet). Software will be used to identify plagiarism.
- Failing to quote directly if you use someone else's words, and cite that particular work and author. If you paraphrase the ideas of another, credit the source with your citation. Please ask me if you have questions about what constitutes plagiarism and/or how to cite sources.
- For closed-book exams, academic misconduct includes conferring with other class members, copying or reading someone else's test, and using notes and materials without prior permission of the instructor.
- Turning in the same work for two classes.

Texts and Readings

- Required
- *The Dark Side of the Screen: Film Noir* 2nd Edition, by Foster Hirsch
 - *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, by James Cain
 - Articles, readings and resources posted on Sakai
 - Feature films ([Kanopy](#), iTunes, YouTube, etc.)
- * Note: only some of the required films are available via the LUC library or public domain streaming sites. Students are responsible for renting/acquiring all others on their own.
- Optional
- *Film Noir Reader*, edited by Silver and Ursini

Grading & Evaluation

Attendance policy: This class meets only once a week and is heavily reliant on discussion and student participation. Consequently, attendance and participation in each class is important and will be included as part of your final grade.

Late Work: Students are expected to complete all of the assignments and readings on time. Assignments submitted late will be penalized one point per business day and will not be accepted after one week from the original due date. For obvious reasons, final presentations must be completed on the assigned date.

Grade Breakdown: Your final grade will be based on your submission of weekly viewing diaries and response questions, two written assignments, a presentation, two exams, and your participation in class discussions. Your grade will be calculated using the following formula:

- Film Diaries & Response Questions – 20% (2% per weekly submission)
- Close Textual Analysis Paper – 15%
- Research Paper & Presentation – 30% (20% paper, 10% presentation)
- Exams – 25% (10% for the midterm, 15% for the final)
- Participation & Attendance – 10%

Assignments

There are three types of written assignments for this course. All papers must be typed, double-spaced and submitted electronically as Word documents or PDF files via Sakai. Points will be deducted for any papers submitted late (as described above).

The assignments are as follows:

- **Film Diaries** – each week you will be responsible for watching a film and completing a set of readings outside of class. After finishing that assignment, write a brief (1-2 page) reaction to the film and list two questions that you have in response to the material. In these “diaries” you might address such questions as: how the material relates to other films and issues we’ve been discussing in class; what surprised, thrilled or angered you about the material; what the film reveals about the period in which it was made or its makers; how it

follows or defies the conventions of the genre as you've come to know it; and/or any other thing that you're thinking about in reaction to what you saw and read. Most importantly, you should list the questions you're left with after reviewing the assigned material. We will draw on these "response questions" each week in our class discussion, and compile the best into potential research topics for the final paper and presentation. Film diaries must be submitted electronically and are due by 2 pm on the day of class.

• **Close Textual Analysis** – An overarching question in film noir studies is whether noir is indeed a definitive and distinct film genre and, if so, what characteristics of story, theme, iconography, character, location and production circumstance mark a particular film as belonging to the genre. For this close textual analysis paper, choose a film from the approved list provided by the instructors, screen the film and make an argument about whether and how it meets the qualifications for the genre by closely analyzing the text. You should not do any outside research to complete this assignment. Draw your conclusions and proof (cite concrete examples) from the cinematic text itself. Compose your argument as a 4-7 page paper, double-spaced, and submit electronically via Sakai.

The paper will be evaluated on the following criteria: 1) the quality, originality and clarity of your argument, 2) your ability to reference specific scenes, images, lines of dialog and other elements of the film to support your ideas, and 3) and your ability to express your ideas clearly and concisely (i.e. your writing).

• **Research paper & presentation** – as your final project in the class, you must research one of the questions raised during the class—we will keep on ongoing list of "response questions" and in-class queries that would be appropriate for this project—and complete a 7-14 page research paper addressing that question.

You must consult at least three outside sources (films, books, articles, journals, etc. NOT assigned for class) and include a complete bibliography with your paper. Your paper should be submitted electronically via Sakai by the beginning of class on 11/29.

Paper topics/questions must be chosen and cleared with the instructor by November 15th.

Research papers will be graded on the following criteria: 1) writing– your ability to structure and articulate your argument/answer clearly; 2) research – the quantity, quality and relevance of your secondary source materials; 3) primary source analysis – your analysis, reference and/or citations of specific primary source materials (i.e. films/novels); and 4) content and depth – the depth, originality and effectiveness of your argument and information.

You must also prepare a presentation, summarizing your paper and the information therein, to be presented during a class symposium held during the last two class sessions (11/29 or 12/6). Your presentation should be well organized, practiced, utilize and reference graphics, images and/or film clips where and when appropriate, but not exceed 10 minutes! The goal of the presentation is to concisely explain your research and findings to the class.

The presentations will be graded on: 1) content organization - the depth of your information, and your ability to extract and summarize key points and ideas from your research; and 2) presentation execution - your use of media (graphics, clips), presentational flow and organization.

Note: you will be responsible for (i.e. tested on) material and information presented by your classmates during the symposium, some of which will be included in the final exam. So the quality and clarity of your presentations won't just affect your grade, but also your classmates' grasp of the material and consequently their performance on the final exam.

The Research Paper and Presentation count for a total of 30% of your final grade (20% for the paper, 10% for the presentation).

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1
Aug. 30 Syllabus Review and Introductions. What is Genre?
In-class screenings: Genre Jeopardy.

Reading due Week 2: Hirsch, Ch 1 (pp. 1-21) & Ch 3 (pp. 53-67)
Screening due Week 2: *M (1931)*.

Week 2
Sep. 6 Noir's Influences and Cinematic Roots
In-class screenings: *Public Enemy, Cabinet of Dr. Caligari, The Thin Man*.

Reading due Week 3: "Notes on Film Noir" by Schrader (Sakai) and Hirsch, Ch. 4 (pp. 71-111).
Screening due Week 3: *The Maltese Falcon (1941)*.

Week 3
Sep. 13 Refining Our Definition of Film Noir: *The Maltese Falcon*.
In-class screenings: *Visions of Light, Maltese Falcon, DOA, L.A. Confidential*.

Reading due Week 4: Hirsch, Ch 5 (pp. 113-144) & Ch. 7 (pp. 167-197).
Screening due Week 4: *Touch of Evil (1958)*

Week 4
Sep. 20 Refining Our Definition of Film Noir: *Touch of Evil*.
In-class clips: *Touch of Evil, Killing of a Chinese Bookie, Sunset Blvd, Memento*

Reading due Week 5: "The Return of Dr. Caligari" by Jensen (Sakai) and *The Postman Always Rings Twice* by James Cain (chapters 1-9).
Screening due Week 5: *Kiss Me Deadly (1955)*.

Week 5
Sep. 27 Noir's Darkest Themes: Paranoia and HUAC
In-class screenings: *Kiss Me Deadly, Force of Evil*.

Reading due Week 6: Complete Postman book, Hirsch Ch. 2 (pp. 23-51), "Women in Noir," by Tasker and "Censoring and Selling Film Noir" by Biesen (Sakai).
Screening due Week 6: *The Postman Always Rings Twice (1946)*

Week 6
Oct. 4 She's No Good: the Femme Fatale and *The Postman*
In-class clips: *Double Indemnity, Postman, Mildred Pierce, The Femme Fatale*.

Due for Week 7: Close Textual Analysis Paper.

Week 7 MIDTERM EXAM.
Oct. 11 The Postman Rings More Than Twice: Adaptations and Changing Tastes.
In-class Screening: *Postman* (1946), *Postman* (1981), *Obsession*, *Jerichow*.

Reading due Week 8: “Urban Dystopias On & Off-Screen” (Sakai)
Screening due Week 8: *Chinatown* (1974)

Week 8 The Fallen Angel: Film Noir and the City.
Oct. 18 In-class screenings: *The Big Sleep*, *Chinatown*, *L.A. Confidential*, *Black Dahlia*.

Reading due Week 9: “Black on White” by Flory and “The Whiteness of Film Noir” by Lott (Sakai)
Screening due Week 9: *Devil in a Blue Dress* (1995)

Week 9 Not so Black and White: Noir and Race
Oct. 25 In-class Clips: *Odds Against Tomorrow*, *Devil*, *Border Incident*, *Glass Shield*.

Reading due Week 10: Hirsch, Ch. 8 (pp.199-210) and TBA (Sakai)
Screening due Week 10: *Breathless* (1960)

Week 10 Noir from Afar: International Film Noir
Nov. 1 In-class Clips: *Breathless*, *Shoot the Piano Player*, *Third Man*, *Pale Flower*.

Reading due Week 11: “Colour Me Noir” by Fuller and Olsen, “Sin City, Style and the Status of Noir” by Anderson, and “Dreaming of Electric Femme Fatales” by Zeist (Sakai).
Screening due Week 11: *Blade Runner* (1982/2007)

Week 11 Neo-Noir: Deconstructing and Expanding the Genre
Nov. 8 In-class Screening: *Blade Runner*, *Sin City*, *Drive*, *Mala Educacion*.

Reading due Week 12: TBA (Sakai)
Screening due Week 12: *VR Noir: A Day Before the Night* (2016)
Due for Week 12: Research paper topic proposals.

Week 12 Beyond Film Noir: Interactive Noir and (Re)Defining the Genre.
Nov. 15 Paper topic review and discussion.

Due for Week 14: Research Papers.

Week 13 **** Thanksgiving: No class****
Nov. 22

Week 14 Research Presentations
Nov. 29 Group 1

Week 15 Research Presentations
Dec. 6 Group 2

Dec. 13 FINAL EXAM

** The instructors reserve the right to revise this syllabus, particularly the course schedule, as deemed necessary or required by the shifting needs of the class. Any changes will be both announced in class and posted as an updated version of the syllabus on Sakai.*