MDST 3640 Professor William Little

Fall 2015 Wilson 204 454 New Cabell Hall

Nau 141 Office Hours: F 1-3 and by appointment

TR 12:30-1:45 e-mail: wgl2h@virginia.edu

**Rigged to Blow:**

**The American Gangster Film**

This course offers in-depth examination of an enduring, flexible genre in American cinema: the gangster film. The aim of this study is three-fold: 1. To trace the genre’s development from the early silent film period to the present as a means to explore artistic and technological achievements marking the history of American film; 2. To explore the extensive influence the genre has had on the nature of the American film industry, from the industry’s implementation of the Production Code in the 1930s to the growth of independent cinema in the latter part of the twentieth century and to examine how the genre informed the relationship between French New Wave Cinema and New Hollywood Cinema; 3. To explore how the representation of gangster life on screen articulates crucial anxieties, frustrations, and desires circulating in American society at the time of the film’s creation. To pursue this last aim, students will consider carefully a number of issues dramatized in and/or raised by the films studied, including the following: the dream of social mobility; the myth of self-reinvention; the romance of the nuclear family; the politics of cultural assimilation; the individual’s relationship to the modern city; the relationship between the law and violence; the performance of codes of masculinity; the criminal organization as model of corporate enterprise; the impact of technology on the sense of self; the problem of assessing what is culturally valuable in a society marked by mass production and rapid consumption.

Students will be expected to conduct patient, rigorous analysis of the form and content of the assigned films. To facilitate this practice, viewings will be supplemented by essays of film criticism and by theoretical readings drawn from a variety of disciplines, including cultural studies, religious studies, philosophy, and psychoanalysis. The list of films is as follows: Mervyn LeRoy’s, *Little Caesar*, William Wellman’s, *The Public Enemy*, Robert Siodmak’s, *The Killers*, Raoul Walsh’s *White Heat*, John Boorman’s *Point Blank*, Arthur Penn’s *Bonnie and Clyde*, Francis Ford Coppola’s, *The Godfather*, Martin Scorsese’s *Mean Streets* and *The Departed*, The Hughes Brothers’ *Menace II Society*, The Wachowski Brothers’ *Bound*, Quentin Tarantino’s *Pulp Fiction*.