**New American Genres in Sound Era – 1930+: The Gangster Movie**

Sound films reinforce American predilection for genres (categories of films).

Gangsters a big item in US culture in early 30s, largely as result of Prohibition. A little later rural outlaws on the run become popular, e.g., ‘Bonnie and Clyde’.

The Crime/Gangster Film: Warner Bros. specialty – Jimmy Cagney

His persona – very charismatic; two-fisted vitality; explosive energy; “eager, bouncy terrier”; “master of pugnacious grace”

Ruthlessly destructive but somehow admirable individualist defying the system; existentialist antihero; Depression antihero – has the guts to stand up to the system….

Can be loyal to the people he loves: e.g., his mother, although not usually his girlfriends.

 ‘Public Enemy’ 1931

 Part of Warner Brothers’ social realism of 1930s films.

Directed by William Wellman, who promised the “most violent picture you ever did see.”

Grapefruit in Mae Clark’s face after a lot of sarcasm; revenge and dancing in the rain; affection for Ma (the affectionate clip on the chin); his famous chilling (but restrained) death scene.

 Movie is pre-Code; no reference to law enforcement.

 In contrast to some early sound films, ‘Public Enemy’ is well shot and well edited.

‘White Heat’ 1949 – Cagney plays Cody, who is more violent and destructive than Tom; Margaret Wycherly plays Ma; Virginia Mayo; Edmund O’Brien plays relentless cop.

Relationship with Ma; “Top of the world, Cody!”; “Top of the world, Ma!”

The Code; the law will track you down relentlessly.

Show-stopping finale.

Remains intermittently popular up to present, especially Martin Scorsese, e.g., ‘Goodfellas’ 1990