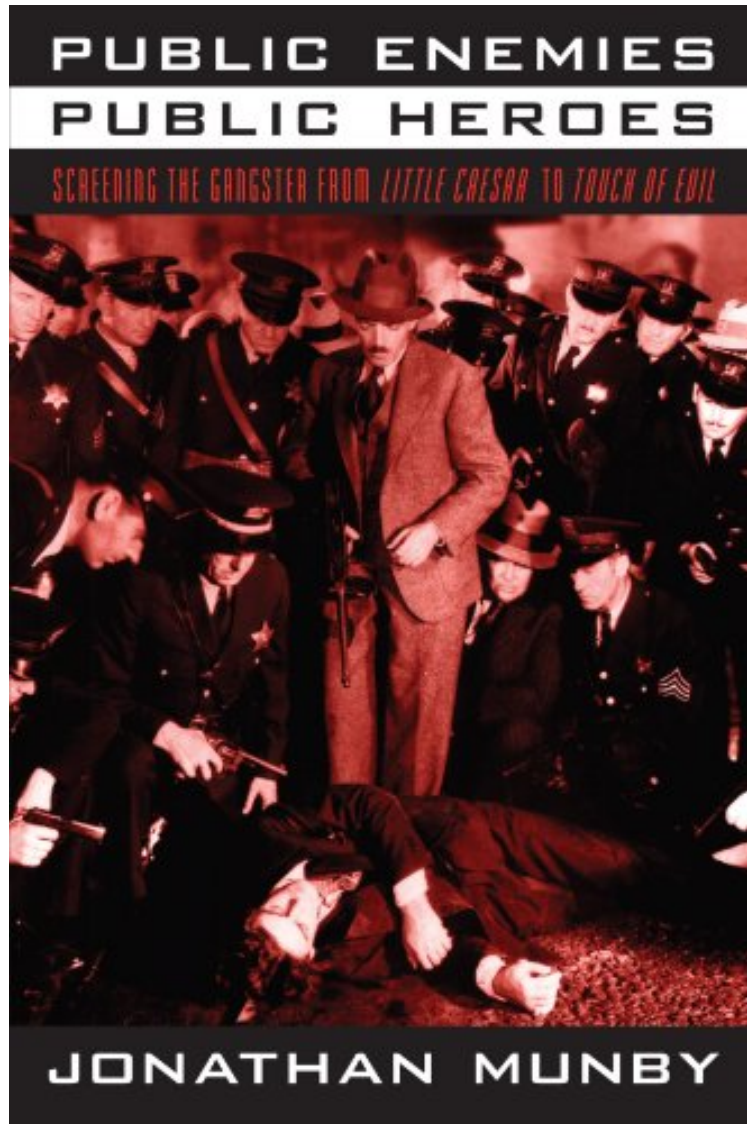


Public Enemies, Public Heroes: Screening the Gangster from Little Caesar to Touch of Evil

Jonathan Munby

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Jonathan Munby : Public Enemies, Public Heroes: Screening the Gangster from Little Caesar to Touch of Evil
before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Public Enemies, Public
Heroes: Screening the Gangster from Little Caesar to Touch of Evil:

9 of 9 people found the following review helpful. Why do we like gangster films?By A CustomerThis is a very

exciting book about why many people find gangster films appealing and why at the same time lots of institutions of authority have found them to be threatening, right from the very beginning. For example, it provides a detailed background of the gangster film's origins in the early '30s, exploring matters such as the motivations for Prohibition, anti-immigration movements, and what was taken to be "proper" American speech, in order to provide a sense of the feelings of resentment these films tapped into and why their early viewers were so excited by them. This sense of how gangster films have continually spoken for those otherwise ignored marks one of the book's most important themes. It also helps to provide an explanation of how the gangster film changed over the decades in response to attacks, both direct and indirect. The book describes and explains the gangster film's continual battles with various censors, within and without Hollywood, to show how these films continually evolved in ways that enabled them to cater again and again to those who would dissent with an oppressive status quo. Of especial interest is the chapter on German _film noir_ directors, which provides a very plausible account of why much _noir_ should be subsumed under the gangster genre. Dealing with the same issues of subversiveness and critical perspectives of existing power structures, much standard _film noir_ is more a continuation of the gangster film tradition than a break with it. Lots of other critics have noted this connection between these two types of films, but few have argued for it as forcefully, as clearly, or in as much detail as Munby. A tantalizing epilogue links these films to gangsta movies of the 1990s, a connection that one hopes will be worked out in more detail in the future. Perhaps the most exciting thing about *Public Enemies, Public Heroes*, however, is that it explains how the violence and crime of gangster films appeals to us in ways that largely avoid the jargon-heavy vocabulary of much film studies scholarship today. The style, while dense, is not overlaid with extensive theoretical terminology. One can tell that Munby has reflected deeply on these matters and how to explain them to an audience that isn't necessarily a part of current theoretical discussions of film. I would highly recommend this book to anyone who wished to understand better both the appeal of gangster films and what these films have typically reacted against. It shows that crime and violence, in narrative contexts, may be used to express in vivid and at times graphic detail objections to those things that order and structure our lives in oppressive ways.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Absolutely essential reading for film scholars

By Jezebel Munby's book examines the gangster film in relation to industrial and cultural history and particularly the forces of censorship or moralism in Hollywood. This brilliant book tackles difficult questions of cultural analysis and film history and is eloquent to boot. Stellar reading, really inspiring for film--especially gangster genre--scholars.

In this study of Hollywood gangster films, Jonathan Munby examines their controversial content and how it was subjected to continual moral and political censure. Beginning in the early 1930s, these films told compelling stories about ethnic urban lower-class desires to "make it" in an America dominated by Anglo-Saxon Protestant ideals and devastated by the Great Depression. By the late 1940s, however, their focus shifted to the problems of a culture maladjusting to a new peacetime sociopolitical order governed by corporate capitalism. The gangster no longer challenged the establishment; the issue was not "making it," but simply "making do." Combining film analysis with archival material from the Production Code Administration (Hollywood's self-censoring authority), Munby shows how the industry circumvented censure, and how its altered gangsters (influenced by European filmmakers) fueled the infamous inquisitions of Hollywood in the postwar '40s and '50s by the House Committee on Un-American Activities. Ultimately, this provocative study suggests that we rethink our ideas about crime and violence in depictions of Americans fighting against the status quo.

From Library Journal Beginning in the early 1930s, argues Lancaster University lecturer Munby, gangster films reflected the urban masses' discontent with the Horatio Algeresque conservatism of Depression-era America. By the end of this genre's heyday, in the early 1950s, the films mirrored the changing sociopolitical order adjusting to corporatism. Munby's wide-ranging overview is most useful in examining the genre's response to the Production Code, the Legion of Decency, and the House Un-American Activities Committee as these groups threatened to muzzle dissent on the silver screen. Recommended for all film collections as a companion to Eugene Rosow's *Born To Lose: The Gangster Film in America* (1978. o.p.).

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About the Author Jonathan Munby is senior lecturer in film studies and American studies at Lancaster University. He is the author of *Public Enemies, Public Heroes: Screening the Gangster from Little Caesar to Touch of Evil*, also published by the University of Chicago Press.