

*“What is the robbery of a bank compared to the founding of a bank?” -Bertolt Brecht*

# THE HEIST FILM

DEPAUL UNIVERSITY | WINTER QUARTER 2023

FILM 390/490 ADVANCED TOPICS IN CINEMA

THURSDAYS | 1:30PM | CDM CENTER ROOM 708

Instructor: Eric Marsh | [marsh@cdm.depaul.edu](mailto:marsh@cdm.depaul.edu)

Virtual Office Hours: Fridays, 8AM-2PM, by email appointment only

**Course Description** - This course explores cinematic robbery. Focusing on the heist (or ‘caper’) film, the class will trace the history and trajectory of this unique and flexible genre from its origins in film noir and gangster films of classic Hollywood to its explosive emergence in the post-WWII era in Europe and beyond. Students will examine the narrative and stylistic conventions of the heist film, its evolving relationship with audiences over time through revision and variation, as well as its function as social commentary. Additionally, students will create their own projects and explore the heist as allegory for the filmmaking process: an imaginative and creative collaboration involving ideas and vision, planning and preparation, action and execution, and, ultimately, the production of an artistic or poetic work.

**Course Management System** - All course materials will be available to you on [D2L](#).

**Required Text** – All readings will be provided by the instructor on [D2L](#).

The Heist Film: Stealing With Style by Daryl Lee (2014)

American Film Genres by Stuart Kaminsky (1973)

A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre by Rick Altman (1984)

+ various supplemental readings will be assigned weekly and for papers/projects

## **Basis for Evaluation**

Projects .....	60%
Final Project .....	20%
Attendance & Participation .....	20%
Total .....	100%

A = 100 – 94, A- = 93 – 90, B+ = 89 – 88, B = 87 – 83, B- = 82 – 80, C+ = 79 – 78, C = 77 – 73, C- = 72 – 70, D+ = 69 – 68, D = 67 – 63, D- = 62 – 60, F = 59 – 0.

## CLASS SCHEDULE & COURSE OUTLINE

WEEK 1	1/5	<b>Introduction: A Brief History of Cinematic Robbery</b>
WEEK 2	1/12	<b>Birth of a Genre</b> <i>The Asphalt Jungle</i> (1950, d. John Huston) <i>The Lavender Hill Mob</i> (1951, d. Charles Crichton)
WEEK 3	1/19	<b>The Art of Failure</b> <i>Rififi</i> (1955, d. Jules Dassin) <i>The Killing</i> (1956, d. Stanley Kubrick)
WEEK 4	1/26	<b>Heist as Satire</b> <i>Bob le Flambeur</i> (Jean-Pierre Melville, 1956) <i>Big Deal on Madonna Street</i> (1958, d. Mario Monicelli)
WEEK 5	2/2	<b>Conclusions: The Heist Film in the 1950s</b> Paper/Presentation #1 due
WEEK 6	2/9	<b>The Heist Adapts Its Message</b> <i>How to Steal a Million</i> (1966, d. William Wyler)
WEEK 7	2/16	<b>Melville, Minimalism, and Myth</b> <i>Le Cercle Rouge</i> (1970, d. Jean-Pierre Melville) Paper/Presentation #2 due
WEEK 8	2/23	<b>Mann, Masculinity, and Authenticity</b> <i>Thief</i> (1981, d. Michael Mann) <i>Heat</i> (1995, d. Michael Mann)
WEEK 9	3/2	<b>Hollywood and The Black Stickup</b> <i>Dead Presidents</i> (1995, d. Hughes Brothers) <i>Set it Off</i> (1996, F. Gary Gray)
WEEK 10	3/9	<b>Fin de Siecle: Death &amp; Rebirth of a Genre</b> <i>Ocean's Eleven</i> (2001, d. Steven Soderbergh) Paper/Presentation #3 due
FINALS	3/16	<b>One Last Job: The 21st Century Heist Film</b> Group Discussion + Final Projects due

## **Assignment Breakdown & Due Dates**

For IN-PERSON STUDENTS: All projects in this course will be done collaboratively, in groups, aka CREWS. CREWS will randomly be assigned for each group project. Each crew will receive instructions from me (aka things to read, watch, research) and work together to formulate a paper and presentation detailing and synthesizing their findings.

For ASYNC STUDENTS: All projects in this course will be done individually. You will receive your own instructions/paper prompts from me that differs from what the in-person students will be doing. The due dates and topics however, are the same.

### **PROJECT #1: HEISTS IN THE 1950s (25%)**

Crews will research, write and present on a wide variety of heist films from the genre's first decade. Due 2/2.

### **PROJECT #2: THE HEIST ADAPTS ITS MESSAGE (25%)**

Crews will research, write and make video essays on a wide variety of heist films from the 1960s and 1970s. Due 2/16.

### **PROJECT #3: HEISTS AT THE END OF THE 20TH CENTURY (10%)**

Crews will research and present on a wide variety of heist films from the 1980s and 1990s, Due 3/9.

### **FINAL PROJECT (20%)**

Students will have the opportunity to form their own crews - or work as a lone wolf - and create a project inspired by our journey through the heist genre. This could be a movie, screenplay, research paper, video essay, etc. Process and methodology will be up to the student(s). Due 3/16.

**Content & Schedule Changes** – The course schedule is subject to change depending on class progress, time constraints, and material availability. The overall workload, however, will not change. Make sure you pace yourself accordingly. You will be notified of any changes in the syllabus in a timely fashion.

**Weekly Updates** - Every week I will post an update (or two) on the D2L homepage detailing the class business for that week: assignments, readings, projects, etc. If you want to keep up with the course, you *must* follow the updates/lists and make sure you're on track. No excuses.

**Screenings** - All films assigned for the course will be made available to stream on D2L. All of the assigned films are required “texts” for the course, and as such, are *mandatory*. Movies listed above are subject to change and does not include additional films that will be assigned for papers/presentations.

**Reading Assignments** - Reading assignments are *mandatory*. The readings supplement and inform the lectures and discussions and will be crucial in a broad understanding of the heist genre. Lectures may introduce additional material not available in the readings, and the readings may explore concepts not mentioned in class. All readings will be made available on D2L as PDFs.

**Content/Trigger Warnings** - Films, clips, lectures, and discussion in this course may engage with potentially sensitive or traumatizing material. I will note especially graphic/intense content on D2L and make any warnings ahead of time for clips/films shown in class, and do my best to foster a classroom in which we can relate courageously, compassionately, and contemplatively with difficult and important material each week.

**Attendance [for IN-PERSON STUDENTS]** - Attendance is mandatory (and 20% of your grade). However, if you do need to miss class for any reason, excused or not, please let me know ahead of time. All I ask is that you communicate with me and keep an open line of communication. Every situation will be handled according to individual circumstances and the instructor’s discretion.

**Attendance [for ASYNC STUDENTS]** - Your attendance will be graded based on your contributions to weekly discussion posts. Each week I will start a discussion thread on D2L for ASYNC students and you are expected to post and comment at least once per week on the films/readings, as well as your fellow students’ comments and reactions.

**Class Discussion** - Student participation in class discussions will be measured in two ways. First, students are highly encouraged to ask **questions** and offer **comments** relevant to the day’s topic. Participation allows the instructor to “hear” the student’s voice when grading papers. Secondly, students will be called upon by the instructor to offer comments related to the **films and reading assignments**. Students must keep up with the readings and films to participate in class discussion.

**Civil Discourse** - DePaul University is a community that thrives on open discourse that challenges students, both intellectually and personally, to be [Socially Responsible Leaders](#). It is the expectation that all dialogue in this course is civil and respectful of the dignity of each student. Any instances of disrespect or hostility can jeopardize a student’s ability to be

successful in the course. The professor will partner with the Dean of Students Office to assist in managing such issues.

**Attitude** - A professional and academic attitude is expected throughout this course. Measurable examples of non-academic or unprofessional attitude include but are not limited to: talking to, or over, others when the instructor or another student is speaking, mocking classmate's opinions, cell phones ringing, or anything else that could be considered a distraction. If this becomes an issue the professor will work with the Dean of Students Office to navigate any such issues or problems.

**Online Course Evaluations** - Evaluations are a way for students to provide valuable feedback regarding their instructor and the course. Detailed feedback will enable the instructor to continuously tailor teaching methods and course content to meet the learning goals of the course and the academic needs of the students. They are a requirement of the course and are key to continue to provide you with the highest quality of teaching. The evaluations are anonymous; the instructor and administration do not track who entered what responses. A program is used to check if the student completed the evaluations, but the evaluation is completely separate from the student's identity. Since 100% participation is our goal, students are sent periodic reminders over three weeks. Students do not receive reminders once they complete the evaluation. Students complete the evaluation online in CampusConnect.

**Academic Integrity and Plagiarism** - This course will be subject to the university's academic integrity policy. More information can be found [here](#). If you have any questions, be sure to consult with your professor.

**Academic Policies** - All students are required to manage their class schedules each term in accordance with the deadlines for enrolling and withdrawing as indicated in the University Academic Calendar. Information on enrollment, withdrawal, grading and incompletes can be found [here](#).

**Students with Disabilities** - Students who feel they may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the instructor privately to discuss their specific needs. All discussions will remain confidential. To ensure that you receive the most appropriate accommodation based on your needs, contact the instructor as early as possible in the quarter (preferably within the first week of class), and make sure that you have contacted the Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) at: [csd@depaul.edu](mailto:csd@depaul.edu).

Lewis Center 1420, 25 East Jackson Blvd. Phone number: (312) 362-8002 Fax: (312) 362-6544 TTY: (773) 325.7296

## **COVID-19 Health & Safety Precautions**

Faculty and staff should take proper precautions to safeguard their health. It is important for everyone at DePaul to monitor yourself for COVID-19 symptoms, test when you feel sick and stay home to avoid exposing others if you are sick.

[Health & Safety Practices](#)

[Health Monitoring](#)