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02.14.14

# Film Noir

*Start of Quarter*  
03.31.14



COMP LIT 303B  
SLN: 11717 VLPA

GERMAN 371A  
SLN: 14508 VLPA

MTWTh 11:30-1:20 THO 101 5 CREDITS PROF. ERIC AMES

The term film noir was coined in 1946 by a French film critic who, when viewing a number of recently imported American films (*The Maltese Falcon*, *Double Indemnity*, *Laura*, and others), described them all as noir or "black," referring not only to their stylistic features (deep shadows, claustrophobic settings) but also to the existentially bleak and morally ambiguous vision that seemed to unite the films. Initially, then, noir was a critical term used for describing a post-war group of American-made crime films and the pulp novels that inspired them (stories by Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, James M. Cain, to name a few). At the time, however – and many of these films had been made during World War II – none of the filmmakers involved set out to make a film noir. Rather, they made thrillers, gangster films, detective films, police procedurals, and various types of melodrama. This course asks, how and when did film noir become a "genre," and what does it mean to call it that? Where does genre come from? How does it originate? Who makes it? And how does it change over time? On another level, this course explores the films in terms of their historical contexts: namely, war, race, exile, trauma, gender, sexuality, modernism, and modernity. Finally, it touches on the emergence of "neo-noir," in order to see how the process of genre revision works under changed social and political conditions and in various cultural contexts. How can we explain the enduring appeal of noir as an international phenomenon? MW screenings, TTh lectures and discussion.

SPRING 2014: FILM NOIR

*End of Quarter*  
06.13.14

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