

Welcome to...



FILM NOIR





Today's Movie



1949 THE COLUMBIA COLLECTION

JAMES CAGNEY in
**WHITE
HEAT**

Directed by RAOUL WALSH

From *Dark City*:

- “Of all the gun-toting crazies that passed through Losers’ Lane, none achieved greater infamy than Cody Jarrett (James Cagney) --- a mama’s boy who got homicidal


whenever the White Heat cut through his brain like a buzzsaw. Jarrett was **the poster boy for the criminal derangement** made popular” by other actors in other movies.



“But **White Heat’s** reputation as a ‘classic gangster picture’...is a misnomer.

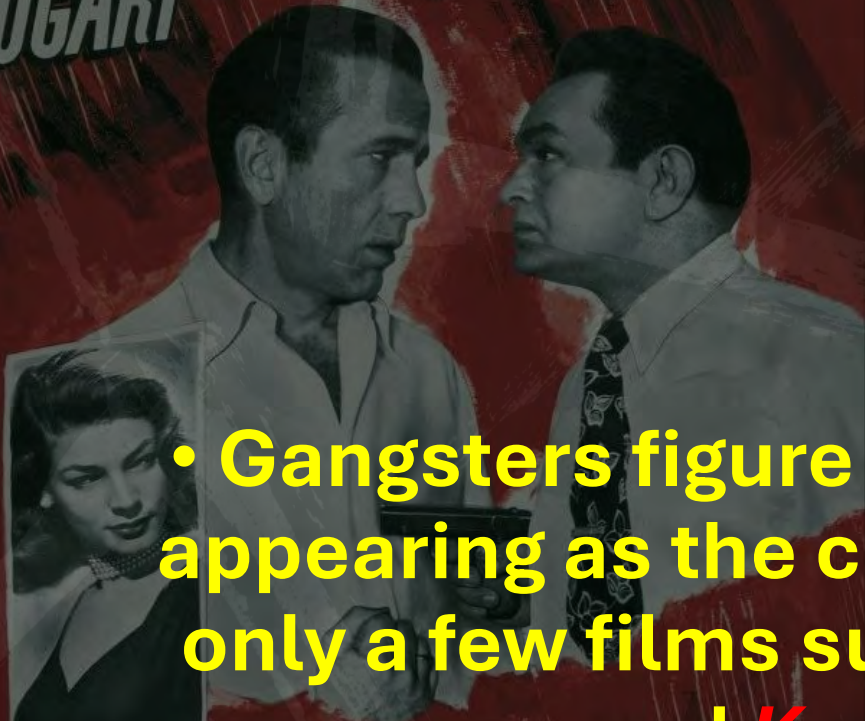
“**Cody Jarrett is an outlaw, not a gangster. The distinction is critical.**”

The **Warner Brothers’ gangster films of the thirties** were notable for their “progressive” take on **crime** which was “**the result of rugged conditions endemic to the modern city.**”



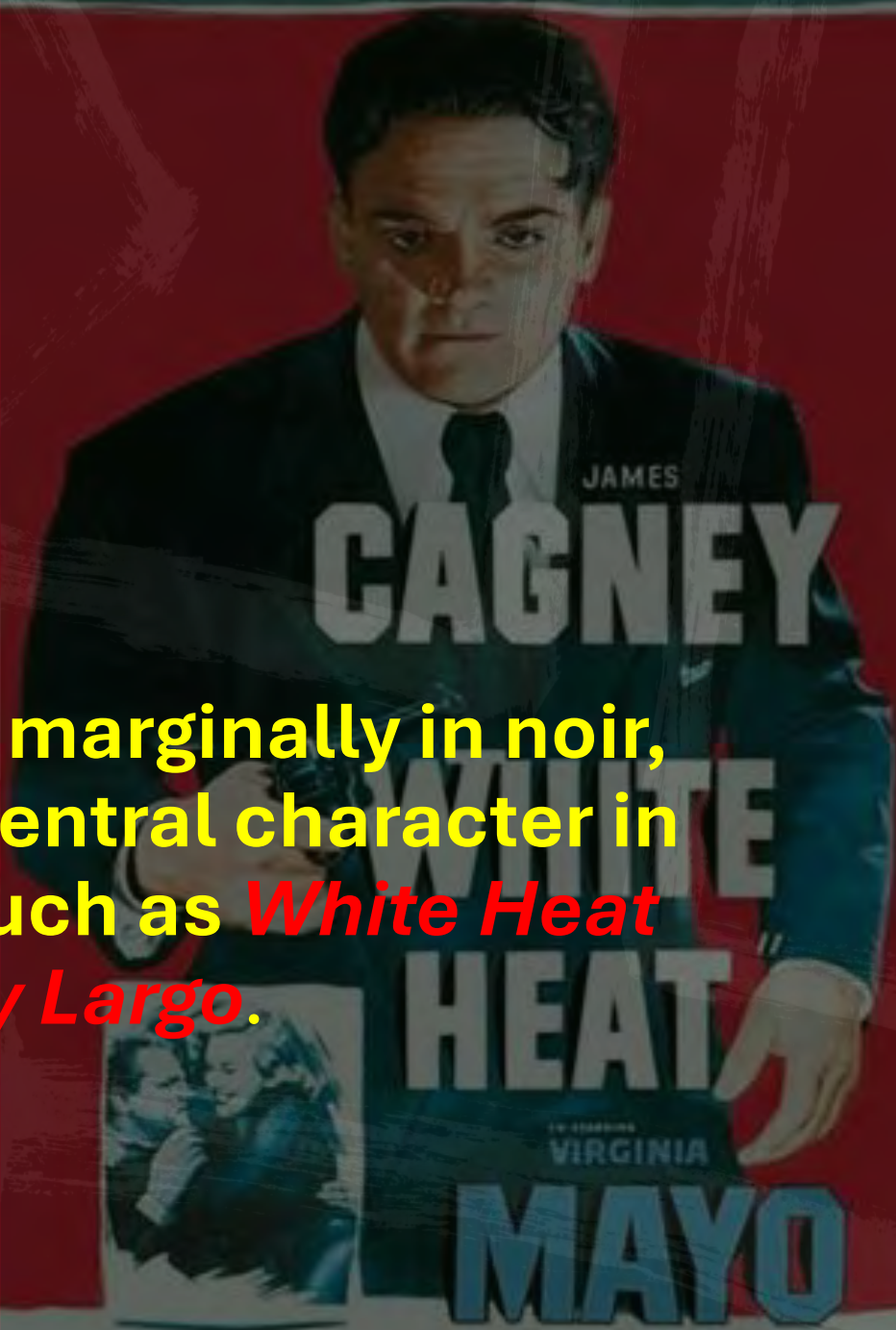
**Gangster movies of
the nineteen thirties
and Noir**

HUMPHREY BOGART EDWARD G. ROBINSON LAUREN BACALL



• Gangsters figure marginally in noir, appearing as the central character in only a few films such as *White Heat* and *Key Largo*.

KEY LARGO



JAMES CAGNEY
WHITE HEAT
STARRING VIRGINIA MAYO

Cagney in *White Heat* and E. G. Robinson in *Key Largo* were well known for their gangster roles in the previous decade.



In the late forties in these two movies, they were not simply reprising their earlier performances.

Now they are playing diseased characters

Cagney's character "is tied to his mother in what is **probably the most perverse Oedipal relationship in American cinema.**"



The Noir Actor

- **The noir actor is typically laid back.** “Performing in a constricted area physically as well as emotionally, he has a glacial presence. If noir stories seem like a bad dream, the acting is somnambulistic.” (*Film Noir* by Foster Hirsch)



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- Cagney's performance in *White Heat* (and Edward G. Robinson's in *Key Largo*) are clear exceptions.

Bravura performances with an all out intensity that Noir normally discourages.

- Played to the hilt, **both actors are portraying madmen floundering for survival.**

Cagney's performance as the bedeviled, mother-wrapped gang boss in *White Heat* **may well be his greatest.**" (Film Noir by F. Hirsch)

WHITE HEAT

- Considered to be **one of the best gangster movies of all time.** In 2003, it was added to the National Film Registry as being "culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant" by the United States Library of Congress.



As you watch this movie, look for Cagney's “Toppers”

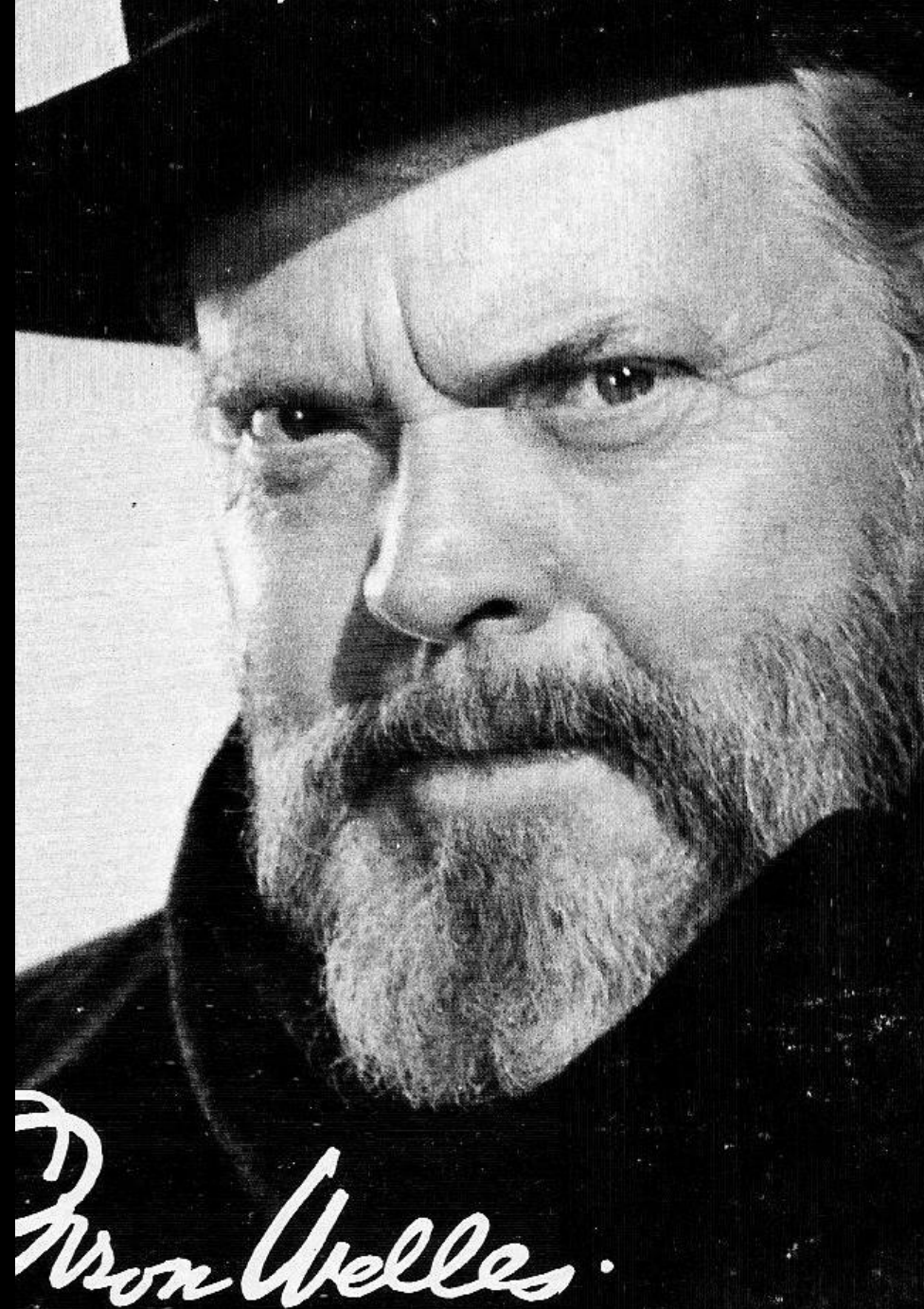
- Watch for **what Cagney does** in this picture that **we accept** without hesitation but are so far over the top that **in the hands of a lesser actor**, we would most likely say, “That’s just **too much or that’s ridiculous!**” Not with Cagney.

- BEFORE
- THE
- MOVIE



Orson Welles on *White Heat*

- In the early 70s, Peter Bogdanovich screened *White Heat* for Orson Welles, a fan of both the director and Cagney who had never seen the movie.
- **“Look at Cagney!”** he exclaimed. **“Everything he does is big --- and yet it’s never for a moment unbelievable --- because it’s real, it’s true!** He’s a great movie actor --- he never scaled anything down.”



Orson Welles.

- **“Cagney’s flamboyant ‘toppers’ --- bits of show business that kick a scene over the top ---are in ample evidence.”** In the hands of almost any other actor, this would be shameless overacting. Not with Cagney because, **as the director and writer, Peter Bogdanovich has written, he “could probably have got away with almost anything” because of his “amazing intensity and conviction.”**



INDUSTRY TO BAN ALL REDS

Official Announcement Due Today Barring Them From Employment In Pictures

New York.—Eric Johnston will issue today announcing the official industry policy banning the employment of Communists and persons even partially known to be Communist leaders as being in full agreement with the un-American Activities Commission.

Studio Sound Up 25 Pct.

Recording, re-recording will cost independent percent more than the after Jan. 1, according to out last week by Sound and Pathe. The upper to studio rental, trucks ities required for such

Sound Service, a subsidiary of General Electric, and Pathé RCA equipment, asserts that because of the continuing costs, they could not existing rental prices with a profit, although

Mayer Urges Complete 'Wipe-out' Of Commies

regarding Communist activities in the industry, Mr. Mayer urged a complete 'wipe-out' of Communists from the industry. He said that the industry should not be lenient towards those who are known to be Communist sympathizers, and that the industry should take a hard line against them.

Studios Start Purging 'Unfriendly'

Studios are starting to purge their ranks of 'unfriendly' elements, according to industry sources. This includes writers, directors, and other industry professionals who are known to be Communist sympathizers.

THE REPORTER

STUDIOS START PURGING



RKO Lets Out Dmytryk, Scott; MGM Drops Cole, Trumbo; Wh...
y Okays Move

STAGE SHOWDOWN FIGHT

'Wrong Ones Out Protected,' Says
The people who are all be out and those right will be protected. L. B. Mayer on his return New York. "I am going when I go to my office other film leaders



*"I don't have an Oedipus complex. I just didn't like seeing you
kiss my mom."*

- **“An Oedipus complex, not the hardship of poverty, is what drives Cody Jarrett to pull dangerous heists.”**

CAGNEY

VIRGINIA

MAYO

WITH

EDMOND O'BRIEN

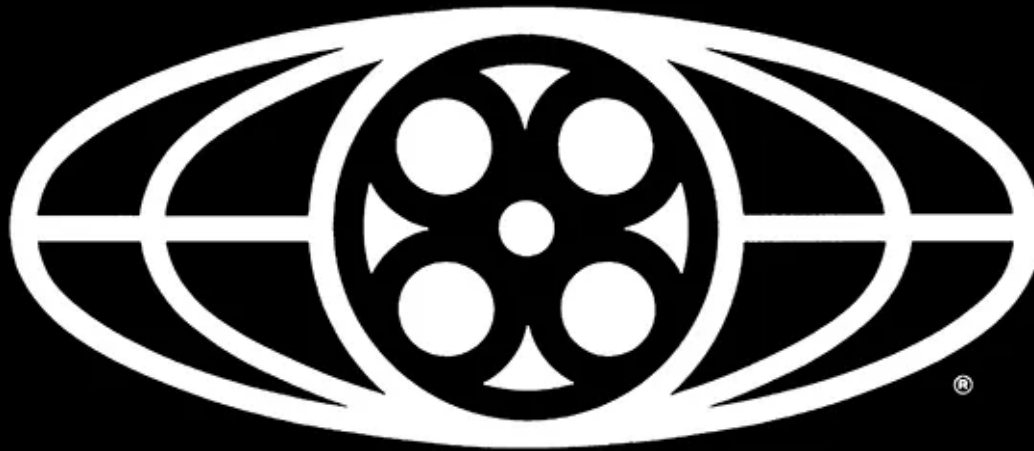
in

**WHITE
HEAT**



- “the gangster (in the movies of the 30s) was creating an organization alternative to the legit enterprises that a poor boy couldn’t crack. Jarrett’s lawlessness, on the other hand, stems from a mental disorder. Don’t delve any deeper than his mother to find the root of his problems.”





MOTION PICTURE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA

**Eric Johnson,
Head of the
Motion Picture
Association of
America** told the
Screen Writers
Guild in 1948:

- “We’ll have no more *Grapes of Wrath*. We’ll have no more *Tobacco Roads*. We’ll have no more films that show the seamy side of American life. We’ll have no more pictures that deal with labor strikes. We’ll have no more pictures that show a banker as a villain.”

**Dr. Drew Casper, Professor of
Film, UCLA**

AFTER THE MOVIE





Was *White Heat* successful?

- **Yes, with the public, no with the critics.** Over time, of course, that critical opinion has changed and the movie is justly celebrated as brilliant. Moreover, it did what Cagney hoped it would: **reignited his career and returned him to his former star stature.**

What did Cagney think of *White Heat*?

- “Cagney came to loathe the film, angry that this snarling loser was the role with which he’d be most identified.”

Cagney’s favorite movie was *Yankee Doodle Dandy* in which he played George M. Cohan and for which he won the Academy Award in 1942.



How did it come to be made?

- After winning the Oscar for Yankee Doodle Dandy, **he formed his own production company.**
- **Things did not go well and Cagney returned to Warner Brothers in mid '49 because he “needed the money.”**

Raoul Walsh, Director

- The writers of *White Heat* wanted Cagney for the lead because "there's **only one man who can play [Jarrett]** and make the rafters rock."
- **Cagney teamed with director Raoul Walsh** who had directed him 10 years previous in *The Roaring Twenties*.



- **The original script was considered so bad** that Walsh asked Cagney's brother to talk him out of doing the picture.
- **Instead Cagney helped revise the script with the help of close friends, including Humphrey Bogart.**



Film Analysis

- Noir films have a fondness for surreal and exotic settings. Bizarre backgrounds encourage the splashy visual set-pieces that decorate noir, e.g., the enormous ferris wheel in *The Third Man*, the killer in *The Naked City* pinned against the gothic spires of the Brooklyn Bridge.



- The climatic scene in *White Heat* is a perfect example of this tendency.



ICONIC SCENES, ICONIC LINES

There are at least two scenes in *White Heat* that are iconic, scenes that usually show up in movie retrospectives at the Academy Awards and other award shows.



The Prison Scene

- The final scene in *White Heat* is without a doubt one of the most memorable in all of film history.
- The final line in *White Heat* may be, as one critic has written, the most famous line in all of film history.

- **And next week...**

