William A. Wellman: **THE PUBLIC ENEMY** (1931, 83 min)

Spelling and Style—use of italics, quotation marks or nothing at all for titles, e.g.—follows the form of the sources.
Cast and crew name hyperlinks connect to the individuals' Wikipedia entries

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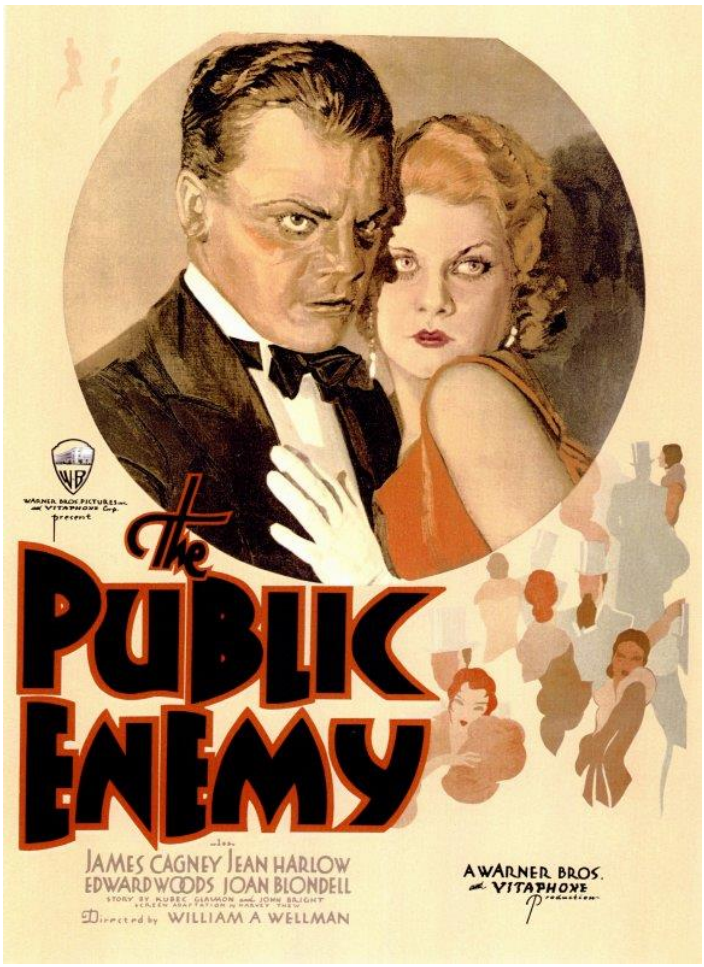


[Vimeo link for **ALL** of Bruce Jackson's and Diane Christian's film introductions and post-film discussions in the Spring 2021 BFS]

[Vimeo link for our introduction to *The Public Enemy*]

[Zoom link for *all* Fall 2020 BFS Tuesday 7:00 PM post-screening discussions:]
Meeting ID: 925 3527 4384 Passcode: 820766

Selected for National Film Registry 1998

Directed by William A. Wellman
Written by Kubec Glasmon and John Bright
Produced by Darryl F. Zanuck
Cinematography by Devereaux Jennings
Film Editing by Edward M. McDermott
Makeup Department Perc Westmore

James Cagney... Tom Powers
Jean Harlow... Gwen Allen
Edward Woods... Matt Doyle
Joan Blondell... Mamie
Donald Cook... Mike Powers
Leslie Fenton... Nails Nathan
Beryl Mercer... Ma Powers
Robert Emmett O'Connor... Paddy Ryan
Murray Kinnell… Putty Nose

William A. Wellman (director) (February 29, 1896, Brookline, Massachusetts – December 9, 1975, Los Angeles, California) has 83 directing credits, some of which are 1958 *Lafayette Escadrille*, 1955 *Blood Alley*, 1954 *Track of the Cat*, 1954 *The High and the Mighty*, 1953 *Island in the Sky*, 1951 *Westward the Women*, 1951 *It's a Big Country*, 1951 *Across the Wide Missouri*, 1949 *Battleground*, 1948 *Yellow Sky*, 1948 *The Iron Curtain*, 1947 *Magic Town*, 1945 *Story of G.I. Joe*, 1945 *This Man's Navy*, 1944 *Buffalo Bill*, 1943 *The Ox-Bow Incident*, 1939 *The Light That Failed*, 1939 *Beau Geste*, 1938 *Men with Wings*, 1937 *Nothing Sacred*, 1937 *A Star Is Born*, 1936 *Tarzan Escapes*, 1936 *Small Town Girl*, 1936 *Robin Hood of El Dorado*, 1935 *The Call of the Wild*, 1934 *Viva Villa!*, 1933 *Wild Boys of the Road*, 1933 *Midnight Mary*, 1932 *The Purchase Price*, 1932 *So Big!*, 1931 *The Public Enemy*, 1931 *Other Men's Women*, 1930 *Maybe It's Love*, 1928 *Ladies of the Mob*, 1928 *The Legion of the Condemned*, 1927 *Wings*, 1926 *The Cat's Pajamas*, 1926 *You Never Know Women*, 1923

Cupid's Fireman, 1923 *Big Dan,* 1923 *The Man Who Won.* His 1927 film, *Wings,* was the first film to win an Academy Award for Best Picture.

Devereaux Jennings (cinematography) (September 22, 1884, Salt Lake City, Utah – March 12, 1952, Hollywood, California) has 83 cinematographer credits, some of which are 1937 *Born to the West,* 1936 *Hark Ye Hark!*, 1932 *Stranger in Town*, 1931 *The Public Enemy,* 1931 *50 Million Frenchmen*, 1931 *Finn and Hattie*, 1930 *Divorce Among Friends*, 1930 *The Life of the Party*, 1930 *Oh, Sailor Behave*, 1930 *The Matrimonial Bed*, 1930 *Golden Dawn*, 1930 *Bride of the Regiment,* 1930 *Dumbbells in Ermine*, 1930 *Hold Everything*, 1930 *Song of the West,* 1928 *Steamboat Bill, Jr.*, 1927 *College*, 1927 *The Missing Link*, 1926 *The General*, 1926 *Battling Butler*, 1925 *Steel Preferred*, 1923 *The Gunfighter*, 1923 *Children of Jazz*, 1921 *The Mistress of Shenstone*, 1920 *Madame X*, 1920 *The Daredevil*, 1919 *Treat 'Em Rough*, 1918 *Ace High*, 1918 *Confession*, 1917 *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, 1917 *Her Temptation*, 1916 *A Gamble in Souls*, 1916 *Eye of the Night*, 1916 *Bullets and Brown Eyes*, 1916/I *The Corner*, 1915 *The Winged Idol*, and 1915 *Matrimony.*

Perc Westmore (October 29, 1904 in Canterbury, England – September 30, 1970, Los Angeles, California) has 343 makeup credits, probably more than anybody else. Some of them are 1970-1971 "The Bill Cosby Show" (23 episodes), 1970 *There Was a Crooked Man...*, 1969 *Once You Kiss a Stranger...*, 1969 *The Good Guys and the Bad Guys*, 1964-1966 "The Munsters" (69 episodes), 1956 "Queen for a Day", 1955 *The Virgin Queen,* 1950 *The Glass Menagerie*, 1950 *Pretty Baby*, 1950 *The Great Jewel Robber*, 1950 *Caged*, 1950 *The Damned Don't Cry*, 1950 *Chain Lightning*, 1950 *Young Man with a Horn*, 1950 *Backfire*, 1949 *Always Leave Them Laughing*, 1949 *White Heat*, 1949 *Task Force*, 1949 *The Fountainhead*, 1949 *Flamingo Road*, 1948 *Adventures of Don Juan*, 1948 *Johnny Belinda*, 1948 *Rope*, 1948 *Key Largo*, 1948 *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, 1947 *Dark Passage*, 1947 *Life with Father*, 1947 *Possessed*, 1947 *Cheyenne*, 1946 *Humoresque*, 1946 *Cloak and Dagger*, 1946 *The Big Sleep*, 1946 *A Stolen Life*, 1946 *Of Human Bondage*, 1946 *Night and Day*, 1945 *Mildred Pierce*, 1945 *Pride of the Marines*, 1945 *Rhapsody in Blue*, 1945 *The Horn Blows at Midnight*, 1945 *God Is My Co-Pilot*, 1944 *To Have and Have Not*, 1944 *Arsenic and Old Lace*, 1944 *The Mask of Dimitrios*, 1944 *Passage to Marseille*, 1943 *Destination Tokyo*, 1943 *Watch on the Rhine*, 1942 *Casablanca*, 1942 *Now, Voyager*, 1942 *Yankee Doodle Dandy*, 1942 *In This Our Life*, 1942 *The Man Who Came to Dinner*, 1941 *You're in the Army Now*, 1941 *They Died with Their Boots On*, 1941 *The Maltese Falcon*, 1941 *The Little Foxes*, 1941 *A Shot in the Dark*, 1941 *The Sea Wolf*, 1941 *The Strawberry Blonde*, 1941 *High Sierra*, 1940 *Santa Fe Trail*, 1940 *The Letter*, 1940 *South of Suez*, 1940 *They Drive by Night*, 1940 *The Sea Hawk*, 1940 *Virginia City*, 1940 *Dr. Ehrlich's Magic Bullet*, 1939 *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, 1939 *The Roaring Twenties*, 1939 *Each Dawn I Die*, 1938 *Heart of the North*, 1938 *Angels with Dirty Faces*, 1938 *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, and 1935 *A Midsummer Night's Dream.*

James Cagney (July 17, 1899, New York City, New York – March 30, 1986, Stanfordville, New York) won a Best Actor Oscar for *Yankee Doodle Dandy* (1942). Some of his other 68 roles were in 1984 "Terrible Joe Moran", 1981 *Ragtime*, 1968 *Arizona Bushwhackers*, 1957 *Man of a Thousand Faces*, 1955 *Mister Roberts*, 1955 *The Seven Little Foys*, 1955

Love Me or Leave Me, 1953 *A Lion Is in the Streets*, 1952 *What Price Glory*, 1950 *The West Point Story*, 1950 *Kiss Tomorrow Goodbye*, 1949 *White Heat*, 1948 *The Time of Your Life*, 1947 *13 Rue Madeleine*, 1945 *Blood on the Sun*, 1943 *Johnny Come Lately*, 1942 *Yankee Doodle Dandy*, 1941 *The Strawberry Blonde*, 1939 *The Roaring Twenties*, 1939 *Each Dawn I Die*, 1938 *Angels with Dirty Faces*, 1938 *Boy Meets Girl*, 1935 *Mutiny on the Bounty*, 1935 *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 1935 *'G' Men*, 1935 *Devil Dogs of the Air*, 1934 *The St. Louis Kid*, 1934 *Here Comes the Navy*, 1934 *Jimmy the Gent*, 1933 *Lady Killer*, 1933 *Hard to Handle*, 1932 *Winner Take All*, 1932 *Taxi!*, 1931 *Blonde Crazy*, 1931 *The Public Enemy*, 1931 *Other Men's Women*, 1930 *The Doorway to Hell*, and 1930 *Sinners' Holiday.*

Jean Harlow (March 3, 1911, Kansas City, Missouri – June 7, 1937, Los Angeles, California, uremic poisoning) appeared in 42 films, some of which are 1937 *Saratoga*, 1936 *Wife vs. Secretary*, 1936 *Riffraff*, 1935 *Reckless*, 1934 *The Girl from Missouri*, 1933 *Bombshell*, 1933 *Dinner at Eight*, 1933 *Hold Your Man*, 1932 *Red Dust*, 1932 *Red-Headed Woman*, 1932 *Scarface*, 1931 *Platinum Blonde*, 1931 *The Public Enemy*, 1931 *City Lights*, 1929 *The Saturday Night Kid*, 1929 *Why Be Good?*, 1929 *Fugitives*, 1929 *Liberty*, 1928 *Chasing Husbands*, 1928 *Moran of the Marines*, and 1928 *Honor Bound.*

Edward Woods (July 5, 1903, Los Angeles, California – October 8, 1989, Salt Lake City, Utah) appeared in only 13 films. The producers originally wanted him for Jimmy Cagney's role as Tom Powers, but Wellman knew better. Woods' other films were 1938 *Shadows Over Shanghai*, 1937 *Navy Blues*, 1935 *Fighting Lady*, 1933 *Marriage on Approval*, 1933 *Dinner at Eight*, 1933 *Tarzan the Fearless*, 1933 *Bondage*, 1933 *Reckless Decision*, 1932 *Hot Saturday*, 1932 *They Never Come Back*, 1931 *Local Boy Makes Good*, and1930 *Mothers Cry.*

Joan Blondell (August 30, 1906, New York City, New York – December 25, 1979, Santa Monica, California) appeared in 157 films and TV series, among them 1981 *The Woman Inside*, 1979 "The Rebels", 1979 *The Champ*, 1978 *Grease*, 1977 *Opening Night*, 1977 *The Baron*, 1973 "The Rookies", 1972-1973 "Banyon" (8 episodes), 1971 *Support Your Local Gunfighter*, 1968-1970 "Here Come the Brides" (51 episodes), 1967 "Winchester 73", 1966 "Baby Makes Three", 1965 *The Cincinnati Kid*, 1964 "Twilight Zone", 1963 "Wagon Train", 1963 "The Virginian", 1957 *Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter?*, 1953 "Suspense", 1947 *Nightmare Alley*, 1945 *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, 1943 *Cry 'Havoc'*, 1941 *Topper Returns*, 1939 *East Side of Heaven*, 1939 *Off the Record*, 1938 *There's Always a Woman*, 1937 *Back in Circulation*, 1937 *The King and the Chorus Girl*, 1936 *Gold Diggers of 1937*, 1935 *We're in the Money*, 1933 *Footlight Parade*, 1933 *Gold Diggers of 1933*, 1933 *Broadway Bad*, 1932 *Central Park*, 1932 *Make Me a Star*, 1931 *Blonde Crazy*, 1931 *The Public Enemy*, 1931 *God's Gift to Women*, 1931 *Other Men's Women*, and 1930 *The Heart Breaker.*

Donald Cook (September 26, 1901, Portland, Oregon – October 1, 1961, New Haven, Connecticut) has 66 acting credits, some of which are 1959 "Too Young to Go Steady", 1958 "Schlitz Playhouse", 1950 *Our Very Own*, 1945 *Blonde Ransom*, 1945 *Patrick the Great*, 1943 *Freedom Comes High*, 1937 *Circus Girl*, 1937 *Two Wise Maids*, 1936 *Beware of Ladies*, 1936 *Can This Be Dixie?*, 1936 *Ellis Island*, 1936 *Show Boat*, 1936 *The Girl from Mandalay*, 1936 *Ring Around the Moon*, 1936 *The Leavenworth Case*, 1935 *The Calling of Dan Matthews*, 1935 *Confidential*, 1935 *The Spanish Cape Mystery*, 1935 *Ladies Love Danger*, 1935 *Here Comes the Band*, 1935 *Murder in the Fleet*, 1935 *Motive for Revenge*, 1935 *The Casino*

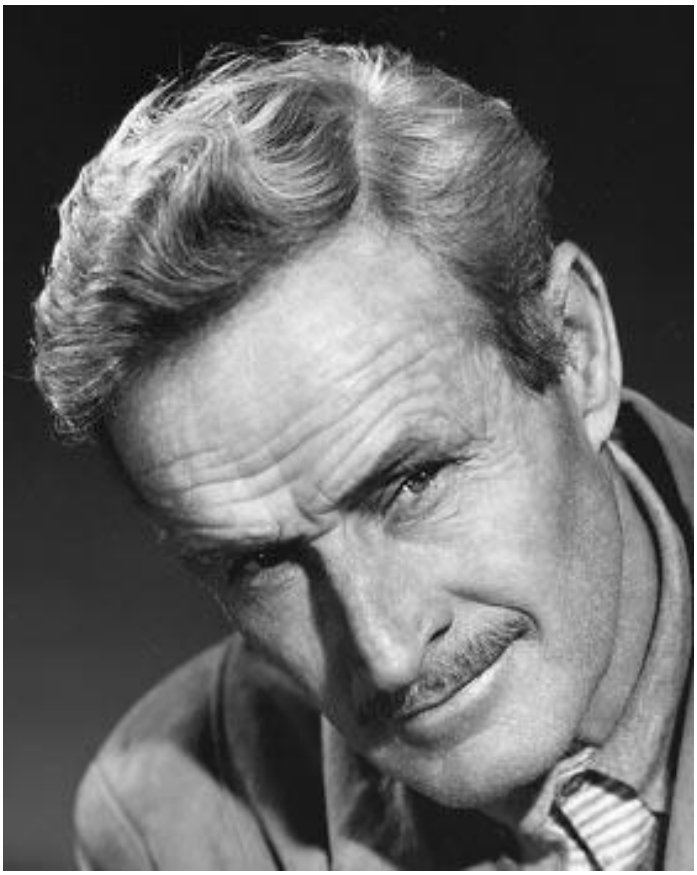
Murder Case, 1935 *Gigolette*, 1935 *The Night Is Young*, 1935 *Behind the Evidence*, 1934 *Fugitive Lady*, 1931 *Party Husband*, 1931 *The Public Enemy*, and 1931 *Unfaithful.*

Leslie Fenton (March 12, 1902 in Liverpool, England – March 25, 1978, Montecito, California) appeared in 62 films, among them 1938 *Boys Town*, 1936 *The House of Secrets*, 1936 *The Longest Night*, 1935 *East of Java*, 1935 *Men Without Names*, 1935 *Chinatown Squad*, 1934 *Strange Wives*, 1934 *Marie Galante*, 1933 *Night Flight*, 1929 *The Man I Love*, 1928 *The Dragnet*, 1927 *The Last Performance*, 1925 *Lazybones*, 1925 *Thunder Mountain*, 1925 *Havoc*, and 1923 *Gentle Julia.*

Beryl Mercer (August 13, 1882, Seville, Spain – July 28, 1939, Santa Monica, California) was in 54 films, some of which were 1939 *A Woman Is the Judge*, 1939 *The Story of Alexander Graham Bell*, 1939 *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, 1939 *The Little Princess*, 1936 *Three Live Ghosts*, 1935 *Magnificent Obsession*, 1934 *Jane Eyre*, 1933 *Berkeley Square*, 1932 *No Greater Love*, 1932 *Unholy Love*, 1932 *Young America*, 1931 *The Man in Possession*, 1931 *The Sky Spider*, 1931 *The Public Enemy*, 1931 *East Lynne*, 1931 *Inspiration*, 1930 *Outward Bound*, 1923 *The Christian*, 1922 *Broken Chains*, and 1916 *The Final Curtain.*

Robert Emmett O'Connor (March 18, 1885 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin – September 4, 1962, Hollywood, California) appeared in 214 films and TV series, some of which were 1958 "Man Without a Gun", 1954 "Annie Oakley", 1954 "The Loretta Young Show", 1950 *Watch the Birdie*, 1950 *Sunset Blvd.*, 1947 *The Hucksters*, 1946 *The Harvey Girls*, 1945 *They Were Expendable*, 1945 *Anchors Aweigh*, 1943 *Dr. Gillespie's Criminal Case*, 1943 *The Human Comedy*, 1941 *Fiesta*, 1940 *Dance, Girl, Dance*, 1935 *A Night at the Opera*, 1933 *Gabriel Over the White House*, 1932 *Blonde Venus*, 1932 *Taxi!*, 1932 *Two Kinds of Women*, 1931 *Ladies of the Big House*, 1931 *Reckless Living*, 1931 *Fanny Foley Herself*, 1931 *The Public Defender*, 1931 *Three Who Loved*, 1931 *Up for Murder*, 1931 *The Public Enemy*, 1931 *Three Girls Lost*, 1930 *Our Blushing Brides*, 1930 *The Big House*, 1920 *Drink Hearty*, 1920 *His Royal Slyness*, and 1919 *Pay Your Dues.*

Murray Kinnell (July 24, 1889, London, England – August 11, 1954, Santa Barbara, California) appeared in 71 films, some of which were 1937 *Think Fast, Mr. Moto*, 1937 *Parnell*, 1937 *Captains Courageous*, 1937 *The Prince and the Pauper*, 1937 *The Soldier and the Lady*, 1936 *Winterset*, 1936 *Lloyd's of London*, 1936 *Make Way for a Lady*, 1936 *Mary of Scotland*, 1935 *Captain Blood*, 1935 *Charlie Chan in Paris*, 1934 *Charlie Chan's Courage*, 1933 *Today We Live*, 1932 *Rasputin and the Empress*, 1932 *Grand Hotel*, 1932 *Freaks*, 1931 *The Public Enemy*, 1931 *The Secret Six*, 1930 *Princess and the Plumber*, and 1930 *Old English.*



From *World Film Directors Volume I*. Ed. John Wakeman. The H.W. Wilson Co. NY 1987
'WILLIAM WELLMAN" entry by John A. Gallagher

(February 29, 1896-December 9, 1975)
American producer and director was born in Brookline Massachusetts, one of two sons of Arthur Gouverneur Wellman, an insurance broker whose parents were English immigrants, and the former Cecilia Guiness McCarthy, who was of Irish descent. Frank T. Thompson, in his book on Wellman, says

that his red-haired and fiery-tempered mother "embodied every cliché of Irish girlhood," while his gentle and amiable father "made up in alcoholic thirst what he lacked in business sense." Arthur Wellman's career was erratic, and the family moved frequently around the Boston area, sometimes living in moderate affluence, sometimes reduced to eating "beans every night" on "the other side of the tracks."

Wry and hyperactive, William Wellman was a high school star at baseball, football, and especially ice hockey. It was the latter sport that brought him his first show business contact. Douglas Fairbanks, touring with *Hawthorne of the USA* in 1914, saw Wellman play hockey at the Boston Arena and invited him backstage at the Colonial Theatre, beginning a friendship that became important in Wellman's career.

"Wild Bill" Wellman inherited his mother's temperament. He was reckless and quick-tempered, constantly in fights and sometimes in more serious trouble. According to his own accounts—and Wellman's recollections should never be swallowed without some grains of salt—he and a friend "used to borrow cars at night….We always brought them back, but we were caught bringing one of them back and I was put on probation for six months and had to report to the probation officer of the city of Newton, who happened to be my own mother." Expelled from Newton High for dropping a stink bomb on the principal's head. Wellman worked briefly and ingloriously in the wool, candy, and lumber trades before a plane flight revealed his true vocation: "I just *had* to fly."

In 1917 Wellman went to war to become a flier. He joined the French Foreign Legion—a necessary (and traumatic) preliminary—and then the Lafayette Flying Corps, an offshoot of the more famous Lafayette Escadrille. As a fighter pilot with the Black Cat squadron, Wellman shot down three German aircraft before his own plane was brought down, leaving him with back injuries that troubled him for the rest of his life.

Wellman left the Lafayette Flying Corps in March 1918 with a Croix de Guerre and several American citations and returned to a hero's welcome in Boston….

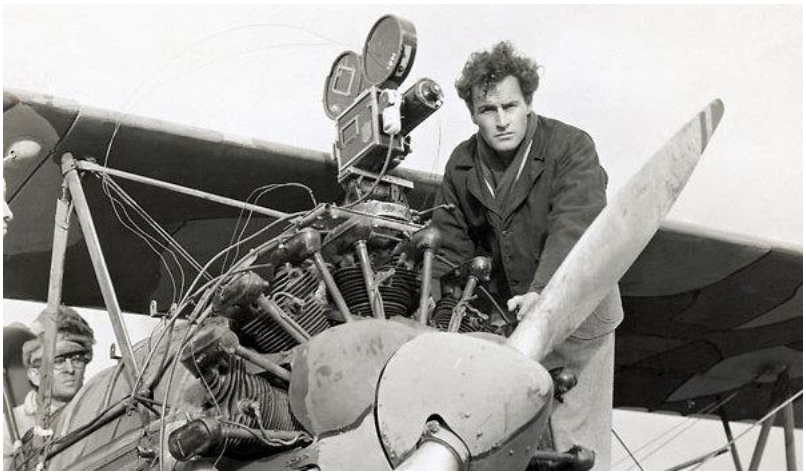
Released from the Air Corps at the end of the war, Wellman remembered the telegram he had received from Douglas Fairbanks congratulating him on his war efforts and offering him a job. Donning his uniform and his medals, he went to see Fairbanks, by then a major star, and was promptly given a sizable part in comedy Western, *The Knickerbocker Buckaroo* (1919). Wellman found himself excited by the movie business but disgusted by the sight of himself on screen at the premiere, mugging in thick makeup: "I stayed for just half the picture and then went out and vomited for no reason at all."...

Discovering how much Al Parker had been paid for directing *The Knickerbocker Buckaroo*, he decided that he could be happy behind the camera. He started modestly as a messenger at the Goldwyn studios…. Wellman took every chance he could to study the working methods of staff directors like Maurice Tourneur, Frank Lloyd, and Tod Browning. In *A Short Time for Insanity*, his autobiography, he said that he "stole scripts, new ones, old ones, and pored over them, always from a director's point of view."

The ambitious messenger caught the attention of Will Rogers, through whose influence he was soon promoted to assistant propman. But Wellman's real break came when General Pershing visited the studio and recognized the ex-aviator (from a wartime encounter in a Paris brothel, according to Wellman). The front office was impressed by his comradely meeting and Wellman was promoted to assistant director, in this capacity working for Clarence Badger,

E. Mason Hopper, and Alfred Green before moving to the Fox studio in late 1921. At Fox, Wellman was assistant to Harry Beaumont, Colin Campbell, Emmett Flynn, and his mentor Bernard J. Durning. The latter is now almost forgotten, but Wellman told Kevin Brownlow that "Durning gave me two of the greatest years I've ever had and taught me more than anybody in the business. He made all those thrilling melodrama and you learned everything from them_action, pacing, stunts. This was the greatest school a director ever had.

When Durning became ill during the making of *The Eleventh Hour* (1923), Wellman stepped in to finish the picture, pleasing the Fox executives enough to make him a full-fledged director. His first feature was a Dustin Farnum vehicle, *The Man Who Won* (1923). A succession of low-budget Buck Jones melodramas followed. When they proved moderately successful, Wellman asked for a raise and was promptly fired. It was the first of his many battles with executives and producers. Thanks to his intransigent nature, "Wild Bill" subsequently worked in every major studio in Hollywood, with the exception of Universal.



Out of work for a year, Wellman joined MGM in 1925, taking a demotion to assistant director. Soon afterwards he met a singer and dancer named Margery Chapin and embarked on another short-lived marriage. After "doctoring" Robert Vignola's *The Way of a Girl* and Josef von Sternberg and Philip Rosen's *The Exquisite Sinner*, Wellman given a project of his own: *The Boob*, one of Joan Crawford's first movies and, the director proudly claims, her worst.

Completed in September 1925, *The Boob* was not released for six months and so was preceded into the theatres by Wellman's next picture, *When Husbands Flirt*, made for Columbia in 1925. Wellman was already building a reputation as a phenomenally rapid worker, and tempted by a bonus, he filmed this Dorothy Arzner script in less than four days. B. P. Schulberg was impressed and signed Wellman to a contract with his Preferred Pictures. When Schulberg joined Famous Players-Lasky (soon to become Paramount), he took the young director with him.

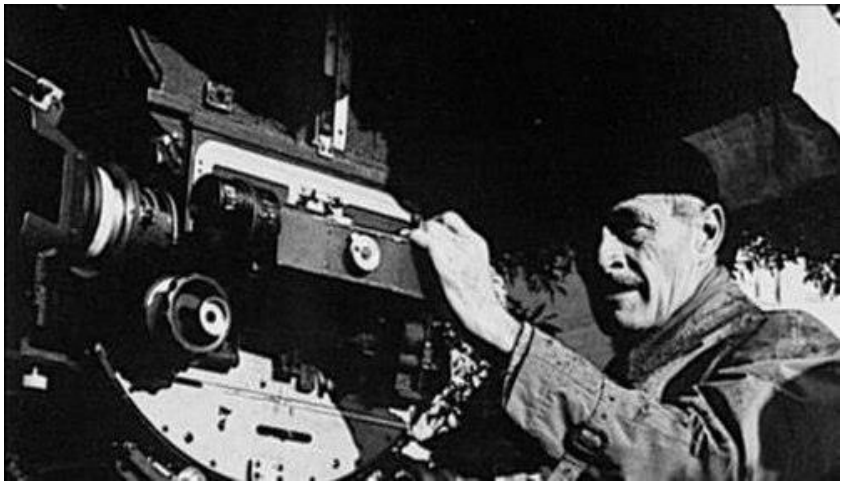
...When King Vidor's *The Big Parade* and Raoul Walsh's *What Price Glory?* registered at the box office, Paramount wanted its own World War I epic. They settled on a flying story suggested by John Monk Sunders, himself a wartime pilot. Although Wellman had only minor credits up to that time, he was the only director in Hollywood with aerial combat experience, and with Schulberg's support, he was handed this choice assignment. John Monk Sunders was sent to Washington to solicit government help. And in the end, according to Kevin Brownlow, *Wings* "tied up thousands of soldiers, virtually all the pursuit planes the air force had, billions of dollars worth of equipment—and some of the finest military pilots in the country." There were angry speeches in Washington before the shooting was completed.

Wings (1927) was the first important picture to deal with the role of the plane in World WAR It also emb
odied several themes dear to Wellman's heart—the romantic triangle, often squared by the self-abnegation of one of the rivals; male friendship; and the horseplaying but deeply felt comradeship of groups of men engaged in some shared—and usually dangerous—endeavor….The studio cast its biggest box-office draw, Clara Bow, as the heroine.

Wellman, known as a "one take" director, became a perfectionist in the filming of *Wings*, shooting scenes over and over gain until he was satisfied with them. Up to that time, most aerial scenes had actually been shot on the ground, but in this film Wellman stipulated there should be no faking. The cinematographer Harry Perry and his huge team of cameramen shot close-ups of the flyers from the rear cockpits of their planes and followed dogfights from a whole squadron of camera planes.

The movie's climax is a reenactment of the Battle of Maint Mihiel, shot on the plains outside San

Antonio, Texas….The battle itself was planned like a real one by army officers in consultation with the filmmakers, and 3,500 troops and sixty pilots were rehearsed for ten days….*Wings* was a huge success, praised by flyers for its authenticity and by critics for its spectacle….In its day, the film had an impact on popular culture comparable to that of *Star Wars*. ….*Wings* received the first Oscar ever awarded for best picture of the year. establishing Wellman as a major director at the age of thirty-one….



Gary Cooper starred in Wellman's next movie, *The Legion of the Condemned* (1928), another World war I aviation drama, with Fay Wray as a beautiful spy. [A majority of Wellman's silents are lost films.]...An exception—and one of his best early films—is *Beggars of Life* (1928), featuring Arlen, Louise Brooks and Wallace Beery. Brooks gave one of her best performances as a girl who kills her foster father when he tries to rape her and then goes on the run with a gentle young hobo. Most of the picture was shot in Jacumba, California, near the Mexican border, where Wellman and his crew are said to have plunged into two riotous weeks of drinking, gambling, and brawling. Margaret Chapin accompanied her husband to Jacumba, acting as a script girl, but the marriage ended soon after.

Beggars of Life, which offers the first clear indication of Wellman's burgeoning social conscience, includes one sound scene in which Beery, as the truculent bum Oklahoma Red, sings a song. Tod that Beery would have to stand motionless in this scene because the microphone was immovable, Wellman (according to eyewitness David Zelznick) hung it on a broom handle and shot the scene with Beery singing as he walked. Wellman thus joins the sizable company of directors credited with the invention of the boom microphone. Whether or not the claim is correct, *Beggars of Life*, as Frank T. Thompson writes, "is a testament of Wellman's exhilaration with movement"—a film about movement, about people who are bound to advance constantly….The story and the acting are simply the catalysts that make the motion occur." On this basis of this film and *Wings*, Wellman was named by *Film Daily* as one of the world best directors for 1928-1929.

He made the transition to sound easily, and as Thompson says, his first talkies "moved just as much as his silents," differing from them mostly in the matter of close-ups. Wellman said, "You use close-ups to get a point over." With dialogue to do this for him, he seldom moved in closer than a medium shot, even at moments of high drama.

Wellman's relationship with Paramount, always shaky, was turning sour. His early sound films there were strictly routine assignments….Disarmingly modest about his work, Wellman said that "for every good picture, I made five or six stinkers. But I always tried to do it a little differently. I don't know whether I accomplished it, but I tried." In the opinion of his admirers, he succeeded much better than he had been given creit for.

Walter Van Tilburg Clark's 1940 novel *The Ox-Bow Incident* was a "serious Western," using the genre as a backdrop for a poetic tragedy of intolerance and mob violence. Wellman fell in love with the book and bought the rights himself. He approached several studios, but the downbeat story—with little action and no romance—was deemed uncommercial. Finally, he made a deal with 20th Century-Fox, which agreed to finance the movie on condition that he direct a picture a year for the studio for five years—two of them to be chosen by Zanuck and directed by Wellman whether he liked them or not.

The Ox-Bow Incident is set in Nevada in 1885.

The movie failed at the box office, as the industry cynics had predicted. Its critical reception, on the other hand, was enthusiastic.

The Ox-Bow Incident was nominated for a best picture Oscar and was soon established as a classic of the genre. However, James Agee wrote that this, "one of the best and most interesting pictures I

have seen for a long time," was ultimately disappointing on account of its "stiff overconsciousness." It seemed to him "a mosaic of over-appreciated effects which continually robbed nature of its own warmth and energy."

Wellman had high hopes for *Lafayette Escadrille* (1958), intended as an autobiographical memoir of his days of flying and fighting. His story had a tragic ending, but Warner Brothers made him change it. "The story was too close to me," he said later, "and it nearly broke my tough old heart when they wouldn't let me make it the way it really happened. . . .The happy ending destroyed the whole thing, and I got out of the business because of it."

Wellman died of leukemia at the age of seventy-nine, and as he requested, his ashes were scattered form the skies.

Like his friends John Ford, Victor Fleming, Raoul Walsh, and Howard Hawks, Wellman was a hard-nosed man's man who refused to regard himself as anything so effete as an artist and insisted tat his only aim was to entertain. He has often been compared to Hawks because of their similarity of subject matter and their shared preoccupation with groups of professionals in crisis situations. Unlike Hawks, however, Wellman would direct virtually anything that a studio handed him. "You make all kinds of things," he said, "and that, I think, is what gives you the background to eventually make some very lucky picture."

For nearly forty years, Wellman was regarded as one of the best directors in Hollywood. His reputation went into decline in the 1950s, and much of his best work was forgotten. *You Never Know Women, Beggars of Life, Heroes for Sale, The President Vanishes,* and *The Robin Hood of El Dorado* went unseen for years, until Wellman was rediscovered and championed by such critics as Kevin Brownlow, Richard Schickel, Gerald Peary, Frank Thompson, and Manny Farber.

Richard Maltby, *The Public Enemy, Senses of Cinema* Cinémathèque Annotations on Film, Issues # 29:

Like many 1930s crime movies, *The Public Enemy* (1931) begins with an explicit statement of authorial intent: "It is the intention of the authors of *The Public Enemy* to honestly depict an environment that exists today in a certain strata [sic] of American life, rather than to glorify the hoodlum or the criminal". This declaration of civic responsibility is usually regarded as an empty, cynical gesture intended to appease critics concerned at the movies' "subversive" effects, but such an interpretation simplifies the complex and contradictory cultural position occupied by Hollywood's representations of criminality in the early Depression. Contemporaneous reviews treated *The Public Enemy*'s claim to provide "a sociological study" of gangland more seriously, endorsing its "remarkably lifelike portraits of young hoodlums" as "a hard and true picture of the unheroic gangster" (1).

The studio did not aim to produce either a sociological treatise or a socially subversive text, but the "roughest, toughest, and best of the gang films to

date" (2). In the cultural climate of the time, its producers had to defend it against the persistent criticism that such movies were a source of inspiration for criminal behaviour. The editorial justification of *The Public Enemy* as a contribution to social debate was not, however, something tacked on to the end of the project to fool the censorious, but an integral part of the movie's process of construction. As the script was being written, Darryl F. Zanuck, head of production at Warner Bros., argued to the administrators of the Production Code that "if we can sell the idea that … ONLY BY THE BETTERMENT OF ENVIRONMENT AND EDUCATION for the masses can we overcome the widespread tendency toward *lawbreaking* – we have then punched over a moral that should do a lot toward protecting us" from cuts at the hands of state and municipal censor boards (3).

No one who saw *Little Caesar* or *The Public Enemy* in 1931 saw them in a cultural vacuum. Embodying the metropolitan civic corruption that had been tolerated in the 1920s, the gangster had been an acceptable representative of anti-Prohibition sentiment in the popular press until 1929, but in the cultural catharsis of the early Depression he became a scapegoat villain, threatening the survival of social order and American values. This shift in public sentiment was most conspicuously charted in changed press attitudes to Al Capone, who had ceased to be the celebrated "Horatio Alger lad of Prohibition" long before his conviction for tax evasion in October 1931 (4).

Contrary to the mythology of a "pre-Code" cinema, the "classic gangster film" was in fact the product of only one production season, 1930-1931, and constituted a cycle of fewer than 30 pictures. The box-office success of *The Doorway to Hell* in late 1930 and *Little Caesar* in January 1931 triggered a series of imitations in a pattern typical of the industry's exploitation of a topical cycle, but none of the pictures released after April 1931 were box-office successes. By then, exhibitors were reporting that audiences had had enough of gang pictures, while a plethora of civic and religious organisations complained that these movies continued to endow gangsters "with romance and glamour". In response, the industry claimed that the movies were "deterrents, not incentives, to criminal behaviour" (5), "debunking" gangsters through "the deadly weapon of ridicule", and stripping them of "every shred of false heroism that might influence young people", most conspicuously through the use of ethnic stereotyping in casting and performance (6). After the New York censor board eliminated six scenes from *The Public Enemy* before permitting its release in mid-April, however, the MPPDA acted to curtail the cycle, establishing guidelines for "the proper treatment of crime" in pictures and eliminating scenes of inter-gang conflict and stories with gangsters as central characters.

The conventional critical identification of *The Public Enemy* with *Little Caesar* and *Scarface* as the trilogy of "classic" early 1930s gangster movies has encouraged a reading of its plot as if it portrayed the rise and fall of a gangster in Capone's image. Unlike *Little Caesar* or *Scarface*, however, *The Public Enemy* does not depict the acquisition, exercise or loss of power. Tommy Powers (James Cagney) remains more hoodlum than gangster, occupying a subordinate role in the bootlegging business, not an organisational one, obeying instructions rather than giving them, and untroubled by any ambition to escape the neighbourhood.

Zanuck's claim that the movie was "more biography than plot" was not, however, inaccurate: *The Public Enemy* might fairly be described as a composite biography of a neighbourhood criminal gang such as Chicago's Valley gang, led by Patrick "Paddy the Bear" Ryan until his assassination in 1920. His protégés Terry Druggan and Frankie Lake became the first gangsters to distribute beer on a large scale in Chicago after Prohibition, providing Capone's mentor John Torrio with a model of successful collaboration between bootleggers and respectable business. By 1924 bootlegging had made them millionaires, and Druggan boasted to the press that even the lowliest member of his gang wore silk shirts and rode in chauffeur-driven Rolls Royces.

The movie's press book explicitly identified its two protagonists as being based on Lake and Druggan, but Tommy inherited his "sunny brutality", his impulsiveness and lack of organisational prowess from press accounts of Northside gang leaders Dion O'Banion and Hymie Weiss, who were depicted as figures of local colour rather than as Capone-like businessmen. The beer wars between Capone and the

Northsiders were most often represented as a conflict between two systems of social organisation, Capone's mercenary capitalism against O'Banion's dependence on loyalty, friendship and affection.

The movie borrows freely from the "factual" accounts of the O'Banion gang's exploits, incorporating several incidents from newspaper reports of the lives of O'Banion, Weiss, and Louis "Two-Gun" Alterie. Most famous of these was the 1923 death of Samuel "Nails" Morton in a riding accident, and the subsequent (apocryphal) execution of the horse by either O'Banion or Alterie. After O'Banion's assassination in 1924, Alterie vowed revenge by proposing a publicly staged shoot-out with O'Banion's killers, akin to Tommy's attack on Schemer Burns' headquarters. Weiss was notorious for his evil temper and impulsiveness, and reports that he once pushed an omelette into a girlfriend's face were cited as the source of *The Public Enemy*'s infamous grapefruit incident. His assassination in the first "machine-gun nest" murder in October 1926 was recreated in the killing of Matt Doyle (Edward Woods).

Like other crime movies of the period, *The Public Enemy* omitted any substantial or detailed representation of what sociologists at the time described as the "unholy alliance between organized crime and politics", in favour of their representation of the spectacle and melodrama of criminal performance (7). Tommy does become a member of the *nouveau riche*, dressing and driving in the style to which Terry Druggan's gang became accustomed, and visiting as ritzy a nightclub as Warner's set budget would allow. But Tommy and Matt remain "boys" throughout the movie, and Tommy's psychological immaturity is most vividly demonstrated in his relationships with women. Incapable of domesticity – Matt says he is "not the marrying kind" – Tommy treats women as a form of property, a means to display his new affluence, along with clothes and cars. When Kitty's (Mae Clark) attempts at domesticity start "getting on my nerves", he trades up for a more luxurious model, but his relationship with Gwen (Jean Harlow) is never consummated, since Matt interrupts them with the news of Nathan's death, and Tommy is deprived of the social and sexual opportunity she presents because he has to go and shoot a horse.

The Public Enemy is also a family melodrama, staging the conflict between the two social worlds of the second generation immigrant, dramatising the family conflicts generated by the process of Americanisation. Tommy's father makes only one appearance in the movie, emerging from the house in police helmet and braces to beat Tommy for theft. His silence intensifies the symbolic identity as both Father and the Law bestowed on him by his improbable costume. He is subsequently absent from the movie, and the law is otherwise present only through the appearance of the garrulous Officer Patrick Burke, who tells Mike that "the worst part" of Tommy's delinquency "is that he's been lying to his mother". Tommy and his elder brother Mike fight in every scene they share until Tommy is in hospital, and for all his moral rectitude, Mike disrupts every opportunity for family harmony.

In its plot and character delineation, *The Public Enemy* attempted to render its protagonist unattractive, but the picture's most problematic element was also its most significant commercial achievement: the creation of a new star in James Cagney. To an even greater extent than was true of Edward G. Robinson's performance in *Little Caesar*, Cagney's screen persona was defined by his first starring performance. Alone among the major stars of Classical Hollywood, Cagney's appeal was almost exclusively to an urban male audience.
Although he did not play a gangster – that is, a character making his living through organised criminal activity and in armed conflict with the police – again until 1938, Cagney did play a series of gamblers, con artists, ex-gangsters and reformed criminals who behaved very much as gangsters, and through these performances he became the mediated, heroic embodiment of the hoodlum: "good-natured,

well-dressed, adorned and sophisticated, and above all… American, in the eyes of the gang boy" (8).

Some of his most disreputable fans accepted the authenticity of his performance, believing that both he and Robinson were slum boys who had "made good in a big way in the movies", and eagerly imitating Cagney's dress and mannerisms, in the process supplying superficial evidence of the movies' doleful influence on the young (9). Nevertheless, adolescents with more practical experience of criminality recognised the repressive artificiality of narrative closure when they saw it. As one explained, "Sure, I like Little Caesar and Jim Cagney, but dat's de boloney dey give you in de pitchers. Dey always died or got canned. Dat ain't true" (10).

ENDNOTES

1. Warner Bros. press book for *The Public Enemy*, André Sennwald, "Two Thugs," *New York Times*, 24 April 1931, p. 27
2. *Variety* review of *The Public Enemy*, 29 April 1931
3. Zanuck to Joy, January 6, 1931, PCA *Public Enemy* Case File. Typography in original.
4. Fred D. Pasley, *Al Capone: The Biography of a Self-Made Man*, Faber, London, 1966 [first published 1931]), p. 317
5. Hays to Joseph Melillo, 11 June 1931, Production Code Administration *Public Enemy* file, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Los Angeles
6. Will Hays, Annual Report of the President of the MPPDA, 30 March 1931, Motion Picture Association archive, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Los Angeles, 1931, Meetings file.
7. John Landesco, *Organized Crime in Chicago: Part III of The Illinois Crime Survey 1929*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1968, p. 277
8. Landesco, p. 210
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10. Henry James Forman, *Our Movie-Made Children*, MacMillan, New York, 1933, p. 264

Mick LaSalle: Pre-Code Hollywood (Green Cine):

The "pre-Code era" refers to a roughly five-year period in film history, beginning with the widespread adoption of sound in 1929 and ending on July 1, 1934, with the inauguration of the Production Code Administration and a policy of rigid censorship. Before July 1, 1934, restrictions on movie content varied widely, depending on local laws, mores and

public taste. As a result, "pre-Code films" tend to be racier, sexier, more adult, more cynical, more socially critical, more honest and more politically strident than the films produced by Hollywood on up through the early 1960s.

Indeed, the difference between pre-Codes and films made during the Code is so dramatic that, once one becomes familiar with pre-Codes, it becomes possible to tell, sometimes within five minutes, whether a 1934 film was released early or late in the year. Contrary to what was sometimes assumed by historians, the pre-Code era didn't fade. It was ended in full bloom and with the finality of an axe coming down.

The term "pre-Code," though a convenient shorthand, is in a sense a misnomer: For the entire pre-Code era, a Production Code did, in fact, exist. It was just blithely ignored. The story begins in 1929, when a group of lay Catholics and Catholic clergy in Chicago, seeing the 1920s social revolution beginning to make its way onto film and realizing that sound was making movies more daring than ever, devised a code of ethics and practices they hoped the studios would adopt. In February of 1930, these Catholics met with the production heads of the various studios, including Irving Thalberg of MGM, and made revisions to the Production Code. Ultimately, the Code was adopted by all the major studios, and a group already in place, the Studio Relations Committee, was installed in an advisory capacity to apply the strictures of the Code to various movies and to advise the studios as to what cuts might be needed.

It's safe to say that if the producers actually thought they might ever have to abide by the Code, they would never have adopted it. It was a reactionary

document, not merely interested in grossly limiting what could be depicted on screen, but concentrating on using film as a social instrument to push forward a traditionalist agenda. According to the Code, sex outside of marriage could not be portrayed as "attractive and beautiful," could not be presented in a way that might "arouse passion," and could not be made to seem "right and permissible." Dances were allowed, so long as they did not "excite the emotional reaction of an audience... with movement of the breasts [or] excessive body movements while the feet are stationery." All crime had to be punished, and while it could be portrayed, it had to be done in such a way as not to arouse sympathy for either the crime or the criminal. Authority could not be held up to ridicule. In the case of clergymen, their depiction as comic characters or villains was proscribed. In the case of politicians, police and judges, they could, under some circumstances, be movie villains, so long as it was clear that they were bad apples and not representative of their institutions.

Under this Code, movies were to be sermons. Worse than that, they were to be deceitful sermons, presenting an untrue vision of life for propagandistic purposes. It was a document instigated by people who not only did not understand art but also hated and feared art's truth, power and freedom.

Fortunately, even as they signed it, the studio heads had no intention of abiding by the Code. From the beginning of film history, would-be reformers from both the left and right had repeatedly tried to censor and influence screen content, and by 1930, Hollywood had learned that the best way to handle these people was to agree with them until they went away. Thus, the Studio Relations Committee, as set up, was given absolutely no power to control screen content, and their advice was almost invariably ignored. Moreover, the man in charge of the SRC, Jason Joy, was no reformer. He liked sleazy movies and, upon leaving the SRC, Joy became story editor for Fox, which produced a slew of lewd entries during his tenure.

Though eventually the Code would revive - its betrayal by the studios gradually became a rallying point for reformers - in 1930, it was dead on arrival. And Hollywood went on making movies of increased daring and sophistication.

Today, as seen from a distance of well over 70 years, the pre-Codes retain their freshness and fascination. Their appeal is multi-faceted. They have the capacity to take viewers by surprise, by virtue of their honesty but also simply because they weren't made according to a prescribed formula. They startle us with their modernity. Women in pre-Codes, for example, act recognizably like women - independent, shrewd and worldly - and not like the bubbleheads, girls next door, martyrs and rueful sluts you often find in American film through the early 1960s. Likewise, men don't act like fools for authority but as independent spirits. Most refreshingly, with pre-Codes you get the unmistakable sense of an era's speaking with its true voice, without the countervailing influence of censorship. The pre-Codes were inhibited by only one force: Public mores. As a result, what we see in the pre-Codes is an unfiltered expression of how people felt about life in their time.

The beauty of that - of an era speaking for itself - is beauty enough. We don't need to agree with the sentiments expressed by these films. To expect them to be "modern" is to subject them to an inappropriate and ever-shifting standard. Yet, even acknowledging that, the pre-Codes have a way of making the leap across the decades, and part of their undeniable thrill is in recognizing in them one's own emotional

experience. When we connect with, for example, the exuberance of a passion turning to love in Queen Christina, or the wife's anger in The Divorcee, or the existential doubts expressed in Frankenstein, or the youthful passion and political rage of The Gold Diggers of 1933, we're having a communion across time. It's an experience akin to the feeling we might get when reading a 500-year-old poem that says everything we're feeling - only it's more immediate, because with movies we're actually seeing the people, walking and talking.

The pre-Code era was especially good for women. Though the 1940s is sometimes remembered as a golden age for actresses, it was in the early 30s that women dominated the box office, and their films weren't considered "woman's films" at the time. Rather, they were the movies that the general public flocked to see. They dealt with the issues surrounding the emergence of the newly sexualized, self-sufficient New Woman, who'd emerged in the 1920s. They explored sex, marriage, divorce, and the work place, mainly in a spirit of discovering and re-evaluating morality in light of a new day. Men's vehicles were equally interesting. They depicted crime, the business world, politics, war, history and horror also from the viewpoint of examining morality and coming to terms with modern life. It's ironic: Though the reformers considered pre-Codes immoral, Hollywood, in fact, never made so many films directly concerned with morality as in the pre-Code era. The difference was that the reformers didn't want morals to be examined, debated, discussed or discovered. They wanted them to be accepted blindly.

Though the films of the pre-Code era are at least as varied as those of other eras, they tend to share some philosophical similarities. They celebrate independence and initiative, whether the protagonist is honest or crooked. They prefer the individual to the collective and are deeply cynical about all organized power, such as the government, the police, the church, big business and the legal system. Anything that gets in the way of freedom, including sexual freedom, they tend to be against. In the same way, anybody who tells somebody what to do is usually the villain. The horror of World War I and disgust with Prohibition are always fresh in mind. Later in the era, the Great Depression would only reinforce the notion that people in power are either stupid or malevolent, that pleasures are for the taking and that the world is a rigged game, so that anything you can do to beat it is justified. In terms of politics, an FDR-like liberalism is pervasive. The pre-Code movies celebrate individualism and individual freedom but see nothing inconsistent with expecting the government to look out for the little guy.

It used to be that pre-Code movies weren't available on DVD and scarcely available on VHS, but that's changing for the better. To start, there are several ways to see the early stirrings of the pre-Code sensibility. For glimpse of proto-pre-Code pessimism, see Lon Chaney in The Unknown. The glorification and the idealization of the loose woman, a consistent feature of pre-Code, can be vividly found in Garbo's A Woman of Affairs and The Mysterious Lady and in Von Sternberg's 1928 The Docks of New York, in which Betty Compson gets the full Sternberg treatment two years before Dietrich did.

Movies about prostitutes were a familiar feature of the first years of the pre-Code era. They were Hollywood's way of dealing with the real changes in sexual behavior happening with American women, under cover of presenting tales of exoticism. Among these are the English and German language versions of Anna Christie both starring Garbo (the German language version is better); Blonde Venus, with Dietrich, and Red Dust, starring a delightful Jean Harlow. Two of the best pre-Code prostitute movies

are set for DVD release some time in the next year: a restored Baby Face, in which Barbara Stanwyck sleeps her way to the top; and James Whale's poignant Waterloo Bridge from 1931, with Mae Clarke giving the performance of a lifetime. (The Whale film will be included as a special feature in a re-release of the 1940 remake starring Vivien Leigh.)

Most actresses in the early pre-Code played prostitutes. Norma Shearer in the epoch-making The Divorcee established a different pattern. She played a normal wife who, upon discovering her husband has been unfaithful, sets out on a voyage of sexual discovery. With nothing floozy-like about her, Shearer established the bedroom as safe territory for normal women, thus paving the way for Claudette Colbert in Smiling Lieutenant (only on laser disc!), Loretta Young in Employee's Entrance, Bette Davis in Ex-Lady, Miriam Hopkins in Design for Living and others.

The gangster was the pre-Code's male equivalent of the prostitute, an exotic figure the movies used to explore a new, amoral social mindset. James Cagney in The Public Enemy, Edward G. Robinson in Little Caesar and Clark Gable in A Free Soul were thinly veiled heroes, and after breaking through with these films, they carried their personas virtually intact into other films, in which they embodied a new kind of heroism: Street smart, innovative, shady and self-interested. It was the era of the shameless self-promoter, such as Lee Tracy in Blessed Event and Cagney in Blonde Crazy.

Even horror films fit the pattern of moral questioning and examination. The pre-Code era was not an era of monsters (as in the 1950s) but of existential horror, as embodied by Dracula, Frankenstein and Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (the 1931 version). These films question the nature of existence, just as the era's social protest films, such as I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang, Heroes for Sale and Gabriel Over the White House questioned and criticized the social and political organization of society.

The pre-Code era came to an end soon after the Catholics formed the Legion of Decency in April of 1934, an organization of clergy that threatened to keep Catholics away from the movies. Joseph Breen, one of the architects of the Code, who was now ensconced as head of the SRC, presented himself to the studio heads as the one man who could mediate between them and the Legion. The studios gave in to his demands. The Production Code Administration was founded, under the agreement that no film could be released without a seal of approval from the PCA.

In retrospect, it's probably fortunate that Hollywood's brief era of freedom came when it did. As it happened, the pre-Code era coincided with a particularly interesting period in American history. It saw the emergence of women, the prevalence of gangsterism, the collapse of the economy, the end of Prohibition, and the coming of a political realignment that would last 47 years. Had Hollywood been allowed the same freedom between say, 1949 and 1954, would it have resulted in an equally rich cinematic legacy? It's impossible to say. In any case, the brilliance and vitality of the pre-Code era - and its virtual elimination from historical consideration until Bruce Goldstein's pre-Code festivals at Film Forum in the 1980s and Turner Classic Movies' debut in 1994 - is a warning about the damage a small, organized bands of reactionaries can do.

Chris Barsanti, *The Public Enemy*, Slant.com:
Contrary to popular opinion, the best moment in The Public Enemy isn't when Jimmy Cagney shoves a grapefruit in his girlfriend's face—it's the moment Chicago gangsters Tom Powers (Cagney in a career-making performance) and his buddy Matt Doyle (Edward Woods) hear that one of their own is dead, not by a rival gangster, but from being thrown off his horse. Even when Powers and Doyle march into the stable in a welter of cold fury, you don't quite believe they're actually going to execute the horse, and yet they do. In a film that begins and ends with high-toned messages about the evil hoodlums do to society,

this was likely originally intended to illustrate the rapacious inhumanity of these gangsters (a horse?), but there's no denying its intrinsic black comedy. Studio-imposed moralizing aside, this is a film with a wicked sense of humor—witness the scene in which a swishy haberdasher feels up Cagney's bicep while measuring him for a suit—that makes up for an occasionally stale plot.

Powers and Doyle are childhood best buddies, growing up petty crooks in the teeming Chicago tenements of the early 20th century and graduating to big-time crimes once the local mob is handed the sweet gift of Prohibition. Director William A. Wellman brings a sociological bent to his depiction of their milieu, using old newsreel footage of the city, carefully marking the passing of the years and paying close attention to the particulars of the characters' working-class Irish surroundings. There's a clean arc to the story as we follow Powers and Doyle from the "social club" where the neighborhood kids do odd crimes for the resident Fagin character, Putty Nose, to their first involvement with burgeoning bootlegger Paddy Ryan, to them living the high life as smart-dressed hoods and the final showdown where Powers stalks into enemy headquarters (a justifiably famous shot where he practically walks into the camera), a revolver in each hand and a killer's stare on his face. The nature of the film's rise-and-fall plot, however, can seem overly premeditated at times, and borders on the simplistic.

The Public Enemy starts by telling its audience that it does not mean to glorify the criminals that it portrays, and unlike some other gangster flicks of the 1930s, it actually doesn't. Although the crook that Cagney plays here has a definite thuggish cool, he's repeatedly shown to be such a thickheaded animal that he doesn't register as much of an antihero (the only thing helping him is that none of the other characters register much in the way of personality, either). He's the kind of overzealous idiot gunman who Bogart would have mocked relentlessly in The Big Sleep. Even so, there's little denying the power of Cagney's presence, from the first moment he's on screen, he radiates such a brash Fenian cockiness you can imagine kids at the time flocking out of the theater and cocking their caps just like him. It's a performance so perfect in its intensity that any other quibbles about the film ultimately recede into insignificance.

Prohibiton (Wikipedia)

Prohibition in the United States was a nationwide constitutional ban on the production, importation, transportation, and sale of alcoholic beverages from 1920 to 1933.

Prohibitionists first attempted to end the trade in alcoholic drinks during the 19th century. Led by pietistic Protestants, they aimed to heal what they saw as an ill society beset by alcohol-related problems such as alcoholism, family violence and saloon-based political corruption. Many communities introduced alcohol bans in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and enforcement of these new prohibition laws became a topic of debate. Prohibition supporters, called "drys", presented it as a battle for public morals and health. The movement was taken up by progressives in the Prohibition, Democratic and Republican parties, and gained a national grassroots base through the Woman's Christian Temperance Union. After 1900, it was coordinated by the Anti-Saloon League. Opposition from the beer industry mobilized "wet" supporters from the wealthy Catholic and German Lutheran communities, but the influence of these groups receded from 1917 following the entry of the US into the First World War against Germany.

The alcohol industry was curtailed by a succession of state legislatures, and finally ended nationwide under the Eighteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution in 1920, which passed "with a 68 percent supermajority in the House of Representatives and 76 percent support in the Senate" as well as ratification by 46 out of 48 states.[1] Enabling legislation, known as the Volstead Act, set down the rules for enforcing the federal ban and defined the types of alcoholic beverages that were prohibited. Not all alcohol was banned; for

example, religious use of wine was permitted. Private ownership and consumption of alcohol were not made illegal under federal law, but local laws were stricter in many areas, with some states banning possession outright.

Following the ban, criminal gangs gained control of the beer and liquor supply in many cities. By the late 1920s, a new opposition to prohibition emerged nationwide. Critics attacked the policy as causing crime, lowering local revenues, and imposing "rural" Protestant religious values on "urban" America.[2] Prohibition ended with the ratification of the Twenty-first Amendment, which repealed the Eighteenth Amendment on December 5, 1933, though prohibition continued in some states. To date, this is the only time in American history in which a constitutional amendment was passed for the purpose of repealing another.