LACS 233-01 The Godfather: The Art of Hard Choices

January Term 2019.
MTWF 9:30-12:00 (Jan. 7-10 and 14-17) in LIB 103
Instructor: John Alcorn (Office: Seabury 110)
Individual tutorials for presentations: MTWR 1:00-3:00

Course description
The Godfather and The Godfather Part II films are narrative masterpieces that provide many insights into the interplay of character and culture in decision-making in high-stakes situations outside the law. We will interpret the films as illustrations of strategic interaction in stylized mafia settings. We will focus on the psychology of motivations: rationality, interest, emotion, justice, and the mafia’s code of honor (vendetta, omertà, and gender norms). And we will discuss narrative techniques and the relationship between art and life (fiction and reality).

0.5 course credit.

Assessment
Assessment has three components: 1) A paper (1,500 words) or equivalent media project on a topic to be chosen in consultation with the instructor. The paper topic will be different for each student. 2) Seminar participation: A presentation about a designated topic in the films; a presentation about your draft paper or project, and general participation in discussion. 3) Posts in focused online discussion forums. The paper (or media project) and the seminar presentations require analysis of film clips in the spirit of the syllabus.
- Paper (or media project) = 30% of the course grade.
- Seminar presentation = 60% of the course grade: 30% for leading class about a designated topic, 15% for the presentation about the draft paper or media project, and 15% for general participation in discussion.
- Online forum posts at Moodle: 10% of the grade.
- Papers (or projects) and presentations are graded on five criteria: focus, integration of assigned materials, argument (or analysis), evidence, & prose (or presentation).
- Prose and presentation are assessed on five criteria: clarity, concision, organization, proportion, & polish. Penalties apply to tardy work.
- A seminar is a joint enterprise in which we learn from one another and count on one another. Penalties apply to tardiness and to any unexcused absences. A seminar requires full attention during class – ExTRANeous software must be turned off. Students should not exit during class time, unless there is reasonable urgency. We will take a short break in each 2.5-hour class.

Films to purchase or rent (online streams or DVDs)
Digital streams are available at Amazon, Netflix, and Google Play.

Academic resources (posted at Moodle)
Syllabus

Week 1. *The Godfather*

Monday, January 7. Motivations & Behavior

* Analysis of scenes:
  - Hard choices about private justice & instrumental friendship (Bonasera; Johnny Fontane).
  - Hard choices about the market for hard drugs (Corleone family).

Tuesday, January 8. Social norms and strategic interaction.

Reading: Elster (1990)
* Analysis of scenes:
  - Hard choices about revenge (‘business’ vs ‘personal’).
  - Hard choices about war & peace (meeting of mafia bosses).

Wednesday, January 9. Presentations by students.

Presentation: Michael Corleone’s fateful choices
1:03:15 - 1:10:24. The hospital scene: Michael Corleone & Captain McCloskey (& Enzo the baker) - "What's the Turk paying you to set-up my father, Captain?"
1:21:54 - 1:27:08. The restaurant scene: Problems of credibility & of commitment:
Sollozzo & Michael - “Io sono un uomo d'onore. [...] What guarantees can I give you, Mike? [...] All I want is a truce.”

Presentation: A strategic initiative: The move to Vegas.
2:16:31 - 2:19:42. Corleone caucus about move to Vegas - “Things may get rough with the move we're trying.”

Thursday, January 10. Presentations by students.

Reading: Pizzini (1999)

Presentation: Cat & mouse; settling accounts.
2:36:57 - 2:48:40. Baptism & vendetta killings - “I do renounce them. [...] Today I settled all family business.”

Presentation: What makes Kay tick?
2:49:35 - 2:53:05. Michael, Connie, & Kay - “This one time, I'll let you ask me about my affairs.”

Part II Clips TBD (Connie, Fredo’s mistress) and Part II 2:37:58 - 2:44:10. Gender norms & their breakdown: Michael & Kay Corleone - “It was an abortion!”

Presentation: Whom to trust? Keep your enemies close.
Part II 37:50 - 40:40. Michael Corleone & Tom Hagen - “One thing I learned from pop, is to try to think as people around you think. Now, on that basis, anything's possible.”
Part II 16:18 - 20:11. Michael Corleone & Senator Geary - “Senator, we're both part of the same hypocrisy.”
Part II 1:13:20 - 1:16:07. Tom Hagen & Senator Geary - Rescue or ambush? “It will be as though she never existed. All that's left is our friendship.”

Presentation: What makes Fredo tick?

Tuesday, January 15. Presentations by students.

What makes Vito tick? Selection of flashback clips TBD.

Presentation: What makes Pentangeli tick?
Part II 2:33:34 - 2:37:57. Frank Pentangeli & Tom - “The honor of the family is safe” (“L’onore della famiglia sta a posto”).

Wednesday, January 16. Presentations by students.

Presentation: What makes Michael tick?
Part II 2:57:18 - 3:00:37. Michael Corleone, Tom Hagen, & Rocco - “I don't feel I have to wipe everybody out, Tom. Just my enemies.”

Presentation: The parts & the whole.
Retrospective illumination & adumbration. Threads in the film.
Clips TBD and Part II 3:12:00 - 3:16:54. Final scene - Michael Corleone remembers the December 1941 family gathering.

Thursday, January 17. Presentations of draft papers/projects by students.

15 minutes (strict limit) for presentation and discussion of each draft.

**Paper (or media project) is due on Friday, January 15, at 6 pm, by email attachment.**
(Students will receive a prompt with specific guidelines a week before the due date.)
Please note the following Trinity College policies:

- **Credit hours.**
  For this course (0.5 credit), students should plan to spend an average of 30 hours per week studying and completing assignments.
  (Guidelines from the Curriculum Committee and the Dean of Faculty)

- **Academic accommodations.**
  “Trinity College is committed to creating an inclusive and accessible learning environment consistent with the Americans with Disabilities Act. If you have approval for academic accommodations, please notify faculty during the first two weeks of the semester or a minimum of 10 days prior to needing your accommodations. Please be sure to meet with me privately to discuss implementation.”
  (Statement of the Office of Student Accommodations)

- **Academic Integrity.**
  “In accordance with the Trinity College Student Integrity Contract, students are expected to abide by the highest standards of intellectual honesty in all academic exercises. Intellectual honesty assumes that students do their own work and that they credit properly those upon whose work and thought they draw. It is the responsibility of each student to make sure that he or she is fully aware of what constitutes intellectually honest work in every examination, quiz, paper, laboratory report, homework assignment, or other academic exercise submitted for evaluation in a course at Trinity College.”
  (Trinity College Student Handbook, p. 13)

- **The syllabus is subject to change.**
  “The content, policies, requirements, and assignments listed in the syllabus are subject to change.”
  (Guidelines from the Curriculum Committee and the Dean of Faculty)