The Evolution of the Villain in American Cinema
From the 1950s to the Present

The Honors Program
Senior Capstone Project
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ABSTRACT

The villain character has evolved greatly throughout American cinema. Post World War II,

the evolution is most striking by comparing films from the 1950s, 1970s, and 2000s. With a

selection of four movies from each respective decade, the villains will be contrasted to

identify any similarities and differences across decades to determine if the political

environment has an impact on the way in which the villain character is portrayed.

Objective: The purpose of this project was for me to determine if villains were constructed

based on views of the American people at the times in which the films were created. This

would mean that the foreign entanglements at the time of production had a direct impact on

the villain character as far as casting and racially biased portrayals.

Methodology: To choose a majority of my movies, first I used a list of the Top 100 Domestic

Grossing List (in America) and cross referenced it with those that won an Oscar for best

picture. Then, since only one movie from the 2000s fit the primary criteria, I chose three other

movies. These three other movies were on the Top 100 Grossing list as well as had a

definable villain character. Additionally, I chose a different movie than the ones that

originally qualified from both the 1950s and the 70s in order to have films with a more

concrete villain because there was one from each decade that focused more on the hero and

his villainous attributes as opposed to a villain character that stood on his own. After these

films were selected, I had them approved by both my faculty advisor and personal librarian.

Second, the decades that I chose to focus on all had very impactful foreign involvements that

altered the way in which the US viewed others and was viewed by others. For the 1950s, this

was the start of the Cold War as well as the ending of World War II. In the 1970s, Vietnam

caused a lot of controversy with the draft and Nixon destroyed any trust Americans had in the government with the Watergate Scandal. Then by the 2000s, terroristic plots seemed to be on the news daily after September 11th, which opened up the floodgates of entanglements in the Middle East. Third, I compiled sources that related to my project by narrowing the scope to books addressing evil and villainy, the decades which I was focusing on, and the individual movies which I watched. Lastly, I brought together what I gathered about the villain characters from viewing the films first-hand and reading the literature to determine if the evil actor was, in fact, representative of that time in American history.

Results: In almost every movie, the villain was a white male, usually in his thirties, of either Italian or Irish decent (if their heritage was made known throughout the course of the film).

Conclusion: The findings that came from my primary and secondary research disproved my hypothesis. I was under the impression that not only would the films be discriminatory against the villain through racial undertones, but also that the villain would be radically different amongst each decade. While the decade did impact certain facets of the villain's creation, such as their complexity, the actual representation of evil never strayed too far from the derived archetype. Additionally, Hollywood is a functioning business and therefore tries to steer clear of political turmoil and the alienation of a particular group for fear of monetary backlash. This was a variable I had not considered in my original formation of the hypothesis.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout history there have been many different definitions of evil. From the Bible with Adam and Eve, "the first allusion to the possibility of evil – the first introduction of the very concept of evil – comes only with reference to the tree of knowledge, identified as 'the tree of knowledge of good and evil'" (Norden, 45). From the time that there was man, there was evil to serve as a trick and downfall; however, it changes form quite often. Depending upon the context, evil can be a person or a personification; it can be an action or thought, within or without. That being said, this can make the context of defining a character as evil and therefore a villain difficult. "William Everson has pointed out that 'the activities of the bad guys tell us far more about the changing mores and morals of our times than a similar study of the good guys ever do. From the beginning, the basic virtues have remained unchanged. But social, moral, and legal behavior is forever changing'" (Gillis, 3).

Typically, villainy is defined by a character doing something that society would deem unacceptable, whether it be moralistically or legally at a detriment to others. Evil, on the other hand, takes the idea of doing bad things to an entirely new, more serious level. "Political philosopher C. Fred Alford argues that our modern concept of evil presupposes an assignment of agency and intentionality. He defines evil as 'pleasure in hurting and a lack of remorse.'…On the modern conception, evil requires agents who are malevolent, acting with both intentions and knowledge" (Norden, 57). Therefore, when we use the term evil, it is more commonly a descriptor of someone who is a sociopath or possesses sociopathic tendencies. They are not villains who were good and then had a reason to be bad. They are the characters, whose motive is either unknown or simply for their own enjoyment. Usually the

villain is an insensitive and cruel person, who while sometimes has legitimate reasons, crosses the boundary for what would make them an acceptable member of society.

At the same time the explanation for criminality derives from four different spheres, "1) criminalistic subcultures or other situational factors 2) psychopathy or mental illness 3) aspirations for a better life 4) bad biology aka 'born bad'" (Rafter, 49). There are plenty of instances, gangs for example, where crime is a part of everyday life and the situation is tough to leave. This scenario would address one and four. However, if the person uses criminal actions to try and escape to a better life, while understandable, it is not an admirable way to better their life situation. This addresses number three. And then there are people who are born without empathy for others, sociopaths, or those who enjoy certain things society has criminalized and because of some limited mental capacity, are unable to resist the urge to commit evil acts. Each one of these settings can further the development of an already fragile character and, therefore, push them over to the dark side. However, the last category accounts for people who, like those falling into the second category, enjoy being the villain. Alfred Hitchcock, a well-known director of movies laced with intertwining evil plots, said… "Today, to a great extent, evil has spread... the world today is full of brutality…Evil and good are getting closer together today… you can barely tell one from the other" (Norden, 40). For this last grouping though, these people know that what they are doing is wrong and while they could stop committing evil acts, choose not to on the basis of self fulfilment and lack of societal obligation to their communities.

When it comes to the physical characteristics of evil, the actors have run the gamut. There are many movies that use established stereotypes to make their point and easily define their villain. Usually this means a minority becomes the scapegoat and personification of evil

within society. Because of the portrayal of certain ethnic groups in such a negative way, "…films help shape beliefs so fundamental that we are scarcely aware that we have them: … unexamined stereotypes about who is likely to be dangerous" (Rafter, 47). Additionally, according to Roger Ebert, "Hollywood is running low on dependable villains (Cones, 146)," which leaves the same evil characters, like the bad cop, drug dealer, and Nazi, to be endlessly repeated in a cycle of cliché plot lines.

There is also a use of colors and contrast in the literal sense to determine perceptions of evil for the viewer. "In the end, while evil/Blackness is powerful, those who conquer it – the goodness/Whiteness – remain the most powerful of them all" (Norden, 121). While the movies, in which my original criteria were fulfilled, do not necessarily reflect this generalization, overall a biased representation seems to be the norm. This shows that in general the movies that have attained critical acclaim since the second half of the twenty-first century are not blatantly racist, but more portraying biases in a subtle way. Dark and light are still used through lighting and clothing, as well as music in order to further facilitate the audience's ability in deciphering who the villain is in comparison to the hero. While some films may be very obvious with their choice of villain characters for a specific reason, many do choose the more covert portrayal to eliminate friction with audience members that could be offended.

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DECADE ANALYSIS

1950s: The Decade

Even before the 1950s began, America was a country concerned with concealment and security. This paranoia infiltrated every part of life from employment to neighbors to movies. People became more interested in the possible criminality of one another then any good traits.

> "In 1947 the House Committee on Un-American Activities investigated the motion-picture industry to determine whether Communist sentiments were being reflected in popular films. When some writers (who happened to be secret members of the Communist Party) refused to testify, they were cited for contempt and sent to prison. After that, the film companies refused to hire anyone with a marginally questionable past." (1.5 The Cold War)

After World War II ended, the 1950s was a time filled with suspicion and distrust for Americans. Many different groups, primarily those of foreign descent, were the target to this new, hostile doubt to their character. Categorizing individuals by the groups in which they belong and therefore the stereotype that correlated to that particular collective became the norm both in daily life and in film during this decade. "The war in Korea, the testing of the nuclear bomb, and the rise of the Soviet Union to global significance brought about the phrase cold war. Fear and paranoia were associated with the perceived communist menace and the threat to civil liberties…" (Roman, 54). Two groups, in particular, given the foreign entanglements at that time, were more prominent as the villain or morally questionable individual: Russians and Asians.

Though the fighting in Korea ended in 1953, three years after President Truman approved the production of the hydrogen bomb and sent over the air force and navy (Bradley), there was still a deep mistrust of most Asians because of Pearl Harbor and any individuals

who could be associated with such a group were stereotyped. The same could be said for

Russians, given the Cold War and hostilities between the US and the Soviet Union.

"Hollywood's anti-communist films of the late 1940s and 1950s, attacking the Reds

domestically and overseas, incorporated political, social, and cultural attitudes that had

surfaced in American movies decades earlier." (118, Toplin) Though it was emphasized more,

the same people still remained villains, but now for different reasons. The Russians had

always been thought of as a bad guy. This even extended so far as to generalizing Eastern

Europeans as villainous because of the supposed resemblance of their accents to that of

people living in the Soviet Union.

Dorothy Jones looked at anticommunist films of the early 50s and determined they

could be put into three categories; "1) formula spy melodramas that followed 'the familiar

timeworn pattern,' 2) movies that attempted to deal with communism in the United States and

to explain 'the way in which the party recruits and holds its membership, and the tactics by

which it operates,' and 3) dramatization of Cold War events 'which had taken place abroad'"

(124, Toplin). In the case of one and three, the villain is literally a Russian or Communist, and

therefore evil by nature. Additionally, they are not to be trusted since they infiltrate American

society and attempt to destroy it from the inside out. In the case of the second, this is a more

metaphorical approach in which some directors chose not to directly address the Cold War

with a Russian villain. However, they instead applied themes and scenarios to American

society in a representative fashion, as is the case for *On the Waterfront.* "…as studies have

shown (regarding sci-fi and western films in particular,) conventional entertainment films of

the 1950s could also convey themes and perspectives relevant to the Cold War." (130, Toplin)

For films taking this position, they are still putting forth the message that communism is bad, but with a more relatable American villain and with a less historically driven reenactment.

The Villains

On The Waterfront - Johnny "Friendly" is a mob boss of the workers union on the docks. He runs the neighborhood through intimidation and therefore is never convicted of any wrong doings because people are afraid of what will happen if they speak out. There were multiple murders of the brave individuals who were willing to stand as witnesses against Johnny, which leads to the conclusion that Johnny "Friendly" is not only a thug and criminal, but also a murderer and will eliminate anyone who gets in his way.

This villain is a middle-aged, white male Italian American mob representation. He uses force to get his way and manipulates people into doing his dirty work because he either does favors for them which require repayment or instills fear so that they won't testify. The director of this film, Elia Kazan, testified in the HAUC trials which is why this particular film is said to have so much more meaning than just insight into a mob run worker's union. "The film's reverence for the church as a pillar of Americanism and morality very much conformed to the religious tenor of 1950s anti-communism… (the film) has frequently been interpreted as a text imbued with Cold War symbolism" (Sbardellati, 178). The way in which the protagonist, played by Marlon Brando, stands up to the antagonist is said to possibly be a parallel Kazan's willingness to testify in order to protect the country from Communists, even if it was unpopular at the time. According to film critic Pauline Kael, *On the Waterfront* is "one of the most powerful American movies of the 50s, and few movies caused so much talk, excitement, and dissension" (Kael, 546). This controversy and a look into the courage it takes

to go against a villain as powerful as Johnny "Friendly," who could represent Communists as a whole, are why this film has a solid villain character.

Rear Window - Lars Thorwald is a white male with icy blue eyes who murders his wife and then attempts to murder Jeff, his neighbor and witness, in order to keep her disappearance a secret. This traveling salesman seems to have snapped and decided that he cannot care for his bedridden wife anymore and therefore wants to be able to make a clean break without divorce or the proceedings that go with it. He is living in an apartment complex that seems to be very small and can lead one to conclude that he is in a low to mid-level economic bracket. Though it seems as though the murder of his wife was more a crime of passion, the actions Lars took afterwards were highly calculated and covered most of his tracks. Had Jeff not been a peeping tom and bedridden with nothing to do but note the movement of his neighbors, it is likely that Lars would have gotten away with the murder. Once he was found out however, Lars took it upon himself to try in a last ditch effort to cover all possible implications by breaking into Jeff's apartment and pushing him out the window.

Alfred Hitchcock loved to create suspenseful movies with murderers as the villains. "In the late 1940s and 1950s, when Freudian explanations of crime became popular, films presented a host of morally twisted characters, in effect using the camera to psychoanalyze them" (Rafter, 48). Camera angles are often used to make the already tall Lars tower over wheelchair confined Jeff in a very daunting way. Hitchcock was able to play on the paranoia of the time and draw the audience in by creating a storyline with a villain who could be their own neighbor. As goes for most of his movies, they are meant to have the viewer become distrusting of the person next to them in the theater by the end, which during the 1950s was no

difficult task. *Rear Window* played off of the already looming suspicion that cast a shadow over most relationships at the time.

The Bridge on the River Kwai - While the main villain is General Siato, the overall villain class is the Japanese race. They are the ones who run the work camp in which prisoners are held hostage and forced to work on projects throughout Japan. Additionally, the Japanese are highly impersonal and a very proud group. For example, if Siato cannot complete the bridge by the deadline imposed, he will have to kill himself because of the shame of his inability to accomplish a task. While this is very severe from the view of an American perspective, it also references attacks on Pearl Harbor in that there too the Japanese were willing to sacrifice themselves for their country. In the end, the British work together with the Japanese to get the bridge made in a cooperative manner. This was definitely a more positive view of a group, which at the time generated a significant amount of negative sentiment. There is a bit less racism towards the group as a whole; however, the people who are imprisoned are not fans of the Japanese given their abuse of the POWs.

As a group, the Japanese soldiers have accents or do not speak English at all, making them more fearsome because of the unknown and cultural barrier. Additionally, they are very severe in their punishment with locking the British officers in what is essentially an oven with no food or water until they submit to General Siato's commands. If any prisoners try to escape they are shot on sight and the infirmary is poorly run with most prisoners dying upon entering for treatment. The lack of concern for the life of the POWs makes one feel enraged, especially given the fact that they are the people helping the Japanese accomplish their goals, such as the bridge for the train. It leads one to believe that the Japanese are insensitive and self-serving,

however that is not very different from the American use of work camps for Japanese in the US.

Ben Hurr - Messala is a power-mad, ego centric Roman who seeks to establish his own authority through the persecution of Jews and anyone who attempts to help or defend them. This is why he not only throws Ben Hur in prison, but also his mother and sister, who then wind up developing leprosy from their stay. Messala is the archetype for a power-driven soldier who seeks to destroy anyone who stands in the way of him and greatness. It is for this reason that even in death, Messala vindictively taunts Ben Hur and cannot see the error in his ways because of his stubborn pride. As a Roman, the actor playing Messala is a white male with brown hair and eyes, who looks to be about 30. While this is a bit separate from the typical Italian-American stereotypical ideal for a villain of Italian descent, he is nonetheless an Italian villain.

While this film does not address Communists, attacks on national security, or distrust of those of Asian descent, it instead shows how no matter where the villains were coming from, they were usually associated as part of a larger group that was also categorized as evil. This way it made the audience have a much easier viewing experience in which they could easily identify the villain, as Roman as opposed to having to remember the names or why the individual was bad. The crimes of the group reflected upon the individual, and then his own misdeeds and evil doings further contributed to the rationale for his villainy.

Conclusion

There are a few striking similarities about villains who originate in the 1950s. That being said there are exceptions to every rule and therefore some movies will always be outliers. First, almost all of the evil characters are derived from a group which the American

people believe to be evil. For The *Bridge on the River Kwai,* it was the Japanese, for *On the Waterfront*, Italian mobsters, and for *Ben Hur* the Romans were brought back from the past to demonstrate the perils of groupthink and herd mentalities. The need for villains to be from a poorly viewed group was to make it easier for viewers to understand why the villain was bad. Having it be much less about the individual and more about the group led to a simpler storyline in which people did not have to think about why someone was bad, because just the association with that group answered all questions. Johnny "Friendly" is a bad guy because of his crimes like murder, bribery, and corruption, but these reasons are just additional support. The main reasoning for his villainy is because he is an Italian-American in a mob, meaning it's in his nature. All of 'those people' are evil and whether or not the individual is seen committing crimes, mere association makes him guilty by default.

Most of the villains from the 1950s are also men. Very few women were even leading ladies, not close to on par with the screen time or depth of storyline as was provided to their male counterparts. This is as much a representation of the time as it is of the outlook on women in general. In order for a female character to be considered a villain, they typically portray more masculine qualities to establish a presence among their male counterparts. Additionally, in taking this method of validation, the female alienates herself from her own kind and therefore creates a barrier between the ideal of what she should be and what she actually is, thereby becoming the foreign or unknown character, thus instilling fear.

1970s: The Decade

During the 1970s, there was an ever increasing amount of turmoil within the United States. Following race riots and protests about unfair treatment in the 1960s, tension was high.

This overlapped with two ongoing foreign entanglements; the Cold War and the Vietnam War. While people had grown accustomed to their "evil" Soviet counter parts across the ocean, the ten years of fighting with nothing gained in Vietnam decreased the nationalism people once felt for America as well as increased their unhappiness with the government. The Watergate scandal showed that even the President doesn't trust anyone and therefore the public shouldn't either. "Beyond the spying was the lying, and this also scarred the American psyche" (Kirshner, 136). This led to an overall glaringly apparent apprehension by all Americans that they were being watched and possibly recorded.

Urban settings in particular seemed to breed and foster these negative feelings even more so than other areas across the country. There was more "attention to urban vigilantism in the crime-conscious 1970s" (Toplin, xix). Hopelessness was extremely apparent especially in the cities where people were trying to get by on low wages surrounded by crime. "New York's troubles seemed to mirror and magnify the anxiety of the nation as a whole at the time, a period of economic distress, profound uncertainty, and a sense of existential despair about the meaning of and future for America…" (Kirshner, 123). Metropolitan areas and this city, in particular, were the backdrop for many films because of its paralleled nature to the time period of the stories.

Struggle and suffering without a justifiable cause seemed to be an underlying theme in this decade. "These were difficult times for the country; its armed forces were fighting halfway around the world, and often, it seemed there was a war on at home as well, with struggling cities on the cusp of devolving into lawless urban combat zones" (Kirshner, 118). The need to cope with hard times through less than honorable means also became a part of the humanist side of the villain. "In the 1960s and 1970s, when nonconformity became heroic and

criminologists taught that there are few fundamental differences between deviants and the rest of us, films glorified characters who turned to crime to escape the monotony of poverty" (Rafter, 48). People could see themselves and their own hardship in that of the villain characters and therefore understood when they were driven to criminal means.

The 1970s also brought about an introduction into the terrorism realm that would follow and become the more prevalent in the 2000s. Externally, there was an attack at the Munich Olympic games in 1972 and issues with Iranian militant students seizing the US embassy in Tehran and taking hostages in 1979 (Gillis). While these were not the most prominent issues of the decade, they still showed America was distrusting of those without, and more cautious of the Middle East. "In the 1970s, the trickle of ethnic theme motion pictures became a flood, as audiences sought movies about their own immigrant roots as well as the immigrant heritages of others… the era's two most popular immigrant ethnic groups were Jewish-Americans and Italian-Americans" (Toplin, 66). The emergence of these terroristic acts as well as discussion of the cultural heritage of individuals impacted characters in the movies. "From the late 1970s well into the 1990s, Hollywood, the dominant shaper of popular culture in America, was preoccupied with demonic anti-heroes who stand beyond good and evil and inspire terror and awe in audiences or just plain entertain them" (Norden,89). The motives for evil characters to do what they do became a bit murkier as the line between good and bad began to smudge.

The Villains

A Clockwork Orange – Alex, a blonde haired blue eyed British gang leader, commits crimes with his eager band of misfits. He is a "cold-blooded teenage sadist…beating and raping a woman while crooning 'Singin' in the Rain.'" (The Top 20 Villains). When the boys aren't

physically committing these crimes, Alex is dreaming about them. He is a sociopath who sees all others as beneath him and therefore at his disposal. Because of his disposition and temperament, he is the perfect candidate for experimentation of the psychological sort. After being conditioned to be averse to the actions which landed him in prison, the audience sees another side of Alex. Once he is released and returns home, he finds his room has been rented out, leaving him homeless, two of the guys in his gang are now police officers and get away with anything, like beating him and leaving him for dead, and that the world now treats him how he treated others. Having experienced life on this side and then being driven to an attempted suicide, one would think that Alex would be changed and grow. But once he is better in the hospital, it turns out the fall restored his love of crime and deviance, proving that even with more time and effort put in, some people can't be morally conformed and molded to fit reasonably accepted societal norms.

Even with this momentary lapse in judgment, viewers are left with an awful taste in their mouths from a villain who made it to number 5 on Entertainment Weekly's ranking of the top villains in 2009. "In some cases it is nearly impossible to identify with the non-heroes of alternative tradition crime films. We watch from an emotional distance as Alex, the hyper violent delinquent of A Clockwork Orange, rapes and pillages…" (Rafter, 160). Because of the detachment from society and his sociopathic inability to relate or be relatable, the audience fears him even more. He has no real motive other than his own satisfaction and no deterrent until the psychological conditioning which becomes undone. This unknown creates more fear because for a villain who is as violent and unpredictable as Alex, there seems to be no real way to control him or his urges to inflict harm upon others.

The Godfather – Don Vito is an older Italian man who commands a lot of respect in the Italian-American community as the head of one of the Five Families in the New York City area. While he is known as a force to be reckoned with and a man not to be crossed, he also has a moral compass and is extremely calculating in his methods of obtaining power and keeping it. Don Vito has politicians and policemen in his pocket in order to keep his gambling and prostitution interests safe. In addition, he uses blackmail and severe intimidation techniques, such as the memorable horse's head in the bed to get his family friend a movie role. However strong he is at the beginning of this movie, his power begins to weaken as attacks on himself and his family are carried out by other mob families. Pauline Kael, a movie critic, said this film "expresses a new tragic realism . . ."(Kael, 289) that can be seen in the attempts on the life of Don Vito and the killing of middle son, both of which draw sympathy from the viewer.

While he has a significant amount of power and influence, throughout the film he is a family man. He puts his sons first and would do anything to keep them safe. He is feared but at the same time loved for his good nature and becomes somewhat of a compassionate character because of his love for his family but also his old age. This movie was also representative of the focus on immigrants during this era that was prevalent amongst many films. *The Godfather* …"went beyond crime and violence to explore Italian American culture – religious beliefs, class divisions, gender roles, and the existence of an extralegal intragroup judicial system – in a serious manner generally absent from most earlier Italian American crime films" (Toplin,68). Audiences enjoy films more when they find them relatable, and everyone comes from some type of family. The fact is, the crimes committed, while some beyond horrendous and graphic, were not without motive, whether it be power, revenge, or

hate. Movie critic Andrew Sarris said the film "…drifts away from the rigor of the crime genre into the lassitude of an intellectual's daydream about revenge without remorse and power without accountability," however "there is more feeling in the film than we had any right to expect" (Sarris). Tying that into the main plot of the movie created a more relatable story line and characters that, even when villainous, had redeeming qualities.

The Godfather director Francis Ford Coppola said he "always wanted to use the Mafia as a metaphor for America. Both America and the Mafia have their hands stained with blood from what is necessary to do to protect their power and their interests" (Kirshner, 204). Pauline Kael is in agreement stating that this portrayal is "a wide startlingly vivid view of a Mafia dynasty, in which organized crime becomes an obscene nightmare image of American free enterprise" (Kael, 289). Another metaphoric ideal derived from this particular film is that of the Nixonian mentality. Given the Watergate Scandal at the beginning of the decade, the distrust between and among characters is not only from their misdeeds, but a product of the times. "The most Nixonian of them all is Michael Corleone…Ruthless, tactically brilliant, but increasingly isolated…obsessed with his enemies who he needs not simply defeat but to destroy" (Kirshner, 134). Like the President, Michael did not trust anyone, even some members of his own family, and therefore spent his life working to eliminate those with questionable allegiances.

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest – Nurse Ratchet is the first and only female villain that is portrayed in the collection of films I have chosen. This "sadistic head nurse is the embodiment of bureaucratic tyranny" ("The Top 20 Villains"). She ensures that everything in her ward of the mental institution follows the proper rules and protocol. As a white woman she should follow the stereotype of being a docile creature and following the man, as did

many of the female characters in movies and books at the time and before. However, Nurse

Ratchet has the authority in the situation to command the men and therefore becomes a more

masculine character, which in and of itself makes her villainous because of the disregard for

her femininity. Additionally, Mac says she runs the institution "like a rigged game" and

makes the rules unfair so that the patients must always obey her and have no other alternative.

Ratchet uses intimidation to force obedience among the men because she has the final say as

to if they can be released, if they are in as a mandatory sentence, or if they are to be kicked

out, if the stay is voluntary. She also has any trouble makers go for electro shock therapy, and

if they continue to cause issues like Mac, a frontal lobotomy.

This movie exhibits the mental turmoil of the time. "It contained the prophetic essence

of the whole Vietnam period of revolutionary politics going psychedelic" (Kael, 549). The

fact that there was an embodiment of an establishment enforcing rules the masses did not

agree with, draws a very close parallel to how many felt about the draft and war. Additionally,

the fact that a large number of soldiers came back from Vietnam with PTSD and other

psychological disorders further strengthens the comparison of the mental patients to those

returning from active duty.

Taxi Driver – Travis Bickle is both the villain and hero in this film. While he does free a

young girl from prostitution, this does not cover up the fact that prior to this heroic deed he

intended to kill a Senator in front of a crowd of people to get back at a woman who rejected

him. He also bought many guns illegally. In his attempt to save the young girl, he also killed

her pimp and two of the guards in that whorehouse, before trying to kill himself, but he ran

out of bullets. This was "yet another seventies film that raised the bar for the portrayal of

violence on the screen" (Kirshner, 131). Bickle comes back from Vietnam a mentally unstable

and obsessive individual. It is clear that the war took its toll. Though he is a fit white male in his early thirties looking to be of Italian-American descent, his villainy is more out of the treachery that he has seen and as a way to cope with the pain of war that he cannot forget. Travis is a scary character because he is calm one minute and flies off the handle the next. He fixates on one woman and then resorts to drastic measures if rejected. He is unpredictable because he is erratic and illogical which makes him more of a threat because people must be very careful not to set him off.

Set in New York City, this film represents all that was and possibly is still wrong with urban society. It is "a landmark on its own terms as a character study of loneliness, alienation, and madness – is also a summary statement about the city teetering on the brink of abyss" (Kirshner, 128). Not only is the city ill-conducive to prosperous members of society without undue hardship, but also increases the difficulty for people like Travis who "can't find any point of entry into human society" (Kael, 745) once he returns from fighting for his country.

Conclusion

As the years pass, the villains get more complex. In the 1970s, there becomes more of an internal component to the evil characters, such as mental disease and the stereotype surrounding that. Alex is a sociopath, Travis suffers from PTSD, and Nurse Ratchet is surrounded by mental patients. There is also a visible blurring of the lines to what is right and wrong. Travis, though a murderer, kills a pimp and two thugs, making him a hero. Don Vito does terrible things, however he has such strong ties to his family that he becomes relatable and the audience is sad to see him die. This inability to have a solidly defined evil could be influenced from the wars at the time and that confusing people as to what is right and wrong and when there are exceptions to the rule. Everyone except Alex has a good side to them

which makes them more relatable to the audience. However, even Alex, when still under the spell of the aversion therapy, is made to be a somewhat sympathetic character because we as an audience could feel sorry for his suffering after he is 'cured.' Even so, there are definite evil deeds that the villains commit which makes them enter this list, but throughout this decade, the evil is focused more onto one person as opposed to one group as a whole. The villain individuates the group and while they can be connected to others within their peer group, they are taken as a more selective case regarding their wrong doings.

This is also the first instance that we see a defined female villain enter the picture. The range of villains also goes from teenager to older man as opposed to the typical white male about 30-35 years old. Only two of these villains however come from a group that as a whole would be defined as villainous; Don Vito and the Italian mob and Alex and his British teen gang. The other two are just evils that result from society and their placement within society. Ratchet has to be tough on her patients in order to keep them in line but it winds up making her very cold and distant. Whereas Bickle is a victim of the Vietnam War that has left him an insomniac with a need for violence. "In the 1970s, the trickle of ethnic theme motion pictures became a flood, as audiences sought movies about their own immigrant roots as well as the immigrant heritages of others… the era's two most popular immigrant ethnic groups were Jewish-Americans and Italian-Americans" (Toplin, 66).

2000s: The Decade

The 2000s was a time of great complexity across the globe. September 11th, 2001 sparked an increase in terror attacks around the world, while the US struggled to regain its footing after such a surprise breach of national security. Two years later, President Bush led us into Iraq in search of 'weapons of mass destruction' and to bring to justice those who had

murdered thousands of American civilians. The US wanted retribution for the attacks on their home, and rightly so. This anger was pushed onto those in the Middle East as well as Arabic and Muslim people in the US. In the latter half of the 2000s, an economic downturn became the worst recession since the Great Depression in the 1920s. This was largely in part of banks having false confidence in people and their ability to pay back housing loans and feeling of euphoria and trust that emerged out of years of suspicion and paranoia from the terrorist attacks just a little more than five years earlier. However, once again the American people were the victims. "…lurking beneath the labyrinth of conspiracies… is something more basic: fear about that essential loss of trust" (Kirshner, 159). Deception throughout the decade is an underlying theme which leads to everyone questioning the motives of others.

The complexity of the time has led to a new kind of villain; a super-villain. "They get the plot spinning towards catastrophe; it's their lurid schemes the hero must rise to defeat" (Corliss). Now not only are the villains themselves evil and the force that must be destroyed for the hero to prosper, but they also create evil circumstances that seem beyond control of average people. By creating something larger than themselves, these new villains are stating that even if they are defeated, their cause will live on and there will always be other evil people to keep the status quo. While this is a somewhat depressing outlook, the struggle is what the viewer wants. "The audience wants to know why the villain is so malevolent and so capable. If the threat is not powerful enough, close enough to our deep shames, fears, and anxieties, we may become indifferent to it…" (Beck, 19). This is also what makes the film makers go deeper into the stories of the villain. Though many of the movies do have a solid 'bad to the bone' character, they also have at least one other person who could be considered a villain but that is because they are also a victim of circumstance. Depending on the level of

free will they have and the manipulation implemented by the driving evil force, this makes the semi-evil villain more relatable to the audience who can relate and see how easy it would be to fall from grace.

The Villains

The Departed – Carl Sullivan and Frank Costello are Irish American descendants in the mob in Boston, Massachusetts. Frank is the head of one of the mob organizations and uses his power and influence to intimidate and buy off cops in the Boston precincts in order to keep his illegal methods of business afloat. Carl was brought up in the neighborhood run by Costello. He becomes a cop to be an informant for Costello from the inside. Having been raised to serve his gang, though Carl is not directly a part of it, he helps them and kills for them. Frank is the obvious villain. Leader of a mob he has ordered hits on others, killed them himself, stolen different things and pushed drugs, intimidated and strong armed witnesses as well as cops, however he is upfront about it and knows who he is. Sullivan on the other hand, was raised to be a liar and deceiver but in the end not only played the cops, but also played Frank himself. When the time came and Sullivan thought that Frank would be caught, he killed him. The man who had raised him was brutally murdered so that Sullivan could protect his own identity as the mole. Then later on Sullivan kills again to keep this secret. However his is ultimately killed by another cop who finds out and his death is not one that feels remorseful. Because of his continuous betrayal, Sullivan is the villain you are happy to see killed.

As was true of the American psyche after the Watergate scandal in the early 70s, "…the emotional fallout from an atmosphere of perpetual paranoia so characteristic of our post 9/11 world. No one can completely trust anyone else" (Sarris). This is extremely

noticeable throughout *The Departed,* especially in one of the last scenes where there are three men killed in a matter of minutes because they don't know where the other's allegiances lie. The major twist in plot with this movie containing multiple villains is that the primary villain who we expect to be the worst (Frank), actually winds up being betrayed by the most evil of all. Sullivan has no loyalty to the man who put him on his path, set him up with a job, nice place to live. This disregard for a father figure causes everyone to turn in disgust at the sight of Matt Damon towards the end of the movie. As previously stated, in a time of suspicion, loyalty is ranked extremely high, and those who do not possess this quality will not find many supporters. It is for this reason that his death and the one who committed the murder are applauded by the audience and Mark Wahlburg's character is actually best liked after shooting Damon and ridding society of such a soulless man.

The Dark Knight – The first villain we are introduced to in this film is the Joker. He is a force to be reckoned with. With his clownish appearance, including white and red face paint in a purple suit, he seems like a joke, however he is one of the more intense villains. The Joker commits crime for the fun of it. He seems to have no external motivation. Money is not of use to him, and in one scene he torches a huge pile of it saying that the town deserves a better criminal, one who isn't motivated solely by money. Additionally, he takes pleasure in bringing out the dark side in others. He threatens and kills many in order to get Batman to become a murderer to stop the madness, however Batman resists. Harvey Dent on the other hand, is the Joker's shining jewel in the crown of fallen men. He was the District Attorney and a force against crime and the mob in Gotham, but when he was crossed by crooked police officers resulting in the death of his fiancé, the Joker only needed to supply the slightest push to send Dent over the edge. After that, Harvey kills anyone who he thinks is related to

Rachel's death by the flip of a coin. His disregard for human life makes him a worse villain because he commits acts of treachery as revenge but also not even on those directly responsible. "This embodiment of evil is almost always an adult male who in the name of revenge relentlessly pursues those he believe responsible for his disablement…" (Norden, 128). Dent evolves into the worse villain of the two because he has so much further to fall, and in the end, instead of having the city lose hope in the good; Batman takes the fall for Dent's murders so that he can remain "Gotham's white knight."

The Joker has always been the greatest villain in the Batman comics. As the winner of the Reader's Poll for Most Evil Villain in Entertainment Weekly in 2009, "Batman's greatest adversary is ruthlessly, functionally insane" ("The Top 20 Villains"). There are multiple reasons for this high rank, including the acting done by Heath Ledger. "Ledger's Joker takes on the dimension of every terrorist in our most fearful imagination. He is something of a genius with high explosives and their electronic detonators. He always seems to be one step ahead of the authorities, and, on occasion, even Batman himself" (Sarris). Cunning, sadistic, and unpredictable, the Joker doesn't seem to have ulterior motives for his treachery other than a bad childhood. The combination of all of these traits attracts the viewer because while people fear what they don't understand, they are also drawn to it. Undoubtedly the Joker provides many plot twists with his villainy and ability to turn everyone into an enemy.

Both Harvey Dent and the Joker like to point out that "everything in society is really a sick joke" (DiPaolo, 60). Dent takes the stance of being a victim of cruel circumstances even though he had devoted his life to bettering society for the masses. The Joker "is a mockery of wars in the Middle East and government corruption again resemble the manifesto of a terrorist…. (strikes out) at a modern American society that they (the villains) fin morally

repellent" (DiPaolo, 60). Acts carried out by this 'terrorist' do just that; terrorize the people.

He constantly evokes fear but more than that, turns those who were good, like Dent, to evil

because that is an ultimate win. Especially when it comes time to toying with Batman himself,

though the Joker doesn't get him to completely break his moral code, compromises must be

made and at a few points Batman becomes somewhat of a tyrant in his quest to defeat the

Joker.

Hurt Locker – For this movie there is no one, villain character. Instead, a war about fighting

in Iraq means that almost all of the people could be villains because the Iraqi terrorists are the

targets; however, it is hard to differentiate them from civilians. Most of the members of Al

Queda or other extremist groups are Muslim, speak Arabic, have dark features, and are deeply

religious. It is for the combination of these traits that they are feared, because they are not

understood, be it linguistically or moralistically. Those who are a part of this group set road

side bombs, perform suicide bombings, and also force other innocents to carry bombs for

them by force or threatening the lives of loved ones. This is one of the first instances that

there is not a particular individual who is seen as a villain but rather a large group with many

members who are considered to be evil and feared.

This film is the perfect example of what I thought more of the movies would

exemplify. Supporting my hypothesis in most ways, there is not even a true villain, but more a

group of people who Americans have been conditioned to be suspicious of and fear because

of 9/11 and other acts committed by Al Queda and Muslim extremist groups. There are also

certain physical distinctions that are utilized throughout this film. "Along with speaking

'Arabic (that) isn't very understandable,' some point to the 'beard' as indicative of Arab,

terrorist status. Appearance of facial hair seems connected in these discussions with

descriptions of 'dirty' and 'ugly' male characters" (Wilkins, 14). While the purpose of this film was to be based on a true story, the reasoning for the biased portrayal was not only to be accurate, but to also make an attempt to show some of the native people in the region in a positive light.

Lord of the Rings: Return of the King – In this third and final movie in the Lord of the Ring series, Frodo is on the last leg of his journey to take the ring back to the … Sauron, the creator of the rings and head villain throughout the series is seen as both a flaming eyeball atop a volcanic mountain and an Asian inspired warrior outfit covered head to toe with spikes and metal. He is the most daunting figure is the center of evil in this world and during this last movie is launching his final attack to conquer Middle-earth. Sauron has always been and will always be after power. He created the rings to rule the earth and then one to rule them all, with the intention of this ring being for him alone. This greed and drive to attain power through any means makes Sauron evil, but what makes him a supervillain is the fact that he will stop at nothing to get to the top. "Jim Ware opined that, although JRR Tolkien 'didn't make evil seem interesting or attractive at all' in his writings, the film may transform evil into something appealing merely because of the medium's highly visual nature" (Norden, xiv). It is also scary the way in which he is dehumanized and made to less resemble a human as opposed to a warrior ideal. In this last movie we never see what Sauron's face or have any association or connection with him to humanity, thus making him even more a villain to fear.

On the other hand, there is Smeagol. This hobbit-like creature was once what appeared to resemble a human being, though a little unusually proportioned; however once in contact with the ring, he began to change. The power that the ring possesses makes every person who comes in contact with it desire it, even to the point of fighting and killing for it. That is

exactly what Smeagol does. He kills his friend just to keep the ring for himself and then begins to develop a split personality. At multiple points in the film, he has full conversations with his two selves, and you can see one is a better adjusted to human life, while the other is solely concerned with possessing the ring. This split shows that Smeagol does have a good side to him, and therefore he is not a supervillain, but rather only half evil. Even with his attempts to recapture the ring from Frodo and Sam, Smeagol uses his better judgment and the human half of his personality to determine the right course of action.

Conclusion

By the 2000s, villainy has become increasingly complex. Anthony Hopkins, also known as Hannibal Lecter, put it best saying that "audiences are drawn toward the magnetism, toward the darkness" (Corliss). People like being able to see something that they cannot do or someone they cannot be in daily life. It gives them a chance to escape from the mundane and ordinary. Now that the villains are becoming more relatable in their complexity, this form of vicarious living is that much more intriguing to the viewer. "Contemporary screen stories, therefore, must continually be refreshed by new plot frameworks that bear the same old tried-and-true conflict vehicles. The demands of the popular culture marketplace call for new forms of danger or humiliation that can engage the sympathies of audiences and bring them along for the emotional ride…" (Beck, 19). While the story lines for the characters may be more developed with a deeper meaning, the end resultant is always the same; evil is defeated and the hero prevails.

At this point, not only are there multiple evil characters in each movie, but sometimes there is not even a defined villain, just an overall group that is denoted as evil. Each villain has his own backstory and therefore is known as more than just the antagonist. Adding to this

complexity, these characters can be mythical or evil by possession which makes them less tangible unlike the villains of the past. It gets to the point where an evil thing can be something like an all seeing eye that used to be a human (like Sauron) or a person who becomes evil and changes in every way because they become possessed by something evil (like Smeagol). When there is a set villain, there are two ways in which they are evil. Either they have always been evil, or there was a pivotal moment in their life that caused them to go from being good to evil. In *The Dark Knight*, the Joker has always been evil and we are not quite sure why, whereas Harvey Dent becomes evil after his fiancé is murdered. In *Lord of the Rings* as well, Smeagol becomes evil after having the ring and killing his friend for it, unlike Sauron who has always been evil and wants to continue with the evil deeds. Both Sullivan and Costello are evil from the beginning because not only has Costello been high up in the mob for a while, but he raised Sullivan to become an informant from the time he was a kid.

The Decades Conclusion

Given the movies that I chose which fit my original criteria, there were some similarities among the decades. Most of the villains were white male between 30 and 60 years of age. The villains were also associated with a group that was considered to be evil and therefore making it easier for the audience to come to the conclusion that this person was a "bad guy," if not for their own actions than for the actions of those within their immediate social group.

Additionally, there were a few differences between the decades. As time went on, villains became more complex. Their stories gained depth so from the 1950s where there was more emphasis on the hero and his attributes, but the 2000s, the villain has as much airtime as the hero in order to give them more backstory. This complexity also translated into the

motives which by the present day are multiple and sometimes not even truly known. At times, this can confuse the audience, on purpose, in order to make them weigh options for paths of misdeeds. The villains also become more individuated with time. Hand in hand with an elaborated story, the character starts to distance themselves from the group, not for alienation purposes, but for differentiation. They become the representation of the group as opposed to a part of it with the same traits as the other members. Particularly when you look at mobs, from Johnny "Friendly" in the 1950s to Don Vito in the 1970s, you are introduced into a more unique and personalized backstory. So while yes Don Vito is a mob boss, he also has many other roles; father, grandfather, friend, confidant, etc. Then by the time you get to the 2000s, mob bosses like Frank Costello wind up having a story of their own but also can even be better than those who are a member of their organization, like Sullivan who uses everyone and trusts no one, whereas Frank is willing to be loyal to those who are loyal to him.

From these three decades there are a few major points. First, there are ways that the villain character can be "coded," or made to resemble a stereotype, without actually being overtly racist or obvious. This makes it so that the character is foreign and different and therefore evokes a sense of fear as well as establishes themselves as the bad guy without necessarily having to look the part from a physical standpoint. Second, villains are constantly evolving to play off the priorities in society that dictate the moralist values. In the 1950s, women had their place in the home, therefore something that deviated from that was not normal and could therefore be seen as evil. Now, however, a large number of women work outside the home and since this has become the norm its representation in movies is accepted and not attention seeking. Third, the narratives have changed. As we move further into the 2000s, there is less focus on the hero and his story and more focus on the villain and what

makes him tick. The audience has become increasingly intrigued with the motives of the bad

guy.

<u>**CONCLUSION**</u>

The primary and secondary research I conducted throughout the course of the year

disproved my hypothesis. Originally, I was under the impression that not only would the films

be discriminatory against the villain through racial undertones, but also that the villain would

be radically different amongst each decade. While there are notable decade differentials, the

fact that there are not extreme racial stereotypes represented throughout my selection of

twelve films could have to do with the criteria I used in choosing those particular movies.

Therefore, with a more unbiased sampling, there are many movies that do prove my

hypothesis correct; however in the context of my particular thesis, this was not the case.

Secondary Findings

In having a basic level of knowledge about American history and the decades in which

I focused, there were very clear foreign groups the US was at war with during each time

period. In the 1950s it was the Russians and those of Asian descent, the 1970s was more about

inner turmoil but there was still hatred for the East because of the Vietnam War, and most

apparent in the 2000s, after 9/11, Middle Eastern, Arabic, and Muslim people became the

target of criticism, ridicule, and hatred. This led me to believe that whether it was blatantly

portrayed or not, the foreign involvements of the time are reflected in the movies that are

produced and released.

Additionally, it was also brought to my attention that Hollywood is at its core, a

business. Therefore, it would not be beneficial to get involved in political turmoil. The

alienation of a particular group would most likely cause monetary backlash and controversy

which would be detrimental to all those involved in production. This was a variable I had not

considered in my original hypothesis formation. "Producers may want to stay away from "message" pictures, fearing unwanted controversy…"(Toplin,ix). There are many different influences, including financial considerations, for movie portrayals. On the other hand, while some producers would want to avoid controversy, others may not be able to break away from their own feelings and stereotypes which may show through to their characters. This means the director's personal vision or the interest of an elite group that may be represented in the film is not necessarily the general public perception. In turn, this leads to the knowledge that even if there is a group targeted for a movie in a certain era, that does not mean that all Americans feel that way. There could be biases among producers or exaggeration employed for cinematic impact.

While the decade did impact certain facets of the villain's creation, such as their complexity, the actual representation of evil never strayed too far from the derived archetype. Usually the bad guy is just that, a guy. This man, often white, tends to be from Irish or Italian descent. I think the reasoning behind this is because men from these groups have always been a villain throughout cinematic history. Therefore, it is easier to be able to keep these less controversial men as the basis for a villain because it will not rock the boat. Villains are also typically someone, who the audience could associate with a real person in their own lives and therefore the entire story becomes more relatable. However, as the years grow and attention spans shorten, the villains develop into more complex individuals with backstories that draw empathy and understanding from the audience. Though this does not mean their actions are condoned, reasoning behind wrong doings makes for a more in depth plot. "The face of evil will inevitably continue to change and evolve in the years ahead.." (Norden, 192). That being said, there will always be the evil villains that, no matter how many people try to help or show

them the right path, they are bad to the core and are not looking for redemption. These

characters, now coupled with more complex villains who became evil because of

circumstances show the two ends of the spectrum of bad.

The Main Conclusion

As time passes, audiences become more sophisticated in their abilities to understand

and focus on multiple storylines throughout the course of a significantly longer film. In the

1950s, movies were black and white. There was a good guy and a bad guy. You were easily

able to tell them apart, and there was a moral dilemma in which the hero inevitably prevailed.

Then in the 1970s, there is an additional layer added to the villain composition of a

psychological and historical background to help the audience form their own construct of

these notably more complex individuals, some of whom could be both good and bad at the

same time. By the 2000s, the audience has reached the height of sophistication but that comes

with a price; the inability to focus on deep storylines and being in a constantly distracted state.

From the 1950s to the 2000s, there was a shift in emphasis from the hero to the villain. While

people have always been interested in the bad guy, this was now becoming a major

component of the film and served as the most notable talking piece.

As early as the beginning of the 20th century, it could be seen that technological

advancements were having an impact on Americans. Walter Benjamin, a philosopher and

critical theorist in the early 1900s came to the conclusion that the way the world was headed,

people were soon not going to be able to live without technology and it would be a

dominating force in their everyday lives. "Not only did he recognize the potential for a

'bloodbath' in a technology subjected to 'the lust for profit' (SW 1, 487)—amply

demonstrated in the horrors of the First World War—but he came to distinguish between a

'first' and a 'second', potentially liberatory technology, the latter making possible 'a highly productive use of the human being's self-alienation'(SW 3, 107; 113)" (Osborn). Benjamin was convinced that technology created a "crisis of experience" that diminished the impact art had on the viewer because of their inability to focus on something simpler than major technological advancements.

This modern viewer distractedness is thanks to our extremely fast-paced society. Now that so many things happen at one time in everyday life, movie goers find themselves bored with plot lines that are not at the same, if not increased, level of intrigue as their usual routine. People have become trained to watch for action. On their phones during the less flashy sequences, heads look up once there is an explosion or fight among characters. This also leads to shallow plot lines so that the viewer can have many different stories going on at once. They are being challenged to remember and focus because of the speed at which they are presented with new information in regards to certain characters. Out of this comes a very superficial viewing experience. There is not only a lack of depth with the overall story, but the message is less pertinent because viewers are unwilling to take the time to extract a complex and sophisticated ethical dilemma. Movies become more about the ride we feel for that hour and a half, rather than how many actually stays with you when it's over. There are only a handful of movies that seen once are remembered. And even of those, they need to be watched a few times in order to absorb all of the smaller details and messages that go beneath the surface.

Further Areas for Study

Though my hypothesis was proven wrong, this led to the conclusion that there are villains who are "typed" for certain qualities that are stereotypically associated with a certain minority group. This creates an argument of literal versus figurative villainy and which draws

a stronger emotional connection from the audience as well as deeper association with other groups. Therefore, even though the person themselves does not physically represent that particular group, their character traits lead the audience to make that connection and in turn judge the villain based not only off what they have done, but what others with those traits of a non-White origin have done. This would be a great future area for study considering this could explain the gang related movies that focus on the Mafia or the Irish mob. In cases like these, people who are seen as white Americans are acting in a way that could be associated with members of gangs with different racial affiliations such as Bloods, Latin Kings, or Triad. However, it could also be reflective of the mentality groups like this possess, thus proving that villainy can easily be transferrable among races when given the same situations.

Another interesting topic that arose throughout my research is that Hollywood is a business which could impact their decisions as to who is cast as the villain. Investors can control many parts of film production which may lead to a hand in the choice of actors for rolls. Additionally, it could be easier for Hollywood to use groups that are already portrayed as villains often because the mere association means they do not need to go in depth with the character development. A group that has been established as a common villain, such as the Mafia, is also less controversial simply because of the number of times that people with that connection have been deemed "bad." These are two avenues of exploration that build off of my research and could provide more insight as to the reasoning behind villain composition.

There are numerous movies as well as many critiques that come to the same conclusions and therefore influenced my initial thought on the matter. However, the findings disproved this hypothesis which must mean that among movies that were both top grossing and won best picture, there needs to be an additional level of depth to the villain. Simple

stereotypes are not going to intrigue an audience nor draw the critical acclaim that most films strive for. In order for films to receive this higher accreditation and acclaim, the film makers need to leave an impactful message with the audience. Usually, with easily constructed and stereotypically motivated villains, this complex overall takeaway cannot be attained. The villain character must go the extra mile and break rigid structures in order to have the movie attain critical and monetary success. It would be interesting to see what types of criteria the Academy uses in order to rate films and who becomes a part of it and how they run their voting process. Additionally, looking at the films that are top grossing, there may be trends in certain characters, plot lines, or messages that draw in more people and therefore increase their overall ticket sales.

The Evolution of the Villain in American Cinema From the 1950s to the Present
Senior Capstone Project for Kelsey McClure

APPENDICES

Appendix A – Final Movie Selection (By decade and director)

1950s
Ben Hur (1959) – Wiliam Wyler
- Jewish prince betrayed by Roman friend and becomes enslaved but regains his freedom to take revenge

On the Waterfront (1954) – Elia Kazan
- Ex prize fighter tries to stand up to corrupt union officials

Rear Window (1954) – Alfred Hitchcock
- Wheelchair bound photographer watches neighbors and thinks sees a murder

The Bridge on the River Kwai (1957) – David Lean
- British colonel leads group of men in Japanese POW camp to build bridge

1970s
Taxi Driver (1976) – Martin Scorsese
- Vietnam vet comes back to be taxi driver in nyc and fights crime

The Godfather (1972) – Francis Ford Coppola
- Show a head of mob and his life

A Clockwork Orange (1971) – Stanley Kubrick
- Futuristic Britian where man in jail volunteers to be experimented upon

One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest (1975) – Milos Forman
- Patients in a mental institution overthrow dictator nurse

2000s
Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King (2003) – Peter Jackson
- Weird named ppl lure other weird named ppl away from frodo and some guy while they get jewelry

The Dark Knight (2008) – Christopher Nolan
- Batman takes on the mob with law officials. Mob calls in the Joker to deal with Batman

The Departed (2006) – Martin Scorsese
- Undercover cop works to infiltrate the mob but has to deal with the rat

Hurt Locker (2009) – Kathryn Bigelow
- Elite army bomb squad deals with disarming bombs in the middle east

Appendix B – Field Notes: Movie Villain Notes

1950s Movies						
Movie	**Villain**	**Sex**	**Physical**	**Group**	**Action**	**Movie Notes**
Ben Hur	Messala	Male	Tall, brown eyes, brown hair,	Roman soldier, originally Jew, white, wealthy, good education	Turned in Ben and mother and sister, killed Jews,	Started as friend but then went Roman, eventually regrets turning in Ben and his family
Rear Window	Lars Thurwald	Male	Grey hair, glasses, blue eyes, older, tall	NYC resident, white, working class, good education	Killed wife, attempted to kill photographer by throwing him out a window	No remorse, see murder as way to solve problem,
The Bridge on the River Kwai	Colonel Saito	Male	Black hair, brown eyes, short,	Japanese soldier, lead force that runs POW camp, bilingual	Ran POW camp in Thailand, killed many American, British, Australian soldiers in WWII	Hard on prisoners but willing to compromise if serves him
On the Waterfront	Johnny "Friendly"	Male	Brown hair, brown eyes, tall,	Italian mob in NYC area, white, thug, poor education	Run the shipping hands union so controlled who got work and didn't, ordered hits, bribery, corruption	No remorse, looks to keep control even after challenged,
Decade – usually member of unfriendly group ie romans, japs, commies; all male with almost no female leads whatsoever.						
villain rep of larger group (-rear window), need cultural villain so ppl can have bad guy meet stereotype (what group bad and why), not much thought about y villain bad						

1970s Movies						
Movie	**Villain**	**Sex**	**Physical**	**Group**	**Action**	**Movie Notes**
The Godfather	Don Vito Corleone	Male	Larger older man, moustache, grey hair, brown eyes	Italian mob boss, head of one of 5 families	Order murders, buy police and politicians, lead gambling and prostitution rings, blackmail and intimidate	Sympathetic character because made out to be doing all this for his family and their name, also bc older = more sympathetic
A Clockwork Orange	Alex	Male	Blonde, blue eyes, tall, false lashes on one eye when committing crimes	British, leader of gang of 4 who terrorize people	Murder, rape, steal, assault, dream about doing all these,	Sociopath who only changes after having aversion therapy but then it is reversed after a suicide attempt, no remorse
One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest	Nurse Ratchet	Female	Green eyes, light brown hair	Nurse staff, hospital administration, white -becomes masculinized as a tool of the system	Strict rule, unfair, "likes a rigged game," uses intimidation to force obedience	If anyone steps out of line they get electro shock therapy and then Mac got a frontal lobotomy bc still unruly
Taxi Driver	Travis Bickle	Male	Brown hair, brown eyes, fit	Vietnam vet, mentally unstable, obsessive with Betsy then the 12 yr old prostitute	Kills a pimp and two whorehouse workers, originally intended to kill the Senator or open on crowd, buys many illegal guns	Scary bc possessive and unable to relate to ppl, actions seen as a hero but still sketchy man
Decade – mental disease and stereotype surrounding that,						
Individuates the group, still need stereotype from group but more about bad doings of the villain himself, more sophisticated audience = more complex, reflective of 70s (blurred lines of good and bad within war), each have a good side to them that do bad things in order to get it done, more difficult to judge what good and bad						

The Evolution of the Villain in American Cinema From the 1950s to the Present
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Movie	Villain	Sex	Physical	Group	Action	Movie Notes
2000s Movies						
Lord of the Rings: Return of the King	Gollum/Smeagle Sauron	Male	**g/s** – deformed and possessed by ring and desire to own it **s** - magical eye of Mordor, demi god, super strong	**g/s** – sub villain, half ling/hobbit **s** – led Mordor, made 1 ring to rule all others,	**g/s** – strangled friend with bare hands to get the ring, betrayed Frodo and Sam **s** – killed anyone who got in his way, led others to death,	**g/s**- split personality, no loyalty except to ring **s** – uses the ring hunters and witch king of Angmare to hunt down rings
Dark Knight	The Joker (j) Harvey Dent (h)	Male	**j**- purple suit, clown make up, greenish hair, scars **h**-blonde hair blue eyes, all American,	**j**- outcast, thief, extortionist, murderer, **h**-started DA, good person, put villains away, then vengeful, murdering,	**j**-attempt and kill many innocent people, **h**-kill cops, shoot innocent, threaten kids,	**j**- commits crime bc loves chaos, terrorist, no hidden agenda **h**- became corrupted when love taken away, seek to avenge her memory
Hurt Locker	Iranian terrorists	Male	Dark hair, dark eyes, speak Arabic, Muslim, religious	Al Qaeda or extremist groups, also those who participate in suicide bombings	Plant car bombs, ones on the side of the road under ground, suicide bombers, force other ppl to ie Beckham (kid) and other man	William James diffuses bombs, sergeant, find even after going home there is nothing he loves more, not even family
The Departed	Carl Sullivan (C) (Damon) Frank Costello (F) (Nicholson)	Male	**C**- brown hair, blue eyes, built **F** – older male, brown eyes, balding	**C** and **F** both Irish mob in Boston **C** – cop, detective **F** – mob boss, thug	**C** – informant to mob, murder, disloyal to all, kills frank **F** – murder, steal, intimidate,	**C** – kills anyone who knows his secret no matter what **F** – raised cs in order to have him in the police but betrayed
Decade – more complex with more villains and expanded villain pool by more ppl in associated group, become mythical or bc of possession, villains tend to either be evil in totality or become evil given circumstances that arise						

The Evolution of the Villain in American Cinema From the 1950s to the Present
Senior Capstone Project for Kelsey McClure

<u>Appendix C – Literature Review from Final Proposal</u>

Abstract

At this point in the process, my thesis is very much an exploratory work in which I am starting to narrow the focus until I can expand. The purpose of this project was for me to be able to determine if villains were constructed based on views of the American people at the times in which the films were created.

Objective: The villain character has evolved greatly throughout American cinema. Post World War II, the evolution is most striking by comparing films from the 1950s, 1970s, and 2000s. Focusing on four movies from the respective decades in order to compare them to one within the decade and against the other decades will provide a sample of villains for comparison.

Method: First I compiled a list of films from the perspective decades that were represented on both the Top 100 Domestic Grossing List (in America) and those that won an Oscar for best picture. Second, I chose three movies for the 2000s because there was only one that fit the primary criteria. Additionally I chose a different movie than the ones that originally qualified from both the 50s and the 70s in order to have films with a more defined villain. After these films were selected, I had them approved by both my faculty advisor and personal librarian. Third, I compiled sources that related to my project by narrowing the scope to books addressing evil, the decades which I am focusing on, and the individual movies which I am watching. Lastly, I plan to bring together what I have gathered about the villain characters from their respective movies and the literature I have compiled in order to determine if they are in fact representative of America at the time in which they were created. This literature review takes information from both the films I personally viewed, which I deem my primary

sources, as well as the books I have read on the subject, which I consider to be secondary

materials to serve as a supplement in my analysis of the films and their respective decades.

Results: In almost every movie, the villain was a white male, usually in his thirties, of either

Italian or Irish decent (if their heritage was made known throughout the course of the film).

Conclusion: My first hypothesis and direction for this project was off. I was under the

impression that not only would the films be discriminatory against the villain through racial

undertones, but also that the villain would be radically different amongst each decade. While

the decade did impact certain facets of the villain's creation, such as their complexity, the

actual representation of evil never strayed too far from the derived archetype.

Evil Throughout American Cinema

Evil seems to be determined by the deviation from the norm for actions committed by

one particular character which question the moral compass of society as a whole. "Committed

filmmakers can also use historical evildoing to reflect on the immoralities of their own time"

(Norden,17). In addition to this emphasis on morality, evil also seems to be derived from

selfishness and a need for the villain to either avenge a wrongdoing that caused them pain or

get ahead by dishonorable means. "And so, where the old gangster movie had been a dark

metaphor for the American dream turned nightmare, the new gangster movie became a

cynical study in criminal corporate capitalism" (Whitty). Changing ideas about business,

government, and personal responsibility have all contributed to the ways in which people

view evil. "William Everson has pointed out that 'the activities of the bad guys tell us far

more about the changing mores and morals of our times than a similar study of the good guys

ever do'" (Gilles, 1). Whether or not views change, the villains remain a foil to the hero,

however sometimes they are also a piece of the good guy. "…villains are connected.. in an

even more visceral and symbolic way. The vast majority of them are dark reflections…"

(DiPaolo, 59) of the hero himself. This provides the audience with a view of right and the

person who has made the good choice versus wrong and the villain who took the path of

darkness.

<u>Decade Overview</u>

The 1950s

During this decade, the country was becoming accustomed to a life no longer fighting

abroad. Films focused on living among the ruins as a result of war while not being in direct

fear of danger because of World War II being fought in other places around the world

(Deluze). However this was also the beginning of the Cold War where tensions and suspicions

were high. The villains in this decade were typically a member of a group deemed

'unfriendly,' such as the Romans for their incessant conquering, the Japanese for their attack

on Pearl Harbor, and the Communists for which the Red Scare and Cold War surrounded. An

individual villain served as a stereotyped representation from one particular group. It was

much more of a cultural bias so that the viewer could have a bad guy that was easily

recognizable. Because it was so clear given the group that the villain belonged to, there was

no real thought into why the character was bad, just that he was because no person from that

group could be good. Additionally, almost the entire cast as a whole was male, especially the

villain. There were almost no female leads whatsoever. The main takeaway from the decade is

that the villains were simple. Simple in construct, simple in evil, and simple in defeat.

The 1970s

As the years pass, the villains become more complex. Twenty years later there was a

much more sophisticated audience who understood that there was more to just the black and

white of evil which was represented in the earlier years. Now the villain, while still a member

of a stereotyped group, was much more of an individual with both a good and bad side. This

blurred line between right and wrong, good and evil, can be paralleled to the Vietnam War

which was on the minds of many Americans at the time. Confusion about which action was

the right course of action is heavily reflective in the films from this era. "The attention to

urban vigilantism in the crime conscious 1970s" (Toplin, xix) also led to movies in which the

villain may be evil, but they are doing something wrong with the right intentions. Situations

became more complex and the viewer could understand why something deemed evil may

have been necessary, therefore the villain became more humane in the way in which they

related to the audience. Mental disease and the stigma surrounding that were also instrumental

in the construct of villains, especially when having to overcome horrific circumstances that

left the person impaired. In this era, there is much more of a male dominated evil, however

the introduction of a female villain in One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest shows growth. That

being said, Nurse Ratchet is evil mainly because she is a woman with no qualities that are

deemed womanly. She is harsh and severe and controlling, all of which are traits acceptable

for a man but definitely not a woman. This could be said to be reflective of a time where

fights for equality were not just for race, but gender as well.

The 2000s

By the time we get to the present day, complexity for villains has reached an all-time

high. The pool of evil expanded so that more people were associated with a particular group

that was deemed to be evil. Multiple 'bad guys' were in every story to serve not only as a foil

to the 'good guy,' but also as a contrast to one another. There were two distinct types of

villain constructs represented in every film from this decade which I analyzed. One villain is

evil at the core. He, and it still is almost always male, has no remorse, no feelings, no human connection, and very much resembles that of a sociopath. This villain, evil in totality, is the one which the audience easily identifies as the bad guy. The second type of villain is one born of circumstance. This is a character that the audience is introduced to as a good guy but undergoes a transformation to villainy because of monumental evil that impacted his life in a way that was beyond his control. Usually it is because of some sort of tragic loss for which there seemed to be no explanation as to why it happened to that person. Very easily we can conclude that this is a parallel to the attack on the World Trade Center on September 11th, where so many innocent lives were lost because of a few bad people. Because of the experience of being under attack within our own country, there was much more uncertainty in the world contributing to an overall lack of comfort which resulted in a heightened relation with evil (Deluze). It is because of this very legitimate reason for the created villain to harbor anger and seek revenge that he is more complex than any before him. The audience can relate to the corrupt character's skewed perception of right and wrong because of the situation he finds himself in. There are also more fantasy and mythical stories where characters become evil because of a possession by the guiding destructive force. Loose ties could be drawn between this outlook and that of normal people becoming radicals and committing crimes in the name of a higher power.

<center>Decade Comparison</center>

One of the most noticeable differences throughout the decades is that as time progresses, the villains become more complex. In the 1950s, the villain was a cut and dry, easy to understand, clear 'bad guy.' He, and it was always a he, had no redeemable qualities to make him more human and did nothing to offer any contradiction to the totality of the evil

which viewers believed present in his character. However, as we progress to the 2000s, the evil in the villains has become more a thing of circumstance than a cornerstone of who the person is at the core. The villains are more complex in their reliability to the audience and therefore the ease of the viewer to deem the evil acceptable.

Themes

There are a few recurring themes that show up throughout the course of the decades. First there is the impact that war and evil in the real world have on films. Second is the use of a villain character to portray a stereotype and represent a larger group with possibly exaggerated features. Third is a much narrower theme of women villains taking on masculine characteristics because the concept of evil does not fit the typical female stereotype. Lastly, there are a number of cultural contexts that appear across the films including the discussion of race, sex, and religion as well as decade differences.

Conclusion

As time passes, everything becomes more complex. People evolved into not seeing something for just being good or bad, but instead on a spectrum of grey that, depending on the circumstance, can be acceptable. The time in which films were made undoubtedly has a significant impact on the way that the villain is portrayed. Though I was under the impression that evil would wind up being portrayed with particular races depending on the time period, this was not the case. "Film production, as a business, rarely prolonged an issue as touchy as racism…" (Toplin, 3). After viewing the twelve films, the main conclusion was growing complexity of the audience, not their personal biases, determined the representation of the villain. Turmoil occurring in the country at the time involving wars and threats to our national security also dictates how we interpret evil and also how we react to it which therefore

becomes the driving forces for how Hollywood chooses to represent the characters we see as

villains.

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