

Dear California Noir students,

I am really looking forward to our course. (For one thing, it will be wonderful for me to be able to mention names like Clark Gable or Judy Garland or Jimmy Stewart to a group who will recognize them!)

Some preliminary information:

The films:

***The Maltese Falcon* (Huston, 1941) and *Detour* (Ulmer, 1945)**
***Double Indemnity* (Wilder, 1944) and *The Blue Dahlia* (Marshall, 1946)**
***Sunset Boulevard* (Wilder, 1950) and *In a Lonely Place* (Ray, 1950)**
***Kiss Me Deadly* (Aldrich, 1955) and *D.O.A.* (Maté, 1948)**
***Vertigo* (Hitchcock, 1958) and *Out of the Past*, (Tourneur, 1947)**
***Chinatown*, (Polanski, 1974)**

I hope you will be able to watch the “required” films (BOLD) before we meet each week. I will talk a bit about the optional films for each meeting as well. They are all great noirs, but I am aware we have limited time.

When we get together, I will be showing you a number of clips to organize our conversations and help us focus in on what our movies are trying to make us **believe**, and **feel** about political issues, about social relations, about moral issues etc., as well as **how** they do that—by using sound and images and edits, faces and gestures. And importantly, how the geographical setting, the often “background” meanings associated with LA, Hollywood, San Francisco shape the experience of the movie.

The novels:

I will ask you to read (at least some of) *The Big Sleep* by Raymond Chandler **OR** *The Day of the Locust* by Nathanael West. The idea is to read enough of Chandler to get a sense of the language that he created—his fusion of slang, cynicism and lyricism. (Robert Parker called Chandler’s language “the American idiom of disillusionment.”)

Or, in the case of West’s *Day of the Locust*, I want us to think about West’s “tone,”—his hallucinatory blend of realism and surrealism as well as his use of black humor. (West’s novel has been called “a prophetic nightmare of the American Dream Factory.”)

We will probably refer to Chandler’s language throughout the course. We will focus on West in Week Three (as a counterpart to *Sunset Blvd*) and in the rest of the course we will think about the way both novels were comments on the American Dream.

You will need to find copies of these on your own. They are both widely available, used and in digital formats. Please let me know if you have any trouble finding them. I will help.

The short stories:

Here is my latest list. I am aware we may not have time to talk about them. But, I will make copies of all these stories available on your OLLI Dashboard, and as we get deeper in the materials, we can decide together if we want to work any of them into our conversations.

Dashiell Hammett, "Fly Paper," 1929

James M. Cain, "Dead Man," 1936

Leigh Brackett, "I Feel Bad Killing You," 1944

Ross MacDonald, "Find the Woman," 1946

Hank Searls, "Let's All Die Together," 1950

Mike Hammer, "The Screen Test of Mickey Spillane," 1955

Helen Nielson, "A Piece of Ground," 1957