FLM 34 — Film Noir: The Femme Fatale in 1940s and 1950s Film
Instructor: Mick LaSalle

Course Summary:

One of the major messages of film noir is that sex can kill you . . . but it might be worth it anyway. This notion, cynical and yet naïvely romantic, recedes and returns in American life.

By the end of this class, students will not only have seen the signature noir films centering on evil or destructive women, but they will understand how these films fit into the history of women on screen and the social history of the United States in the 20th century.

The point is that these films are fun, but they didn’t come out of nowhere, and there weren’t symptoms of nothing. They are fun, but they represented a combination of conflicting impulses and aspirations -- as expressions of power and fantasy for both women and men, but also of a social pathology.

Having taken this course, students will be familiar with the key players and films of the era, but will also be able to take their knowledge and find greater satisfaction and substance in the noir and women’s films they see thereafter.

Syllabus (Subject to Change):


Week Two: Jane Greer

Week Three: Joan Bennett

Week Four: Lizabeth Scott

Week Five: Claire Trevor

Week Six: Jean Gillie and Ann Savage

Week Seven: French Noir (noir without censorship): Mylene Demongeot
Week Eight: Rita Hayworth

Week Nine: Late film noir

Week Ten: Noir revival of the 1980s and 1990s and the AIDS connection