

## Five Good Reasons to Show *Great Guy* (1936) in Our U.S. History and American Studies Classes (and the Challenges We'll Face)

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ONE OF THE MOST VERSATILE and multi-faceted films that an educator can use to illustrate urban America in the 1930s is *Great Guy*, a relatively obscure film from 1936 directed by John G. Blystone and starring James Cagney and Mae Clarke.<sup>1</sup> There are some simple practical considerations that make the film such a good fit for an American history or American Studies class.<sup>2</sup> It is only one hour and twelve minutes long (which makes it ideal especially for a Tuesday/Thursday class). It is available for free from *Entertainment Magazine* online and can be easily shown from their website in any smart classroom.<sup>3</sup> The film features some major actors from Hollywood's Golden Age. The story is direct, easy to follow, and entertaining. Beyond these details, though, this film offers a rich portrayal of America in the 1930s and—though a fictional story—is a fantastic historical source. Furthermore, because the film is set during a period of economic crisis and directly addresses cultural conflict over gender, immigration, and the role of government in American citizens' lives among its many themes, the issues raised in this film are also relevant to current American policy debates and cultural concerns and will resonate with our students and help them contextualize their own world within a greater historical narrative.

## Film Synopsis

Although the particular city in which the film is set is not named, the story appears to take place in New York City in the 1930s. Johnny Cave, a civil servant who used to be a well-known boxer, is promoted to Chief Deputy of the Department of Weights and Measures after his boss becomes the victim of attempted murder by the mob. The mob is in league with several corrupt public officials. Together, the gangsters and the municipal administration are determined to rob the average American consumer in any way possible. Johnny, who is equally determined to stop their crooked practices, is young, likeable, and strictly honest. As soon as he assumes his new position, he very aggressively pursues grocers and gas station owners who are overcharging their customers. In one scene, while Johnny is training new agents, he delivers a moving and impassioned speech in which he explains that it is their job to protect the American housewife. He tells his trainees that “40% of the American income is spent on food, if people are cheated out of only 5%, that adds up to the national war debt.” Johnny is dedicated to protecting the American consumer (particularly women) from dishonest retailers by fining the business owners and exposing all forms of fraud that, he discovers, leads all the way to the mayor’s office. Johnny fights the good fight in spite of repeated threats and violence against him, attempts to frame him for illegal behavior, and a break up with his girlfriend, Janet Henry, who works for the aptly named Abel Canning, a dishonest businessman who controls City Hall. Johnny is also willing to use violence himself and frequently gets into fist fights with nearly every male character. With Janet’s help, Johnny is finally able to have the corrupt city officials, retailers, and mobsters arrested. Johnny cleans up the city and is recognized as a local hero. Then he and Janet, who have been worried about their savings, get married, furnish a home, and live a modest version of the American Dream.

There are five main reasons that I think this film is an excellent pedagogical tool.

### **Reason One: An Excellent Illustration of America in the 1930s**

First, *Great Guy* beautifully illustrates many of the tumultuous changes and tensions that were occurring in America in the 1930s with great complexity and depth. The film touches on the themes of social reform, urbanization, urban corruption, Prohibition, the New Woman, the Great Depression, the New Deal, and the shifts in consumer culture during the 1920s and 1930s. During class discussion, this film is an excellent capstone for summarizing the history lessons from the 1890s through the

1930s as well as a great jumping off point for classroom discussion about the New Deal.

In class discussion, we began examining social reform by going back to the Progressives and drawing parallels between the Panic of 1893 and the subsequent reforming movements that focused on social welfare, moral improvement, and economic revival. One prominent characteristic of the Progressive Era was the active eradication of immoral behavior and dishonest dealings that often precipitated the formation of antivice squads by both municipal and private reformers who had been created (or had taken it upon themselves) to regulate individual behavior and to expose corruption in state and city governments.<sup>4</sup> During the Progressive Era, President Roosevelt's Square Deal was famous for trust-busting, railroad regulation, and other strict legislation that was designed to protect consumers (e.g., the Sherman Antitrust Act of 1890 and Meat Inspection Act of 1906) which also expanded the role of the federal government in economic regulation.<sup>5</sup> Throughout his own presidential terms, Woodrow Wilson supported and expanded many of these policies, thus perpetuating a federal government that was noticeably involved in its citizens' daily lives through its various offices and officials.<sup>6</sup>

A generation later, the heroes of *Great Guy* have similar concerns and interests and are also faced with national economic uncertainty. Showing a film set in 1936 helps our students see the continuity in American history and to integrate each lecture and topic in a way that could truly stick. They can see that many of the issues that federal and state governments faced in the late nineteenth century were still unresolved and at the center of public debate forty years later. Because I have found that contextualization and synthesis are a challenge for students in these large sweeping survey courses, a tool like this film can really help our students piece together the larger narratives within American history. Classroom discussion can also turn toward observations of how government and economic policies function in the United States today to further help our students develop their historical memory in their understanding of current policy development.

*Great Guy* also opens up opportunities to analyze the topic of urbanization as viewers see how the film's characters have adjusted to living in a large city. There are some humorous and touching examples of New Yorkers experiencing the anonymity of walking down crowded streets, sharing tables in crowded cafeterias, and generally negotiating the reality of how disconnected Americans had become from one another by the 1930s.<sup>7</sup> For example, in one scene, Johnny has been framed by the mob and placed at the scene of a car accident with an empty bottle of liquor in his pocket. The crowd that gathers around his overturned car and bruised

body reacts in disgust and moral outrage to his perceived crime and readily assumes he is guilty of drunk driving. No one offers him help. Johnny barely notices and does not seem phased by these strangers' indifference. Johnny is modern, independent, and accustomed to taking care of himself rather than seeking out the assistance or compassion of strangers.

His reaction can be contrasted to an earlier scene in which Aloysius, Johnny's partner who has recently arrived in America from rural Ireland, eats lunch in a cafeteria. Aloysius tries desperately to engage the strangers around him in conversation, but is repeatedly rudely rebuffed. Aloysius takes their indifference personally and is disappointed by their preference to eat alone. The two characters are exhibiting different stages of adaptation to big city life. Demographic shifts and patterns of social change were still solidifying themselves in early twentieth-century America and produced a wide range of expectations and behaviors in urban public spaces. It is important for our students, who live in a very different age, to see that American culture is constantly evolving and to witness the points at which aspects of current culture emerged.<sup>8</sup>

This film also provides students with an opportunity to discuss Prohibition and alcohol in Americans' lives. In 1936, Americans were still feeling the aftereffects of Prohibition, which had just been repealed in 1933. *Great Guy* presents a somewhat ambivalent treatment of alcohol and again opens up an opportunity for discussion. For example, another major character is one of Johnny's former boxing friends, Pete Reilly, a prominent bootlegger. Pete appears to still be entangled with the mob and is about to leave the country. Near the end of the film, he hosts a large party that is the site of the story's dénouement. Pete pushes cocktails on his friends and makes constant remarks about how generous he is with his large selection of alcohol and about how much fun his guests will have if they drink a great deal. Although we never really see any of the party guests drinking (presumably because of the Hays Code), their elegant glasses and exotic drinks communicate a sense of glamour and fun and success.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, however, Pete is a thug and of questionable moral character. Pete Reilly does, however, appear to redeem his Prohibition Era behavior at the end of the film, when he helps Janet and Johnny catch the corrupt city officials with whom he once trafficked. Students are intrigued by Prohibition and the reactions it received from the American public. Pete Reilly's party is a wonderful way to help students see an example of its effects and to also underscore the moral lessons they are meant to take from this film.

Best of all, *Great Guy* portrays the Great Depression in a way that is meaningful for our students. *Great Guy* depicts the story of professional young people who are starting out in their careers and who are worried

about money. They live in a city and have their own apartments and their own interests. Johnny and Janet are just beginning to learn how to save their money, balance their checkbooks, and live on their wages. Johnny and Janet are characters to whom our students can relate, which may help make the Depression appear more real to them. In addition to showing students photographs of businessmen selling apples, the moving portraits by Walker Evans, and selected scenes from the *Grapes of Wrath*, this film complements our repertoire of images about the Depression and adds another layer to our students' education. Also, students will see that finances and financial institutions in America have changed, and that it was during the 1920s and 1930s that a program such as the installment payment plan became popular.<sup>10</sup>

Furthermore, because the Department of Weights and Measures is depicted so virtuously and Johnny Cave depicted so heroically, students are given examples of government offices that are sincerely committed to serving the American public and addressing their financial concerns. Johnny Cave's dauntless integrity and his genuine connection to his position at the Department of Weights and Measures clearly make him the good guy in this tale.<sup>11</sup> He is a public servant who resists the temptation to use his position for his own personal gain, and dedicates himself—often at great personal risk—to protecting the American public. In short, he is a hero. His character allows us to revisit discussion of Teapot Dome and Tammany Hall and to balance those lessons by assisting our students in finding examples of incorrupt civil servants, who faithfully perform their jobs to make a great difference by helping the public, and who are not fictional.

Finally, *Great Guy* positions the class to talk about the New Deal. In 1936, when this film was released, Roosevelt had been in office for four years and the New Deal was well underway. The federal government had formed several agencies dedicated to providing relief and reform in the wake of the Great Depression. This film provides our students with examples of how those agencies could have operated and also shows us how some of the aims and principles of the New Deal are with us still today. As the Chief Deputy of Weights and Measures, Johnny Cave plays one of these New Deal type agents. Since 1901, when the U.S. Department of Commerce created the National Bureau of Standards, federal, state, and municipal governments have worked to regulate and standardize the units by which consumer items are sold. These offices are still in operation and employ thousands of Americans today. Several of the New Deal's programs, including the Securities Act of 1933 and the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933, were based on similar principles and established precedents that bolstered the authority of local agencies such as bureaus of weights and measure.<sup>12</sup> Today, most counties and cities have Departments

of Weights and Measures that are often part of the Office of Consumer Affairs. These Departments typically regulate weights and measures through their inspections of scales and other measuring devices, their quality tests of products, and their education programs.

### **Reason Two: An Opportunity to Discuss Gender Roles**

The second reason that I find this film so valuable is that it allows our students to talk about gender in a meaningful way. The complex ways that gender functions in this story are fascinating. Mae Clarke's character, Janet Henry, is perhaps one of the most interesting as she is faced with the most challenges and changes throughout the film. Janet is an independent and strong single woman. She has gone to business college and now supports herself as the private secretary to the rich and powerful philanthropist, Abel Canning. She has placed herself in charge of Johnny Cave's bank account and manages the couple's savings with great attention. She is informed, opinionated, and confident.

Janet is also very loyal and is initially convinced that her boss, for whom she has worked for many years, is a decent, caring, upstanding citizen. In the midst of Johnny's investigations, he discovers that Abel Canning has, in fact, bribed every city official, has been cheating all his customers—including an orphanage to which he ships dry goods—and has aligned himself with the criminal Marty Kavanaugh and his gang. When Johnny tells Janet that her boss is a crook, he asks her to choose between the two men she admires and loves the most. Her loyalty is put to the test, and she has to decide whether she will trust her years of experience working for Mr. Canning (and accessing his private files) or whether she will support her boyfriend.

Janet decides to break off her engagement to Johnny and to stand behind her employer. This seems to be a bold move for a young woman living in the 1930s. She appears to have such faith in herself and her professional prospects that she chooses not to marry if that marriage requires her to give up her job or to doubt herself. Janet tells Johnny that she loves him, but that she will get over her feelings. She has made the practical decision of choosing her career over her relationship, a choice that many of our students believe would have been impossible for a young woman at that time. Surely, she is partly shaped by the facts of the Depression and understands that she needs to guarantee a steady income for herself if she is to survive. Yet she is probably also motivated by her strong sense of self and the pride that she takes in supporting herself. Her practicality outweighs her sentimental and romantic self. Janet is never portrayed as silent or conventionally feminine in any way. In the only scene in which

the two discuss their impending wedding, she keeps the conversation brief and to the point. She is never starry eyed or silly.

Janet Henry is the New Woman. The New Woman emerged at the *fin de siècle* as a reaction against the Victorian Cult of Domesticity and became increasingly visible in the era between the World Wars.<sup>13</sup> The New Woman was an important agent of political and social change in the early twentieth century as she advocated for universal suffrage, for equal access to the workplace, and a higher degree of personal freedom. Suffragists, Progressive activists, and flappers were all versions of the New Woman, exploring women's potential new roles in American society in the upcoming century. The New Woman demonstrated that she could operate competently in public arenas that had been traditionally masculinized and that she could contribute to the public interest.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, however, the New Woman resisted surrendering her femininity, and emerged with a new approach to gender expectations and limitations.<sup>15</sup>

Janet possesses the most common characteristics of the New Woman. She is educated, financially independent, indifferent to marriage and domesticity, assertive, poised, and heavily involved in decision making.<sup>16</sup> Unlike the flappers of the 1920s, however, she does not broadcast her rebellion by being overtly sexual, boyishly or scantily dressed, nor does she appear to drink or smoke.<sup>17</sup> Janet is a serious version of the New Woman, who, in the 1930s, is aware of how important self-reliance and financial stability truly is.<sup>18</sup> Her character has the potential to shock our students and to force them to revisit their assumptions about femininity, women's roles in American history, and their assumptions about social progress.

Masculinity is another great topic about which this film will spark discussion. James Cagney's character of Johnny Cave exhibits many paradoxes. Although a professional civil servant, Johnny Cave still comes across as a Hollywood tough guy. He is 5' 6" tall, dimpled, well-groomed, and on the right side of the law, but he still gets into fights in almost every scene. He is a representative of the city government, yet he feels that it is acceptable to push butchers around, to punch out gas station attendants, and to destroy another man's apartment in a fight with the evil Marty Kavanaugh. One would think that his pugnacious behavior is incongruent with the character's position and public image. Also, there is no mention of his education or training for his position, yet everyone in the film reminds us that he used to be a prizefighter before he took his current job. There is a tendency to make him conventionally masculine in the 1930s Hollywood sense and to have him be competent in the ways that Janet is not, perhaps so that the two complement each other.

*Great Guy* is an unusual film for Cagney in many ways.<sup>19</sup> Although he is still cast as a streetwise tough guy, he is indisputably good, moral, and



upright. This character does not glamorize crime as Cagney's roles had in so many of his other films.<sup>20</sup> He does not exhibit the usual chauvinist and demeaning behavior to women that he so famously demonstrated when he smashed a grapefruit into Mae Clarke's face in *Public Enemy* (1931). Nevertheless, Cagney is still restricted by the established tropes of conventional masculinity and finds himself throwing punches, lobbing insults, and glowering at his enemies, but he has a more playful air about him. His performance can be read as one that is self-aware and pokes some fun at his limitations, but still never dares stray from equating strength and conviction with physical prowess and power.

### **Reason Three: A Look at (Irish) Immigrants in New York City**

*Great Guy* gives some insight into the experience of immigrants, particularly of the Irish in New York City.<sup>21</sup> Most of the core characters are Irish. Johnny Cave, whose nickname is "Red," is Irish of course, as is Aloysius, his sidekick; Pete Reilly, the former boxer turned bootlegger; Mrs. Ogilvie, the matron of the city orphanage who is a victim of corruption; Captain Hanlon, the police chief; and Marty Kavanaugh, the villain who seems to be a lot like Boss Tweed. The characters are constantly talking and joking about being Irish and enjoy flinging affectionate insults based on stereotypes at each other. Janet Henry, who is not Irish, often blames Johnny's temper on his heritage. The comical and serious stereotyping and characterizations in this film also help students see the discursive experience of Irish immigrants in New York City. Thus, this film allows students to engage in discussion about identity and ethnicity and to grasp the performative aspects of both.<sup>22</sup>

James Cagney himself is a great example of the Irish immigrant experience, appearing to achieve the American Dream by rising up above his working-class roots to become rich and famous.<sup>23</sup> Cagney was born in July 1899 into a poor Irish-American family on New York's Lower East Side.<sup>24</sup> He began working odd jobs all over the city as a young child and was able to attend only one semester at Columbia College. His acting career began almost accidentally as he began occasionally dancing in various vaudeville shows which paid well and helped him support his widowed mother and four surviving siblings. While dancing on the vaudeville circuit, he met Al Jolson who liked Cagney and persuaded Warner Brothers to offer him a movie contract. For the next fifty-one years, Cagney would make most of his films with Warner Brothers. (*Great Guy* is one of the few films made without Warner; it was produced by Grand National Studios.) Throughout his career, during which he made seventy-three films, Cagney was frequently cast for his Irish identity, playing characters with last names such as O'Hara and O'Toole.



Again, the issue of immigration is also relevant to American political discourse and debate today, and its portrayal in this film provides students with a greater sense of how the issue has evolved over the centuries.

#### **Reason Four: A Fantastic Example of Golden Age Hollywood Film**

Fourth, *Great Guy* allows us to discuss the Golden Age of Hollywood (1927-1948). In my United States II survey course, I spend a day on the history of Hollywood and popular culture in general.<sup>25</sup> One of the purposes of this lecture is to discuss the film industry's treatment of the Great Depression. We discuss some of the best-known films about the Depression: *Skyscraper Souls* (1932), *Modern Times* (1936), *Of Mice and Men* (1939), and *Grapes of Wrath* (1940), which generally depict the era as experiencing a crisis of faith in the American Dream. Often, the bad guys go unpunished, the individual consumer and laborer are vulnerable and exploited, there are no trustworthy institutions to protect the common people, and corruption is rampant. *Great Guy* problematizes these generalizations and paints a richer, more complex image of the Depression, of the film industry, and of their places in Americans' lives.

Also, *Great Guy* exposes students to some of the great celebrities of the age. James Cagney (1899-1986) is certainly exemplary of the stars of the Golden Age of Hollywood. He was nominated two times for an Academy Award for Best Actor for *Angels with Dirty Faces* (1938) and *Love Me or Leave Me* (1955) and won the award in 1942 for *Yankee Doodle Dandy*. Recently, he was ranked the eighth actor on the "50 Greatest American Screen Legends" list by the American Film Institute.<sup>26</sup> Yet many of our students have, for the most part, never heard of James Cagney. Mae Clarke (1910-1992) is another Golden Age of Hollywood legend. She performed in 108 films between 1929 and 1970. She had starred with Cagney in two prior films—*Public Enemy* (1931) and *Lady Killer* (1933). Clarke was a great star in the early 1930s and embodies much of the glamour and tragedy of these early leading ladies (she went through three messy divorces and eventually died of cancer) and the It Girls that emerged in the 1920s. Finally, director John G. Blystone (1892-1938) is also no longer a household name, although he directed 100 films between 1915 and 1938. Over half of his films were made during the Silent Film Era (1903-1927), and *Great Guy* was one of the last of his career.

#### **Reason Five: An Intellectual Challenge for Our Students**

The fifth reason that I like using this film is that it challenges my students. This film elicited great student response in my classroom. One

of the most rewarding aspects of using this film is that it exposes our iGeneration students to Golden Age films—often for the first time—and opens up a whole new world to them in which older film technology and newer technology come together in unexpected ways.<sup>27</sup> Also, during the screening, our students must actively watch this film and will consequently start to learn how to view film. There are no special effects, no quick cuts, no soundtracks to provide cues. The film’s focus is on the narrative and on telling a good story. Furthermore, because this film is so packed and contains so many lessons for them to observe and analyze, they must remain engaged throughout the entire seventy-two minutes, which can be a real challenge for some.

### **The Challenges We’ll Face Showing this Film**

There are also tremendous challenges for faculty in using this film. There were three main obstacles that I encountered. First, many of my students had no interest in watching a film in black and white. They do not generally watch older films and are impatient with the quality of the picture and sound and the seemingly limited effects with which the story is told. Many of them said that the film was too “quiet” because it lacked a rousing soundtrack, spectacular effects, and dramatic displays of emotion. Second, the supporting character, Aloysius, is very distracting. His character is not terribly important and is placed there mainly for comic relief. Part of Aloysius’s gag is that he is always talking—and always talking blarney. Not only are his ramblings deliberately incoherent and irrelevant, his character has an impenetrable accent and often mumbles. My students were frustrated with how difficult it was to understand him and overemphasized his importance in the story. Third, the humor is problematic. This film is, in many ways, a comedy. The dialogue is filled with the fast-talking witty repartee that characterizes so many Golden Age films and for which Cagney was famous. To a twenty-first-century audience, the dialogue can be too fast for them to follow, thus rendering the humor less accessible and often detracting. Unfortunately, many of the dated gags and slang terms cause our students to take the film less seriously and see it as silly and sophomoric.

### **Suggested Strategies for Meeting these Challenges**

In order to meet these challenges, before showing *Great Guy* in an undergraduate class, one must contextualize it for them. I have three suggestions. First, it helps to strategize the schedule of lectures and class topics. I screened *Great Guy* immediately after my lecture on the Golden

Age of Hollywood and my lecture on the Great Depression. I believe that it was a great help for them to have an introduction to the standards and practices of the Silent Era and the Golden Age before they were introduced to what they reported was their first viewing of a black and white film. We also watched a few brief clips of silent films during the Golden Age lecture, which also prepared them for classic films. Prior to this class meeting, we had already discussed urbanization, immigration, and the Harlem Renaissance, which had made them familiar with the landscape and neighborhoods of New York City. I felt that my students had a solid background before viewing this film.

Second, I recommend handing out or posting a sheet with a brief plot synopsis and character description during the class meeting before screening the film or offering this information on the course website. The list of characters can also include pictures of the actors so that students would not be distracted by simply trying to keep the characters straight. I explained to them that they did not have to hear every word that Aloysius said and that they had to understand that he was generally there to provide one example of an Irish stereotype. Once they understood what his stereotype was supposed to be, they could shift their attention away from him and concentrate on the other components of the story.

Third, before the screening of the film, I recommend passing out another sheet with some basic and very general study guide questions designed to keep students paying attention to the theme of the story and prevent them from being distracted by and bogged down in ancillary details.<sup>28</sup> Usually, I am wary of presenting students with a list of questions for fear that these will limit their focus to just the stated topics and prevent them from formulating their own ideas. So, I suggest making the study guide voluntary and asking those interested in receiving one to request by raising their hands. Faculty with access to software such as TurningPoint will find ample opportunities to poll students as they watch the film, which helps to maintain their attention as well.

Still, this film is often a tough sell—in spite of its great value. Nonetheless, I want to encourage all History and American Studies faculty to persist in exposing our students to classic films, to the great stars of the Golden Age, and also to the more obscure films. *Great Guy* is not one of Cagney's most well-known films.<sup>29</sup> None of my colleagues had ever heard of it, and frankly, neither had I until I found it in a dollar DVD bin in a drugstore. Today, current technology has made it easy for films to be cheaply remastered, copied, and distributed to the public. Lost gems like this one are suddenly accessible and affordable, and in the case of *Great Guy* and many others, available free online. Because Hollywood movies are often such a large part of our students' lives, I think that they

appreciate using them in the classroom and are open to learning from film screenings. *Great Guy* will surprise many of our students and will generate a lively discussion that helps tie many of our lecture and discussion topics together. Our students will learn something new and valuable from watching this film.

## Notes

An earlier version of this paper was presented at the National Technology and Social Sciences Conference in April 2008. I am grateful to Charles Martin-Stanley, moderator, and all fellow panelists and attendees for their feedback and support. I am also grateful to the Faculty Development and Recognition Committee and to the College of Arts and Sciences at Western Connecticut State University for their funding and support.

1. *Great Guy* (1936), Grand National Studios, directed by John G. Blystone, written by James Edward Grant, starring James Cagney and Mae Clarke, 72 minutes, B&W, DVD, 2000.

2. I showed this film in an undergraduate United States II history course while I was a visiting assistant professor at Naugatuck Valley Community College during the 2005-2006 academic year.

3. *Great Guy* is available online at <<http://emol.org/movies/greatguy/>> and is also on DVD from multiple distributors.

4. Judith Walkowitz, "The Politics of Prostitution," *Signs* 6, no. 1 (Autumn 1980): 123-135; Mark H. Haller, "Urban Crime and Criminal Justice: The Chicago Case," *The Journal of American History* 57, no. 3 (December 1970): 619-635; George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 160-161.

5. Edward L. Glaeser and Andrei Shleifer, "The Rise of the Regulatory State," *Journal of Economic Literature* 41, no. 2 (June 2003): 401-425.

6. Wilson faced many critics during his term, and his policies sparked much discussion. During Roosevelt's New Deal, many of these discussions were revisited and revived with frequent comparison between the two. For example, see William F. Herrin, "Government Regulation of Railways," *California Law Review* 2, no. 2 (January 1914): 87-103 and Otto Kahn-Freund, "The Report of the Transport Advisory Council on the Square Deal Dispute," *The Modern Law Review* 3, no. 2 (October 1939): 136-149.

7. Gunter Barth, *City People: The Rise of Modern City Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 1980), 7; Wendy Gamber, "Away from Home: Middle-Class Boarders in the Nineteenth-Century City," *Journal of Urban Studies* 31, no. 3 (March 2005): 289-305. For an interesting counterargument demonstrating how cities promoted a sense of community and civitas, see Daniel J. Monti Jr., *The American City: A Social and Cultural History* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Books, 1999).

8. Discussion can easily and effectively include a revisitation of or introduction to the great literary writers of the age who were dealing with similar portrayals of urbanization as *Great Guy*. One could begin with the famous works of the nineteenth century:

Jacob Riis, *How the Other Half Lives* (1891); Stephen Crane, *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (1893); and/or Lincoln Steffens, *The Shame of Our Cities* (1904). Then turning to the 1930s, one could supply extracts from Lewis Mumford which can be compared and contrasted to articles such as Alfred E. Smith's "I Have 7,000,000 Neighbors" (1933). *Great Guy* clearly has much to offer an urban studies class, as well.

9. "Film Censorship: An Administrative Analysis," *Columbia Law Review* 39, no. 8 (December 1939): 1383-1405.

10. Martha L. Olney, "Credit as a Production-Smoothing Device: The Case of Automobiles, 1913-1938," *The Journal of Economic History* 49, no. 2 (June 1989): 377-391.

11. For discussion of a 1940 court case involving the New Jersey Department of Weights and Measures, see "Constitutional Law, Interstate Commerce. State Regulation of 'Bootleg' Coal," *Columbia Law Review* 41, no. 1 (January 1941): 122-125.

12. In Connecticut, for example, the Department of Consumer Protection website includes clear and lengthy explanations of its general statutes of weights and measures that are available to the public (chapter 750-753). The Department's two mottos on its homepage are "Regulate. License. Monitor. Protect." and "Ensuring a fair marketplace and safe products and services for consumers." Available at <<http://www.ct.gov/dcp>>.

13. See Theodore Dreiser's *A Gallery of Women* (1929).

14. Arnaldo Testi, "The Gender of Reform Politics: Theodore Roosevelt and the Culture of Masculinity," *Journal of American History* 81, no. 4 (March 1995): 1509-1533.

15. Daniel J. Walkowitz, "The Making of a Feminine Professional Identity: Social Workers in the 1920s," *American Historical Review* 95, no. 4 (October 1990): 1051-1075.

16. Lynn D. Gordon, "The Gibson Girl Goes to College: Popular Culture and Women's Education in the Progressive Era, 1890-1920," *American Quarterly* 39, no. 2 (Summer 1987): 211-230.

17. Marsha Orgeron, "Making 'It' in Hollywood: Clara Bow, Fandom, and Consumer Culture," *Cinema Journal* 42, no. 3 (Summer 2003): 76-97.

18. Elaine S Abelson's fascinating study of the gendering of homelessness during the Great Depression notes that in "the face of overwhelming economic crisis, the 'new woman' of the 1920s easily slipped out of sight." Perhaps Janet Henry's competent and resilient character was designed to ease public fears of seeing unemployed mothers and widows living on the streets. Elaine S Abelman, "'Women Who Have No Men to Work for Them': Gender and Homeless in the Great Depression, 1930-1934," *Feminist Studies* 29, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 104-127.

19. Ron Briley, "Reel History: U.S. History, 1932-1972, as Viewed through the Lens of Hollywood," *The History Teacher* 23, no. 3 (May 1990): 215-236.

20. Martha P. Nochimson argues that it was Cagney's physique that made him so effective when cast as a gangster. "The attractions of his lithe, feline grace set him apart from the wooden, if morally correct, bodies of the good men." Martha P. Nochimson, "Whaddaya Lookin' At? Re-reading the Gangster Genre through *The Sopranos*," *Film Quarterly* 56, no. 2 (Winter-Spring 2003): 2-13. In *Great Guy*, Cagney's athleticism again sets him apart—this time from the bad guys, who lack his vigor and youth and optimism.

21. In fact, in the U.K., this film was released under the title *Pluck of the Irish*.

22. Catherine Foley, "Perceptions of Irish Step Dance: National, Global, and Local," *Dance Research Journal* 33, no. 1 (Summer 2001): 34-45.

23. In an article published in 1934, Paul G. Cressey, the Associate Director of Motion Picture Study at New York University, lists James Cagney (among Edward G Robinson, Harold Lloyd, Tom Mix, Hoot Gibson, and George Raft) as a great public figure whose prestige, according to data submitted by the young men participating in a study at NYU,

far exceeds those of educational, social, or political leaders. Paul G. Cressey, "The Motion Picture as Informal Education," *Journal of Education* 7, no. 8 (April 1934): 504-515.

24. James Cagney was born in America at a time when the Irish were emigrating in great numbers. Between 1820 and 1920, five million Irish came to America. In the 1890s, 40% of Irish people were living outside of Ireland. Kevin Kenny, "Diaspora and Comparison: The Global Irish as a Case Study," *Journal of American History* 90, no. 1 (June 2003): 134-162.

25. See Appendix I for a partial schedule of lecture topics in United States History II.

26. The AFI offers a PDF version of the list at <<http://connect.afi.com/site/DocServer/stars50.pdf?docID=262>>.

27. The iGeneration includes students who were born after 1985 and who cannot remember a time before the Internet, home computers, home video games, etc. They have lived a life steeped in technology and in the type of technology that claims to promote interaction and greater means of communication and connection, while at the same time replacing physical human interaction with virtual communities and indirect communication. The iGeneration is used to receiving its information in bulleted soundbites and brief talking points and in informal arenas (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, blogs, chatrooms, etc.) and has developed its own perceptions on grammar and spelling.

28. For sample study guide questions, please see Appendix II.

29. His acting career spanned from 1930 until 1984. *Great Guy* was James Cagney's thirtieth major film. By 1936, he was well-known, having already starred in *The Public Enemy* (1931) (also with Mae Clarke) and *Hard to Handle* (1933).

## Appendix I: Partial Schedule of Lecture Topics

### U.S. History II, Naugatuck Valley Community College

T	Feb. 7	Urbanization
T	Feb. 14	Populism
T	Feb. 28	Progressivism
Th	Mar. 2	Progressivism and Politics
T	Mar. 7	Immigration
Th	Mar. 9	World War I
T	Mar. 14	Cultural Changes during World War I
Th	Mar. 16	Politics in the 1920s
T	Mar. 28	The Roaring Twenties
Th	Mar. 30	The Harlem Renaissance
T	Apr. 4	The Golden Age of Hollywood
Th	Apr. 6	The Great Depression
T	Apr. 11	The <i>Great Guy</i>
Th	Apr. 13	Discussion of the film and introduction to the New Deal

## Appendix II: Study Guide Question Examples

### *Great Guy* Questions

How does this film present the Great Depression?

How does this film deal with issues of gender?

What are the main ethnic groups presented in this film?

How do the topics with which the characters are concerned connect to previous periods we have studied (Progressivism, urbanization, immigration, the Roaring Twenties)?

What is the main message of the film?

What role do government offices play?

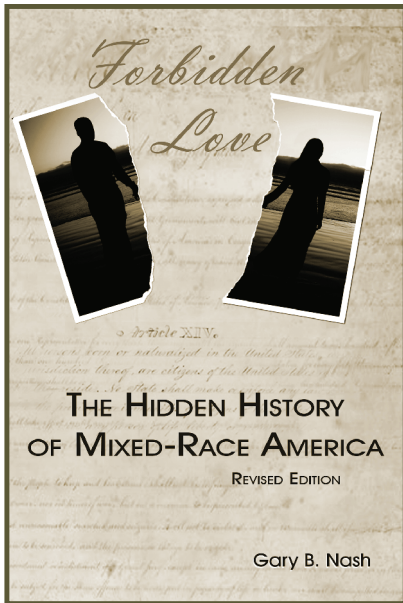
How effectively does this film convey its intended message?



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