

The following films were adapted from James M. Cain's novels and stories.

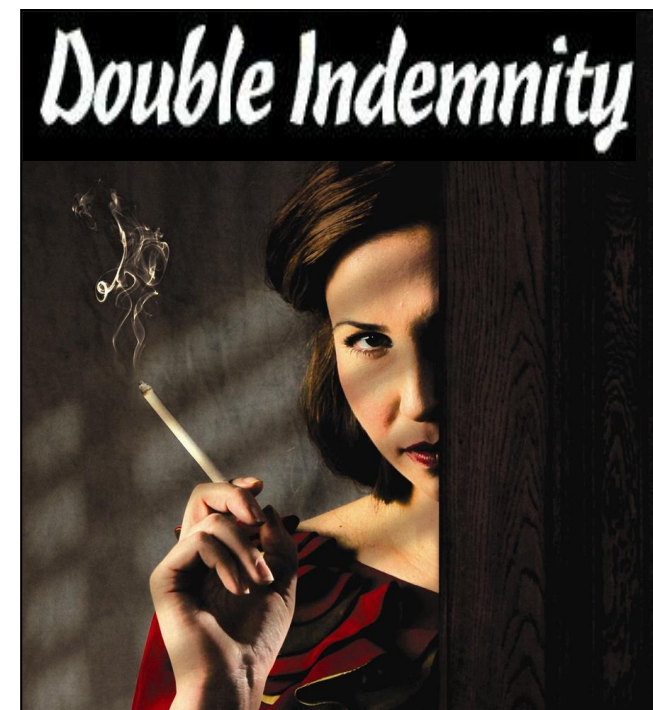
- *She Made Her Bed*, USA, 1934, directed by Ralph Murphy (story "The Baby in the Icebox")
- *Wife, Husband and Friend*, USA, 1939, directed by Gregory Ratoff (novel *Career in C Major*)
- *Le Dernier tournant*, France, 1939, directed by Pierre Chenal (novel *The Postman Always Rings Twice*)
- *When Tomorrow Comes*, USA, 1939, directed by John M. Stahl (novel *The Root of His Evil*)
- *Ossessione*, Italy, 1943, directed by Luchino Visconti (novel *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, uncredited)
- *Double Indemnity*, USA, 1944, directed by Billy Wilder
- *Mildred Pierce*, USA, 1945, directed by Michael Curtiz
- *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, USA, 1946, directed by Tay Garnett
- *Everybody Does It*, USA, 1949, directed by Edmund Goulding (novel *Career in C Major*)
- *Slightly Scarlet*, USA, 1956, directed by Allan Dwan (novel *Love's Lovely Counterfeit*)
- *Serenade*, USA, 1956, directed by Anthony Mann
- *Interlude*, USA, 1957, directed by Douglas Sirk
- *Interlude*, USA, 1968, directed by Kevin Billington
- *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, USA, 1981, directed by Bob Rafelson
- *Butterfly*, USA, 1982, directed by Matt Cimber
- *Girl in the Cadillac*, USA, 1995, directed by Lucas Platt (novel *The Enchanted Isle*)
- *Mildred Pierce*, USA, 2011, directed by Todd Haynes

Twists, Slugs and Roscoes: Hardboiled Fiction Slang Words

"I jammed the roscoe in his button and said, 'Close your yap, bo, or I squirt metal.'"

- **Ankle:**
 - (n) Woman
 - (v) To walk
- **Bean-shooter:** Gun
- **Bent cars:** Stolen cars
- **Bracelets:** Handcuffs
- **Cheese it:** Put things away, hide
- **Chicago overcoat:** Coffin
- **Dance:** To be hanged
- **Daylight**, as in "let the daylight in" or "fill him with daylight": Put a hole in, by shooting or stabbing
- **Eel juice:** liquor
- **Elephant ears:** Police
- **Fade:** Go away, get lost
- **Fog:** To shoot
- **Gasper:** Cigarette
- **Gat:** Gun
- **Hammer and saws:** Police (rhyming slang for laws)
- **Hinky:** Suspicious
- **In stir:** In jail
- **Iron:** A car
- **Jane:** A woman
- **Kale:** Money
- **Kiss:** To punch
- **Lammed off:** Ran away, escaped
- **Lead poisoning:** To be shot
- **Meat wagon:** Ambulance
- **Mush:** Face
- **Nailed:** Caught by the police
- **Newshawk:** Reporter
- **Out on the roof, To be:** To drink a lot, to be drunk
- **Oyster fruit:** Pearls
- **Palooka:** Man, probably a little stupid
- **Pump metal:** Shoot bullets
- **Red-light:** To eject from a car or train
- **Roscoe:** Gun
- **Scratch:** Money
- **Squirt metal:** Shoot bullets
- **Tip your mitt:** Show your hand, reveal something
- **Trip for biscuits**, as in "You get there fast and you get there alone - or you got a trip for biscuits": Make the trip for no purpose, achieve no results

Many more can be found at
<http://www.miskatonic.org/slang.html>



About James M. Cain, the author of *Double Indemnity*

"I think my stories have some quality of the opening of a forbidden box, and that it is this, rather than violence, sex, or any of the things usually cited by way of explanation, that gives them the drive so often noted." - James M. Cain in the preface to his novel *The Butterfly*, 1947.

James Mallahan Cain (July 1, 1892 – October 27, 1977) was an American author and journalist. Although Cain himself vehemently opposed labeling, he is usually associated with the “hardboiled” and “noir” schools of American crime fiction. Several of his crime novels inspired highly successful movies including *The Postman Always Rings Twice* and *Double Indemnity*.

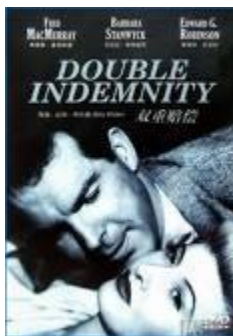
James M. Cain was born into an Irish Catholic family in Annapolis, Maryland. The son of a prominent educator and an opera singer, he graduated from Washington College at the age of 18 where his father, James W. Cain, served as president. In 1910, he began working as a journalist for the *Baltimore American* and then the *Baltimore Sun*. Drafted into the United States Army in 1918, Cain spent the final year of World War I in France writing for an Army magazine. Upon returning to the United States, he continued working as a journalist, writing editorials for the *New York World* and articles for *American Mercury*. He briefly served as the managing editor of *The New Yorker*, but later turned to screenplays and finally to fiction. Cain spent many years in Hollywood working on screenplays but his name only appears on the credits of three films: *Algiers* (1938), *Stand Up and Fight* (1939), and *Gypsy Wildcat* (1944). Cain's first novel, *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, was published in 1934. *Double Indemnity* was first published in the magazine *Liberty* in 1935.

Cain continued writing up to his death at the age of 85. However, the many novels he published from the late 1940s onward never rivaled his earlier successes.

Synopsis of *Double Indemnity*

When smalltime insurance salesman Walter Huff meets seductive Phyllis Nirdlinger, the wife of one of his wealthy clients, it takes him only minutes to determine that she wants to get rid of her husband—and not much longer to decide to help her do it. Walter knows that accident insurance pays double indemnity on railroad mishaps, so he and Phyllis plot frantically to get Nirdlinger on—and off—a train without arousing the suspicions of the police, the insurance company, Nirdlinger's dishy daughter, her mysterious boyfriend, or Nirdlinger himself.

Life in the Thirties



Double Indemnity was greatly influential and set the standard for the future of film noir

Screen Time

Double Indemnity was adapted as a film directed by Billy Wilder in 1944. The film stars Fred MacMurray, Barbara Stanwyck, and Edward G. Robinson. Admired by many critics when first released, *Double Indemnity* was nominated for seven Oscars (including one for Best Picture) but did not win any.

Other prominent hardboiled fiction writers include:

- Carroll John Daly
- Dashiell Hammett
- Raymond Chandler
- Chester Himes
- Mickey Spillane
- Walter Mosley
- Jim Thompson
- Cornell Woolrich

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Can you think of any crimes in recent history that caused a similar media sensation as the one that inspired *Double Indemnity*? Why do you think they became so popular?
- What do you think the process for adapting a book for a play or film is like? If you were to adapt your favorite book for the stage, what about it would you be sure to keep the same? What about it would you change?
- Even though this story was originally written in the '30s, do you think it's still relevant? Does it speak to the same issues we have today?

The Wall Street Crash of 1929 dramatically closed the curtain on the prosperity of the twenties and precipitated the greatest economic decline in US history. In 1929 only 3% of Americans were without a job, by 1933, the unemployment rate had risen to 25%.

Natural calamities added to the nation's miseries. Drought in America's heartland turned the once rich soil to dust. Winds whipped the loose soil into gigantic dust storms that ravaged the country from South Dakota to Texas. Thousands were forced to abandon their farms, clogging the highways as they headed West in the hopes of finding a better life.

The economic hardships spawned a wave of lawlessness in which desperadoes such as Bonnie and Clyde, Pretty Boy Floyd, Machine Gun Kelly, and John Dillinger became folk heroes.

It was not until 1940 with the outbreak of war in Europe and the simultaneous military buildup in America that the nation's economic fortunes improved and the Great Depression slid into history.

FACTS about America in the 1930s

Population: 123,188,000 in 48 states
Life Expectancy: Male, 58.1; Female, 61.6
Average salary: \$1,368
Unemployment rises to 25%
Huey Long proposes a guaranteed annual income of \$2,500
Car Sales: 2,787,400
Food Prices: Milk, 14 cents a quart; Bread, 9 cents a loaf; Round Steak, 42 cents a pound
Lynchings: 21

Bonnie Parker and Clyde Champion Barrow were shot to death by officers in 1934 after one of the biggest crime sprees in history



double indemnity *noun*

: a provision in a life-insurance or accident policy whereby the company agrees to pay twice the face of the contract in case of accidental death

first known use
1924

Merriam-Webster Dictionary

hard-boiled fiction *noun*

: a tough, unsentimental style of American crime writing that brought a new tone of earthy realism or naturalism to the field of detective fiction. Hard-boiled fiction used graphic sex and violence, vivid but often sordid urban backgrounds, and fast-paced, slangy dialogue. Credit for the invention of the genre belongs to Dashiell Hammett (1894–1961), a former Pinkerton detective and contributor to the pulp magazines, whose first truly hard-boiled story, "Fly Paper," appeared in *Black Mask* magazine in 1929.

first known use
1929

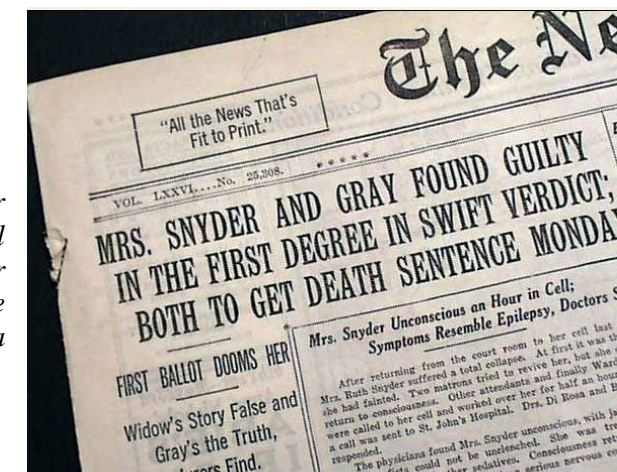
Encyclopedia Britannica

noir Fiction *noun*

: a sub-genre of hard-boiled fiction where the protagonist is usually not a detective, but instead either a victim, a suspect, or a perpetrator. It is called *noir* (French for "black") because it is darker than other hard-boiled literature.

first known use
1984

<http://noirfiction.info/what.html>



Ruth Snyder became a national sensation as her story blew up in the media

Real Life Inspiration for *Double Indemnity* and *The Postman Always Rings Twice* The Ruth Snyder and Judd Gray Trial

On January 12th, 1928 Ruth May Snyder, 32, and her lover Henry Judd Gray, 35, each went to the electric chair at New York's Sing Sing Prison. Their execution was the culmination of a torrid affair that began in 1925 and ended in the murder of Ruth's husband.

Dissatisfied with her marriage, Ruth persuaded Henry to kill her 48-year-old husband, Albert Snyder. She had already made several unsuccessful attempts herself, after first insuring Albert's life for nearly \$100,000. He had survived poisoning and "accidental" gassing, so Ruth decided to have Henry fix him for good.

The Snyders were out at a bridge party on Sunday, March 20th, 1927, when Henry snuck into their home and hid to await their return. When they arrived Albert, half-drunk, went to bed. Ruth summoned Henry out of hiding, and they crept up to her husband as he slept. The couple began beating Albert on the head with a sash-weight. They finished the job with chloroform and a picture-wire.

Police were called a few hours later when Ruth was discovered bound and gagged with her husband murdered in his bed. She claimed that an intruder had attacked her, but the detectives were dubious. They found Henry's name in her address book and suspected he was involved. They told her that Henry had been arrested and had confessed, and Ruth admitted to scheming to kill her husband, but not to actually murdering him.

Henry told the investigators, "She told me what to do and I just did it. She had this power over me."

Even in her condemned cell Ruth continued to wield a strange kind of power, receiving more than 160 offers of marriage from men apparently wanting to live dangerously. Proclaiming her innocence until the very end, she spoke her last words: "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do!"

Source: http://www.truecrimelibrary.com/this_week_in_crime.php?id=102