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**Document A**

**Tom Waits, *Romeo is Bleeding* (song lyrics), Fifth Floor Music, Inc., 1978**

Romeo is bleeding but not so as you'd notice  
 He's over on 18th Street as usual  
 Lookin' so hard against the hood of his car  
 And puttin' out a cigarette in his hand  
 5 And for all the Pachucos at the pumps  
 At Romero's paint and body  
 They all seein' how far they can spit  
 Well it was just another night  
 But now they're huddled in the brake lights  
 10 Of a '58 Bel Air  
 And listenin' to how Romeo  
 Killed a sherif with his knife  
  
 And they all jump when they hear the sirens  
 But Romeo just laughs and says  
 15 All the racket in the world  
 Ain't never gonna save that copper's ass  
 He ain't never gonna see another summertime  
 For gunnin' down my brother  
 And leavin' him like a dog  
 20 Beneath a car without his knife  
 Romeo says: Hey man gimme a cigarette  
 And they all reach for their pack  
 And Frankie lights it for him  
 And pats him on the back  
 25 And throws a bottle at a milk truck  
 And as it breaks he grabs his nuts  
 And they all know they could be just like Romeo  
 If they only had the guts  
  
 Romeo is bleeding but nobody can tell  
 30 And he sings along with the radio  
 With a bullet in his chest  
 And he combs back his fenders  
 And they all agree it's clear  
 That everything is cool  
 35 Now that Romeo's here  
  
 Romeo is bleeding  
 And he winces now and then  
 He leans against the car door  
 And feels the blood in his shoes  
 40 And someone's cryin' at the 5 Points  
 in the phone booth by the store

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Romeo starts his engines  
 Wipes the blood off the door  
 And he brodys through the signal  
 45 With the radio full blast  
 Leavin' the boys there hikin' up their chinos  
 And then they all try to stand like Romeo  
 Beneath the moon cut like a sickle  
 And they're talkin' now in Spanish  
 50 All about their hero  
 But Romeo is bleeding  
 As he gives the man his ticket  
 And he climbs to the balcony at the movies  
 And he'll die without a whimper  
 55 Like every hero's dream  
 Like an angel with a bullet  
 And Cagney on the screen  
 And Romeo is bleeding  
 60 Romeo is bleeding, hey man  
 Romeo is bleeding, hey man  
 Romeo is bleeding, hey man  
 Romeo is bleeding  
 Andele pues!  
 Hey Pachuco!  
 65 Hey Pachuco!  
 Hago la lucha!  
 Dáme esa pistola, hombre!  
 Hijo de la chingada madre!  
 Ay, que pinche pancho!  
 70 Hey man!  
 Hago la lucha!  
 Hago la lucha!  
 Vamos a dormir, hombre  
 Hey man!

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## Document B

**Robert Warshow**, excerpt from "The Gangster as Tragic Hero" (1948), published in *The Immediate Experience: Movies, Comics, Theatre, and Other Aspects of Popular Culture*, Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1962, 85–88.

In its initial character, the gangster film is simply one example of the movies' constant tendency to create fixed dramatic patterns that can be repeated indefinitely with a reasonable expectation of profit. One gangster film follows another as one musical or one Western follows another. But this rigidity is not necessarily opposed to the  
5 requirements of art. There have been very successful types of art in the past which developed such specific and detailed conventions as almost to make individual examples of the type interchangeable. This is true, for example, of Elizabethan revenge tragedy and Restoration comedy.

For such a type to be successful means that its conventions have imposed themselves  
10 upon the general consciousness and become the accepted vehicles of a particular set of attitudes and a particular aesthetic effect. One goes to any individual example of the type with very definite expectations, and originality is to be welcomed only in the degree that it intensifies the expected experience without fundamentally altering it. Moreover, the relationship between the conventions which go to make up such a type  
15 and the real experience of its audience or the real facts of whatever situation it pretends to describe is of only secondary importance and does not determine its aesthetic force. It is only in an ultimate sense that the type appeals to its audience's experience of reality; much more immediately, it appeals to previous experience of the type itself: it creates its own field of reference.

20 Thus the importance of the gangster film, and the nature and intensity of its emotional and aesthetic impact, cannot be measured in terms of the place of the gangster himself or the importance of the problem of crime in American life. Those European moviegoers who think there is a gangster on every corner in New York are certainly deceived, but defenders of the "positive" side of American culture are equally deceived  
25 if they think it relevant to point out that most Americans have never seen a gangster. What matters is that the experience of the gangster as an experience of art is universal to Americans. There is almost nothing we understand better or react to more readily or with quicker intelligence. The Western film, though it seems never to diminish in popularity, is for most of us no more than the folklore of the past, familiar and  
30 understandable only because it has been repeated so often. The gangster film comes much closer. In ways that we do not easily or willingly define, the gangster speaks for us, expressing that part of the American psyche which rejects the qualities and the demands of modern life, which rejects "Americanism" itself.

The gangster is the man of the city, with the city's language and knowledge, with its  
35 queer and dishonest skills and its terrible daring, carrying his life in his hands like a placard, like a club. For everyone else, there is at least the theoretical possibility of another world—in that happier American culture which the gangster denies, the city does not really exist; it is only a more crowded and more brightly lit country—but for the gangster there is only the city; he must inhabit it in order to personify it: not the  
40 real city, but that dangerous and sad city of the imagination which is so much more important, which is the modern world. And the gangster—though there are real gangsters—is also, and primarily, a creature of the imagination. The real city, one might say, produces only criminals; the imaginary city produces the gangster: he is what we want to be and what we are afraid we may become.

45 Thrown into the crowd without background or advantages, with only those ambiguous  
skills which the rest of us—the real people of the real city—can only pretend to have,  
the gangster is required to make his way, to make his life and impose it on others.  
Usually, when we come upon him, he has already made his choice or the choice has  
50 already been made for him, it doesn't matter which: we are not permitted to ask  
whether at some point he could have chosen to be something else than what he is.

The gangster's activity is actually a form of rational enterprise, involving fairly definite  
goals and various techniques for achieving them. But this rationality is usually no more  
than a vague background; we know, perhaps, that the gangster sells liquor or that he  
operates a numbers racket; often we are not given even that much information. So his  
55 activity becomes a kind of pure criminality: he hurts people. Certainly our response to  
the gangster film is most consistently and most universally a response to sadism; we  
gain the double satisfaction of participating vicariously in the gangster's sadism and  
then seeing it turned against the gangster himself.

But on another level the quality of irrational brutality and the quality of rational  
60 enterprise become one. Since we do not see the rational and routine aspects of the  
gangster's behavior, the practice of brutality—the quality of unmixed criminality—  
becomes the totality of his career. At the same time, we are always conscious that the  
whole meaning of this career is a drive for success: the typical gangster film presents a  
steady upward progress followed by a very precipitate fall. Thus brutality itself becomes  
65 at once the means to success and the content of success—a success that is defined in its  
most general terms, not as accomplishment or specific gain, but simply as the  
unlimited possibility of aggression. (In the same way, film presentations of  
businessmen tend to make it appear that they achieve their success by talking on the  
telephone and holding conferences and that success is talking on the telephone and  
70 holding conferences.)

From this point of view, the initial contact between the film and its audience is an  
agreed conception of human life: that man is a being with the possibilities of success or  
failure. This principle, too, belongs to the city; one must emerge from the crowd or else  
one is nothing. On that basis the necessity of the action is established, and it progresses  
75 by inalterable paths to the point where the gangster lies dead and the principle has  
been modified: there is really only one possibility—failure. The final meaning of the  
city is anonymity and death.

In the opening scene of *Scarface*, we are shown a successful man; we know he is  
successful because he has just given a party of opulent proportions and because he is  
80 called Big Louie. Through some monstrous lack of caution, he permits himself to be  
alone for a few moments. We understand from this immediately that he is about to be  
killed. No convention of the gangster film is more strongly established than this: it is  
dangerous to be alone. And yet the very conditions of success make it impossible not to  
be alone, for success is always the establishment of an individual pre-eminence that  
85 must be imposed on others, in whom it automatically arouses hatred; the successful  
man is an outlaw. The gangster's whole life is an effort to assert himself as an  
individual, to draw himself out of the crowd, and he always dies because he is an  
individual; the final bullet thrusts him back, makes him, after all, a failure. "Mother of  
God," says the dying Little Caesar, "is this the end of Rico?"—speaking of himself thus  
90 in the third person because what has been brought low is not the undifferentiated man,

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but the individual with a name, the gangster, the success; even to himself he is a creature of the imagination. (T. S. Eliot has pointed out that a number of Shakespeare's tragic heroes have this trick of looking at themselves dramatically; their true identity, the thing that is destroyed when they die, is something outside themselves—not a man,  
95 but a style of life, a kind of meaning.)

At bottom, the gangster is doomed because he is under the obligation to succeed, not because the means he employs are unlawful. In the deeper layers of the modern consciousness, all means are unlawful, every attempt to succeed is an act of aggression, leaving one alone and guilty and defenseless among enemies: one is punished for  
100 success. This is our intolerable dilemma: that failure is a kind of death and success is evil and dangerous, is—ultimately—impossible. The effect of the gangster film is to embody this dilemma in the person of the gangster and resolve it by his death. The dilemma is resolved because it is his death, not ours. We are safe; for the moment, we can acquiesce in our failure, we can choose to fail.



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**Document C**

**Banksy, *Flag* (a.k.a. *L.A. Flag*), screenprint, 70 x 49.5 cm, 2006.**

