



FLM/HIST 370: *Cosa nostra*: Cinema and History of the (Anti)Mafia
Course Syllabus
Spring Semester 2019

Instructor: Elgin K. Eckert, Ph.D.

Credits: 3

Contact Hours: 45 hours

Prerequisites: None

Class Hours: TBA

Office Hours: TBA

Course Type: Standard Course

Lab Fee: 10 €

Course Description

This hybrid history and cinema course provides an in-depth examination of *Cosa nostra* through a historical, social, and cultural perspective. The historical aspect of the course will trace the progression of the Sicilian mafia from the Risorgimento to the present day, also considering the migration of this group into the United States. The fiction – stereotypes, myths and legends – surrounding the mafia will be examined through a scrupulous analysis of some of the most important American and Italian films portraying mafia culture. The film studies component of the course will give a comprehensive introduction to the most important issues of cinematography and deal with selected issues of film theory.

One of the important parts of this course will consist of a discussion on important protagonists in the fight against the mafia and collaborations between Italian and US law enforcement in their efforts to defeat transatlantic organized crime.

Course Objectives

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

Learning Outcomes	Assessment Measures <i>Course requirements that will be used to assess students' achievement for each learning outcome</i>
explain <i>Cosa nostra</i> 's origins, growth, and persistence;	class discussions Midterm examination quizzes
describe the similarities and differences between the Italian and American manifestations of <i>Cosa nostra</i> ;	class discussions Midterm examination quizzes

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relate historical facts about the mafia to a broader Italian and American context	class discussions Midterm examination quizzes
explain the representation of the mafia in cinematic popular culture	class discussions
identify and analyse specific film techniques	Film studies assignments

Course Materials

Readings

A course reader, including all the indicated readings, will be available at a local copy shop for € 20 and online as pdf. Please see “Umbra Institute Course Materials - Textbooks and Readers” handout provided in the orientation folder for more information.

Films

Francis Ford Coppola *The Godfather* 1972 – evening screening

Francis Ford Coppola *The Godfather II* 1975

Martin Scorsese *Goodfellas* 1990

Martin Scorsese *The Irishman* 2019 – home viewing

Marco Tullio Giordano *I cento passi* (The Hundred Steps) 2000

PIF *La mafia uccide solo in estate* (The Mafia only Kills in Summer) 2013

David Chase *The Sopranos* (TV series, selections) 1998-2006

Assessment

Preparation and Participation	10%
5 Quizzes based on Secondary Readings (lowest grade dropped)	20%
5 Film Studies Assignments	20 %
Midterm Examination	20%
Reflection Paper	5%
Research Paper	15%
Final Examination	10%

Grading

Letter grades for student work are based on the following percentage scale:

Letter Grade Range	Numerical Score Equivalent	Student Performance
A	93% - 100%	Exceptional
A-	90% - 92%	Excellent
B+	87% - 89%	
B	83% - 86%	Superior
B-	80% - 82%	
C+	77% - 79%	
C	73% - 76%	Satisfactory
C-	70% - 72%	
D+	67% - 69%	
D	63% - 66%	Low Pass
D-	60% - 62%	
F	59% or less	Fail (no credit)

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Course Requirements

Preparation and Participation (10%)

Students are expected to do all reading assignments before the assigned date in order to contribute to classroom discussions. Film screenings and Documentaries are an integral part of this course and must be treated as such (please see [An Important Note on Film and Documentary Screenings](#) below). It is not acceptable to walk out of film/documentary screenings for any reason, use electronic devices, or fall asleep. Any student not paying complete attention to the film screening component of the course will get 3 points deducted from their **Participation** grade for each instance.

5 Quizzes based on Secondary Readings (20%)

Students will take 5 quizzes based on the secondary readings. **The lowest quiz grade will be dropped.**

5 Film Studies Assignments (20%)

Students will complete 5 written assignments covering basic film techniques.

Midterm Examination (20%)

The in-class midterm exam will be based on the historical issues studies in class. It will be composed of identifications, multiple choice, and short answer questions as well as a short essay.

Response Paper (5%)

Students in this course will be asked to write a short (1 ½ - 2 pages) response paper about the documentary *Excellent Cadavers*.

Research Paper (15%)

Students in this course will write a 7-10-page research paper on two of Martin Scorsese's films.

Final Examination (10%)

The in-class final exam will focus on film techniques and films viewed in class. It will be composed of identifications, multiple choice, and short answer questions.

Course Content Disclaimer

Because of the material covered in this course, we will be discussing subjects that may be disturbing to some students. Some of the films screened in this course contain scenes of graphic violence and/or murder, both in fictitious and in historical contexts.

Students who anticipate discomfort while screening these films should familiarize themselves with the plot before class, and then sit near an exit so that, when necessary, they may step out of the room for a few minutes. Removing yourself for a moment is perfectly fine, and you may always do so without academic penalty **as long as you let the professor know that you left in order to avoid emotional discomfort**. You will, however, be responsible for any material you miss. If you do leave the room for a significant time, please make arrangements to get notes from another student **and** see me individually to discuss the situation.

An Important Note on Film Screenings

You must treat each film screening as you would a reading. You are expected to be an active viewer, looking for historical, political, economic, social, cultural, narrative, and aesthetic meaning. You must take notes on every film you see. For each film, you are expected to be able to analyze the characters, themes, film techniques, narrative organization, historical significance, relation to history/film history, etc. It is not acceptable to walk out of film screenings for any reason other than those listed in the Course Content Disclaimer (above),

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use electronic devices, or fall asleep. Any student not paying complete attention to the film screening component of the course will get 5 point deducted from their **Participation** grade for each instance (see Preparation and Participation above). Missing an evening film screening will automatically lower the students' grade by one grade level (i.e., a final grade of a B+ would be lowered to a B).

Attendance Policy

Class attendance is **mandatory**. Students are allowed **two "free" absences**, which do not need to be justified. **It is the students' responsibility to keep them in case of real necessity (sickness or any other unforeseen inconvenience that may prevent students from being in class)**. Each additional absence, unless for a very serious reason, will lower the students' grade by one grade level (i.e., a final grade of a B+ would be lowered to a B).

If students miss class, they are responsible for obtaining class notes from other students and/or for meeting the professor during office hours. It is also the policy of the Institute that any student who has eight or more absences automatically fails the class.

Except in the case of medical emergencies, absences are not accepted when tests are scheduled; tests cannot be made up. **Furthermore, scheduled times and dates indicated for exams, quizzes, oral presentations, and any other graded assignments cannot be changed for any reason.** Even if more sections of the same class are activated, students may only take exams during the scheduled times and dates for the section they are enrolled in.

Presence during mandatory field trips is especially important for student performance in class. Missing a mandatory field trip, unless for a very serious reason that is communicated to the professor and Umbra Academic Director in a timely manner, will lower students' final grade by one grade level (i.e., a final grade of a B+ would be lowered to a B).

Academic Integrity

All forms of **cheating** (i.e., copying during exam either from a fellow student or making unauthorized use of notes) and **plagiarism** (i.e., presenting the ideas or words of another person for academic evaluation without acknowledging the source) will be handled according to the Institute Academic Policy, which can be found in the Umbra Institute Academic Policies and Conduct Guidelines.

Classroom Policy

Students are expected to follow the policy of the Institute and demonstrate the appropriate **respect** for the historical premises that the school occupies. Please note that **cell phones** must be turned off before the beginning of each class. **Computers and other electronic devices** cannot be used during class lectures and discussions except with prior permission of the instructor.

Schedule of Topics, Readings, and Assignments

Readings are to be done as a more in-depth review of each class lesson.
Quizzes on marked readings will take place the lesson afterwards.

WEEK 1

Introduction to the Course
Italian immigrants in the US in the late 1800's/ early 1900s
David Hennesy, New Orleans
How to "read" primary sources: HIPPO analysis

Primary Documents:
Murder of an Italian in New Orleans (NYT)
Report of David Hennesy murder (NYT)
"Demons loose in New Orleans" newspaper article

the *Black Hand*
the *Five Points Gang*
Joe Petrosino, NYC
How to analyze a political cartoon

Primary Documents:
Political Cartoon "Doing the Slums"
Black Hand Letter
1906 film *The Black Hand*

Readings: P_RA_CTICE Q_UI_Z O_N J_AN²⁷

Raab, Selwyn "Roots" in *Five Families: the Rise, Decline, and Resurgence of Americas Most Powerful Mafia Empires*. St Martins Griffin, 2016. **Reading starts on page 5 (marked)**

Dickie, John. "Joe Petrosino" in *Cosa Nostra: a History of the Sicilian Mafia*. Hodder, 2007.

WEEK 2

First Emergence of the Mafia in the United States
The Rise of the US mafia
Prohibition
The Castellamarese War
Lucky Luciano and the Mafia Commission
Al Capone
Meyer Lansky

Primary Documents: Al Capone

Readings: Q_UI_Z 1 O_N J_AN²⁹_TH

Raab, Selwyn. *Castellamarese War* in cit.

---. *Dirty Thirties* in cit.

----. *Runaway Jury* in cit.

Lucky Luciano and WWII
John F. Kennedy and the Mafia
The Mafia in Cuba

Readings:

Primary Sources: FBI Files on Meyer Lansky (<https://vault.fbi.gov/meyer-lansky>) Part 1 of 26 and Part 26 of 26

Primary Sources: FBI Office Memorandum on Charles “Lucky” Luciano’s parole and deportation <https://archive.org/details/LuckyLuciano/page/n59> pp. 59-61

WEEK 3

The Mafia in the US in the 50’s and 60’s
J. Edgar Hoover’s FBI and Criminal Investigations
The Kefauver Hearings
Joseph Valachi
The Apalachin Meeting

Readings: **Q**_{UIZ} **2** **O**_N **F**_{EB} **5**_{TH}

Raab, Selwyn. *Wake up, America* in cit.

---. *Heroin and Apalachin* in cit.

---. *Death of a President* in cit.

The RICO act of 1970

The US Mafia from the 70’s until today

Primary Document: John Gotti FBI record

(<https://vault.fbi.gov/john-joseph-gotti-jr/john-joseph-gotti-jr-part-01-of-10/view>)

Readings:

Raab, Selwyn. *The Birth of RICO* in cit.

WEEK 4

No class meeting

EVENING SCREENING OF *THE GODFATHER* AT POSTMODERNISSIMO CINEMA

Readings: **Q**_{UIZ} **3** **O**_N **F**_{EB} **12**_{TH}

Raab, Selwyn “Roots” in *Five Families: the Rise, Decline, and Resurgence of Americas Most Powerful Mafia Empires*. St Martins Griffin, 2016. **Reading goes up to page 5.**

Dickie, John. *Prologue*, in *Cosa Nostra: a History of the Sicilian Mafia*. Hodder, 2007.

---. *Introduction* in *Cosa Nostra* cit.

Origins of the Mafia in Italy

The Mafia under Faciscm
Cesare Mori
Lucky Luciano and the Resurgence of the Mafia in Sicily
Italian Politics after WWII: the *PCI* and the *DC*
Bandito Giuliano
Placido Rizzotto

Readings:

---. *The Man with Hair on his Heart* in *Cosa Nostra* in *Cosa Nostra* cit.
---. *The Last Bandit*, in *Cosa Nostra* cit.

WEEK 5

American *Cosa nostra's* influence in Italy
Peppino Impastato and an Emergence of the The Anti-Mafia
Sack of Palermo, The First Mafia War, The 1970's in Italy
The Emergence of the "Corleonesi"

Readings: **Q_{UIZ} 4 ON F_{EB}. 19TH**

Dickie, John. *Death of a Leftist Fanatic* in *Cosa Nostra* cit.
---. *The Sack of Palermo* in *Cosa Nostra* cit.

The Second Mafia War
The Mafia's attack on the state and its representatives

Readings:

Dickie, John. *Terra infedelium* in *Cosa Nostra* cit.

WEEK 6

Mafia Commission Trial
The Anti-Mafia Pool
Carlo Alberto Dalla Chiesa
Rocco Chinnici
Giovanni Falcone
Paolo Borsellino
Tommaso Buscetta

Readings: **Q_{UIZ} 5 ON M_{AR}. 2**

Stille, Alexander. *Excellent Cadavers: The Mafia and the Death of the First Italian Republic*. Pantheon, 1995. chapters 21 and 22.

Documentary *Excellent Cadavers*

Assignment:

Reaction Paper

WEEK 7

The Mafia in Italy from 1992-today

Nino Di Matteo

Reaction Paper due

Readings:

Stille, Alexander. *Excellent Cadavers: The Mafia and the Death of the First Italian Republic*. cit. Chapter 23.

WRITTEN MIDTERM EXAM

SEMESTER BREAK

WEEK 8

Film Techniques:

1. The Shot and Camera Movement
2. Mise-en scène
3. Characters and Narrative Structure in Film

Readings and Assignments:

Handout Film Assignment 1: Camera Movement

Sikov, Ed. "Shot and Camera Movement" in *Film Studies: An Introduction*. New York: Columbia UP, 2010. 24-33

No class: film screening tomorrow evening

EVENING SCREENING OF *THE GODFATHER II*

WEEK 9

Discussion of *The Godfather* and *The Godfather II*

Film Techniques:

4. Editing

Readings and Assignments:

Handout Assignment 2: Mise-en-scène

Corrigan, Timothy, and Patricia White. "Mise-en-scène" in *The Film Experience* cit. 70-84

Screening of *Goodfellas*

WEEK 10

Screening of *Goodfellas* (cont.)
Discussion of *Goodfellas*

Readings and Assignments

Handout Assignment 3: Analyzing Narrative and Narrative Structure

Corrigan, Timothy, and Patricia White. "Characters and Narrative" in *The Film Experience* cit. 222-245.

Auteur and Genre theory
Martin Scorsese as an *auteur*
Martin Scorsese's Netflix production of *The Irishman*

Readings and Assignments:

Home-viewing of Martin Scorsese's *The Irishman* (on Netflix)

Corrigan, Timothy, and Patricia White. "Auteur and Genre Theory" in *The Film Experience* cit. 410-412.

WEEK 11

Small Screen Series about Organized Crime
Selections from *The Sopranos*

Readings

Handout Assignment 4: Editing

Corrigan, Timothy, and Patricia White. "Editing" in *The Film Experience* cit. 140-159.

Discussion of *The Sopranos*
Film Techniques 5: Sound

Readings:

Handout Assignment 5: Analyzing Sound

Corrigan, Timothy, and Patricia White. *The Film* cit. 183-211.

Toscano, Aaron A. "Tony Soprano as The American Everyman And Scoundrel: How The Sopranos (Re)Presents Contemporary Middle-Class Anxieties." *Journal of Popular Culture* 47.3 (2014): 451-469.

WEEK 12

Italian Cinema about Organized Crime: an overview
Screening of *I cento passi*

Readings:

John Dickie. "Death of a Leftist Fanatic" in *Cosa nostra*. (reread)

Screening of *I cento passi* (cont.)

Discussion of *I cento passi*

Discussion of Pauline Small article

Film Techniques IV: Settings and Sets, Props

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Readings

Small, Pauline. "Giordana's *I cento passi*: renegotiating the Mafia codes" in *New Cinemas: Journal of Contemporary Film* vol. 3(1), pp. 41-54 (marked selections)

WEEK 13

Another approach to the Mafia: Humor and Irony
Between documentary and Film: PIF'S *The Mafia only kills in Summer*

Readings:

Stille, Alexander. *Excellent Cadavers: The Mafia and the Death of the First Italian Republic*. Pantheon, 1995. chapters 21 and 22. (reread)

Discussion of PIF'S *The Mafia only kills in Summer*
Italian Small Screen series focusing on Organized Crime

WEEK OF FINAL EXAMS AND SPECIAL ACADEMIC EVENTS

Final Exam

Final Research Paper due on date of Exam

The Final Exam and Special Academic Events Calendar will be provided later in the semester.

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Bibliography

- Corrigan, Timothy, and Patricia White. *The Film Experience: An Introduction*. Bedford/St. Martin's, 2004.
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- Raab, Selwyn. *Five Families: the Rise, Decline, and Resurgence of Americas Most Powerful Mafia Empires*. St Martins Griffin, 2016.
- Renga, Dana. *Mafia Movies: A Reader*. University of Toronto Press, 2011.
- Renga, Dana. *Unfinished Business. Screening the Italian Mafia in the New Millennium*. University of Toronto Press, 2013.
- Repetto, Thomas. *American Mafia: A History of its Rise to Power*. Holt, 2004.
- Sikov, Ed. *Film Studies: An Introduction*. Columbia University Press, 2010.
- Stille, Alexander. *Excellent Cadavers: The Mafia and the Death of the First Italian Republic*. Pantheon, 1995.