

# Cosa Nostra: The Mafia in History and Fiction

Department of World Languages and Literatures, University of North Texas

**Instructor Molly Sweigart**

**Office Hours: M 9-10, F 2-3 and by appointment**

**Office: 405K Language Building**

**Email: Molly.Sweigart@unt.edu**

## Course Description

This course will survey organized crime in Southern Italy, and the Sicilian Mafia in particular. Students will consider its origin and development as social and political phenomena, both in Sicily and in the United States, and reflect on its portrayal in popular culture and film.

## Course Objectives

*This course fulfills the CLASS requirement for Diversity and Global Issues. At the end of this course, students should be able to do at least three of the following:*

- 1. Identify the origins, influences, and limits of one's own cultural heritage.*
- 2. Demonstrate the ability to learn from and empathize with perspectives and experiences different from one's own.*
- 3. Show an understanding of the interrelationships of the self, local society, and global environments.*
- 4. Describe the impacts of complex, worldwide systems.*
- 5. Explain the reasoning for one's ethical responsibilities within worldwide systems.*

## Required books:

Dickie, John. *Cosa Nostra: A History of the Italian Mafia*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004. Available from online retailers, as well as through our campus bookstore.

Other short readings may be assigned via Canvas if expedient.

## Optional Books:

Saviano, Roberto. *Gomorra*. New York: Picador, 2007.

Saviano, Roberto. *ZeroZeroZero*.

Jones, Tobias. *The Dark Heart of Italy*. New York: North Point Press, 2003.

Dickie, John. *Blood Brotherhoods: A History of Italy's Three Mafias*.

Dickie, John. *Mafia Republic*.

Puzo, Mario. *The Godfather ; The Sicilian ; Omertà ; etc.*

## Films:

### Required Viewing

We will screen some of the following films in class and some you will be required to view at home. Physical copies are on reserve at the Chilton Media Library (noted CML) which is on the second floor of Willis Library. Some are available for online streaming through UNT's media library or Kanopy. Most can also be purchased or rented from online retailers (e.g. Amazon Prime Video) for a nominal fee.

- 1. In nome della legge (In the Name of the Law) (At home)*
- 2. Mafioso (In class)*
- 3. La siciliana ribelle (At home)*
- 4. Salvatore Giuliano (At home)*
- 5. Il divo (In class)*
- 6. Il traditore (At home)*
- 7. Gomorra (At home)*

### Presentation Viewings

This list of films is for you to choose from when you are planning your presentations (see below). No need to watch the films from this list on which you are not presenting, although all are excellent films and well worth seeing. Most are available at Chilton Media Library or elsewhere, as noted.

1. *The Godfather*
2. *The Godfather II*
3. *Donnie Brasco*
4. *Goodfellas*
5. *I cento passi*
6. *Loro*
7. *Piranhas*

### Recommended Movies & Shows

These shows can be found on Amazon Prime or Netflix and serve as supplemental resources to deepen and enhance one's understanding of the material.

1. *Gomorrah* (Series on Sundance)
2. *ZeroZeroZero* (Prime)
3. *Vendetta: Pino Maniaci contro la Mafia* (Netflix)
4. *Suburra* (Netflix)
5. *The Ruthless (Lo Spietato)* (Netflix)
6. *Excellent Cadavers* (documentary, 2005 YouTube)
7. *Letizia Battaglia: Shooting the Mafia* (documentary, 2019, YouTube)

### **Course Overview**

**ATTENDANCE:** You are expected to attend class faithfully except in the case of documented emergencies, illness, or official UNT events, about which I expect to be informed in advance. Missing more than one class in other circumstances will result in a penalty of 3% to your final grade per absence.

**PARTICIPATION:** In addition to your physical presence, I also expect you to be intellectually present in class, to stay on topic and engaged with whatever immediate question we have in view. Participation includes reading or watching assigned material thoughtfully and punctually, taking relevant notes, and generally doing things that contribute toward the creation of a productive learning environment for all of us. In short, please come to class prepared, ready and willing to discuss the topic of the day!

**PRESENTATIONS:** At some point in the semester, you will be responsible for analyzing one of the supplemental films in the form of a 20-30 minute group presentation. Groups (of about 4 students) will coordinate and present together, but each member will receive an individual grade based on the guidelines of expectations. The presentations will take place at regularly scheduled intervals, and each member will be required to submit a typed, one page summary of their portion along with a worksheet of questions pertaining to your film.

The purpose of these presentations is to analyze the film as a coherent work of art, explaining its themes to the historical questions and narrative tropes discussed in class. As such, your group should summarize concisely the plot of the film in order to explicate its particular approach to the world of the mafia. \*Let your focus for the presentation be what you are most interested in!\*

Some good orientation questions to ask yourself as we go through the films:

- ✓ What perspective do we get of organized crime? (Top-down, outside-in, bottom-up...)
- ✓ How is the social world of the Mafia portrayed?

- ✓ How does the Mafia relate to other social spheres in the world of the film (politics, family, church...)?
- ✓ What relationship does the film construct between the audience and the protagonists? Are we being led to approve of them? Feel sorry for them? Root for them? Judge them?
- ✓ How is the criminality portrayed (a desperate expedient, a glamorous and exotic lifestyle, an alternate reality)?
- ✓ In what way does the film convey this impression? How does the director make his point?
- ✓ How is the Sicilian Mafia portrayed vs. Italian-American Mafia? What are some similarities? Differences?

Some of the films will be more tightly or more obviously connected to some themes than others, and some (particularly the Italian films) may require you to do background reading in order to understand the historical and cultural context. Feel free to ask me if you need some pointers, and make sure to cite your sources if you use any.

**QUIZZES:** We will have **2 in-class** quizzes and **2 online Canvas** quizzes this semester to assess your grasp of essential details and themes. They will be evenly-spaced throughout the semester (*see below*). Make-up quizzes will not be permitted unless official documentation (Ex. Signed doctor's note) is provided.

**FINAL EXAM:** There will be a cumulative final exam administered online on the designated day:  
**Wednesday, May 7 12:30-2:30 pm (via Canvas)**

### Final Grade

Your final grade will be the weighted average of the following criteria:

Presentation	30%
Attendance / Participation / Preparedness	30%
Quizzes (4)	20%
Final Exam	20%
<hr/>	
TOTAL	100%

### Course Policies and General Information

**PROTOCOL FOR THE USE OF ELECTRONIC DEVICES IN CLASS:** You may use electronic devices – tablets, computers, and the like – for note-taking or relevant activities. Do not abuse the privilege.

**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:** I expect you to conform to the highest standard of academic integrity. Any other form of academic misrepresentation (passing off someone else's work as your own, cheating during tests, etc.) will be both punished in this course (at minimum, a grade of zero on the assignment in question) and reported to Academic Affairs. If you are unsure as to whether something is all right, it is probably not, but you are welcome to check with me or consult the University Policy on Academic Dishonesty.

**S.P.O.T. EVALUATIONS:** At the end of term, you will receive an e-mail with a link to a confidential survey to evaluate this class. Please take the time to fill this out: we read the surveys and appreciate your honest feedback.

**DISABILITY ACCOMMODATION:** The University of North Texas makes reasonable accommodation for students with disabilities. Students needing a reasonable academic accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Access (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the student will request their letter of accommodation. ODA will provide faculty with a reasonable accommodation letter via email to begin a private discussion regarding a student's specific needs in a course. Students may request reasonable accommodations at any time, however, ODA notices of reasonable accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of

reasonable accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. Students are strongly encouraged to meet with faculty regarding their accommodations during office hours or by appointment. Faculty members have the authority to ask students to discuss such letters during their designated office hours to protect the privacy of the student. For additional information, refer to the Office of Disability Access website.

**ACCEPTABLE STUDENT BEHAVIOR:** Student behavior that interferes with an instructor's ability to conduct a class or other students' opportunity to learn is unacceptable and disruptive and will not be tolerated in any instructional forum at UNT. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior will be directed to leave the classroom and the instructor may refer the student to the Dean of Students to consider whether the student's conduct violated the Code of Student Conduct. The university's expectations for student conduct apply to all instructional forums, including university and electronic classroom, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc. The Code of Student Conduct can be found at <https://policy.unt.edu/policy/07-012>

**SEXUAL DISCRIMINATION, HARASSMENT, & ASSAULT:** UNT is committed to providing an environment free of all forms of discrimination and sexual harassment, including sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking. If you (or someone you know) has experienced or experiences any of these acts of aggression, please know that you are not alone. The federal Title IX law makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender are Civil Rights offenses. UNT has staff members trained to support you in navigating campus life, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, helping with legal protective orders, and more.

UNT's Dean of Students' website offers a range of on-campus and off-campus resources to help support survivors, depending on their unique needs: <http://deanofstudents.unt.edu/resources>.

The UNT Survivor Advocates can be reached by emailing [SurvivorAdvocate@unt.edu](mailto:SurvivorAdvocate@unt.edu) or calling 940-565-2648. The UNT Survivor Advocates connect students who have been impacted by violence to resources (counseling, health, safety, academics, legal, etc.), and act as their advocate. They can assist a student by filing protective orders, completing crime victim's compensation applications, contacting professors for absences related to an assault, working with housing to facilitate a room change (if needed), and connecting students to the many other resources that are available, both on and off campus. They are here to help! For more information see <https://deanofstudents.unt.edu/sexual-misconduct/reporting-sexual-misconduct>

## **COURSE SCHEDULE WLLC 3530**

Reading assignments are posted for the date in which I expect you to have read them.

Week 1 January 15	Course introduction / Syllabus review / Expectations PowerPoint and discussion: Introduction to Sicilian culture, history and the Mafia <b>To watch for next week:</b> <i>In nome della legge</i> (In the Name of the Law) *Purchase book <i>Cosa Nostra</i> and read Prologue, Introduction and Chapter 1*
Week 2 January 22	Revolution and Risorgimento: The Birth of the Mafia <b>Discussion:</b> Dickie <i>Cosa Nostra</i> : Prologue, Introduction, and Chapter 1 <b>Optional Reading:</b> Dimico (et al.), "Origins of the Sicilian Mafia: The Market for Lemons" <b>Film discussion:</b> <i>In nome della legge</i>
Week 3 January 29	Early Anthropologists, Home Rule, and the Constables. <b>Discussion:</b> Dickie ch. 2-3 Reflections and group discussion *Sign up for group presentations*

Week 4 February 5	All the -isms: Nationalism, Socialism, Fascism <b>Discussion:</b> Dickie ch. 4 <b>In-class screening:</b> <i>Mafioso</i>
Week 5 February 12	Review and Reflections <b>Film discussion:</b> <i>Mafioso</i> <b>Quiz 1 in class</b> *Group presentation work*
Week 6 February 19	Coming to “La Merica” <b>Discussion:</b> Dickie ch. 5 <b>Presentation 1:</b> <i>The Godfather</i>
Week 7 February 26	The Rebirth of the Mafia and The Last Bandit <b>Discussion:</b> Dickie ch. 6 <b>Presentation 2:</b> <i>The Godfather II</i> <b>To watch for next week:</b> <i>Salvatore Giuliano</i>
Week 8 March 5	Review and Reflections <b>Presentation 3:</b> <i>Donnie Brasco</i> <b>Film discussion:</b> <i>Salvatore Giuliano</i> <b>Quiz 2 online</b> <b>To watch for March 19:</b> <i>Il traditore (The Traitor)</i>
Week 9	<b>Spring Break</b>
Week 10 March 19	God, Concrete, Heroin, and Cosa Nostra <b>Discussion:</b> Dickie ch. 7 <b>Film discussion:</b> <i>Il traditore (The Traitor)</i>
Week 11 March 26	The First Mafia War <b>Discussion:</b> Dickie ch. 8 <b>Presentation 4:</b> <i>Goodfellas</i> <b>To watch for next time:</b> <i>La mafia uccide solo d'estate</i>
Week 12 April 2	<b>Review:</b> Dickie ch. 7-8 <b>Film discussion:</b> <i>La mafia uccide solo d'estate</i> <b>Quiz 3 in class</b>
Week 13 April 9	The Second Mafia War <b>Discussion:</b> Dickie ch. 9 <b>Presentation 5:</b> <i>I cento passi</i>
Week 14 April 16	Excellent Cadavers and the demise of the Corleonesi <b>Discussion:</b> Dickie 10-11 <b>Presentation 6:</b> <i>Loro</i> <b>In-class screening:</b> <i>Il divo</i>
Week 15 April 23	Cosa Nostra conclusions and other “Mafias”: Camorra and ‘Ndrangheta <b>Discussion:</b> Dickie conclusions and other “Mafias” in Italy

**Film discussion:** *Il divo*  
**Presentation 7:** *Piranhas*  
**To watch for next class:** *Gomorrah*

Week 16      Review and the other “Mafias”: Camorra and ‘Ndrangheta  
April 30      **Discussion:** Review of Camorra and ‘Ndrangheta  
                 **Film discussion:** *Gomorrah*  
                 **Quiz 4 online**

**FINAL EXAM DATE: WEDNESDAY, MAY 7    12:30 – 2:30 PM (online)**