

Cosa Nostra: The Mafia in History and Fiction

Department of World Languages and Literatures, University of North Texas

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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.

Films

Required Viewing

We will screen each of these films in class. The viewing of each film is mandatory, therefore if you miss a class you must view the film on your own time. All are on reserve at the Chilton Media Library (noted CML) which is on the second floor of Willis Library with the exception of one which is accessible through UNT online streaming. Most can also be purchased or rented from online retailers (e.g. Amazon Prime Video) for a nominal fee.

1. *Mafioso* (CML)
2. *La siciliana ribelle* (UNT Library Streaming)
3. *The Godfather* pt. II (CML)
4. *Salvatore Giuliano* (CML)
5. *I cento passi* (CML)
6. *Il traditore* (CML)
7. *Gomorra* (CML)

Supplemental Viewing

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* (CML)
2. *Casino* (CML)
3. *Goodfellas* (CML)
4. *Il divo* (Language Media Library)
5. *Piranhas* (Amazon Prime Video)
6. *La mafia uccide solo d'estate* (Amazon Prime Video)

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. *Gomorra* (Sundance)
2. *Zero, Zero, Zero* (Prime)
3. *Vendetta: Pino Maniaci contro la Mafia* (Netflix)
4. *Suburra* (Netflix)
5. *The Ruthless (Lo Spietato)* (Netflix)

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.

PRESENTATIONS: At some point in the semester, you will be responsible to analyze one of the supplemental films in the form of a 30-45 minute group presentation. Groups (of about 5 students) will co-ordinate 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 I will ask each member to submit an individual outline with bibliography for his/her section of the presentation.

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.

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 a little background reading in order to understand the historical 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 three quizzes this semester to assess your grasp of essential details and themes. Each will be offered in class as scheduled below. Make-up quizzes will not be permitted unless official documentation (Ex. Signed doctor's note) is provided.

Final Grade

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

Quizzes (3)	30%
Participation	30%
Presentation	20%
Final Exam	20%
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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 ACCOMODATION: The University of North Texas makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking reasonable accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Access (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide you with a reasonable accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding your specific needs in a course. You 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 deliver letters of reasonable accommodation during faculty 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 at <http://www.unt.edu/oda>. You may also contact ODA by phone at (940) 565-4323.

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 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	Course introduction / Syllabus review / Expectations
January 17	Videos and readings: Introduction to Sicilian culture, history and the Mafia
Week 2	Revolution and Risorgimento: The Birth of the Mafia
January 24	Discussion: Dickie <i>Cosa Nostra</i> , Prologue, Introduction, and Chapter 1 Optional Reading: Dimico (et al.), "Origins of the Sicilian Mafia: The Market for Lemons" Screening: <i>Mafioso</i>
Week 3	Early Anthropologists, Home Rule, and the Constables.
January 31	Read Dickie ch. 2-3 Discussion, reflections *Sign up for group presentations

Week 4 February 7	All the -isms: Nationalism, Socialism, Fascism Read Dickie ch. 4 Screening: <i>La siciliana ribelle</i>
Week 5 February 14	Review and Reflections Quiz 1 *Time to work on group presentations
Week 6 February 21	Coming to “La Merica” Presentation: <i>Godfather part 1</i> Read: Dickie ch. 5 Screening: <i>Godfather part 2</i>
Week 7 February 28	The Mafia in post-war America Read: Dickie ch. 6 Presentation: <i>Casino</i> Screening: <i>Godfather part 2</i>
Week 8 March 6	Resurgence after Mussolini Presentation: <i>Goodfellas</i> Screening: <i>Salvatore Giuliano</i>
Week 9	Spring Break
Week 10 March 20	God, Concrete, Heroin, and Cosa Nostra Read: Dickie ch. 7 Screening: <i>I cento passi</i>
Week 11 March 27	The First Mafia War Read: Dickie ch. 8 Presentation: <i>Il divo</i>
Week 12 April 3	Review and reflections: Dickie ch. 7-8 Quiz 2 *Time to work on group presentations
Week 13 April 10	The Second Mafia War Read Dickie ch. 9 Screening: <i>Il traditore</i>

- Week 14 Dickie ch. 9-11 continued discussion and review
April 17 **Presentation:** *La mafia uccide solo d'estate*
- Week 15 Review and the other “Mafias”
April 24 **Presentation:** *Piranhas*
 Screening: *Gomorra*
- Week 16 Discussion, review and the other “Mafias”
May 1 **Quiz 3**
 *Open study for questions and reflections before Final Exam

FINAL EXAM DATE: WEDNESDAY, MAY 8 1:30-3:30 PM