



DEPARTMENT OF FRENCH AND ITALIAN STUDIES

Mafia Culture and the Power of Symbols, Rituals and Myth

ITALST 265: Fall 2020

Monday 6:30-9:20 pm

OFFERED REMOTELY

(Asynchronous course. All classes and information will be posted on LEARN)

Instructor: Antonio Nicaso

Synchronous Office Hour: Monday 2-3 pm and 8-9 pm EST or by appointment.

Emails: anicaso@sju.ca; anicaso@uwaterloo.ca

General information on course delivery and content

ITALST265 will be entirely delivered remotely, which means you will have access to the course classes from wherever you are residing. The course will be completely offered as an asynchronous course which means that the course material will be posted on LEARN, and you can access the posting to watch it when it is convenient for you. (Although we strongly recommend you systematically watch the classes posted and do the readings weekly to avoid being overwhelmed).

Required readings and PowerPoints will be posted on LEARN weekly. You are responsible for the contents of the classes, the readings from the book *Made Men*, the posted articles and the Power Points. Some movies (The Godfather trilogy, Goodfellas, Eastern Promises) are available through UW media to stream. For the other movies please use your own resources.

OFFICE HOURS will be offered *synchronously (live)* on Monday from 2 to 3 p.m. (Please contact me through TEAMS – Use button on LEARN); from 8 to 9 pm EST (Q&A, during class hours). Please contact me through Bongo – Virtual Classroom on LEARN).

OFFICE HOURS will also be offered by appointment: please write to me at anicaso@sju.ca or anicaso@uwaterloo.ca to set up an appointment.

TESTS: There will be three tests – October 19, November 16, and December 7. These tests will consist of 5 questions concerning aspects of the materials studied for the course. (You may also be asked to

comment on a “still” from one of the films watched). The tests will be available from 6:30 p.m. EST (Waterloo time) to 6:30 p.m. EST (Waterloo time) the following day. Students will have 2 1/2 hours to write the test from the moment they access it.

FILM REVIEW: Due Date and Time: November 20, 2020 at 11:59 p.m. EST (Waterloo time). The penalty for late submission is a reduction by 10% for each day or part day that the Assignment is late.

Watch one or two films, or documentaries studied and review it/them in 1,000-1200 words maximum by focusing on at least two concepts discussed in ITALST265.

Grading and Feedback: Please submit the film analysis through *Turnitin*. Your grade will be determined by the quality and completeness of your paper. Please define any concepts you are deploying and make necessary distinctions if you are referring to two or more. Make sure your analysis has a clear opening and ending.

Suggestions and further guidance will be posted on “Announcements” on LEARN under the title: [What is a film analysis?](#)

Marking Scheme:

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First test (30%), Second test (25%), Third test (15%).	70%
Film analysis (1,000-1,200 words) Due on November 20; every late day -10%	30%
Total	100%

Course description

The course will analyze the cinematic representation of organized crime in North America. It will focus on the manner in which North American cinema productions often glorify the Mob’s lifestyle. As this characterization of both the Mafia and the Mafiosi began with the archetypal figures of the bosses, special attention will be given to movies of the 1930s, as well as to Francis Ford Coppola’s *The Godfather* trilogy. The course will also analyze the depiction of other criminal organizations in popular culture, such as Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs, Street gangs, the Triads, the Yakuza and the Vory v Zakone.

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of the course the student should be able to:

1. Understand and analyze scholarly debates about the nature of the Mafia in North America; gain an understanding of its mechanics, such as recruitment, organizational structure, and violence, that goes beyond what most people glean from its fictional representations; and understand what corruption means, what its varieties are, and how serious of a problem it is in Canada and other contemporary societies.
2. Understand and analyze the cinematic representation of the Mafia and other Mafia-type criminal organizations in North America.
3. Deconstruct the romanticized portrayal of the Italian and Italian-American gangster lifestyle created on the silver screen and on television by analyzing the atrocities committed by organized crime.

In order to do well in the course, regular attendance and completion of required reading and viewing are necessary. In particular, students should read the specified chapters from the textbook as well as other required texts given by the instructor as regular homework assignments.

Primary Text: A) Nicaso & M. Danesi, *Made Men*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2013.

B) Selected Articles (Available on Course Reserves)

“Ethnicity and the Classical Gangster Film: *Mervyn LeRoy’s Little Caesar and Howard Hawks’ Scarface* by Norma Bouchard in *Mafia Movies, A Reader*, Edited by Dana Renga, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011, (pp. 68-75).

“Black Hands and White Hearts” in *Mob Culture, Hidden Histories of the American Gangster Film*, Edited by Lee Grieveson, Esther Sonnet and Peter Stanfield, Rutgers: The State University, 2005, pp. 207-237.

“The Dialects of Sin in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* and Francis Ford Coppola’s *The Godfather Trilogy*” by Balázs Szigeti, in *The AnaChronist*, 2009, Vol. 14, pp. 24-46.

Short novel *Rustic Chivalry* by Giovanni Verga in *Tales from the Italian and Spanish, A New Sort of Fiction, Realism and romance, adventure and humor, revealing the soul of the latin lands*, The Review Company, New York, 1920, pp. 1-7.

“Conventional and Iconic Signals” in *Codes of the Underworld, How Criminal Communicate* by Diego Gambetta, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009; pp. 149-173.

“Self-Image” in *Mafia Life* by Federico Varese, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 218; pp. 137-157.

“The Honorable Outlaws” in *Yakuza, The Explosive Account of Japan’s Criminal Underworld* by David E. Kaplan and Alec Dubro, Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1986, pp. 13-40.

The Triads in Warlords of crime, Chinese Secret Societies: The Mew Mafia by Gerald L. Posner, Harmondsworth: Penguins Book, 1988, pp. 27-43.

Narcoculture? Narco-trafficking as a semiosphere of anticulture By Julieta Haidar and Eduardo Chávez Herrera in *Semiotica 2018* (De Gruyter Mouton), pp. 1-30.

Films: Please watch the following movies (Available on Course Reserves):

The Godfather I, II & III (By Oct. 26, 2020),

Eastern Promises (By Nov. 9, 2020),

The Year of the Dragon (By Nov. 23),

The Yakuza (By Nov. 30).

N.B. To watch *Little Caesar, 1931, and Scarface 1932* (By Sept 14, 2020), please use your own resources. You can rent the two movies on Amazon Prime or borrow them in local libraries.

Schedule of Course Work:

Week 1	Sept. 14, 2020	Intro and presentation of the course. The gangster genre of 1930s. The Little Caesar (1931), and Scarface (1932). The origins of the Mafia in Italy and North America: reality and myth. What is in a name? The Name as a Logo. Mafia in Popular Culture: Movies, Videogames and Advertising.	Read the article <i>Ethnicity and the Classical Gangster Film: Mervyn LeRoy's Little Caesar and Howard Hawks' Scarface</i> by Norma Bouchard. Read Chapter 1 and 5 of <i>Made Men</i> by Antonio Nicaso and Marcel Danesi
Week 2	Sept. 21, 2020	The Alien Conspiracy. The Black Hand. The murder of New Orleans Chief of Police. The fascination for the Mafia during Prohibition and Italophobia.	Read the article <i>Black Hand and White Hearts</i> by Giorgio Bertellini.
Week 3	Sept. 28, 2020	Cavalleria Rusticana (Rustic Chivalry). The Honour. The Code, The Ritual of Initiation, and the Foundation Myth.	Read the short novel <i>Rustic Chivalry</i> by Giovanni Verga Read Chapter 2, 3 and 6 of <i>Made Men</i> by Antonio Nicaso and Marcel Danesi
Week 4	Oct. 5, 2020	Appearance. Symbols. Tattoos. Nicknames. The Talks. The role of women in organized crime and their representation.	Read the article <i>Code of the Underworlds, How Criminal Communicate</i> by Diego Gambetta Read Chapter 4 of <i>Made Men</i> by Antonio Nicaso and Marcel Danesi
Week 5	Oct. 19, 2020	TEST I (Open book) (Based on the first four lectures)	
Week 6	Oct. 26, 2020	Analyses of <i>The Godfather I; II and III</i> .	Read <i>The Dialects of Sin in Shakespeare's Macbeth and Francis Ford Coppola's The Godfather Trilogy</i> by Balázs Szigeti

Week 7	Nov. 2, 2020	Drug trafficking, Narco-Culture & Out-law Motorcycle Gangs.	Read <i>Narcoculture? Narco-trafficking as a semiosphere of anti-culture</i> by Julieta Haidar and Chávez Herrera.
Week 8	Nov. 9, 2020	The Vory v Zakone	Power point presentation on The Vory v Zakone. Read <i>Self-Image</i> by Federico Varese
Week 9	Nov. 16, 2020	TEST II (Open book) (The test is not cumulative)	
Week 10	Nov. 23, 2020	The Triads.	Power Point presentation on Triads. Read Chapter 3 of <i>Warlords of Crime</i> by Gerald L. Posner
Week 11	Nov. 30, 2020	The Yakuza.	Read Chapter 1 (The Honorable Outlaws) of <i>Yakuza</i> by David E. Kaplan and Alec Dubro
Week 12	Dec. 7, 2020	TEST III (Open book) (The test is not cumulative)	

OTHER IMPORTANT INFORMATION [REQUIRED LANGUAGE APPROVED BY SJU SENATE COUNCIL]

Academic Integrity: In order to maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo community are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility. [Check www.uwaterloo.ca/academicintegrity/ for more information.]

Grievance: A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of their university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Read the St. Jerome's University Policy on Student Petitions and Grievances, www.sju.ca/sites/default/files/upload_file/PLCY_AOM_Student-Petitions-and-Grievances_20151211-SJUSCapproved.pdf. When in doubt, please be certain to contact the St. Jerome's Advising Specialist, Student Affairs Office, who will provide further assistance.

Discipline: A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing an academic offence, and to take responsibility for their actions. [Check www.uwaterloo.ca/academicintegrity/ for more information.] A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offence, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offences (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about "rules" for group work/collaboration should seek guidance from the course instructor, academic advisor, or the Associate Dean. When misconduct has been found to have occurred, disciplinary penalties will be imposed under the St. Jerome's University Policy on Student Discipline, www.sju.ca/sites/default/files/PLCY_AOM_Student-Discipline_20131122-SJUSCapproved.pdf.

For information on categories of offences and types of penalties, students should refer to University of Waterloo Policy 71, Student Discipline, www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy71.htm. For typical penalties, check the Guidelines for the Assessment of Penalties, www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/guidelines/penaltyguidelines.htm.

Appeals: A decision made or penalty imposed under the St. Jerome's University Policy on Student Petitions and Grievances (other than a petition) or the St. Jerome's University Policy on Student Discipline may be appealed if there is a ground. A student who believes they have a ground for an appeal should refer to the St. Jerome's University Policy on Student Appeals, www.sju.ca/sites/default/files/PLCY_AOM_Student-Appeals_20131122-SJUSCapproved.pdf.

Note for students with disabilities: AccessAbility Services, located in Needles Hall (Room 1401) at the University of Waterloo, collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with AccessAbility Services at the beginning of each academic term, www.uwaterloo.ca/accessability-services/.

Turnitin.com: Text matching software (Turnitin®) may be used to screen assignments in this course. Turnitin® is used to verify that all materials and sources in assignments are documented. Students' submissions are stored on a U.S. server, therefore students must be given an alternative (e.g., scaffolded assignment or annotated bibliography), if they are concerned about their privacy and/or security. Students will be given due notice, in the first week of the term and/or at the time assignment details are provided, about arrangements and alternatives for the use of Turnitin® in this course. It is the responsibility of the student to notify the instructor if they, in the first week of term or at the time assignment details are provided, wish to submit the alternate assignment.