



**ITALST 265 – Fall 2021**  
**Mafia Culture and the Power of Symbols, Rituals, and Myth**  
**Monday 6:30 -7:50**

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

**Instructor:** Antonio Nicaso

**T.A.:** T.B.A.

**Email:** [anicaso@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:anicaso@uwaterloo.ca)

**Office hours:** By appointment through Zoom or Microsoft Teams.

**Course description:**

The course will analyze the cinematic representation of organized crime in North America. It will focus on how North American cinema productions often glorify the Mob's lifestyle. The course will give special attention to movies from the 1930s to the present. It 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, students should be able to:

1. Understand and analyze scholarly debates about the nature of the Mafia in North America.
2. Gain an understanding of its mechanics, such as recruitment, organizational structure, and violence, that goes beyond what most people glean from its fictional representations.
3. Understand the importance of corruption and how serious of a problem it is in North America and other contemporary societies.
4. Understand and analyze the cinematic representation of the Mafia and other Mafia-type criminal organizations in North America.

The goal is to deconstruct the romanticized portrayal of the Italian and Italian American gangster lifestyle created on the silver screen and television.

In order to do well in the course, regular attendance and completion of assignments are necessary. In particular, students should read the specified chapters from the textbooks and handouts given by the

instructor as regular weekly assignments, course's discussion board available on Learn. Note-taking is mandatory.

**Course materials:**

*Required Readings:*

- *Made Men: Mafia Culture and the Power of Symbols, Rituals, and Myth* by Antonio Nicaso and Marcel Danesi (Roman and Littlefield).
- "The Dialects of Sin in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather Trilogy*" by Balázs Szigeti in *The AnaChronist* 14 (2009): 24-46 ISSN 1219-2589 (article available online).
- You may also expect some additional readings, such as newspaper and magazine articles.

*Required Watching:*

- *The Black Hand* (1906)
- *Goodfellas* (1990)
- *The Godfather, II, and III* (1972, 1974, and 1990)
- *Goodfellas* (1990)
- *Eastern Promises*
- *The Year of Dragon*
- *Yakuza*

***An Important Note on Film Viewing***

You must treat each film viewing 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.

<b>Evaluation :</b>	<b>Due Date</b>	<b>Value</b>
<b>Test n. 1</b>	<b>Oct. 18, 2021</b>	<b>25%</b>
<b>Film Analysis</b>	<b>Nov. 20, 2021</b>	<b>30%</b>
<b>Test n. 2</b>	<b>Dec. 6, 2021</b>	<b>25%</b>
<b>Participation</b>		<b>20%</b>
<b>TOTAL :</b>		<b>100%</b>

*Attendance/participation:* The course will be taught in a lecture and conversational format. All students are required to attend class regularly, to complete all required readings, and to participate actively in class discussion, through a weekly comment on the course's discussion board available on Learn. The student, after each class should write one or more paragraphs about the lecture's content (an analysis or a comment on the topics discussed in class). The weekly comments will count for 20% of your final grade, each comment worth 2%. The comments will be assessed based on clarity and critical observation.

*Tests (2) with short answers, multiple choice and one or two longer answers: (Both worth 25%): 50%.*  
*A film analysis: (30%): It is due: Nov. 20, 2021*

**P.S. No makeup tests are offered.**

### **Course Outline / Class Schedule**

Notes on readings.

<b>Week</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Topics</b>	<b>Readings Due</b>
1	Sept. 13, 2021	Origin and organization of the Mafia. The Black Hand in Canada and in the U.S. The Display of Power. The Mafia becomes a brand.	Chapter 1 of <i>Made Men</i> . Screening in class of <i>The Black Hand</i> (1906)

Week	Date	Topics	Readings Due
2	Sept. 20, 2021	Honor, Omertà, The power of Code. The role of women and their representation. Analysis of <i>The Little Caesar</i> .	Chapter 2 of <i>Made Men</i>
3	Sept. 27, 2021	The fascination for the Mafia and Italophobia. Rituals and Symbols, Religious Symbolism, Initiation and Passage Rites.	Chapter 3 of <i>Made Men</i>
4	Oct. 4, 2021	Appearance. The Made Man. Tattoos, Gangster Chic, Enter the Movies. Names, The Gang, The Wise Guy, The Talk, Term of Distinction,	Chapters 4, and 5 of <i>Made Men</i>
5	Oct. 18, 2021	TEST # 1	
6	Oct. 25, 2021	Analysis of <i>The Godfather</i>	Watch: <i>The Godfather</i> . Read: "The Dialects of Sin in Shakespeare's Macbeth and Francis Ford Coppola's The Godfather Trilogy" by Balázs Szigeti in <i>The AnaChronist</i> 14 (2009): 24-46 ISSN 1219-2589 (article available online).
7	NOV. 1, 2021	Analysis of <i>The Godfather - Part II and Part III</i>	Watch: <i>The Godfather Part II and Part III</i> .
8	Nov. 8, 2021	Analysis of <i>Goodfellas</i>	Watch: <i>Goodfellas</i>
9	Nov. 15, 2019	Drug trafficking and Narco-Culture - Mafia and Biker Gangs	Watch <i>Eastern Promises</i> .
10	Nov. 22, 2019	Myth, Foundation Myths, An American Myth: Cosa Nostra, Street Myths, Technology.	Watch <i>The Year of Dragon</i> .
11	Nov. 29, 2021	Other criminal organizations: Yakuza, Triads, Vory v Zakone.	Watch <i>Yakuza</i> . Conclusion chapter of <i>Made Men</i> .
12	Dec. 6 2021	TEST # 2	

## **COURSE POLICIES**

### **Extension of deadlines**

Students are entitled to a rescheduling of exams or an extension of deadlines for legitimate medical or compassionate reasons. Students are also entitled to rescheduling of exams based on religious grounds. However, it is the student's responsibility to inform the instructor *prior* to the due date, to arrange a timely makeup, and to provide acceptable documentation to support a medical, compassionate, or religious claim.

### **Late Work**

The essay is expected to be submitted on the day they are due. Student will be penalized ten percent for every day a paper is late. Papers submitted over one week after the deadline won't be accepted. If a student becomes ill or the victim of an emergency, please let the instructor know within 48 hours.

### **Copyright in instructional settings**

Lectures and course materials prepared by the instructor are considered by the University to be an instructor's intellectual property covered by the Canadian Copyright Act. It is absolutely forbidden for a student to publish an instructor's notes to a website or sell them in any form without formal written permission.

### **Note for Students with Disabilities**

The AccessAbility Service office, located on the first floor of the Needles Hall extension (1401), 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 the AS office at the beginning of each academic term.

### **Information on Plagiarism Detection**

Students are responsible for understanding the nature of and avoiding the occurrence of plagiarism and other academic offenses. Students are urged to read the section on Scholastic Offenses in the Academic Calendars (Policy 71: page 14 of the St. Jerome's University Calendar and page 1:10 of the University of Waterloo Calendar). Note that such offenses include plagiarism, cheating on an examination, submitting false or fraudulent assignments or credentials, impersonating a candidate, or submitting for credit in any course without the knowledge and approval of the instructor to whom it is submitted, any academic

work for which credit has previously been obtained or is being sought in another course in the University or elsewhere. Pertinent to this course, examples of cheating on an exam could include viewing another person's exam paper, allowing another person to look at your exam paper, or bringing a 'cheat' or 'crib' sheet with information written on it into the exam. A claim that "you didn't know it was wrong" will not be accepted as an excuse. If you need help in learning how to avoid academic offences such as cheating or if you need clarification of aspects of the discipline policy, ask your course instructor for guidance. Other resources regarding the discipline policy are your academic advisor, the appropriate St. Jerome's departmental chair and, ultimately, the Discipline Advisor for St. Jerome's University. The penalties for a student guilty of a scholastic offense include refusal of a passing grade on the exam, refusal of a passing grade in the course, suspension from the University, and expulsion from the University.

### **Attendance Policy**

The course will be taught in discussion format. All students are required to attend class regularly, to complete all required readings, and to participate actively in class discussion.

## **IMPORTANT INFORMATION**

**Academic Integrity:** To maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo and its Affiliated and Federated Institutions of Waterloo (AFIW) are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility. See the [UWaterloo Academic Integrity](#) webpage for more information.

**Discipline:** A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing academic offences, and to take responsibility for their actions. 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 professor, 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](#). For information on categories of offenses and types of penalties, students should refer to [University of Waterloo Policy 71 - Student Discipline](#). For typical penalties check [Guidelines for the Assessment of Penalties](#).

**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](#).

**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](#).

**Note for Students with Disabilities:** The [AccessAbility Services](#) office, located on the first floor of the Needles Hall extension (1401), 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 the AS office at the beginning of each academic term.