



Why MAFIAs? Studying What Many Have Chosen To Ignore

Joseph Sciorra (April 13, 2014)

The poster features a black and white photograph of two men in suits and fedoras standing in front of a red wireframe globe. The man on the left is holding a sign that reads 'CALANDRA ITALIAN AMERICAN INSTITUTE'. The man on the right is holding a sign that reads '21042'. The background is black with red glowing lines forming a globe.

MAFIAs
Realities and Representations of Organized Crime

CONFERENCE
April 25-26, 2014

FRIDAY
APRIL 25, 2014
9:30 AM – 6:00 PM
John Jay College
of Criminal Justice
524 West 59th Street
New York, NY 10019

SATURDAY
APRIL 26, 2014
9:30 AM – 6:00 PM
John D. Calandra Italian
American Institute
25 West 43rd Street
New York, NY 10036

FOR MORE
INFORMATION
212.642.2094
www.qc.edu/calandra

APRIL 25 & 26 AT THE JOHN D. CALANDRA ITALIAN AMERICAN INSTITUTE. A two-day symposium involving historians and criminologists, sociologists, literary and film critics, as well as individuals involved in Italy's anti-mafia movement

On March 20, 1971, the New York Times ran the front-page headline "'Godfather' Film Won't Mention Mafia." The story reported that producer Al Ruddy of Paramount Pictures and Joe Colombo, founder of the Italian-American Civil Rights League, had agreed to strike the words mafia and Cosa Nostra from the script of the film *The Godfather*.



“Don’t even mention the ‘M’ word!”

This was a propitious deal of quid pro quo, for Colombo was the head of the Colombo crime family who had nefariously appropriated the role of Italian-American leader and spokesperson.

In exchange for script censorship, the intimidation, theft, and violence that had plagued pre-production and production ceased, and mob-controlled labor unions began cooperating with the filming. In addition, gangsters were cast as bit players and extras, and subsequently Hollywood actors began socializing with criminals off the set. This encounter between the realities and representations of organized crime contributed to the ongoing replication of refracted imagery in a media house of mirrors.

A two-day symposium

The theme of the Calandra Institute’s seventh annual conference is “MAFIAs: Realities and Representations of Organized Crime,” and the two-day event seeks to cover a broad variety of worldwide manifestations of organized crime. As the sole university-research institute for Italian American studies, the Calandra Institute is uniquely positioned to address this topic of interest to specialists including criminologists and film historians, among others. Consequently, the Calandra Institute is partnering with the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, where Friday’s session will be held.

Italian American Mafia and all the others

Given the historical association of Italian Americans with organized crime in the United States, it behooves us as scholars of Italian-American history and culture to tackle this subject with all the intellectual rigor of our various disciplinary insights. As we know, organized crime is not unique to any one country or ethnic group but rather develops out of specific economic and social conditions across the globe at different historical moments. Thus, conference participants will speak on topics pertaining to Jewish and Polish American mobsters in the United States as well as organized crime in Colombia, India, Japan, Pakistan, and Sweden. The breadth of this program is in keeping with the Calandra Institute’s 2012 conference “Reimagining White Ethnicity: Expressivity, Identity, Race,” which sought a wider and deeper intellectual discourse across disciplinary fields.

Breaking the silence

Those involved in Italy’s anti-mafia movement—a topic that will be discussed by a number of conference speakers—have inspired people worldwide with their courageous strategies for confronting the silence and acquiescence that have existed for too long around criminal activities of this nature. MAFIAs, the Calandra conference, is in keeping with that sentiment of resistance inasmuch as it aims to shine a light on heinous practices that many have chosen to willfully ignore.

* Joseph Sciorra, PhD, anthropologist, ethnographer, and folklorist, is the Director for Academic and Cultural Programs at the John D. Calandra Italian American Institute (Queens College, CUNY). He has published several works in the field of Italian American studies and is the editor of the social science and cultural journal *Italian American Review*.

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