Mafia Movies
Approaches to Genre in Italian and American Film
Italian 300-level

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Through an analysis of historical, anthropological, literary, and cinematic texts, this course explores representations of the Mafia in Italian and American film from the early 20th century to today. How have Italian and American cultural representations of the Mafia converged, diverged, evolved, and/or persisted over the course of the past century? How have the cultural conditions of their production and reception shifted as Italians have ceased to occupy the privileged category of “the immigrant” in the popular American imagination, and as Italy has transitioned from a country of emigration to one of immigration? How has the Mafia evolved from a local organization to a global network in the 21st century, and how has cinema registered this shift? What are the unique origins and challenges of the Italian anti-Mafia resistance? In addition to raising key questions about cultural representation and power (stereotypes; immigration and national identity; racial, gender, and class difference), the course will introduce students to the study of film genres. How do we know a “mafia movie” when we see it? What are some of the essential character types, film techniques, and narrative conventions that distinguish this genre from other related genres (film noir, crime fiction, police procedural, etc.)?

Learning Goals:

By the end of the semester, students will be familiar with a number of canonical works of American and Italian cinema; they will be able to critically analyze films according to their textual typologies (e.g., generic codes and conventions); they will be able to relate the films to their specific socio-historical contexts; and they will be able to communicate their ideas effectively, both orally and in written form, in modes appropriate to the discipline.

Departmental Goals: Goal II. Cultural Proficiency; Goal III. Professional Preparation

Required Texts:

1. Dana Renga, ed. Mafia Movies: A Reader (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011)
2. Additional articles on Sakai

Internet Resources:

The Internet Movie Database: http://www.imdb.com/
Participation, 25%: regular attendance at screenings, lectures, and recitation sections is mandatory. Highest grades for participation are earned by students who come to class on time having seen the film and read the material assigned for each class, who prepare the discussion questions assigned, pose thoughtful questions, offer their insights consistently, communicate their thoughts effectively, and listen respectfully to the contributions of other students.

Mid-term examination, 25%: Based on lectures and readings, includes identifications and an essay question. The identifications and the essay are aimed at assessing the student’s ability to relate the films to their historical and cultural background as well as to theoretical concepts that are specific to the area of inquiry of the course.

Research Paper, 25%: Approximately seven pages (1,700-1,900 words, typed and double-spaced) on an essay question posed by your professor. Due in the recitation section of Week 10. No late papers will be accepted, no exceptions. Students are required to analyze and compare at least two films and examine critically at least two outside sources on their topic. They should demonstrate the ability to formulate a thesis statement, perform a close reading of a cinematic text by discussing specific examples, and effectively communicate complex ideas in written English.

Final exam, 25%. Based on lectures and readings, includes identifications and one essay question. The final exam assesses the student’s progress in the abilities to relate art and literature both to their historical and cultural background as well as to major theoretical concepts. For the date of our final exam, consult the following link: http://finallexams.rutgers.edu/

9/2/14. Week 1. Introduction to the course

9/9/14. Week 2. Film Screening: The Black Hand, Wallace McCutchen, 1906 (11 min)


9/16/14. Week 3. Film Screening: The Godfather, Francis Ford Coppola, 1972 (175 min)


9/23/14. Week 4. Film Screening: GoodFellas, Martin Scorsese, 1990 (146 min)


9/30/14. Week 5. Film Screening: The Sopranos, David Chase (excerpts), 1999-2007


10/7/14. Week 6. Film Screening: The Leopard [Il gattopardo], Luchino Visconti, 1963 (185 min)


10/14/14. Week 7. Film Screening: Salvatore Giuliano, Francesco Rosi, 1963 (125 min)


10/21/14. Week 8. Film Screening: The Seduction of Mimi [Mimi metallurgico, ferito nell’onore], Lina Wertmüller, 1972 (108 min)


10/28/14. Week 9. Film Screening: I Am Not Scared [Io non ho paura], Gabriele Salvatores, 2003 (101 min)


11/4/14. Week 10. Film Screening: Gomorrah [Gomorra], Matteo Garrone, 2008 (137 min)


11/18/14. Week 11. Film Screening: The Consequences of Love [Le conseguenze dell’amore], Paolo Sorrentino, 2004 (100 min)


11/25/14. Week 12. Film Screening: The Hundred Steps [I cento passi], Marco Tullio Giordana, 2000 (114 min)


10/2/14. Week 13. Film Screening: The Sicilian Girl [La Siciliana Ribelle], Marco Amenta, 2009 (129 min)
