

## Silence Is Not the Answer

Fred Gardaphe (December 22, 2011)



Saviano is right. Silence is not the answer; protesting dramatic portrayals of mafiosi is not the answer. Italian Americans have spent more time and money fighting fictional mafiosi than they have fighting real mafiosi in their midst.

"We Italians have the best law, the best anti-mafia law in the world and we have taught the world anti-mafia methods. As of today, the majority of the world's most important consultations in anti-mafia matters go through Italy. The investigations we have reported have a lot to do with the Italian approach, with Giovanni Falcone's method, for example. This is how Italians get rid of the unbearable prejudice they are victims of. By talking about it not by hiding it. Not by getting mad at Tony Soprano or Scorsese, but by communicating and showing what



Italian history has been, how many victims there have been in order to tell all this."

Roberto Saviano at NYU, Dec. 8, 2011

(see the related videos to the left)

Saviano is right. Silence is not the answer; protesting dramatic portrayals of mafiosi is not the answer. Italian Americans have spent more time and money fighting fictional mafiosi than they have fighting real mafiosi in their midst.

There are two fears that have guided this approach. One is the fear of the mafiosi, which is what keeps the gangsters alive and well; the other is the fear of being Italian American that keeps ignorance alive.

Not knowing their own past has led Italian Americans to combat fictional representations the way Don Quixote went after windmills. Only through knowledge of self and of Italian American cultural history can Italian Americans successfully develop a culture that both defeats and transcends the mafia stigma that has stained their public image.

-

Fred Gardaphe is Distinguished Professor of English and Italian Studies, Queens College, City University of New York. His books include *Italian Signs, American Streets: The Evolution of Italian American Narrative*, *Dagoes Read: Tradition and the Italian American Writer*, *Moustache Pete is Dead!*, *Leaving Little Italy*, and *From Wiseguys to Wise Men: The Gangster and Italian American Masculinities*

**Source URL:** <http://test.ility.org/magazine/focus/op-eds/article/silence-not-answer>

#### **Links**

[1] <http://test.ility.org/files/18889sopranos1324592664.jpg>