

Italic Institute of America: Film Study 2015



A Century of Little Progress (1914 – 2014)



Felix Stefanile

Italian American Poet (1920-2009)

Italian gangsters,
All my life, Italian gangsters;
there's the one with the scar;
there's the good-looking one with the curls
who is a coward;
there's the little murderer who loves his mother;
there's the ratty one in the white car
blowing on his nails;
there's the dignified old Don who turns good,
and dies;
there's the big, oily one being gunned down
in the restaurant – his head sinks
into his bowl of spaghetti;
the man with the machine gun is Italian too,
and grinning.
All my life Italian gangsters;
you too, Leonardo and Galileo,
and you too, Pop.



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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The culmination of 15 years of research, the Italic Institute of America's Film Study is an analysis of the portrayal of Italian Americans/Italian culture in Hollywood movies over the past century (1914-2014).

RESULTS

Of the 1,512 film titles that were researched, the results reveal an overall negative attitude toward Italian Americans and Italian culture in general (68.5%). Images of Italians as violent criminals predominate (34.8%), followed by images of unsavory characters (33.7%). Images of Italians in positive, heroic, or complex roles occur less often (31.5%).

CONCLUSIONS

The figures indicate an entrenched, institutionalized bias in Hollywood against Americans of Italian descent. The diversity of the Italian American experience has been obscured by one-dimensional stereotypes equating Italian culture with criminality. With the success of "The Godfather" (1972), these images gained popular acceptance on an unprecedented scale.



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METHODOLOGY

The Film Study was initiated in 1999 by Bill Dal Cerro, current President of the Italic Institute and its former Media Director. Dal Cerro served as film writer during the 1990's for *Fra Noi*, an Italian American newspaper in Chicago.

In addition to Mr. Dal Cerro's encyclopaedic knowledge of film, four of the Institute's top researchers contributed film titles and input on a continuous basis.

CRITERIA

Film portrayals were classified individually yet under the rubrics of "positive" or "negative," depending on the images conveyed about Italian/Italian American culture. Since film viewing is considered a subjective experience, borderline titles were weighted by overall image and/or an attempt at balance.

For example, "The Godfather" has complex characters, which is a plus; however, the overwhelming impression it leaves with the viewers is of a culture permeated by criminality. There is no balance; therefore, it's a "negative."

The plethora of Italian mobster films (even the comical ones like "Oscar" or "Analyze This") needs no explanation. Such films merely reinforce what is already a pernicious stereotype. The same is true for portrayals of unsavory characters.



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A TYPICAL EXAMPLE OF DISTORTION

In the 1995 film, "To Die For," based on a true story, Nicole Kidman's character tricks three teens into killing her low-brow Italian husband whose family gets even by hiring a mobster to kill her.

In real-life, however, the only Italians involved were the two State Attorneys, Paul Maggiotto and Diane Nicolosi, who convicted the murderess to a life sentence. (Shades of Daniel Petrocelli beating O.J. Simpson at his civil trial!).

"To Die For" is a typical example of how the facts of real-life incidents are often distorted or misinterpreted to put a "negative" spin on Italian Americans.



For other examples of distortion and bias, visit www.stereotypethis.com and its "Hollywood vs. Joe Truth" feature (www.stereotypethis.com/myths/vsTruth1.php).



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ADDENDUM

Since Italian stereotypes remain a staple of popular entertainment, the figures and percentages, though consistent, remain in flux. Further research of historical films or verification of upcoming projects necessitates a fluidity in the overall methodology.

For a copy of the Institute's complete film study, send a check for \$20.00 to:

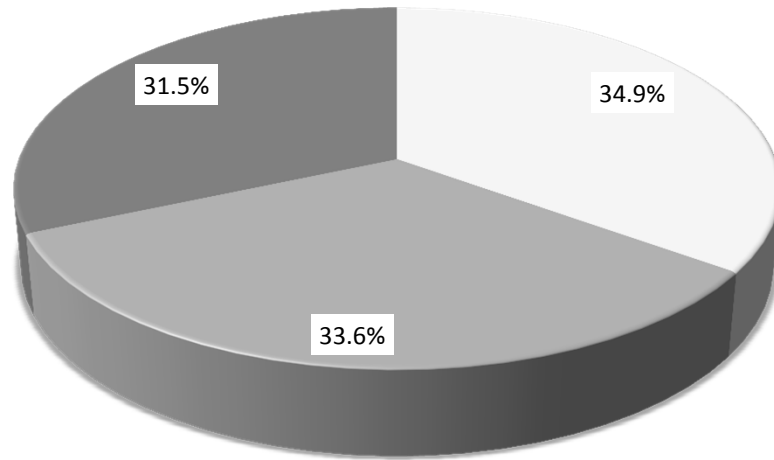


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To keep up-to-date on the Institute and its projects, visit www.italic.org.
Feedback is always appreciated. Direct comments or suggestions to: ItalicOne@aol.com.

Films by Category

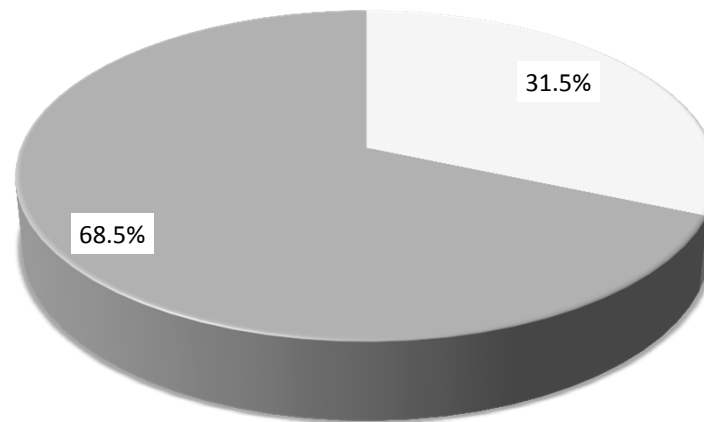


mobsters: 528, 34.9%
bad people: 508, 33.6%
positive: 476, 31.5%

Overall statistics:

- Mobsters (includes both real and fake portrayals) – 528 films, 34.9%
- Bad people (includes negative portrayals of classical Rome/Renaissance) -- 508 films, 33.6%
- Positive (includes positive portrayals of classical Rome/Renaissance) – 476 films, 31.5%

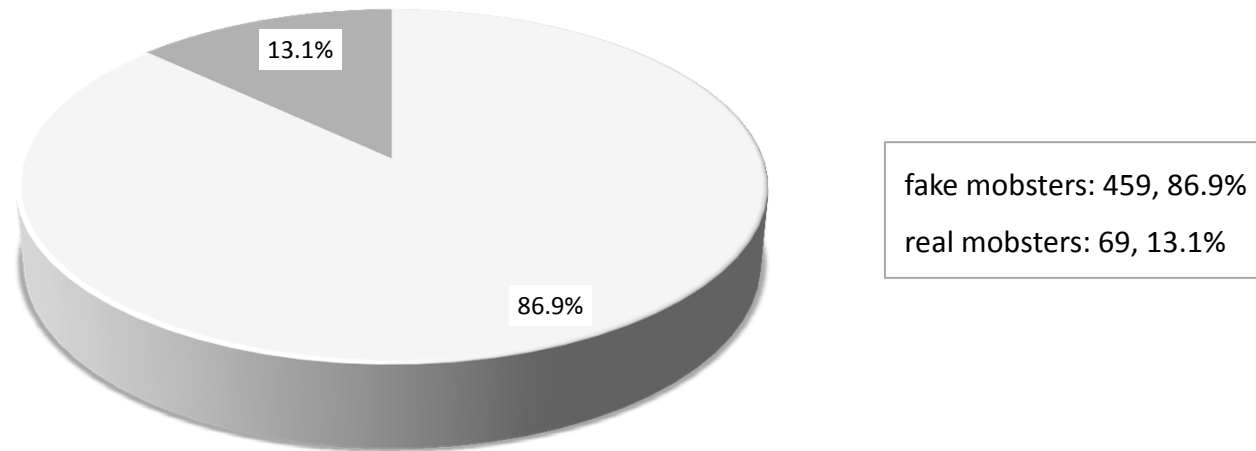
Films by Type



positive: 476, 31.5%
negative: 1036, 68.5%

Positive image vs. negative image

Mobster Films by Type

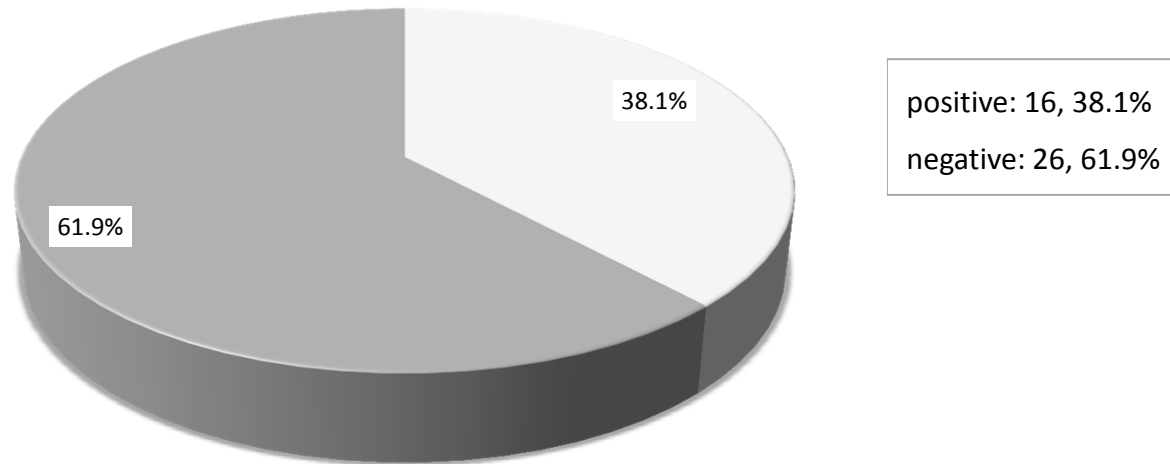


Fake mobsters vs. real mobsters

- Fake mobsters: 86.9% (459 films) – Marlon Brando’s Godfather
- Real mobsters: 13.1% (69 films) – Al Capone and Lucky Luciano

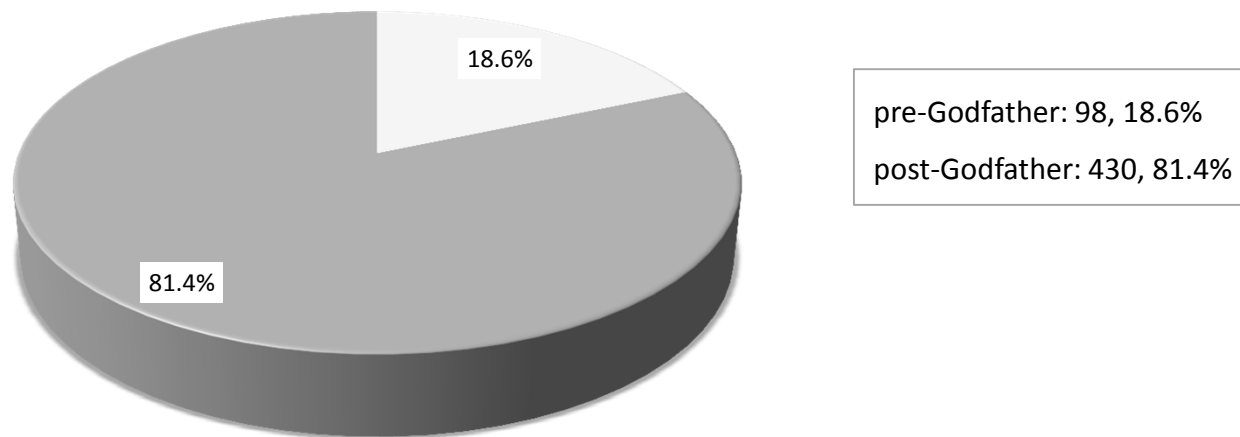
According to the above statistics, nearly nine out of ten mobster images are generic, evil stereotypes with no basis in reality.

Classical Rome/Renaissance



Positive images vs. negative images

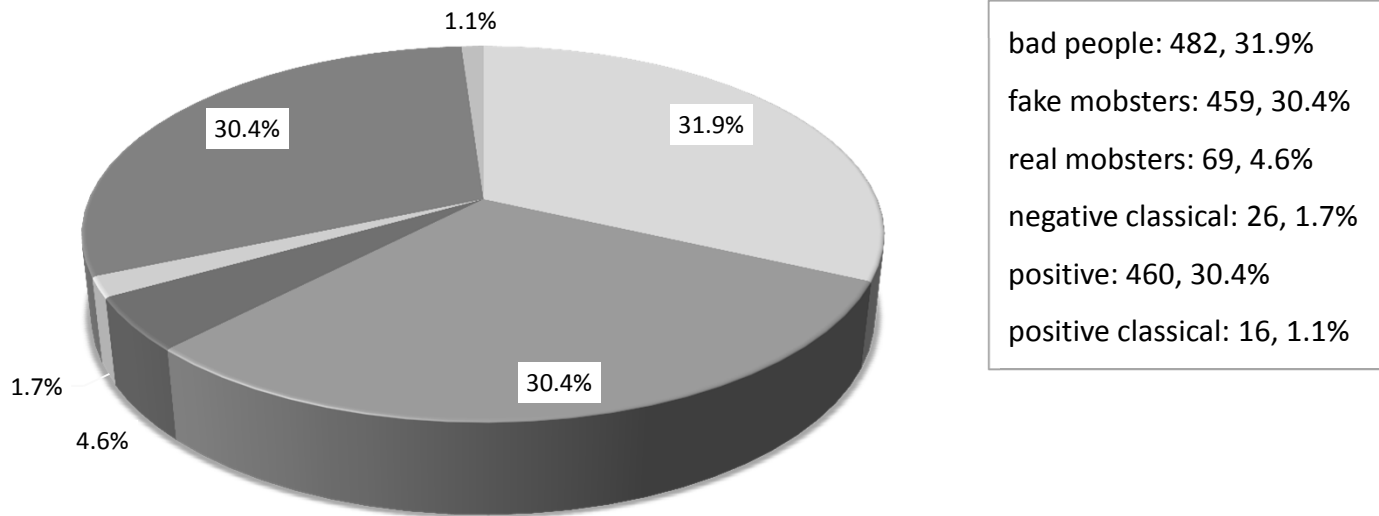
Influence of “The Godfather”



Pre-Godfather vs. Post-Godfather

The majority of Italian mobster films documented in the study (81.4%) were released after “The Godfather” (1972). This statistic shows how the film’s success shaped the subsequent image of Italian Americans in popular culture.

Films by Category



Breakdown of all categories