

"ESSAY ON THE MAFIA"

CBS News Special

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Recorded By

Paul Notarianni

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THE FOLLOWING IS THE CBS NEWS SPECIAL "ESSAY ON THE MAFIA" BROADCASTED JUNE 25, 1972. THIS RECORDING IS ALL BUT ABOUT FIVE MINUTES OF THE ENTIRE BROADCAST. RECORDED BY PHIL NOTARIANNI.

A little less than ten months to live. Was he ---?--? Right up there with the big guys. Right up there with--- ?--- was ---?--- who had been killed with over a thousand dollars of pocket money on his body.

My name is ---?--- and I know that I have no ---?---.

This is Nicholas ---?--- and the number here is sixteen. Sixteen years with the ---?--- and now with New York Magazine as one of America's leading reporters of crime, the Mafia, and the Italian-America community. Luigi ---?--- is an Italian-Italian. Was educated in New York where he worked as a cub reporter. He is the author of several best selling books including From Caesar to the Mafia. For years he has been a member of the Italian Parliament's committee on the Mafia.

What is surrounding us here is about ten miles of film that CBS, ---?--- and I have accumulated in the year of research of the Italian-American, but more particularly on the Mafia. What we propose to do is to dip in and out of this footage like journalists writing up their notes. Here is the "Essay on the Mafia."

Let's pick up our essay on the Mafia. Nicholas ---?--- has been investigating every ---?--- of human being on the day Joe Columbo was shot. Nick, it is your story now. It

is still June 28, 1971 and Joe Columbo has just been shot. One of the ideas behind this rally was that there is no Mafia, and by saying that the Mafia exists you somehow defame all Italian Americans. But the shootings of this day and this very footage were the beginnings of the end of that idea. The New York police have identified at least 100 faces in this crowd as belonging to people with criminal records. For example, the speaker finishes and the face in the cameo is a name that the police filed. This is Nick ---?---, once arrested for the possession of a gun with a silencer. He was on this date reputedly a member of the Columbo family. Since the day of the shooting some people who want him can't find him. One of the fascinating things about this rally was the intermingling of the many impeccably honest Italians with the few with records. At the podium is Paul O'---?---. Of course, he is not Italian. He is an Irish politician. Behind him on the left is ---?--- the Brooklyn Democratic county leader. Drifting in is Joe ---?---. He is the one with gray hair. He was once on trial with Joe Columbo, Jr. on a coin melting scheme. He is currently under federal indictment on a bookmaking conspiracy charge. Some people say this is as close to respectability as Joe ---?--- will ever get. At the podium is ---?---. He is not Italian either. He is an activist Rabbi. At the lower left enters Frank ---?--- whose number we saw a few minutes ago.

Walking through the crowd is Tony ---?---. He will be arrested one week after this rally by the FBI. They will find two loaded .38s in his car. This rally was one of two great shocks to the Italian American community. The second blow began three months before when the film called the "Godfather" started shooting on the streets of New York. The Italian American Civil Rights League had put pressure on Paramount Film to delete certain words from the script. In March Al Ruddy, the producer, and Anthony Columbo, Joe's son held a press conference and said certain words would not be used. That is Anthony Columbo, but keep an eye on that great big ring in the upper right of your picture. Because of the consign of Mr. Ruddy, Paramount Pictures, this movie will not use these words, Mafia and Cosa Nostra, which have for so long offended the Italian American people.

Are you intimidated by this action on the part of the Italian Civil Rights League?

Not only am I not intimidated, but they have been very helpful to me and physically setting up certain aspects of this production.

The man with the ring is one Joe ---?---, a member of the Columbo family. He has been convicted for robbery, grand larceny, and forgery.

When the Godfather opened this year the shock finally hit the Italian community. The movie at this moment is on

its way of becoming perhaps the greatest money-maker in film history. \$100,000,000 is projected take.

Nick, since New York is your Mafia beat--suppose you tell us what is going on here.

Well, obviously a gang war is going on. The Mafia is fighting with itself. Americans like to think that the Mafia is like an American corporation with a president and vice-president and stockholders. But it isn't like that at all. It is a group of loosely knit families with unwritten treaties between the families. Sometimes the treaties get broken. Joe Columbo violated the rules and warfare broke out. A Little later in this broadcast I think that we say exactly why Joe was shot. That is the first thing that is happening, and in a way it is of the smallest importance. The most important thing is that the Italian-American community is in a state of shock.

The Mafia numbers about 5,000 and the size of the Italian-American community numbers between seven and twenty-five million depending upon who is counting. Whichever figures you use less than one percent of one percent of the Italian-American community is in any way connected with crime. Of the 99 plus percent feel, and properly so, that the rest of America looks on all of them somehow stigmatized by the Mafia. There isn't any doubt that the media and the FBI, for example, have lead to this stereotype. The Italian-Americans think it is important

that the country at large realize the enormous contributions they have made, and they wish that America could look at the heroes of this country who were born Italian. It is a long and impressive list.

There is something else, Joe, down at the bottom of all this that I would like to talk about. Most Americans forget that a small part of every ethnic has made the passage from the working class to the middle class by the way of crime. Crime and sports and entertainment, but it is crime which interests us here. Crime has been an American way of life for some section of all immigrant groups. In the nineteenth century we controlled crime that belong to the English, then to the Swedes, and Germans. In the twentieth century the leading criminals were first Irish and then Jews. The Italians took control during prohibition, but right now organized crime seems to be passing from the Italians to the blacks.

After each fraction of an ethnic goes from crime to respectability it gets shot by the criminals of the next group. Unfortunately, for the Italians this period of dominance has emerged with a vast multiplication of mass communications. This Mafia group looks much larger than it is. It is my opinion that is shared by other journalists and criminologists that the Italian Mafia is in its last days; that this recent wave of shootings with a few more to come is like the last bright blue flame when the light

bulb goes out. The Italian-American community is hypersensitive about the subject, and you can't blame them. They have said that there is no Mafia, no Cosa Nostra, when there really is, as small as the organization might be. Of course, they never use the word. Let's get into the substance of our broadcast. What we want to show is that the Mafia is in corruption of some absolutely wonderful verges of the Southern Italians. The publicity around the Mafia, and to the corruption of the Anglo-Saxons, to the initial suspicion of the dark eyed Mediterranean. America is predominantly a Protestant Anglo-Saxon country which has traditionally been in suspicion of the Catholic. Now the South and Sicily are the magnification of all of Italy's verges and vices. It is in Sicily that extreme of clanishness is found. Let me give you an example. One night a ---?--- hoodlum was killed in the village square. I was there, and so was the CBS news crew. The people you see lived on the plaza and knew the man who had been shot and undoubtedly knew who shot him. Yet, we with our microphones, we were outsiders somehow connected with authority. The clan closed around itself. They knew nothing. They take care of things within their own families. There is a word for this ---?--- denial of outside authority. These honorable people use the word Mafia to mean an attitude not an organization. Mafia can mean to be proud and secretive in the face of

authority. And how did this all come about? Let's go back further in time and look at Southern Italy where most of ---?--- Americans come from. This film wasn't taken in the 1880s, but it could have been. Southern Italy is not only one of the poorest parts of western Europe, it is the most conquered. At least thirty-two times, from the Phoenician to the American army, these people have been overrun by outsiders. They have lived under foreign rule forever. Alien and hostile people have written their laws for them. In order for the peasant to survive they have ---?--- and written codes of justice and punishment. In between honorable men there was spoken and unspoken understandings that nothing to do with alien's law. About 1880 a series of natural disasters struck the country destroying birth rate in Southern Italy, the incubator of Europe. Immigration was the only way out. Hundreds of thousands fled, first to South America, and then in extraordinary numbers to the east coast of the United States. Over two million immigrants left Sicily and the south for America. They came with two notions: only the immediate family could be trusted and that the rest of the world would be hostile. America was hostile. The immigrant experience had been sentimentalized, but it was savage. About one-third of the Italian immigrants couldn't stand it and went back. Groups of men would come from a single village brought over by a contractor called the ---?---. Many of these---

?--- were thieves and loan sharks, and the men never got out of debt. The word probably comes from the corruption of the Spanish word "wapa" which means handsome. The legend grew that the wapa mean WOP, without papers. The Americanization of the Irish had just taken place, and the Irish were the head of the immigration service. The tall English-speaking Catholic and the short Italian-speaking Catholic, religious and cultural tension began right away. These newcomers found the new culture far more difficult than the one they had left. Darks were these Southern Italians. A few years earlier in Louisiana and Mississippi the sole white landowners thought these decisions might be a little ---?--- way for the blacks. They forced them for the cotton fields. What the immigrants did was repeat their patterns. An old Italian village buried itself in a single New York tenement, burying themselves in the protective bastion of the family, and tried to defend itself from American life. There was extortion; there was black hand; but most of the time Italian against Italian. So long as the crimes that they committed was against themselves the police couldn't care less. Five blocks from the city hall as this film shows, the filth violated every rule of the sanitary code. The greatest chain was the one around their throat. Many were illiterate even in Italian. They took whatever work could be found. The women labored in the sweat shops, and their men helped organize some of

the powerful unions that were just beginning. Getting the money to live is what counted most. In those days a formal education of the children counted little. The good girl went to work or stayed home. The bad girl went to school. The boys learned from the streets, not from school. Most of New York's truancy laws came from the Italian immigration. Children didn't go to school because school meant authority and authority was something to be feared. Wherever America gave the immigrant a fair chance to work, a fair chance to compete, there were no secret societies, no Mafia. The railroad would take him out of little Italy. It would take him away from the East where he was hemmed in and oppressed by the immigrants who had just preceded him. The move west would even take him away from the Mafia and those other ---?--- societies that moved in with unspoken old country laws--Inter-American Gothic. The year 1905, one hundred twenty-five people of one hundred families had died from malaria in the cotton fields of Louisiana. Abandoned by their patrons, the rest were layed out by a priest sent by the Vatican. This certain Father ---?---. In Arkasas they bought land cheaply that the Anglo-Saxons thought couldn't be farmed, but these Italian peasants outfarmed the locals and built the community called ---?---. The Southern Protestant were first hostile to these ---?--- Catholics. As the Italian-Americans proved themselves they became ---?---. Here they are free

of the hardships of Italy, free of the ghettos of the East Coast. These ---?--- the new land Americans. Standing in the windswept Ozarks is a little girl, add sixty-five years to her she becomes American as the ice cream cone. Take another little girl from Italy. Add sixty-five years to her too, and here is the truer story of the Americanization of the Italian. ---?---, Arkansas was, of course, called ---?--- Town by its Anglo-Saxon neighbors. The students at the University of ---?--- bring their dates to this exotic city for an adventure in Italian cooking called ---?---. As the years went by it became mid-south and sleepy and peaceful. This community of Italians has no sheriff, no crime at all, nobody on any police blotter. It burried itself deeper and deeper into American customs of supermarket and pickup truck. You would think that it was all gone. The ---?--- have finally become ---?---, but out of this is still Italy.

The game is called ---?---. It dates back to when the Greeks conquered Sicily. What they are doing is guessing what the people numbers of extended fingers of the two right hands will add up to. The score is kept on the left there. It was the only form of gambling for two peasants in the field. Of course, it was outlawed by the authorities, and, of course, it has been played forever.

This is the way Southern Italians think learning should be passed on, by hearing from generation to

generation instead of eye from books.

It is homecoming time in Arkansas. The Feast of the Assumption, ---?--- the great festival. The families come back the way Italian cultural memory brings the family back. There is no Mafia, no secret society, no crime, just this mixed-up unpredictable weave of American and Italian ethics.

The faces are out of the hills of Italy, but that accent is out of the hills of the Ozarks. You can play a good game trying to ask what face is Anglo-Saxon and what face is Italian.

To the Anglo-Saxon it looks like an innocent square dance, but in old Sicily this would have been sinful. In Southern Italy men and women never touched in public, never danced together. The great festival always took place in Italy at the end of summer. So responding to their history these Italian-Americans show their grapes. At last Arkansas is a local option state. These big, heavy concords are not on their way to become good Italian wine, but Welch's grape juice, Welch's jellies and jams and--?---. In wine there is truth, but in grape juice there is heartburn for Italian-Italians like ---?---. The difference between wine and grape juice is a small thing in pure American history, but to the Italian-American it has some very serious consequences. ---?---, mayor of San Francisco, touched on this difference slightly in a speech

he made in the North Beach section of his city.

For one thing--I have told some of you this before--when we had that horrible iron curtain pulled over us between 1918 to 1933, that thing they called the National Prohibition, only North Beach kept the favor. And it wasn't they did it illegally. They did it legally. You remember--all of us remember the wine that used to be crushed in North Beach. They used to bring the grapes around, and they would crush the wine and do all of that. Everything was done quite legally, see, because that is statute. The prohibition statute had in it that you could make wine either for sacramental or religious purposes or you could make it for health purposes, and you have no idea how many sick and religious Italians we had in North Beach at that time. You have no idea.

While government officials were busy breaking bottles or illegal whisky, organized crime began to finance itself with bootlegging. In the ---?--- and thirties the leading criminals had Jewish, Irish and Anglo-Saxon names like---?---, ---?---, ---?---.

The Italian organizations like Al Capone's were the exception. The Mafia of the immigrant did not become powerful until prohibition. We will talk about that in a minute. To all Latins prohibition was a Protestant, Anglo-Saxon madness. To all sensible Latins wine is a food. Each of these ---?--- players probably knew someone that made

wine in his cellar. After you press the grapes what is left is skin and stems and bits. What you do with what is left over is distill it, and you make ---?--- Italian moonshine. To make ---?--- you need a still. There were stills in every house in little Italy. Like I said wine is a food. Americans drink pop; Italians drink wine. Nobody gets drunk except on predetermined days. So here they were these old men with a still in the cellar, and the people outside Little Italy willing to pay dollars for what costs only a few cents. All it took is organization, and the little organization called the Mafia was in business in America.

This film was made in 1950 for Italian television. The Italian communities of America were as exotic to Italian-Italians as they were to American-Americans. Their ---?--- of a subculture had been preserved. The most idealized member of the Italian peasant family is the mother. She is expected to be pure, virtuous, and pay no attention to whatever her husband's or son's business may be. After in America mama rides in a white cadillac. This is proper dancing. The women are alone. The men alone. Warm, friendly, family oriented Little Italy where everything is seen right ---?--- and happily right on the surface.

Like a ---?--- play where one man's sanity is another man's madness, here is another film. It was made by people

engaged in stakouts. It is a hidden view of Mulberry Street. Here on the corner of Mulberry and Spring watching the weather is the former bodyguard of Lucky ---?---.---?--- has served time for extortion. Law enforcement people are forever taking pictures in this neighborhood. Sometimes with cause, and sometimes the residents wish they would go farther downtown and take mug shots of Wall Street stock swindlers.

249 Mulberry Street standing in the doorway wiping his face is Louie ---?--- who has a record of desertion and gambling. That is the doorway to the Ravenite Club, the activities of which are a constant source of interest to detectives. The enforcement people who made this film found themselves photographng a New York City plainclothesman. He sees the lense and stays undercover. Now watch, he waits for somebody to come by and uses him to cross to a place where he knows there is not enough light for the camera. Meanwhile, here is Leonard ---?---, a dandy and a gambler who has paid a debt to society six times. The point of all this is that Little Italy has many virtues. For the organized criminal it has the value of being kind of a DMZ. It is simply understood that no one commits crime of substance in this museum of a neighborhood. As a matter of fact little Italy usually has the lowest crime rate of any section of the city. There are too many enforcers around including the police.

The most important that we could find was Carlo Gambino. He is the Godfather of all New York families, but it's his smile that we call attention to. It is the look of a man who clearly knows the difference between the secret codes of Sicilian justice and the written codes of American law. He has occasionally tolerated the intrusions of the American legal systems in the defense of his old world honor. Gambino is so important that he only had a minor criminal record and a history of heart attacks just before he is supposed to be deported.

This perverted honor roll has to include a man who parlayed his post-war job as a translator for the American army into the head of the whole black market of Southern Italy. ---?--- has that same certain smile.

Is it true that you are the head of the Mafie in this country?

It is not.

Well, sir, have you ever been connected with the Mafia at anytime?

Never.

What about the government charge that you are the light man, that you are the number one man in this narcotics business? Have you ever known anyone in the narcotics racket?

No, I never did.

Have you ever known anyone in the underworld?

The whole thing is ridiculous.

---?--- record included murder, ---?---, homicide, and he will die in prison after he is found guilty on this narcotics charge.

He is a respectable businessman, and these charges are ridiculous and fantastic, and he wants to be left alone to continue his business in an ordinary manner.

Joe ---?--- had that small smile too. He tried to become a respectable businessman. A dark and intricate feud with the Gambino, ---?--- and ---?--- families, he asserted his independence. He is the father in Gay ---?--- book, Honor Thy Father. He represents that step we have been talking about from the peasant father to the middle class by the way of crime. Joe ---?--- kept the peasant rule of secrecy quite. This maverick never fit anything in public.

In 1967 the New York police arrested a number of men at the ---?--- Restaurant in Queens. One of the men that hid his face from the camera is Joe Columbo who wanted no publicity at all.

Three years later in 1970 Joe came out from the quiet. So there is little doubt that the FBI and the press had been harassing the Italians and Joe wanted his say.

I have always maintained and said that there is no Mafia and there is no Cosa Nostra. I said that this was only a harassment of the Justice Department of the

administration and the law enforcement agency for no other reason than to hurt people, to hurt children, and to brainwash and use the Italian people as scapegoat, to each and every crime that is committed in this country.

Joe Columbo in twentieth century man public. He organized the Italian-American Civil Rights League, and he moved into ethnic politics. Joe Columbo, the Mafia leader who had specialized in gambling now moved from ---?--- to advertising. It was a moment of pure peasant in this office even though it is Madison Avenue in the 1970s. This deference is ---?--- in the 1800s. That noble smile and courtly bow to a man of respect.

Joe got his first rally in 1970. The largest gathering in the history of Italian Americans. In spite of who he was he had emerged as the most powerful Italian-American leader in the East.

I thank God that I was born of Italian birth. But today this day belongs to you the people. You are organized. You are one. Nobody can take you apart anymore.

In Mafia circles there was consternation. The hidden code had been broken. The secret society had been Americanized. The question was, what kind of power was Columbo trying to build for himself? The site itself was unthinkable to Columbo's fears. A Mafia standing before 50,000 people in Columbus Circle guarded by the police. So a year later the mob shot Joe Columbo.

This day belong to you the people. You are organized. You are one. Nobody can take you apart anymore.

All this blood is a sign of declining strength of the Mafia because when the secret organization is working in full control it is fear not blood that keeps people in line. When people are scared you don't have to use muscle. It is only when the organization is in trouble when blood gets spilled. There are a lot of internal stresses among ---?--- today. The young ones have given up on the idea of a Godfatherly organization with its traditional rackets. The new ---?--- playing for phony stock deals and heroin wholesaling. They prefer night clubs to espresso cafes. They live in suburban houses and own country club memberships. The old ones know that the organization can't stay alive unless it stays distant and secret. The Americanization of the Mafia is a contradiction in terms. The Godfathers would say that the public criminality should belong to the politicians not to the racketeers. That is why Joe Columbo was shot. He tried to throw a bridge over a cultural chasm too wide to span.

And that is why inevitably given time the Mafia has to go. You can't play a Sicilian game by American rules.

[RECORDING DIFFICULTIES FOR THE NEXT PART OF THE TAPE]

But you know it worked. Shortly after this day the FBI stopped using the words Mafia and the Cosa Nostra in its press releases, even if the agency didn't change its

suspicious. And it should have worked because of the honest 99 plus percent of the Italian-American community where being harassed by too many law enforcement agencies just because they were of Italian descent.

As of personal experience, if you want to call it small potatoes you may. I was asked to run for a certain office. The first question the congressmen asked the group to check Michealino out for Mafia connections. Now, to me that was not small potatoes. It is direct stigma. My name ends in a vowel, "Let's make certain that he is not a member of the Mafia." What is it that every Italian is connected with the Mafia. I don't even know when the Mafia ---?---. There is nobody in my family that is related to the Mafia. Why do I have to have this stigma attached to me that I am either part of the Mafia, connected to the Mafia, or backed by the Mafia?

Who is it that you can look up to in any Italian community? Who is there to look up to for leadership?

We have nobody. We really don't. We have nobody to say, "I want to be like him." Nobody to say, "I love the way he represents us." There is nobody there. I don't think there is anyone, any Italian-American, that exists right now that I could look up to and relate to. That is the whole problem. There is no one that I can relate to. There is only the image of spaghetti and meatballs and the Mafia, and that is no image at all.

Bill, ---?--- spaghetti and meatballs are on a San Francisco table. ---?--- whose father founded the Bank of America, the largest bank in the world, \$30 billion dollars in assets. ---?--- a nobel prize winner who helped ---?--- develop the atom bomb. ---?--- runs a \$360 million dollar a year corporation. Joseph ---?--- mayor of San Francisco, the ---?--- millionaire son of a Sicilian immigrant. ---?--- to say about Anglo-Saxons.

There is something that always exists in the Anglo-Saxon mind, some necessary to contribute whatever war with the world, may have some unseen conspiratorial force. One time it was the Vatican that was engaged in international conspiracy. Another time it was the Jews, another time the Jesuites. Now it happens to be a group of Sicilians who for the most part while very real, there are some very real Sicilian gangsters, make no mistake about that. There are very real Irish gangsters and Jewish gangsters and gangsters in the economic who steal a lot more than gangsters in the order of wine, or whisky, or gambling. Steal a lot more. But there isn't any doubt that there is this notion about international conspiracy that fires the imagination of too many Anglo-Saxons.

The reverse conspiracy hit ---?--- in the middle of his political period. When we picked him up in the middle of his 1971 mayor campaign, he was bleeding hard in Italian and not overlooking any roads including the

Chinese.

Joe ---?--- was the most popular Italian on the West Coast, but there was two other ---?--- law suits at this time. One had been brought by the Justice Department just about the time the mayor had been--was ready to run for governor of California. Another he--

[RECORDING DIFFICULTIES AT THIS TIME ON THE TAPE]

First of all Look magazine is now broke as you know, and Rick, it couldn't happen to a nicer man.

In any event in 1969 people were saying that I might be running for governor of California. At the same time, you know, my office was still feeling--

[RECORDING DIFFICULTIES AT THIS TIME ON THE TAPE]