

Characters Such as Corleone by Puzo have not Helped the Image

Joseph Sciame (January 12, 2012)



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Thank you for the invitation to participate in the response discussion re the comments made by Roberto Saviano during the course of his visit most recently at the [Casa Italiana](#) [2], NYU.

I have copied the following from the article on i-Italy and wish to keep my comments to his commentary at that point during his discourse. Gomorrah's writer didn't avoid talking about organized crime and about the perception of Italians abroad.

"Italians have the best anti-mafia law in the world but I know that we cannot take it anymore to be associated with the mafia world," and he talked about characters such as Michael Corleone by Mario Puzo or Al Capone played by De Niro, just as examples. "We can't put the blame on Scorsese or on



the Sopranos for the mafia and this perception." It is important to know what happens, he claimed, "The indifference is the worst form of omerta' (a conspiracy of silence)."

It seems to me that unless I missed something from the discourse, there was an absence of commentary made by some experienced community-minded Italian Americans relative to Mr. Saviano's statement re the anti-mafia laws that exist in Italy, almost implying that there is little being done elsewhere.

I only wish I had been there as a former Chairman of the [Commission for Social Justice of the Order Sons of Italy in American](#) [3] (OSIA) from 2003-05 and now a national past president, during which time we fought vigorously as we do each day in combating and joining forces with those who fight the mafia syndrome, or better known as organized crime.

I would disagree with his comment in that characters such as Corleone by Puzo; they have not helped the image that was initially created by the early immigrants of the 1880s-1920s. Their hard work and dedication to the fabric of our American society is oftentimes wiped out by such characters and images, whether on TV, news media or film. No, we do not blame the Scoreses of the world for the mafia, of course not. But we do blame such actors for continuing to instill in such characterizations that Italian-Americans are in such portrayals.

People begin to believe it, and we know in our American society that there is a systemic belief that Italian Americans are involved in forms of criminality. The famed Lichter study of thirty years ago attested to the statistics of what people believe, regardless of the ongoing contributions to the world by Italians and Italian Americans. This has been further substantiated by a more recent [Zogby Poll](#) [4] sponsored by the [National Italian American Foundation](#). [5]

Finally, if I had been at the meeting I would have stated clearly that there is no indifference in those leaders of the Italian American community in conveying their distaste for matters related to the mafia syndrome and/or organized crime. There is no conspiracy of silence, for we have fought for many a year against bias, bigotry and defamation when needed and where needed. Throughout this great land called America, we have defined our Italian and Italian American role as an ethnic community, one filled with respect for values, and values such as: family, faith, government, education and more.

Most of all, we have contributed in a most positive way to our society by hard work, diligence to the various tasks at hand, involved in every level of government, and better educated owing to the opportunities of education at all levels, especially at the collegiate and university levels.

I share these comments as someone involved in the Italian American community and its social movement for some forty-three years from when I initially joined the OSIA, and have gone from a local to state to national level. It is with that pride that I respond to Mr. Saviano's comments.

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