



The Two Mafias: A Transatlantic History, 1888-2008 (Italian and Italian American Studies)

Salvatore Lupo

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For many people, the term 'mafia' connotes a vast and powerful organization originating exclusively in southern Italy. In this bracing new history, however, renowned Italian historian Salvatore Lupo argues that a realistic understanding of the mafia phenomenon must avoid two seemingly opposed and persistent depictions: one of a single octopus extending its tentacles from Sicily to envelop the world, the other of thousands of small, localized groups operating in relative isolation. Instead, the mafia is best understood within the context of a network of overlapping business, municipal, and familial relationships and institutions. Mafia networks could cover a single rural village like a tight mesh, but they could also forge connections between areas as geographically remote as the Conca d'Oro citrus groves and the Brooklyn waterfront. Their influence extended not just from Italy to the United States, but in the other direction as well, and in both instances they occupied a hazy social space between legality and illegality. Moving from the first Italian immigrants of the 19th century to the most recent historical developments, Lupo's rigorous study reveals the mafia to be the result of a complex cultural and social encounter that was shaped by multiple, diverse environments.

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