

# "Cosa Nostra"

The **Mafia**, also referred to in Italian as *Cosa Nostra* ("Our Thing" or "This Thing of Ours"), is a secret society formed in the mid-19th century in Sicily. An offshoot emerged on the East Coast of the United States during the late 19th century following waves of Italian immigration to that country.

According to some mafiosi, the real name of the Mafia is *Cosa Nostra*, meaning 'our world, tradition, values'

To men of honour belonging to the organisation, there is no need to name it. Mafiosi introduce known members to other known members as belonging to "*cosa nostra*" (our thing) or "*la stessa cosa*" (the same thing). Only the outside world needs a name to describe it, hence the capitalized version of the words: *Cosa Nostra*.

Originating during the mid 19th century, the Mafia served as protection. From this, the Mafia began to spread its roots among the landowners and politicians of Sicily. Forming strong links with the government (it is more than likely that many politicians were members or collaborators) the Mafia gained significant power.

Known as the Honored Society among Mafiosi, the chain of command is organized in a pyramid similar to a modern corporate structure.

## Traditional terminology:

- o **Capo di Tutti Capi** (the "Boss of All Bosses")
- o **Capo di Capi Re** (a title of respect given to a senior or retired member, equivalent to being a *member emeritus*, literally, "King Boss of Bosses")
- o **Capo Crimini** ("Crime Boss", known as a Don - the head of a crime family)
- o **Capo Bastone** ("Beat Head", known as the "Underboss" is second in command to the Capo Crimini)
- o **Consigliere** (an advisor)
- o **Caporegime** ("Regime head", a captain who commands a "crew" of around ten *Sgarriste* or "soldiers")
- o **Sgarrista** or **Soldati** ("Soldier", made members of the Mafia who serve primarily as foot soldiers)
- o **Picciotto** ("Little man", a low ranking member who serves as an "enforcer")
- o **Giovane D'Onore** (an associate member, usually someone not of Italian or Sicilian ancestry)

## GLOSSARY:

- o **Offshoot** – a thing that develops from sth, especially a small organization that develops from a larger one
- o **Incarcerate** – to put sb in prison or in another place from which they cannot escape
- o **Forge** – to put a lot of effort into making sth successful or strong so that it will last
- o **Ancestry** – the family or the race of people that you are descended from