

be appropriate in any class on the history of Italian immigration or of Latin American studies.

—ANGELA DALLE VACCHE

Georgia Institute of Technology

Work Cited

Bendazzi, Giannalberto. 2007. *L'uomo che anticipò Disney*. Latina, Italy: Tunué.

Colorado Experience: “The Smaldones: Family of Crime.”

By Julie Speer.

Rocky Mountain PBS and History Colorado, 2014.

30 minutes. Streaming format, color.

The myth of the frontier figures large in Colorado’s history. Self-sufficient settlers on the eastern plains, grizzled miners in the Rockies, and chuck wagons in Durango influence much of the state’s self-imagined past. Rocky Mountain PBS, in conjunction with History Colorado (formerly known as the Colorado Historical Society and operator of the state historical museum in Denver), attempts to broaden that mythology by telling the stories of a diverse range of Coloradans in the public network’s *Colorado Experience* series. “The Smaldones: Family of Crime,” along with episodes on the Sand Creek massacre and the rise of the Chicano Movement, joins the series’s more regularly featured frontier symbolism. This brief narrative history, based on *Denver Post* columnist Dick Kreck’s 2010 true-crime book, *Smaldone: The Untold Story of an American Crime Family*, ties the tale of the Smaldone brothers, and especially Clyde Smaldone, to broader histories of Italian immigration, prohibition, and organized crime.

“The Smaldones” demonstrates that organized crime in Denver between Prohibition and the post–World War II era was by no means an “underworld” of secrets and shadows, but rather a network of very visible businesses run out of leading restaurants and nightclubs. The gangsters who sold illegal goods and services worked with law enforcement and participated in local, regional, national, and global economic markets. They openly donated to charitable causes, including the Catholic Church, and a number of leading politicians (even one governor) within their circle.

The film features period and contemporary photographs intercut with interviews with historians and journalists. The filmmakers made extensive use

of an audiotaped oral history of Clyde Smaldone, conducted by his son Gene. Far from a violent sociopath, the elder Smaldone comes across as a small-business man, struggling to lower his costs and lamenting—many decades after the fact—when he sold bootleg booze too cheaply. Organized crime often brings to mind a broad and deep international network broken up into regional families, but “The Smaldones” challenges this conceit. “The Smaldones” acknowledges that the brothers purchased booze from Al Capone but asserts that they did so as a business decision rather than because they were members of the same organization; Capone sold his product for about half the price of the Canadian distributors the Smaldones had worked with before. After making the switch, they enjoyed larger margins between wholesale costs and retail profits. The family’s later gambling enterprises similarly seem like an expansion of the family’s business interests. A more stereotypical treatment might describe extending tentacles of an ethnic criminal octopus deeper into an innocent U.S. society.

That said, the film does engage with the interrelationship of the Smaldones’ Italian American ethnicity and their criminality. This association runs the risk of veering into stereotypes and clichés but ultimately stands in contrast to the overt marketing of Italian American criminality undertaken by the current corporate owners of the family’s former North Denver restaurant, Gaetano’s, where diners sit under a logo reading “Gaetano’s: Italian to Die For” and face mug shots on their tab when they get the check at the end of the meal. Instead, the Smaldones end up seeming well-rooted in the Italian community’s broader religious, economic, and cultural life, even while their criminality is not described as similarly rooted in the primordial connections of the Cosa Nostra or the Mafia.

While the film avoids the more base association of Italian American ethnicity with criminality, the fact that this is the sole episode on Italian Americans in five seasons of the *Colorado Experience* makes it fair to ask what the producers mean by the last words of the documentary: “They were small-time mobsters, but they were our mobsters.” At least part of the goal of the show was to both place the family into a national narrative about organized crime and fit their story into the history of Colorado. Ultimately, this documentary is concerned with engaging a general audience in learning a bit more about “our mobsters”—not “our Italian Americans.” Nevertheless, in telling the Italian immigrant story through the Smaldones, the film potentially resurrects concerns regarding the public portrayal of the clichéd *mafioso*. In seeking to diversify Colorado’s history, Colorado PBS and History Colorado simultaneously threaten to codify the state’s Italian Americans with stereotypes.

The film breaks little new ground in the history of organized crime, but it does provide some insight into the pedestrian business life of a criminal

organization that endured from the Prohibition era through the 1980s. Most of us have heard of the Gambinos, Al Capone, or Lepke Buchalter, but the stories of organized crime in smaller cities like Kansas City, Denver, New Orleans, and Tampa perhaps provide greater insight into the social web that supported organized criminal activity. At the same time, the film leaves many basic questions unanswered and largely unexplored: What role, if any, did the Smaldones play in violent crime? What were the extent and limits of the family's relationship with Colorado and the nation's politicians? The filmmakers seemed content to provide a small litany of anecdotes rather than to help viewers think through the interrelationships of crime, politics, and the administration of justice.

—LEE BERNSTEIN
SUNY New Paltz

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Kreck, Dick. 2010. *Smaldone: The Untold Story of an American Crime Family*. Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing.

Influx: Europe Is Moving.

By Luca Vullo.

Em Production, 2016.

86 minutes. Streaming format, color.

Influx is the latest documentary directed and produced by Sicilian filmmaker Luca Vullo, who for the second time explores via film the delicate issue of Italian emigration. His first documentary, *Dallo zolfo al carbone* (From sulfur to coal, 2008), examined the intimate and emotional experience of Italian miners in Belgium in the 1940s and especially the legacy of hard and degrading work conditions for a generation of Italians who left their home country in desperate need of a better life.

With *Influx*, Vullo shifts his attention to the United Kingdom. The film focuses on London, where, as the film claims, more than 250,000 Italians have taken up residence over the past decades, either temporarily or permanently. *Influx* is the result of a crowd-funded campaign that helped Vullo realize an independent visual work that tells a story not fully narrated elsewhere. It tries to answer two fundamental and pressing questions: Why have many Italians decided to migrate to London? Who are they?