

# MAFIA DNA

NEVER SO CLOSE IN THE HEART OF MAFIA LIFE

A TV DOCUMENTARY SERIES

6 X 48 MIN.

In **MAFIA DNA** we get the low-down on 6 of the world's most notorious and effective criminal organizations. We're all fascinated by the bad guy after all. It is in our DNA.

Well, **MAFIA DNA** dares you to look at the major players of international crime at this time in our century. Reconstructing the real mafia lives of initiates, foot soldiers, captains and bosses in these gangs, is like a crash course on the criminal underworld of the 2020s.

**In this series we will not focus on telling the chronological story of the various Mafias and their origins;** there are enough television programs out there that have already done that. **Instead,** we will examine **the unique symbols, rules and codes** that characterize some of the world's most notorious names in organized crime. We will investigate **their secret oaths of silence, their initiation ceremonies** and established **hierarchies**, and the application of their **"Codes of Honor"**.

We will try to understand their **unique languages, their signs, their gestures;** in short, we will look at their communication, which is so often full of intricate codes. We will also look into their complex **hierarchical organizations**, from the men-of-honor, the foot-soldiers and assassins, right up to their great leaders in command. In short, we will analyze, episode-by-episode, **the true DNA** of the leading Mafias of the world.

Every criminal organization worth anything has its own code, its own rules and structures and rituals. The 'Ndrangheta, for example, only accept ethnic Italians into their clan. This is a very different bar of entry from Russia's Vory. To join, and get the tattoos inked under their custom-made suits, they first have to do time in prison. Each and every gang is distinctive, but they all have much in common.

**In MAFIA DNA,** we will reveal the state of play with organized crime in our era. But on a much more personal, intimate level, we ask what gangsters today see when they look in the mirror. How does that self-image adhere or divert from their real-life personas?

We will put these lives of crime on screen, using all the storytelling devices we have. That means: Artful reconstructions, the best in archive footage, interviews with high ranking and frontline law enforcement, and even some former gang members.

These sources will be at least matched by the look/feel. We will use all the tricks there too, such as high def, slick animations and a stirring soundtrack to enhance the viewer experience.

## EPISODE STRUCTURE

**Four acts** will be present in each and every episode:

- Act 1. Birth, Blood and Family,**
- Act 2. Strictly Business,**
- Act 3. Money and Power,**
- Act 4. The Story and The End.**





**Act 1. Birth, Blood and Family:** Some are born into a life of crime, others seek it out. What is the Recruitment process? The fraternity and initiation rites. The Oath, in some cases. It is a process of rebirth, leaving old life and becoming part of a new family. But a family with a code of survival. A code to live by. In many cases, marks on the body (Tattoos and symbols) distinguish new members. There is also Death and Rebirth in the new "Family", with a new Father. Family in different forms, plays a major role in many gangsters' lives. First, there is the family that is the governing structure of every mob life, high or low. Then, there is the family within the family - the intimate relationships between a mafioso, his wife and family. (And often his mistress as well.) Certainly, there are complicated ties and strict rules that govern family and feelings. In the 'Ndrangheta, preserving Italian bloodlines takes a high priority. While in the Russian mafia, it's just the opposite. All but a few upper-echelon Vory remain unmarried and childless. It's an almost monastic devotion, but these guys are nothing much like Monks. It will be seen that the plight of women born into or absorbed into the various mafia clans can be very harsh. Here we touch upon the immobile rigidity of the Chinese Triad, and the strong family chains of the Mexican Cartels. But practically any mafia woman who brings shame to her group will be punished, with banishment - or even more severe consequences.

**Act 2. Strictly Business:** All gangsters must work, even if that just means going out stealing, but mob bosses have to pay real attention. The head of a mafia family in Palermo or Naples, the Father of a Yakuza Family and a Russian crime boss would all have a lot in common. But their differences are fascinating too. In Interviews with investigators and criminologists we can illustrate what it takes to be a boss in Mexico or Hong Kong, Moscow or LA. This means we will see which areas of crime the various gangs dominate, such as 'Ndrangheta's grip on the cocaine trade in Europe, or the Triads lingering hold on casinos and illegal gambling. In this section of each episode, there will sometimes be management lessons useful for any business. How do the bosses manage their organizations? When are they diplomatic, and when are they violent in their dealings with rivals? Some of their complex strategies are worthy of any high-level executive.

**Act 3. Money and Power:** The intrigues, the corruption, the payoffs to politicians' "payrolls". Gangs have to do something with all the money they accumulate. So, let's follow the money and trace known assets of the various mafias ranging from Moscow to New York, Naples and Caracas, London, Rome, San Francisco. There are three identifiable players in this process: a. The underworld organization involved. b. Trusted service providers that move and re-invest dirty capital c. Bankers who close their eyes to what's going on. We will also discover that occasionally, the mafia themselves can be defrauded by bankers and service providers. So much for honor among thieves. And speaking of dishonor, Politics is also a dirty business and the criminal underworld and politicians have been intertwined for centuries. Coordination between Hong Kong police and Triads is a recent example. There are others, as we'll see. In some cases, a mafia can virtually become a state and states can resemble a mafia.

**Act 4. The Story and the End:** Most gangsters are nothing if not image conscious. In many cases they model themselves on movies and music, who mirror them straight back. But a man's image, for the individual gangster whether capo or foot soldier, goes deeper than that. It's the story they tell themselves, and what they hope will be said about them when they're gone. We will discover the true meaning of the "Man of Honor". The code of Omertà. The level of respect that must be earned inside these criminal gangs. Living up to this standard is important at every level and in every kind of Mafia. Talking bigger picture, the right reputation, also helps establish a gang in a neighborhood or territory - as men to be respected, more importantly, to be feared. This makes almost every aspect of their operation so much easier. But how would an aspiring young gangster create that sort of image for himself? There will be plenty of opportunities in this series to answer that question. And we can't leave out the way things end. For many a gangster, their life is short, with a violent finish. After reflecting on that, we can also describe the various gangs most often used murder techniques. And last not but least, do a quick study of some policing and policies that can weaken, and sometimes even break, the mafia strangleholds.

**EPISODE 1 : Italy - 'Ndrangheta \_ Cocaine Capos**

'Ndrangheta is the biggest Mafia organization that the vast majority of people have never heard of. But make no mistake; the 'Ndrangheta, from Calabria, (the toe of the so-called 'boot' of Italy), is today the most power crime syndicate in Italy, if not the world. In 2008 their income was said to be around 55 billion dollars, and in 2010, a US diplomat estimated that the organization's narcotics trafficking, extortion and money laundering activities accounted for at least 3% of Italy's GDP. According to Europol, the 'Ndrangheta "own" the trafficking of cocaine in Europe today. Naturally, the 'Ndrangheta has close associations with the Mafia and Camorra, but they have gone global, with branches everywhere from Australia & Argentina, to Canada and of course the United States.

There are two ways to join the 'Ndrangheta: By birth into a family; or by "baptism", through the "affiliation" rite, which binds the supplicant to the organization for life. Just as with any other self-respecting Mafia, there is really only one way to leave the 'Ndrangheta – By dying.

It is said that training in the "life" starts at a very young age for 'Ndrangheta children; supposedly, there are entire Calabrian towns consisting of 'Ndrangheta families where the authorities barely dare to tread.

From initiation and training all the way to the top, 'Ndrangheta has a code that must be observed. At the top of the power structure, each and every Capo Bastone has the power of life and death over his men and expects the right to absolute obedience from his troops. Like the Mafia, the 'Ndrangheta has its own code of silence, or Omerta, which all members must observe. Balancing the four elements inside this family can be no picnic, but we look at how it's possible.



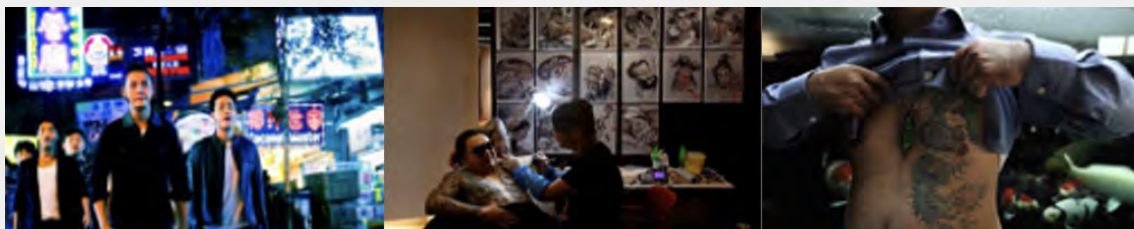
**EPISODE 2 : Hong Kong - Triads and Tong\_ The Wrong Arm of the Law**

In modern day Hong Kong, pro-democracy protestors not only have to battle with the state, and police. The city's gangsters are against them too. It is now well documented that gangs of Triad foot soldiers have attacked protestors, minutes after being seen having a relaxed chat with armed police. The Triads got their start hundreds of years back during the opium trade. These days they engage in a variety of crimes, from fraud, extortion and money laundering to trafficking and prostitution, and are involved in smuggling and counterfeiting goods such as software, clothes, music, video, watches and money.

But the drug business was their biggest business for a long time. They were the undisputed kings of the international heroin trade. These days, they have added to their portfolio. They have begun smuggling chemicals from Chinese factories to North America (for the production of methamphetamine), and to Europe for the production of MDMA. Triads in the United States also traffic large quantities of ketamine.

Another source of revenue is counterfeiting. Triads are still involved in manufacturing fake designer apparel such as clothing and handbags. Since the 1970s, some triad turf control was weakened, and some former mobsters have shifted their revenue streams to legitimate businesses. But don't count the Triads out just yet. They are constantly shifting with the times. In 2012 for example, four triad members were arrested for health care fraud in Japan.

Like all these gangs, the Triads have their own initiation rite. A typical ceremony takes place at an altar, incense, animal sacrifice (usually a chicken, pig or goat). After drinking a mixture of wine and blood (from the animal or the candidate), the member passes beneath an arch of swords while reciting the triad's 36 oaths. Presumably none of them are about defending democracy.



**EPISODE 3 : L.A. – Bloods and Crips \_Straight Outta Compton**

The Bloods and Crips. Some former members of these rival LA gangs made the news recently. But maybe not how you would think. They were promoting a Get Out the Vote drive in the November 2020 election. Most current members of the Bloods and Crips are not so civically minded. The Crips are one of the biggest, most violent associations of all America's street gangs. With an estimated 30,000 to 35,000 members, they have been - and still are - involved in murder, robbery and drug dealing, among other crimes. The Crips have a long and bitter rivalry with the Bloods. The Bloods are also known as Original Blood Family (OBF). Like the Crips, they too come straight out of Compton. The two gangs have had a widespread influence on popular culture. Just look at their overlap with R'n'B, rap and street fashions. Kids all over the world know the 'Latin King' and 'Victory' hand signs. Everybody wants to be a gangster these days or pretends to be.

The Bloods and Crips are still very current, and have made sure they stay that way by weaponizing social media. They have also created any number of imitation gangs, including the serious turf wars being fought today in Tallahassee, Florida, between the imaginatively named North and South Side gangs. These gangs' model themselves on the Bloods and Crips. In this episode we will look at the distinctive signs and crimes that have made these two gangs sworn enemies. Pop quiz: If you had to choose which gang would you pick to join?



**EPISODE 4 : Russia. The Power & The Vory**

Arguably the scariest organized crime group of them all; the Russian Mafia, known to most English speakers as the Vory. One former FBI Special Agent recently called the Vory "the most dangerous people on earth". It is estimated that they have as many as 300,000 members among 450 groups. According to the International Herald Tribune, today the Vory have spread around the world, to Madrid, Berlin, and New York and are involved in everything from petty theft to billion-dollar money-laundering while also acting as judge and jury across all factions of the Russian Mafia. Vory culture sprang from organized crime within the prisons and those origins remain very much embedded within the Vory DNA; only repeatedly jailed convicts are eligible for Vor (or, thief) status. Each new Vor is scrutinized and only accepted by the agreement of several Vors, and then "crowned" a Vor. This happens through respective rituals and intricate, hierarchical tattoos. To be a Vor is to be a thief, a respected title in the underground. The Vory frequently employ military tactics to meet their criminal ends, and their most common activities are terrorism, organ trafficking, and contract killing.

The Vory are the elite of the Russian criminal world, and as we mentioned earlier, their most privileged representatives are "crowned". Prison tattoos, often performed with rudimentary tools, indicate their rank within the criminal world. For example, a tattoo of one cat indicates that the bearer robs alone while multiple cats indicate that he works with partners. An eight-pointed star tattooed on the shoulder is the Vory's main calling card. Unlike for instance the Sicilian Mafia, the Vory have far fewer rules, but the punishment for breaking these is even more severe. What would it be like to survive and thrive in such an environment?



## EPISODE 5 : Mexico - Los Zetas \_ The struggle for Mexico's soul

One of the most dangerous and nihilistic of the Mafias operating in Mexico – and therefore in the world today – are Los Zetas. What's most alarming about this criminal organization is not only the atrocities they have committed in the recent past, but also the potential to perpetuate more horrors in the future. Los Zetas runs on paramilitary lines with sophisticated military training and hierarchy, and members can even earn a "Los Zetas Commando Medallion" for their service.

They are among the most influential modern crime syndicates, and they certainly possess one of the most ferocious and efficient business and military structures among the world's Mafias. Rarely do Los Zetas appear on the front pages and seldom do the newscasts deal with them, but they are the kings of cocaine in Mexico, and they are responsible, along with the other Mexican cartels, for a full blown genuine civil war: seventy thousand dead in ten years, 80 journalists killed and 17 gone missing. Like 'Ndrangheta in Italy, Los Zetas are a 21st century gang. They only began life in 1999 when the head of one criminal Gulf Cartel, feeling threatened by gangland rivals, decided to recruit his own real-life army. They turned out to be highly effective.

Typically, Los Zetas like to portray themselves as revolutionaries, and as friends of the people. But Los Zetas are far from being heroic champions of the struggling masses. In defending their activities of drug trafficking, sex trafficking, gun running, protection rackets and extortion, Los Zetas engages in extremely violent tactics such as beheadings, torture, and indiscriminate murder. And if yet another mafia civil war breaks out, we are bound to see new drug lords emerge. What a career path that must be.



## EPISODE 6 : Japan, Yakuza\_The extreme path

They are recognizable by their slick backed hair, smart black suits and intricate, symbolic tattoos, applied with handmade tools. And some Yakuza can be identified by the missing tips of their little fingers. Chopping them off, to show contrition to their boss is known as "Yubitsume". It's part of the code of behavior that Yakuza are sworn to live by.

The notorious Yakuza, also known as gokudo, "the extreme path", are a unique band of organized criminals. And, while an important part of their identity, Yakuza seldom reveal their tattoos, mainly doing so only when playing cards among themselves, when they open up their shirts and drape them to show off their ink. When new members join, they are often required to remove their trousers as well.

Aside from their unusual position in Japanese society, their code of honor is taken in part from the Samurai code: with stress on absolute obedience to one's lord. Yakuza membership is formalized by ceremonial sharing of sake from a single cup as part of a sworn brotherhood relationship. Much like a traditional Shinto wedding.

What must it be like, to be married to the mob in Japan? You would expect a short life expectancy like a Samurai or a Kamikaze pilot. But then again, some Yakuza live to a ripe old age. How do they do it? They sometimes get involved in politics and take up positions as directors on corporate boards. They have business cards, office buildings, and appear in newspaper society columns. But make no mistake, the Yakuza is one corporate body that no-one wants to get on the wrong side of.





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