MICHAEL FRANZESE

Introducing himself, Franzese explained the separation between the Italian and American Mafia. With his father, growing up in a mafia family, he grew up seeing law enforcement as an enemy. Whilst his father wanted him to go into a legal profession, after his father's arrest he wanted to join the mob. In 1975, Franzese became a ‘made man’ in the Mafia. After years earning incomparable amounts, he eventually lost after several trials. After 8 years of prison time, he became a born-again Christian, writer and motivational speaker.

Franzese explained that his head for business enabled him to be very financially successful, whether his business was legal or illegal. For 18 months before he became a ‘made man’, he said he took part in violence and many things he wishes he could change, and much he regretted. Whilst no longer seeing himself as part of the life, he said the greatest years of the mob were from the 1950s until the 1980s followed by rampant law enforcement against the Mafia.

When asked about Franzese links with other European organised crime groups, he noted that he had a partnership with Russian mobsters in a gas scheme that enabled him to scam the government over every barrel of gasoline it sold. Despite having a contract on his head after leaving the life, and his father disowning him, he says that the mobsters who were around when he was are now dead or imprisoned.

When asked the worst thing he ever saw, he said he saw people get killed. Despite finding faith, it didn’t make him guiltier, but rather as forgiven for believing in God again. His faith has stopped him passing judgement on people. Commenting on the most famous gangster John Gotti, Franzese said he was fantastic social, but incredibly difficult to deal with on a business sense. He currently still has a friendship with Gotti’s wife and daughters.

His business motto is, “do what you do best, and delegate the rest”, and Franzese used this throughout his gangster days. When asked why he didn’t become a government informant, he says he doesn’t find it noble to inform on people, as he says it isn’t his role to fight organised crime. Franzese surprised the audience by saying he is a supporter of President Trump, partly due to his conservative opinions, and partly his personal belief in President Trump.

Following onto a conversation about God, he says his mother in law increasingly encouraged him to become religious, as did his wife. After returning to prison, he found hopelessness as the worst feeling. Faith, Franzese believes, allowed him to believe he could be forgiven and keep going in life despite the hardships and violence he has partaken in.

His work in film and production saw him meet his wife, who he spotted coming out of the swimming pool. She spent a period of time standing him up after several dates, whilst Franzese says this happened five times, his wife disagrees. After persistence, they began a 32 year relationship.
To conclude, Franzese laughed over being one of the only mobsters without a nickname. The media, however, dubbed him, “the yuppie don” because he represented a new, sleek generation of mobsters. He brands the success of the Mafia over a hundred years for its influence over all aspects of the United States, from the White House to the unions where the mobs had millions of members it could force to strike. This meant corporate businessmen came to the mob rather than vice-versa to create illegal schemes.

Franzese ended the talk thanking Cambridge students and the British generally for their manners and interest in him.

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