Title: “Bianco…Bianchissimo!”: Latent Fascism, American Culture, and Blackness in Postwar Italy

Abstract:
The end of the Second World War marked a new beginning for Italy as the country sought to transition from Fascism to a modern, industrialized, American-style economy based on consumer capitalism, distancing itself from the racialized and xenophobic discourses of its totalitarian past. An important aspect of these desired transformations was the notion of race, in particular how Italians understood Blackness in their own country and its relation to Italian national identity. Additionally, the strong presence of American culture in the country via consumer products, music, and film, played a significant role in influencing Italian perceptions and ideas of race. This lecture will examine two manifestations of American culture in Italy in the decades following the war: hygienic standards and their attendant cleaning agents, and the Italian career of African-American singer, actress, and dancer Lola Falana. By juxtaposing the two, the talk will shed light on the intricacies of Blackness in Italian society, its intersection with American culture, and the subsequent effect on the construction of contemporary Italian national identity.