

'Mafia,' 'Cosa Nostra' Still Out of Justice Dept. Lexicon

Post 3/11/77

Despite a temporary lapse by Attorney General Griffin B. Bell, the terms "Mafia" and "Cosa Nostra" are still forbidden words at the Justice Department.

Technically, that has been the case since July 1, 1970, when then-Attorney General John N. Mitchell issued a directive banning use of the words in official department statements about organized crime.

Mitchell acted after receiving complaints that the constant reference to the "Mafia" by government officials had created an inaccurate impression that all members of organized crime were of Italian origin.

Bell, who became Attorney General in January, apparently was unaware of the directive. At a Feb. 24 meeting with reporters, he was asked about

the Mafia and he used the word several times in his response.

Published reports of what Bell said triggered new protests from Italian-American groups and prompted New York City Mayor Abraham D. Beame to write President Carter "on behalf of the Italian-American community in New York City."

A Justice Department spokesman confirmed recently that the Mitchell directive was still in effect and said that the word "Mafia" would not be used again by the Attorney General or anyone else in the department.