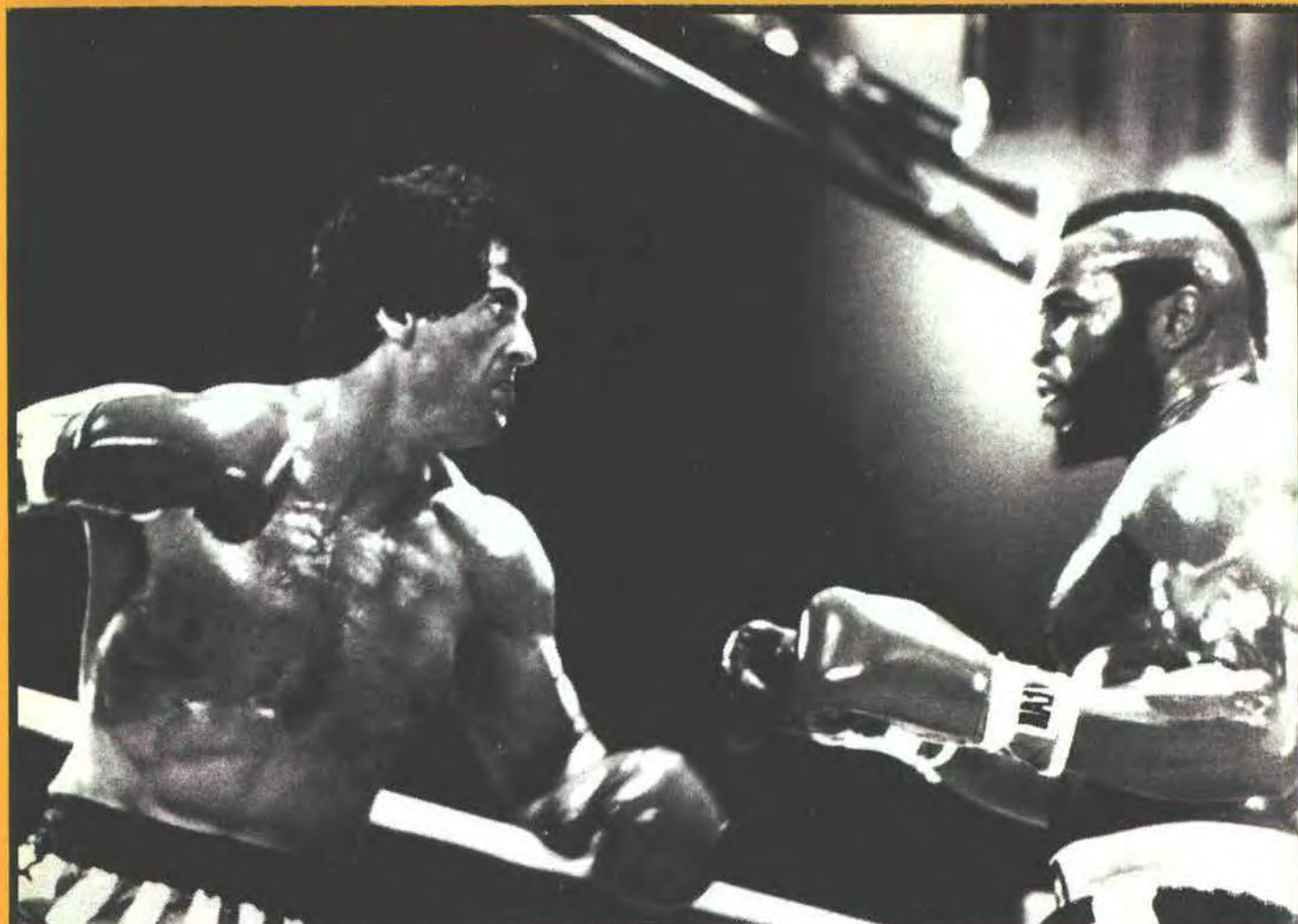


THE Vol. 2, No.4 Fall, 1989  
**ITALIC**  
WAY

The Newsletter of the Italic Studies Institute, Inc.



IN THIS ISSUE:

Head to head, Mr. T vs. Rocky

**Italian vs. Black: The Roots of Conflict**

Ferrero's Negro Army: A Civil War Story.....An African-Italian Restaurant  
A. Bartlett Giamatti: A personal remembrance.....The Bensonhurst Tragedy





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## Letters

Address all letters to: LETTERS, The Italic Way, PO Box 818, Floral Park, NY 11001

### Offended

I take exception to Mr. Bastiano's letter in the Summer edition, especially his sentence "I do not think the majority of Americans of Italian descent need, want or give a damn about the ancient or immediate Italian culture."

He has a right to express his opinion, but I object to him speaking for the majority of Americans of Italian descent. I am a member of the Spanish Lakes Italian American Club here in Florida with 150 members. I have talked to many of them, and the overwhelming majority agree that they are interested in their Italian ancestry, roots and country. Many have traced their family tree back as far as possible. Perhaps Mr. Bastiano is ashamed of his ancestors, but we are not. As far as social connections, I still write to relatives in Italy.

**Frank R. Elarde,  
Port St. Lucie, FL**

### In Praise

Thank you for sending me *The Italic Way*. I cannot express in print how great I found your Spring 1989 edition. It will be saved in my own library for future readings. The history and culture offered in that edition are unequalled by any other current maga-

zine on "Italiana" I have seen. Please continue in same, and don't ever become like *Attenzione*, which sadly evolved into a recipe book and tour guide.

I am American born, and sometimes question why I have this love affair with Italy, a land I have never seen, but upon reading your publication, my questions vanish and a great pride fills my heart, making me, no doubt, a greater American of Italian ancestry.

**Floyd Vivino  
(Uncle Floyd, radio show host)**

Thank you for your wonderful magazine.

I had lost respect for my fellow Italians with the likes of our Mafia cohorts. Reading your magazine gives me a lift and the knowledge about our famous and talented Italians.

**Peter S. De Pasque,  
W. Orange, NJ**

### North vs. South

I have read with a great deal of interest your article "North vs. South" (Summer, 1989). I would like to make a few observations and differ with you on a few points.

You seem to forget that most serious modern economic historians see the roots for the enormous cleavage between north

and south Italy as geographic, exacerbated by historical factors. The fertile Po Valley and the gentle slopes of the Tuscan Appennines gave birth to a generation of peasants who were much more affluent than their Southern counterparts.

Of greater importance were the rulers who governed the small Italian states. While the Sforzas, the Viscountis, the Medicis, and the Venetian Republic were for the most part benevolent despots, the Papacy and the Spanish rulers of the south tried, for political reasons, to keep their subjects in the most abject poverty and, above all, complete ignorance. Why blame the northern indifference to the south rather than laying the blame on the real culprits — absentee landlords and foreign rulers?

**Robert C. Melzi, Ph.D  
Bala Cynwyd, PA**

*(Ed. Dr. Melzi is the author of the Bantam New College Italian & English Dictionary. He was educated at the University of Padua and the University of Pennsylvania.)*

*In our article we were attempting to focus in on attitudes rather than geopolitical causes. Certainly, those*

(continued on p. 3)



# Asbestos abatement is like defusing a bomb. 99% right is 100% wrong.



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# POST SCRIPTS

causes contributed to the problems of attitude just as did such things as dialects and subcultures. However, we ended the piece by recommending a change of attitude on the part of both sides.)

## New York: A Lesson in Italic Apathy

With the defeat of Rudolph Giuliani in the New York City mayoral race by a margin of only some 30,000 votes, the Italic community lost the opportunity of having one of its own presiding over the world's premier city. No doubt, the vast majority of Italian American voters opted for Rudy over his opponent David Dinkins, however, one must suspect voter apathy as one cause of so narrow a defeat.

Elsewhere in City government, a new study by the Columbian Lawyers Association revealed that Italian Americans were in only 10 city management positions out of 354!

It doesn't take much imagination to see what the ultimate cost of apathy is.

## Corrections

• In our last issue we incorrectly identified Signora Pansarella as the wife of vice consul Sebastiano. *Che sbaglio!*

• In our Focus article (Italy's Enduring Myth: North vs South) we stated that the Sicilian Vespers rebellion was directed against the Norman French occupiers. More correctly, it was the Angevin French.



Col. & Sra. Pansarella are seated together at the right. Vice Consul Sebastiano is on the left.

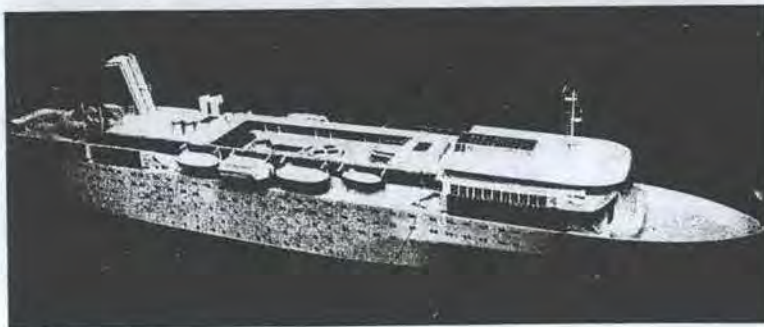
## FUTURE ISSUES OF THE ITALIC WAY

- **SICILY** - Italic from the start
- **ITALIAN WIVES** - Guess who's got one?
- **ITALIAN DEBT** - What Italy owes  
Italian Americans
- **AFRICA** - A part of Italic history
- **MUSSOLINI** - A two-parter with many surprises.





# All'Italiana



Italian "sea power" in the making. Once again, Italian ships with Italian crews.

## CHRIS COLUMBUS: FILM STAR

Look, up on the screen! It's a bird. It's a plane. No, it's *Superman V* and *Christopher Columbus: The Movie*. Executive Producer Ilya Salkind of superhero celluloid fame is set to helm both films on the new Disney/MGM Studios in Central Florida. Each epic will cost in the neighborhood of \$35 million and feature elaborate costumes. From the last son of Krypton to Italy's most famous son, these motion pictures will chronicle the adventures of two giants: an outworlder and the discoverer of the New World.

## WORLDWIDE WINNER

As President of the Creamer Dickson Basford PR agency, Jean Farinelli has energized her company into a pan-European powerhouse. Since joining Creamer in 1987, she singlehandedly forged an international team that saw growth increase from a

meager 1% a year to a stunning 22% a year. Creamer International now has 80 people in London, 40 in France and 15 in Italy. What's more, Ms. Farinelli was instrumental in attracting a number of topflight accounts: Panasonic, Monsanto, and Dannon Yogurt Co. A self-confessed Type A personality, Jean Farinelli has the legendary Vince Lombardi as her role model. Maybe winning means something, after all.

## THE VEAL THING

Say it ain't so, Pasquale Caputo. Now that he has forsaken the warm folksy monologue of his Italo-American roots for a caustic standup routine, comedian Pat Cooper claims to be at peace with himself. However, he won't be invited to any family gatherings in the near future. According to the bespectacled but unbowed barbeimeister, love was a rare commodity in the Caputo clan. "They didn't say, 'I love you,' or hug and kiss you. They only kissed the veal cutlet

because that cost a lot of money."

## AL DI LA (Beyond)

True to their explorer's heritage, the Italians are reaching out to the infinite void. They are assuming a bigger role in European Space Agency projects and working closely with NASA. In addition to the recent deprivation experiment that isolated Italian scientist Stefania Follini deep within the Carlsbad Caverns, the Italian Space Agency announced the selection of four of Italy's finest astronauts by NASA: Franco Malerba, Franco Rossitto, Umberto Guidoni and Cristiano Batalli Cosmovici. Two members of this quartet, Rossitto and Malerba, have been chosen for the 1991 Space Shuttle mission featuring the Tethered experiment. In this project, originally designed by Italian scientist Emilio Colombo, a research satellite will be released on a 12-mile-long tether. By any stretch of the imagination, the mission will mark a noteworthy Italic milestone. By Jupiter! Galileo must be in his glory.

## AD-VENTURES

With spending for advertising totalling \$5.2 billion in 1988, Italy leads all nations in Europe's sunbelt. The word from *Advertising Age* is that "it is quickly becoming the most international of the region." Italian advertising, long known for its flair and inventiveness, is now saturating the airwaves throughout the rest of Europe in preparation for 1992. This effort encompasses autos, beverages and, not surprisingly, food. Thomas Derville, managing director at Gervais Danone, an advertising agency in Torino, calls Italy "the food sector's most lively and interesting market." And this includes the burgeoning frozen food market. Federico Massi, who heads Frigodaunia, a frozen-foods marketer in Rome, boasts that the frozen-food com-





# All'Italiana

partments of supermarkets in the Eternal City have tripled in the past few years. Imagine a new ad campaign: Frozen food that is true to the palate — *infrigido veritas*. Well, it's food for thought.

## NAG OF STEEL

Still smarting from Italy's economic edge over Great Britain, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher clings to every last vestige of Anglo chauvinism. Lately, the Iron Maiden has been venting her spleen at France and Italy for their failure to eliminate foreign exchange controls. Maggie perceives these policies as inimicable to the free movement of capital in the Europe of 1992. Actually, her objections represent a ploy to stave off a common European currency, what she refers to as "the biggest transfer of sovereignty we've ever had." Maggie's most pointed invective, however, is reserved for her two Latin economic rivals, Italy and France: "We believe in an open economy, but they have artificial and cultural barriers which are going to be very difficult to get down. I really can't have Britain worsted by other people having a different set of rules from us."

## PEAK PERFORMER

Scaling the heights of Mt. Everest is a daunting enough task for the young. But, evidently, the University of Milan believes age should be no barrier to accomplishment. In a recent statement, the venerable scholastic institution announced that 92-year-old Italian explorer and geologist Ardito Desio would be climbing Everest in earnest. Though doubtlessly of hardy Italic stock, Professor Desio has yet to reach that plateau. He has, however, been leading a 42-

member scientific team on location in Nepal — not all that far from the world's highest peak.

## CRUISE CRAZE

Genoa's Costa Crociere is taking the plunge into the competitive world of cruises. In 1990 and 1991, Costa will launch two new vacation cruiseliners. Once the queen of the waves, Costa Lines fell on hard times in the 60's and

reluctance in testing Italian tempers. In a symbolic gesture aimed at reviving Italian guilt over the colonial occupation of Libya (1911-1942), Ghedaffi dispatched a black-draped naval-ferry, the Garnata, to Naples. The goal: to extort reparations for alleged Italian misdeeds. Tensions between Italy and Libya, however, worsened. They reached fever pitch when it was learned that an Italian technician, Roberto Cec-



Gheddafi takes on Italy



Pat (Pasquale) Caputo in his "millieu"

70's and had to undergo a massive reorganization before she could return to the seven seas. The imperatives of passenger shipping in the modern era — plus American and Scandinavian encroachments in the Carribean and Mediterranean — necessitated a fresh approach. Today's cruises emphasize scenery, romance and adventure. Now vacationers and lovers alike can sail the seas from Costa to Costa.

## GET GHEDDAFI

While reticent about tweaking America after incurring the wrath of Reagan in 1987 (remember the air raid on Fortress Tripoli?), Libya's resident madman, Moammar Ghedaffi, has no such

cato, had been brutally murdered in Tripoli. The Libyans reacted by stonewalling. Italian investigators and the head of Italian Interpol, Nicola Simone, launched a probe for the killers. The Italian political world was rocked. Socialist politician Carlo Tognoli railed against the Italian government's tepid response. Many in the media called for stronger punitive measures against the flaky Libyan dictator. Military experts warned that the defense of the Italian South is of paramount concern. In light of such incidents and Ghedaffi's past transgressions, i.e. his show of force off the Italian island of Lampedusa, an Italian reprisal may be contemplated.

\*\*\*\*





# World Notes

[We present this section to inform our readers of events and trends that may be of interest with regard to ethnic opinions or cultural values.]

## LEAVE IT HOME!

If you think owning an American Express credit card, green, gold or otherwise, will open doors for you in Italy, you're right — the exits. The fact is Italian business establishments don't usually accept plastic and have a special aversion to American Express.

With a household savings rate exceeding even the frugal Japanese, Ital-

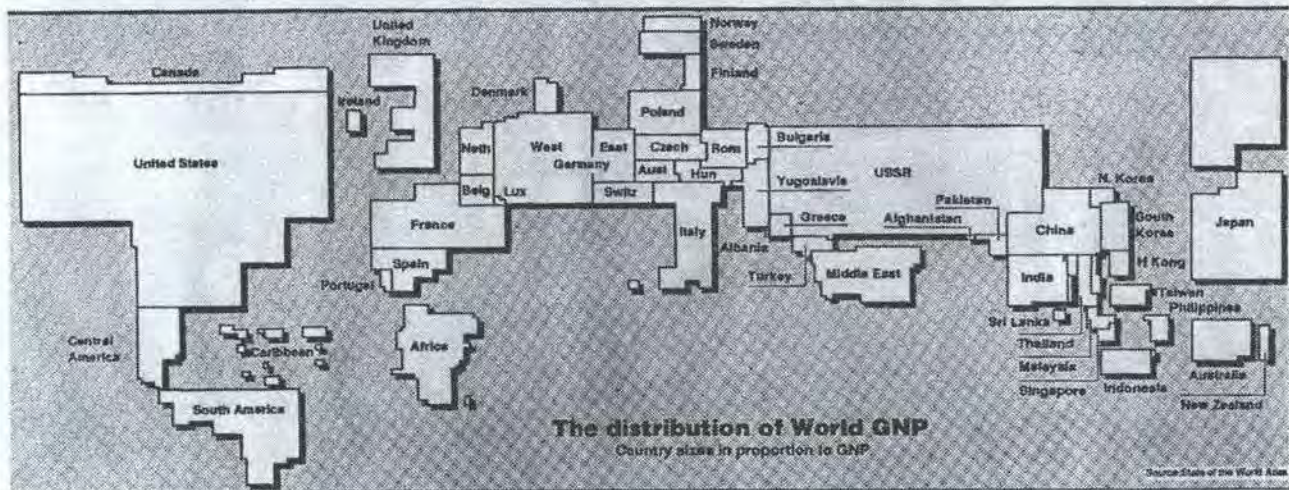
your Italian adventure, bring travelers checks.

## LIRA POWER

Bigger is better, particularly when it comes to the percentage share of World GNP. In fact, a view of the planet by Gross World Product reveals an altogether different map than the usual Atlas. Nations with small land masses loom

their U.S. subsidiaries a little less than trustworthy.

*Banca's* Atlanta branch, under manager Christopher Drogoul, apparently issued \$2.6 billion of unauthorized export credits to Iraq. Meanwhile, the Lancaster, Pennsylvania subsidiary of *Ferranti*, Britain's main electronics defense contractor, has come up \$300 million short on its financial statement.



## The world according to economic might

ian consumers simply will not go into debt to enjoy a "good" time or to buy on impulse. Moreover, because Italian retail outlets are family-run shops rather than superstores, cash is the preferred medium, for cashflow as well as tax purposes. In fact, there are only three million credit cards in all of Italy compared with twenty million in France or the United Kingdom (the U.S. boasts 220 million!) Even tourists who flash the plastic on a whim find that proprietors see red when they see the wrong kind of green. American Express, it seems, is notorious for higher fees and slower service. So if you want to enjoy

large, while entire continents pale into insignificance. Italy, for example, dwarfs Africa, the Middle East (Israel and all the Arab nations combined), India, China and Australia. And its percentage share of the GWP has been steadily increasing since 1965. In that year, Italy had only a 3.6% share of World GNP; Great Britain, by contrast, boasted a 5.8% share. By 1987, however, Italian industriousness had turned the tables: Italy - 5.0%, Britain - 4.6%.

## AMERICAN SCANDALS

Italy's *Banca Nazionale del Lavoro* and Britain's *Ferranti, Ltd.* are finding

*Ferranti* was named for the Italian-British engineer who pioneered England's electrical distribution network and converted it to alternating current (AC).

## PRAVDA BROUGHT TO TASS ON YELTSIN

Vittorio Zucconi, *La Repubblica's* Washington correspondent, knows the secret of a good source — even if it is secondary. His sidebar story about maverick Soviet politico Boris Yeltsin's trip to the "Home of the Brave" has sent shock waves through the U.S.S.R. and resulted in an unprecedented retraction in the official Com-



# World Notes



munist Party newspaper. Boris Yeltsin, according to Zucconi, was a real party animal during his sojourn to the States.

Italian journalist Zucconi reported that for Boris, America was a "bar 5,000 kilometers long." Pravda reprinted the article and was censured by the Soviet news agency, Tass. Signor Zucconi, accustomed to a free press, was greatly dismayed. He said, "This shows you how far *glasnost* has to go." Apparently, in the eyes of the Soviet state, Boris "The Fish" Yeltsin was not the toast of the town.

## IN THE NAC OF TIME

There now exists an inexpensive, non-toxic drug which appears to stem the production of the virus that causes AIDS. Ordinarily used to treat bronchitis, N-acetylcysteine or NAC, dramatically reverses the wasting process that destroys AIDS patients. Flumucil, the over-the-counter product containing NAC, is manufactured by Zambon Farmaceutici. Dr. Anthony Franciosca, the company's medical director, has stated that Europeans have been unofficially using the drug with encouraging results. Dr. Franciosca is hopeful that the FDA will allow an American team to conduct experiments on the efficacy of NAC in the United States.

## FRIENDS, ROMANS, COMRADES

As proof that World War II is a thing of the remote past, look at who the USSR's two best joint venture partners are: West Germany and Italy. (Remember the Axis?)

Of some \$441 million invested in various Soviet industrial ventures, the two frontrunners are the Germans with \$66 million and the Italians with \$62 million. By comparison the U.S. has

only a \$23 million investment.

## LATINISSIMO

Although it's called Latin America because of a Spanish and Portuguese heritage, many Italians (the original Latins) can be counted among the various populations. Descendents of Italy



President Sanguinetti of Uruguay

have become presidents, high government officials and even dictators of many countries "south of the border".

One such official, duly elected president of Uruguay Julio Sanguinetti, has added his voice to the demand for the U.S. to control its drug problem. At a recent Latin American summit conference Sanguinetti pointed to the streets of New York as being just as much the focus of the problem as Medellin, Columbia. Uruguay is one the the more

properous and stable of the Latin nations.

## BUSINESS NEWS

• After a barrage of negative press about its wino-preferred Thunderbird brand, the Gallo Brothers of Modesto, California, have voluntarily removed the fortified juice from skid-row areas around the country. That will leave Richard's Wild Irish Rose without major competition.

• K-Mart's chairman Joseph Antonini smells blood. His prey is none other than Sears Roebuck, the retail giant. Antonini plans to have nearly 3,000 stores by 1995 and an annual net income of \$1.75 billion to top Sears. (What's the K stand for?)

## POOR FOLKS

Along with the full integration of Europe in 1992 comes a social consciousness. Th European Community (EC) has already made plans to aid underdeveloped areas within member states. Of the \$38.6 billion earmarked for this assistance most will go to the entire countries of Greece, Ireland, and Portugal, as well as southern Italy, large parts of Spain, Northern Ireland, and French possessions like Corsica. Nobody is to be left out of the envisioned prosperity of a united Europe.

\*\*\*\*



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## Editorial

### Bensonhurst: The Other Victim

The senseless and cowardly murder of a Black youth in predominately white Bensonhurst, Brooklyn has triggered a senseless media attack on citizens of Italian descent.

Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of this vitriolic reaction carried in the *New York Post* and the *New York Times*, is the assertion that the cause of all white racism in the city can be attributed to Italians (i.e. Italian immigrants and Italian-Americans). Italic youths are summarily condemned as "Guidos" (Peter Hamill) and the partly Italian neighborhood of Bensonhurst is boldly headlined as an "insular" and "closed world" (John Kifner). A sociologist (Dr. Gerry Kruse) states that only Italian neighborhoods fear intrusion by minorities. A previous racial attack in Howard Beach has been, retroactively and incorrectly, ascribed to Italian "Guidos." And in probably the most bizarre slander of all, an op-ed piece by a *60 Minutes* producer, Alan Weisman, traces Italian racism back to the 1960's and his prejudiced maternal grandfather.

It is doubtful whether any other ethnic group has sustained such an unremitting and malicious bashing. To be sure, Italian Americans have brought much of it upon themselves insofar as many willingly participate in the television and cinematic degradation of their image, from the *Godfather* series to the *Fonzie/Tony Manero* characterizations. Yet, others have consciously sought to thrust Italians into the racist vanguard. The fictional film *Do the Right Thing* pits Italian Americans against Blacks in the most violent terms.

Weisman and others of like mind must be reminded of the parallel struggles of Blacks and Italians in the United States. As immigrants, Italians also had to endure institutionalized discrimination and lynching both in the North and the South. Italians and Blacks have had to compete for the same menial jobs, they have had to draw blood in the boxing arenas, and have provided America, disproportionately, with the cannon fodder of many wars. Yet they have lived peacefully in the same neighborhoods, and even mixed blood. Roy Campanella, Franco Harris, and Booker T. Washington are three notable examples. And lest anyone forget, much of American rock 'n roll before the Beatles was the product of African and Italian American youth. Finally, New Yorkers need to be reminded that it wasn't the Italians who abandoned wholesale the New York City neighborhoods into which Blacks moved. The Bronx, for example, is a multi-ethnic borough only because of the Italians.

We would hope that all parts of the community reexamine the Bensonhurst tragedy without making Italic culture the scapegoat. Bensonhurst was not an "Italian" continuation of Howard Beach; a reading of the surnames of those convicted youths will prove that. Rather, it was by all accounts the result of a lover's quarrel, an individual's fear, and a gang mentality.

The rule of law — an Italic contribution to society — will doubtless avenge the murder. But how are we to repair the willful and unjust damage to the Italian community?

Plenary Council  
Italic Studies Institute

(Ed. This letter was submitted to the *New York Times* & *New York Post* but was not published. Indeed a similiar letter from the Sons of Italy's Commission for Social Justice was also rejected.)

### The Italic Way™

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# Forum of the People

(Opinions expressed here are not necessarily those of the Institute)



## BROOKLYN: Then and Now (a NY Times Op-Ed piece)

by Alan Weisman (Mr. Weisman is a producer of TV's *60 Minutes*.)

(Reprinted with the permission of the author)

It was a weekly ritual played out before my eyes on the corner where the schoolyard was, in the heart of Brooklyn, almost 30 years ago. Every Friday, around 4 P.M., the older kids would call a halt to their basketball game and gather outside the gates of the St. Rose of Lima schoolyard.

They knew the kids with the funny skullcaps would be walking by, on their way home. The Jews. The Kikes. Those kids with the glasses, the black vests, the sloppy sideburns and the stupid hats.

Every Friday, around 4 P.M., it was time to beat up the Jews.

Somehow, my friends believed, these guys deserved to be beaten up; it was written down somewhere, an immutable law of social science, Darwinian in its inevitability. After all, if they just took off those stupid caps and cut those ridiculous sideburns, no one would know for sure who they were, and they could then proceed without incident.

But they wouldn't do that (too dumb to grasp the principle of cause and effect), so they got beaten up.

I watched and did nothing.

My classmates at St. Rose of Lima were mostly Italian and Irish, sons and daughters of the working class. Their parents were suspicious of Jews (how come they run everything?) and less than charitable toward each other. (The Italians believed the Irish drank too much and were irresponsible; the Irish believed the Italians ate too much and were dirty.)

But the two camps co-existed rather peacefully, standing side by side at Sunday morning Mass, the Irish were content that a Kennedy was in the White House and the Italians content that an Italian named John ruled the Vatican. They volunteered for community functions; their children comingled on the baseball team and in the choir. On one issue they were truly united: the fear of blacks.

There were only a half dozen black students at St. Rose in the early 60's, and they appeared to have arrived in our

## “ [My grandfather] would point to the black skin of the eggplants and curse the *malignans*.”

neighborhood from another planet. Crisp white shirts with painfully starched collars, trousers impeccably creased, pens clipped neatly to the breast pocket, faces wide-eyed and open, trying hard to look like they belonged.

They rarely spoke with us, and we rarely spoke with them.

In the Irish households, the presence of a handful of blacks at St. Rose was greeted largely with a shrug. After all, what could you do? If they don't bother us, we won't bother them. Maybe they can help the track team — those people know how to run.

But in the Italian households (I grew up in one), the mood was decidedly more passionate. Those *malignans* — eggplants, in southern Italian dialect. Why don't they stay with their own? They have no *respect*. They'll tear the neighborhood down and our homes won't be worth a dime.

At family meals, my grandfather, Auriellio, would hold court at the head of the long table, waving a jug of wine and ranting like Il Duce about the evils of a world that had failed him. He had been a bricklayer and had once entertained thoughts of the priesthood. But his wife had failed him by bearing only daughters, and one of his daughters — my mother — had failed him by marrying a Jew.

And now the *malignans* were coming and he would have to deal with them on his morning walks to the corner store where a copy of *Il Progresso* was reserved for him daily. He might have to look at them as he sat in his rocker and smoked his pipe and spit into the coffee can on the porch of his house in Brooklyn. He would point to the black skin of the eggplants and curse the *malignans*.

Nothing was said about all this in the St. Rose of Lima school. The Brothers of the Sacred Heart were there to pound the contents of the Baltimore Catechism into the heads of these Irish and Italian kids, and to coach the sports teams. The priests were there to say Mass, hear confessions, sermonize on the meaning of the Gospel and raise funds for the new pipe organ.

They never spoke about Selma or that town in Mississippi where three civil rights workers were killed. I never heard them

(continued on p. 11 )





# REVIEW

## Do The Right Thing

A movie by Spike Lee

.....

If there is any film that must be judged by the "eye of the beholder" it is African American filmmaker Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing*.

Taken as a commentary of race relations in New York City (Brooklyn to be precise) it is frightening. Yet there is a surrealism about the characters that even a dyed-in-the-wool bigot would have a problem believing.

The story is set in Brooklyn's Bedford-Styvesent, an area marked by poverty, crime, and constant apprehension. While I cannot claim to know the neighborhood well, I did spend a number of months commuting to a Telephone Central Office there in the fall of

1969. In that time I experienced enough of life's tragedies to convince me that Bed-Sty was anything but a normal Black neighborhood. There was the shooting when a cab tried to negotiate a side street during a stickball game, the suicide on the elevated train tracks which rained down bits and pieces of a forlorn human onto the busy thoroughfare below, and the usual car battery and hubcap thieves.

Into this milieu writer-director-producer Spike Lee has assembled his cast of characters: a pizzeria owner (Sal) and his racist son Pino, Sal's Black delivery boy Mookie (played by Spike himself), and a collection of Blacks who seem to represent every aspect of the Negro stereotype

(the kid with the 100 decibel boom box, the loud Black Power activist, and the street folks who reflect lazily on life's inequities) Even the "hero" Mookie leaves a lot to be desired as a protagonist. He is a liar, a parasite, and an irresponsible stud who has fathered and abandoned his half Puerto Rican child but still elicits favors from its mother. Ultimately, it is Mookie upon which turns the message in this bizarre but entertaining movie.

From an Italic perspective, there can only be sympathy for Sal (played by Danny Aiello) who for 25 years has earned a fair but perilous living from his pizzeria. In his close-knit family and in the pride of heritage he exhibits by displaying photos of his Italian American heroes (DiMaggio, Sinatra, et al.) on the pizzeria's wall, Sal is admirable and true-to-life. Although his son Pino is cast as the heavy (he hates the

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# REVIEW



"mulinyans") in the context of that time and place even he could be accorded some sympathy.

The film chronicles a single day as Sal, Mookie, and neighborhood interact. But while it is a series of characterizations it is not a mirror of real life. For example, there is only one other Black who has a steady job (Mookie's sister.) This coupled with Mookie's shifless work habits gives no credit whatever to hardworking African Americans. Religion, too, is distinctly absent from this slice of Black life, something that is contrary to reality. In the end, Spike Lee's true purpose is racism not recreating life. This film is more an abstract to be interpreted like a Jackson Pollack painting. Unfortunately, therein lies the problem.

The story concludes with a murder and race riot. Two quotations complete the film, one by Dr. King the other by Malcolm X. When the viewer attempts



Author, director, producer Spike Lee (front, right) "checking out" Bensonhurst. (Newsday Jeffery A. Salter)

answer. For the Italian American viewer, if not many whites, there is probably no question that a unjustifiable crime has been committed against Sal. However, one is not quite sure what a Black audience may feel. In a word, the film was "unsettling."

1988 (see the FOCUS section) no doubt leaves the Italic community marked in the eyes of many Blacks. Lee, like many of New York's journalists and imagemakers, has made Italian Americans the pointmen of white racism in New York, and perhaps the whole

## In a word, the film was "unsettling."

to sort out the message in this melange he is apt to go one of two ways. Either, that violence is a necessary adjunct to equality or that violence is never an

The fact that Spike Lee chose Italian Americans to be the antagonists in this movie based on his own experience and a misreading of the Howard Beach affair in

North. It is troubling that this work of fiction now saddles the Italic community with a reputation its certainly does not deserve — racist. JLM

### Weisman (continued from p. 9)

mention the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. The Catholic weekly newspaper, "The Tablet", was sold at every Mass. It campaigned fiercely against divorce and contraception laws, but I can't recall it saying anything about James Meredith.

From time to time, they would show slides of big-bellied, bug-eyed kids from some place in South America, and they would ask us to join the priesthood or the brotherhood so these kids could be saved. Yes, these souls needed food and faith. Meanwhile, those dumb kids with the funny hats and the sideburns were catching their regu-

larly scheduled pummeling every Friday outside the rectory windows. (If they only took off those hats!) And Auriellio was waving his wine jug, pointing to the eggplants and cursing the mulignans.

That was almost 30 years ago in Brooklyn. Last week, I picked up the newspaper and saw a picture of a kid in Bensonhurst holding up a watermelon and taunting a crowd of blacks protesting the killing of a black youth by a gang of whites. The kid with the watermelon appeared to be shouting something as he stood next to a sign that read "We Are Not Racists". I looked at his face. I read his name. I read about the kids who were sought for the crime and some comments from neighborhood residents.

I don't know what really happened. I don't know if these kids are guilty. But I know them, and I have a pretty good idea of what they heard and did not hear in their homes, their schools, and their churches. I can see them in the schoolyards, waiting for those kids with the stupid hats and the curly sideburns to walk by. I've been to their holiday meals where the prayers are said and the long table is loaded with food, where Auriellio waves his jug and points to the eggplants and curses the mulignans — curses them for showing up in a world that was not supposed to change.

A world which, tragically, has not.

\*\*\*\*

*The Italic Way*





## Focus

# Italian and Black:

## The Roots of Conflict

by John Mancini, Rosario Iaconis

What unlucky fate brought Italian and African Americans into seemingly unending conflict? Why, after nearly four generations in this land, are Italian Americans perceived as the nemesis of Blacks in the North? And why, despite their difficult but inexorable climb up the economic ladder, are Italian Americans still seen by many as the "frontline" against a growing minority population?

While other European immigrants passed quickly through the purgatory of tenement slums on their way to the American dream, the early Italians doggedly entrenched themselves in antiquated Little Italys and made even the most menial work lucrative. Some Italian immigrants and their descendents saw little reason to give up neighborhoods and occupations that they had revitalized. This reluctance to "pass through" old neighborhoods has resulted in the odd juxtaposition that many Italian Americans find themselves in: one of America's wealthiest (per capita) ethnic groups that still share the streets with the poorest of groups. Even today, Italic communities can be found situated alongside teeming pockets of struggling newcomers such as Manhattan's Chinatown or zones of poverty like much of the Bronx.

But of all the peoples with whom Italians have had to co-exist, African Americans have presented a continuing and, at times, violent challenge. Without question both have had to endure hardships. Blacks were the victims of institutionalized racism. But discrimination against Italians was no less stigmatizing. An inability to speak English and the burden of

stereotypic images as anarchists or mafiosi impeded the Italian immigrant's quest for acceptance. Often, he was paid coolie wages for the same backbreaking work performed by Blacks and other Whites. Even death on the job was common for both Italian men and women in sweatshops such as the infamous Triangle Waistcoat Factory, where many Italian clothing workers were killed as a result of a fire in the early 1900's, and on hazardous construction sites throughout this century. (This truth was immortalized in the book *Christ in Concrete*). Moreover, Italians suffered vigilante murders and lynchings at the hands of xenophobic Americans. Probably the most infamous example of this was the 1891 lynching of eleven Sicilians in New Orleans. It was an act that outraged the world but escaped the condemnation of the Federal government.

Notwithstanding their struggles, Blacks and Italians became competitors yet managed to live in relative peace. New York's Harlem still maintains an Italic presence to this day. Even intermarriage was not uncommon. (see our sidebar feature).

### Turning Point

If one were to affix the turning point in those peaceful relations, the year 1935 would be significant. That was the year Blacks and Italians came to blows. It was the year Mussolini's war machine invaded Abyssinia (now Ethiopia). The invasion brought African awareness to new heights in the



Mt. Carmel Square in Harlem as it appears today. The parish still numbers many Italian Americans.



The results of a restless 1935 in Harlem. Blacks directed their anti-Mussolini anger at Italian shopkeepers.



## Focus



Roy Campanella,  
Brooklyn Dodger catcher



Booker Taliaferro Washington,  
Founder of the Tuskegee Institute



Franco Harris,  
Football great

## AFRO-ITALIC

*By their fruit you shall know them* is the old biblical adage used to identify trees or, in this case, family trees. Campanella, Franco, and Taliaferro. Names unquestionably of Italian origin but the men who carried these monikers are forever remembered as Black role models: Roy Campanella, the first Black catcher in major league baseball; Franco Harris, pro football's incomparable running back of the 1970's, and Booker Taliaferro Washington, the first great Black educator.

One of Roy Campanella's childhood memories was when his friends called him an "Eyetalian." So hurt was he by this strange insult that young Roy sought solace with his father only to find out that his dad was one of those "Eyetalians." No hindrance to his career though, this Italo-Black athlete went on to be a star player with the Brooklyn Dodgers until a tragic automobile accident left him paralyzed. His team and his fans never stopped adoring him.

Franco Harris' mother was a World War II Italian war bride. Even though the pride in his African heritage ran deep, Harris never stopped being "Italian." His fans were a mixture of Blacks and Italians sometimes called Franco's Italian Army. If anyone was able to bring together the two diverse racial groups, it was Franco. Just ask two of his old friends Frank Sinatra and Henry Mancini.

While there is no conclusive proof that Booker Taliaferro ("T") Washington was fathered by a Taliaferro, his own autobiography states that he was half white and born Booker Taliaferro. He added the surname Washington because people had trouble pronouncing his Italian surname. (The Taliaferri were prominent Americans as early as 1651 when the English king granted 800 acres in Virginia to the family.) Booker was a post-Civil War champion of racial conciliation and an advocate of vocational training for Blacks. He urged Blacks to learn manual skills so they could achieve economic parity. To that end, he founded the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama and won the admiration of many white Southern leaders as well as Presidents McKinley and Teddy Roosevelt.

\*\*\*\*





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## Italian and Black (Continued from p. 12)

United States and aroused racial indignation. Ironically, that summer also saw the world heavy-weight boxing match between Black challenger Joe Louis and Italian champ Primo Camera. A mixed crowd of 60,000 packed Yankee Stadium to witness Louis' 6-round victory over the "Ambling Alp." Even 1,500 police were hard-pressed to keep the hateful factions apart

— one gloating over the victory, the other promising revenge on the African battlefield. Clashes between the two peoples eventually spread to other parts of metropolitan New York resulting in rampages against Italian merchants. The Italians in America became the object of Black fury for a short while, even supplanting the dreaded Klu Klux Klan. To ward off attacks, Mayor LaGuardia placed 1,200 policemen on patrol in Italian neighborhoods.

The symbolism of that ugly year 1935 was carried on in succeeding decades as Blacks and Italian Americans squared off in the boxing arenas. An unending string of Italic "white hopes" did battle with a growing number of victorious Blacks. Marciano, LaMotta, Graziano, Basilio, Benvenuti, and Antuofermo all earned their livings bashing and being bashed by Black men. These pugilistic confrontations have been mythologized in Stallone's *Rocky* movie series.

In everyday life, too, Italian Americans and Blacks have been facing off. The movement of Blacks into white neighborhoods during the 1950's and 60's that resulted in "white-flight" has effectively left Italian American communities surrounded by or adjacent to all-Black areas. In the Bronx, N.Y., a perfect example exists in the Belmont section. An overwhelmingly Italic community stands serenely within a predominately Black and Hispanic borough. Such proximity, in various parts of the country, breeds territoriality and, consequently, occasional violent outbursts.

However, there is a persistence of vision in the public's perception of the Italic/Black conflict. A stereotype, based on the historical information cited above, has evolved that puts the two peoples at odds. An unfortunate corollary would have us believe that "Italians" are at the forefront of white racism in the Northeast. And that is where fact gives way to fiction.



An ethnically mixed Italian language class at Bensonhurst's Dyker Heights Junior High. *The New York Times* called Bensonhurst "closed" and "insular."

### Howard Beach, etc.

Howard Beach is a partly (50%) Italian American neighborhood in Queens, a borough of New York City. In December, 1987 when the news broke that a Black youth was run over on a highway after being chased on foot by a band of white youths, the story was boiled down to "a Black youth goes to a pizzeria in an Italian neighborhood and is murdered by whites." That condensed tale was quite enough for Black movie director/producer Spike Lee to make the film *Do the Right Thing*, the story of a Black youth killed at an Italian American pizzeria in a Black neighborhood. While Lee's plot contained a different twist, his use of Italian Americans as the focus of white racism stemmed in great part from Lee's misinterpretation of the Howard Beach incident. The fact that Howard Beach is only partly Italian came home to thoughtful readers when the trial was held and convictions handed down. The names of the criminals were Scott Kern, John Lester, Robert Riley, and Jason Ladone. Ladone may be an Italian name but, in any event, he was convicted on a lesser charge of malicious mischief.

One year later, the Bensonhurst incident occurred. Another Black youth was shot and killed in a predominately Italian American section of Brooklyn that was characterized by white

(continued on p. 26)



This racially mixed class finds the Italian language a thought-provoking challenge





# Perspectives

[Highlights of historical records that shed light on modern times]

## FERRERO'S NEGRO ARMY

The American Civil War made for many strange bedfellows, but one that would surprise us all was the Negro brigade led by an Italian general.

Although Italians were few in the United States of 1861, some had settled throughout the north and south. The greater number served as privates in the War Between the States, and we know little of their actions. But not all remained common soldiers. At least two rose to the rank of general. One of these Italian Americans was the "fighting dancing master" of New York, Edward Ferrero.

Edoardo Ferrero was born January 18, 1831 in Granada, Spain, of Italian parents. A few years after his birth he moved to New York with his parents. The Ferrero home, typically Italian in every respect, was often frequented by Italian refugees and little Edoardo soon made the acquaintance of Garibaldi and a coterie of exiled patriots who dreamed and planned the liberation of the Italy. The elder Ferrero established a fashionable dancing school which became highly successful. His son continued in the same profession with equal success and for a time taught dancing at West Point.

Having been attracted to military life, Ferrero entered the state militia and by 1861 had worked himself up to the rank of lieutenant-colonel. When the Civil War broke out he raised the 51st New York regiment, known as the "Shepard rifles," of which he was made colonel.

Serving in various minor campaigns in Virginia his regiment took the first fortified redoubt captured in the war at Roanoke. He then commanded his regiment at the second battle of Bull Run, Chantilly, South Mountain, Antietam, and Fredericksburg. In the battle of Antietam his bravery so impressed his superior officers that he was appointed brigadier-general in the field.

Transferring to the Vicksburg front, Ferrero distinguished himself in actions that frustrated his Confederate opponents.

In the spring of 1864 it was on to the Potomac under General Burnside (namesake of the "sideburn"). Ferrero was placed in



**General Edward Ferrero surrounded by his staff. This is negative #1 in the Civil War archives.**

charge of a newly organized Negro division. The use of Blacks in combat was experimental at that time and regular white army officers shunned the assignment for fear of ending their careers in ignominy. Most likely Ferrero's foreign extraction made him eligible for the unenviable post. Nevertheless, he seems to have accepted command without complaint.

At the siege of Petersburg, Virginia, Burnside selected Ferrero's division to lead the main assault on the Confederate lines. The danger of this mission was enormous for a number of reasons. First, the assault was to take place after a monstrous explosion under the Confederate entrenchments. This was to be accomplished by a 500 yard tunnel dug by Pennsylvania miners and loaded with tons of high explosive. Second, while there may have been some chivalry between Northern and Southern soldiers even during battle, the chances were slim that Black troops would be respected by their former masters. Third, Burnside's other divisions, in support, were weary from trench duty and many officers were not of the highest caliber.



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[General ] Burnside selected Ferrero's division to lead the main assault on the Confederate lines.

---

Despite these negatives, Ferrero drilled his Blacks tirelessly in the assault plan. But politics intervened and General Grant ordered Burnside to send white troops into the breach, fearing repercussions if the Blacks were to be massacred, an all too real possibility, as we shall see. So now, instead of the lead division, Ferrero's troops were to bring up the rear. But

remained, uncharacteristically, behind his men directing their efforts by messenger. Confusion, delay and poor leadership from the division level to Burnside turned Petersburg into a major Union disaster. As feared, the Blacks, who were only meant to support the assault took the brunt of Southern fury. Of the 4,500 men killed in the attack, Black troops numbered a third of them.



Most "colored" troops were used in a support role during the Civil War. Nevertheless, many individual Blacks and Black units distinguished themselves in combat, including those under General Ferrero.

Responsibility for the failure was placed in part on Ferrero, and it was reported that an entire division was perhaps too large for him to handle. (This was certainly true of any officer in the days before radio communications and even more so in light of the massive confusion at Petersburg.) The fact remains, that the original plan was changed too late, that Ferrero's trained division was improperly utilized. Ferrero was later court-martialed as were a number of other officers, perhaps unjustly. (Some have speculated that Ferrero was made the scapegoat to counter abolitionist criticism.)

there was no time to train the white divisions, a fact that would have terrible implications.

On D-day the mine exploded. The untrained white troops leading the assault became bogged down and confused in the giant crater that was left from the mighty blast. In fact, they never managed to leave the crater. Ferrero's troops proceeded unknowingly into this morass and by sheer will they were able to storm the heights that were defended by the Rebels. Ferrero, taking his cue from another division commander re-

He finished out the rest of the war in Virginia and returned to New York opening a dance hall a few years later.

For the remainder of the war and until 1948, Black soldiers continued to serve in separate army units. Interestingly, today's, racially integrated Army is led by another Italian American General Carl Vuono.

\*\*\*\*

*(Adapted from a feature in the 1930's magazine Atlantica)*





# Perspectives

## GIAMATTI: AS I KNEW HIM

by Samuel J. Gulino

*(Samuel Gulino is a member of the Italic Studies Institute and formerly an elementary school principal. He is now a freelance writer.)*

Great men come and go and volumes are written about them. But sometimes significant aspects of a man's character — the experiences that perpetually influence behavior — are either unknown or ignored.

So it was with A. Bartlett Giamatti, former president of Yale University and baseball commissioner before his premature death on the first of [September]. In both jobs, he was the first Italian-American. Bart, as he liked to be called, knew the pain and indignity of prejudice against Italian-Americans. He fought it tirelessly. And it was that commonality of experience that brought us together as friends.

We corresponded regularly for almost two years before we met last May. It started when I first wrote to him about a 1939 *Life* magazine feature on Joe DiMaggio. The piece was full of ethnic slurs and shocking prejudice. One example: "Although he learned Italian first, Joe, now 24, speaks English without an accent and is otherwise well

### *In Memoriam*



### A. Bartlett Giamatti

adapted to U.S. mores. Instead of smelly bear grease, he keeps his hair slick with water. He never reeks of garlic and prefers chicken chow mein to spaghetti."

I had written my own piece about DiMaggio — how much he had meant to me as a young Italian-American boy growing up in a western New York town that hated Italians, hated DiMaggio and therefore hated the Yankees.

I sent my article to Giamatti and he responded immediately. "I find myself astonished," he said, "and then I wonder why. Fifty years ago, there were any number of things that you and I would

have found appalling about all kinds of people. I suppose what is remarkable about [this] prejudice . . . is that Joe Di Maggio is the quintessential American hero."

I had mentioned, too, highly publicized prejudicial slurs against former vice presidential candidate Geraldine Ferraro. Giamatti told me: "Had exactly the same reaction. I have written about this kind of thing in a recent book called, 'The Italian Americans', for which I wrote an introductory essay." He asked me to read it and send him my comments.

His essay was a brilliant, sensitive history of the great Italian migration to America. He spoke with eloquence and passion about

the cruel prejudices Italians encountered here. And he made clear his own suffering when he wrote of being "baffled" at "how otherwise sensible acquaintances suddenly behave, of how often mail, reporters' questions, introductions to speak and strangers'" comments will contain slighting or even slurring references to Italian heritage.

In his descriptions of Italian immigrants, I told Giamatti he described my father perfectly — a man who came here alone at the age of 17 in 1910. My father came here to find work, to better himself even if only a little. And he suffered the prejudice typical of the times.

Only four days later, I received his  
(Continued on p. 28)



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# Project Italia

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Filmmaker Julian Krainin  
(*Civilization & the Jews*,  
*Disaster at Silo Seven*)



## PRESS RELEASE November 1, 1989

The Italic Studies Institute announced today that Julian Krainin, the noted screenwriter and filmmaker, will develop the script for a one hour film documentary entitled *The Italians: The Untold Story*. With this endeavor — a part of Project Italia — the Institute will reach millions of people in the U.S. and abroad via the media of television and video. Krainin, who is currently working on a documentary for the Library of Congress, said he is looking forward to the assignment because of his "love of Italy and Italian civilization." According to the Emmy-nominated writer: "It's amazing that people don't understand how much Italian civilization impacts on our everyday lives."

John L. Mancini, president of the Italic Studies Institute stated: "I am extremely pleased that a writer of Julian Krainin's stature has accepted the challenge of writing the script for Project Italia. Our story will not be merely a recitation of historical facts. Instead, it will give the viewer a new appreciation of the effect of the Italic influence on today's society. If there is one major challenge facing Krainin it will be how to limit the story to one hour of TV time."

Among Krainin's credits are: *The Making of an Opera - A Television Mini-Series* (1979 - a four part series with Tony Randall); *Pavarotti at Home* (1979); and *Civilization and the Jews* (1981 to 1985 - the most ambitious documentary television series to be undertaken in the history of public broadcasting in America. The series received the Peabody Award and the Christopher Award.) Working for the CBS Television Network in 1983, Krainin produced, directed and wrote the landmark documentary *Don't Touch That Dial!* For the first time the television industry took a revealing look at itself.

Most recently Krainin worked for Mark Carliner Productions as the producer for the film *Disaster at Silo Seven*. (an ABC Television Network movie special.) Soon after the film's telecast it received international recognition when as a result of President Gorbachev's invitation, the film was broadcast in the USSR and seen on a single night by more than 200 million citizens of the Soviet Union.

The Italic Studies Institute sees Krainin's participation in Project Italia as a major step toward its realization. When completed, *The Italians: The Untold Story* will be a milestone in the understanding of a people who have been a prime mover in the development of our way of life.





# Media Madness

[In which we present media material with commentary]

## La Dolce Deficit

*Untroubled by its debts, Italy sails serenely on*

BY ROBERT BALL

Everyone knows how bad the U.S. budget deficit is. How it rolls like a tidal wave of red ink over the Administration and Congress, undermining the dollar, pushing up interest rates, shaking the international monetary system and threatening to put future generations of Americans in hock to foreigners forever. How, whenever moneymen gather, finance ministers moan, central bankers chide, and all stare in horrified fascination. How could America get itself into such a mess?

Now imagine a country that regularly runs annual budget deficits five times as bad as those of the U.S.; whose fiscal policy



How to understand the country's economy? Imagine it as a real-life movie, with Marcello Mastroianni as governor of the central bank.



A counter fantasy

Time Magazine, Oct. 16, 1989

Italy's ability to break all the rules of economics and continue knocking off such old boys as the British in economic standing (Italy is 5th, Britain is 6th) has driven the media to distraction. Wondering how the Italians manage their financial affairs with a huge deficit has forced news editors to enter fantasyland. "Imagine" says Time, "Italy's central bank run by Marcello Mastroianni, to understand its economy." When we passed this "wisdom" on to an Italian, his response was a copy of an old Ronald Reagan photo with the following caption:

**It's morning in America as the 40th President of the United States and his most trusted advisor discuss the federal deficit.**

## Arab-Sicilian Food: Tale of 1,001 Years

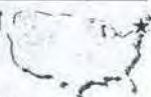
By NANCY HARMON JENKINS

Special to The New York Times

**C**AMBRIDGE, Mass., Oct. 17 — Many people in this university town know Clifford Wright only as a scholar and an author of thoughtful studies of United States policy in the Middle East. But friends, family and fortunate dinner guests know him as an

### COOKS ON THE MAP

**This Month:**  
**Clifford Wright,**  
**Cambridge, Mass.**



an tourists who flock there. Mr. Wright spent two weeks in Sicily

Just reading this headline would lead you to believe that Sicily was an Arab province for 1,001 years and that Sicilian cuisine owed much to those invaders. However, common sense and a little research makes a mockery of the whole idea. After a two-week stint in Sicily, the Arabist professor who offered the theory confessed that he found little or no evidence to support it.

By the way, the Arab occupation was less than 250 years, most of the Arabs being chased out by the Normans.

New York Times, Oct. 18, 1989





# Media Madness



*The Ragman's Son*, Kirk Douglas, writes in his biography: "Israel in the fall of 1952, right after the War of Independence, was a new and struggling nation. A two-hour flight from Rome, and quite a different country. Unlike the lackadaisical, relaxed Italians, these were people with tremendous vitality and energy, rushing in every direction."

**Comment:** Kirk, ask some of those Israelis if they owed their lives to a lot of lackadaisical Italians during WW II. Thanks to Italian efforts tens of thousands of Jews survived the holocaust.



Part of a brochure for a contracting service

Few Americans in the impoverished hill towns of Appalachia ever escape the cycle of poverty that is their lot. The Appalachians are products of a provincial, insular culture that distrusts outsiders. Eastern American psychologist Dr. John Smith finds most Appalachians to be illiterate, ill-kempt and genetically unfit to enter the mainstream culture.

**Comment:** Is this stereotype of WASPs not unlike the image the Italic community has suffered from? The NY Times has called Italian neighborhoods "closed" and "insular." And Robert MacNeil's book, *The Story of English*, has portrayed turn-of-the-century Italian immigrants as dregs.



## Who Discovered America First?

Excerpt from the *Tablet* (Catholic newsletter)  
Oct. 14, 1989

(excerpt) "Columbus a Jew? What does Britannica (sic) say? "...Columbus came from a Spanish-Jewish family settled in Genoa."

**Comment:** Actually, Britannica states that the Spanish-Jewish connection is only a theory. Revisionism!

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# News of the Institute

## BOARD OF GOVERNORS

(Decisions rendered on November 7, 1989)

- The name of the organization has been officially changed to the **Italic Studies Institute, Inc.** (This name conveys our educational goals better as well as listing us under the "I" instead of "S" in directories. Also, the initials ISI will be the same in Italian **Istituto di Studi Italic**)
- The Board voted unanimously to proceed with the \$1 million fundraising campaign to produce the Project Italia film *The Italians: the Untold Story*.
- Effective January 1st members of the Advisory Council will be admitted to the Plenary Council with equal rights.
- Governorships will be limited to a three-year term, and eligibility will be broadened.

## PLENARY COUNCIL

(Meeting of September 7, 1989)

- A Plenary Council membership directory will be produced annually and cross-referenced by business category, company name, and individual. The directory will also include a reprint of our constitution.
- A joint cocktail/business card exchange is being planned with the Italy-America Chamber of Commerce for January 8, 1990.
- The Annual Dinner Dance will be held at the Waldorf-Astoria on June 2, 1990.
- A subcommittee was formed to develop a program of growth for the Institute's newsletter, *The Italic Way*



The Fall 1989 Aurora youth class

## PROGRAMS

- ***The Italic Way*** newsletter - A special committee to study the marketing of the newsletter was formed.
- **Project Italia** - Scriptwriting has begun on *The Italians: the Untold Story*. Jules Krainin, noted filmmaker (*Civilization & the Jews, Incident at Silo 7, An Evening with Pavarotti*, et al.) has been retained.
- **Aurora Youth Program** - The fall session (Level I) has commenced at Cellini Lodge (Sons of Italy) in New Hyde Park, NY
- **Product Line** - An Italian history coloring book for children has been compiled and will be produced next year. Designs for a restaurant placemat, school book cover, coffee mugs and sport shirts are in the works. An advertising campaign for the newsletter and commemorative coins will be ready for release in December.





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## Italian and Black (Continued from p. 15)

journalists and even a sociologist as another example of a uniquely Italian American insularity (i.e. the fear of minorities entering their neighborhood). If we are to believe that this fear is unique to Italic people than surely they are the only white racists in the United States. Nevertheless, as absurd as this logic is, many people, White and Black, subscribe to it for convenient reasons. Although the trial has not yet begun, much evidence points to more basic human emotions as the cause of the tragedy, including an unrequited love and gang brutality.

All this is not to say that there is nothing to be ashamed of — quite the contrary. More than a few Italian Americans fanned the flames of racism with appalling displays of perverse pride and coarse behavior. Black demonstrators marching through Bensonhurst were derided with racist epithets. Fortunately, the decent people of Bensonhurst and the police, led by an Italian American officer, managed to maintain peace. Tasteless rumors were spread by “informed” Italian Americans about how local criminals were going to “protect” the neighborhood. According to these sources, John Gotti, alleged local crime figure, had stationed hitmen on the roofs of Bensonhurst to deal with the demonstrators. Another rumor had the accused murderer’s father as a member of the Mafia. Still another claimed that a Mafia contract had been put out on the Puerto Rican girl who al-



Father James Groppi who devoted a lifetime to minority rights.



1935 weigh-in. Primo Carnera (l.) shakes hands with soon-to-be-victor Joe Louis. The fight set off racial emotions

symbolize an almost holy Italian subculture among the ignorant. The result is emulation by youth gangs and near-reverence by undereducated adults.

**Working Together**  
To dispel the myth that Italian culture is synonymous with racism, it is first necessary for Italian Americans to deal with their own miscreants and their misplaced values. It is far more constructive

to accentuate the common experience shared by Blacks and Italian Americans; to reflect on the great contributions they gave America when they worked toward the same goals. It was, for example, Black and Italian American youth who filled America with much of its music during the golden age of Rock in the 50’s and 60’s. Black boxers Muhammed Ali and Floyd Paterson without trainers Angelo Dundee and Cus D’Amato might never have reached the peaks of their profession. And individuals like Father James Groppi and Viola Liuzzo devoted their lives to Black and minority civil rights.

Finally, ironies abound. In integrated Rosedale, another section of Queens, NY, media hype has blown minor confrontations between the predominantly Italic white residents and

## The result [ of the glorification of the Mafia] is emulation by youth gangs and near-reverence by undereducated adults.

legedly provoked the confrontation that had led to the murder. Who could effectively defend the Italic community when such rubbish is spread by its own members?

### Holy Mafia

This perverse respect for organized crime’s “protective” role in Italian neighborhoods and the gang mentality of some Italian American youth are clearly exacerbated by a media that has glorified the Italic gangster. A combination patron saint and invincible earthly power, the Godfather has come to

neighborhood Blacks into major racial events. In truth, racial cooperation is more the case and the fact that all the elected officials from the area are Black may be indicative of this. And what of Bensonhurst? Well, during the height of the Bensonhurst demonstrations, amid the catcalls and watermelon insults, young Italian Americans hounded *Do The Right Thing* filmmaker Spike Lee, who appeared defiantly in their midst, for his autograph. Surely, an odd reaction for racists. But perhaps Italic hatred isn’t very deep.

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# PROFILES

[We welcome news from all individuals and organizations. Tell us what projects you have underway and any activities you are planning or have completed.]

## The Road to Asmara

by Candice Smith



(l. to r.) Candice Smith, John Mancini, Rosario Iaconis, and owner Mebrak Tsegai preparing to indulge.

When we first heard about the Asmara, an Italian-African restaurant in Harlem, we were pleasantly surprised. Of course we knew that Italy once held colonies in Africa (Libya, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia). We had no idea that the impact of that colonial era could be felt right in our own backyard. But, sure enough, the Asmara on Amsterdam Avenue and 106th Street in Manhattan is a perfect melding of two very distinct cultures.

The restaurant is named for the capital of Eritrea on

The Asmara Restaurant is an oasis of national pride on Manhattan's Amsterdam Avenue



the "horn" of East Africa. That African city still stands, though it has been battered by Ethiopian aggression since Italy's benign rule ended following World War II. A flourishing metropolis with a decidedly Italianate architecture, Asmara boasts a first-rate university, a Muslim mosque and Coptic Christian and Roman Catholic churches—all built by the Italians. Unlike other colonial powers, Italy, in keeping with its Roman tradition, acted as a civilizing rather than oppressive influence. According to Asmara's mayor, Afwork Behane: "The Italians built the city, and we must give them credit for that. It is up to us to maintain it."

What the Italians built, however, neighboring Ethiopia, under the late Emperor Hailie Selassie and the Stalinist regime of Mengistu Mariam, have sought to destroy in a 28-year war of annexation.

Despite their resistance to the Ethiopian design, many Eritreans fled to Italy to escape the carnage and to seek a higher standard of living. Ms. Mebrak Tsegai, owner of the Asmara Restaurant, is one such expatriate. A native of Asmara, she lived in Rome for several years, acquiring many friendships and a love for the Eternal City. In 1975, Ms. Tsegai moved to

New York City and found employment as a housekeeper, nursing home attendant and a waitress. It was while working as a waitress that Ms. Tsegai hit upon the idea of combining the cuisine of Italy with the dishes of her native Eritrea. And thus was born the restaurant Asmara in 1983.

Ms. Tsegai estimates that there are some 800 Eritreans populating the Metro area, all of whom frequent the Asmara and two other Eritrean restaurants in the city. Add to this the ex-Italian colonists nostalgic for the "old" country who have found their way to Amsterdam Avenue and the



Italians called their colonial city of Asmara, Eritrea "the gem on the horn of Africa"





## Asmara (continued from p. 26)

Asmara has an established clientele.

Traditional Eritrean fare is spiced with *berbere*, a hot red pepper sauce, and served with a generous helping of *enjerra*, a crepe-like bread used for dipping. On a recent visit, the staff of *The Italic Way* was feted to a feast of pan-African proportions.

I must admit we were a bit anxious about ordering the specialty of the house — Spaghetti Asmara. But my Italic staffers Roy and John agreed that the dish was authentically Italian. The pasta was definitely *al dente* and the sauce was a superb beef ragu with a hot tang to it. We enjoyed it so much we ordered a second platter. The wine, by the way, was a strong California burgundy.

Another specialty, the Asmara combination plate, was an appetizing potpourri of lentils, chick peas, curry with potatoes and carrots, chicken and beef. All entrees were served with *enjerra*, which we were encouraged to use in place of utensils. All in all, this hearty African-Italian repast could be called Homestyle Eritrean. And the meal was made perfect by the presence of Ms. Tsegai. She spoke in impeccable Italian of her love of Italy, Eritrea and the culinary arts (she does all the cooking himself!) A lovely and gifted woman, she hopes to someday see her homeland fully free from Ethiopian aggression and considers herself Italian at heart.

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### NOTICE

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## Giamatti (continued from p. 18)

reply. "Dear Sam," he said, "I was very touched by your wonderful letter. I shall keep it. I think you and I have seen the same things happen and the same reactions to them. I believe we should stay in touch." (Signed, "Bart." He had put us on a first-name basis.)

Well, now I was hooked by a man of deep feeling and remarkable achievements. To me, he became the Italian-American hero I may have unconsciously searched for most of my life.

We corresponded regularly for some 20 months. Often I wrote to him about ethnic slurs in the media. He urged me to respond with letters to the editor. And I did. And we often discussed education, too.

Finally, we arranged a meeting. And on the appointed day, I was a little nervous and somewhat intimidated. By now, he was a famous man. I didn't know if I could relax and how he might react to a tongue-tied idiot.

But he was gracious and warm, and told me how happy he was finally to meet me. He began by asking incisive questions about my background and upbringing. He was intensely interested in the prejudice against Italians I had encountered as a boy and had written about in the piece about DiMaggio.

I finished my story and then asked about his early life. He told me that he, too, had suffered prejudice and how often it had incensed his father. When he was being considered for the presidency of Yale, his father, a distinguished professor at Mount Holyoke College, told relatives that Bart would never get the job.

He then gave me a copy of his latest book, which focused on college education, but with one long chapter on public schools. He inscribed a message to me that I will always treasure, and then asked what he called a "favor" of me. "Sam," he said, "I'd like you to send me your comments about the book, especially the chapter on public education . . . Please do it when you have the time." I was flattered and of course I did.

After I mentioned that my wife, who had driven with me to the meeting, was waiting in the lobby, he demanded that I bring her up to his office. He gave us almost two hours of time that was always precious because of the enormous demands of his job.

The Pete Rose scandal agonized Bart, I believe. But he knew the integrity of the game was vital to its preservation. So, although it was hard on him to ban Rose from baseball, he was comforted by knowing it was necessary. He imposed the ban just before he died at the age of 51.

I had known one of the great men of America — a noble man who despite his genius retained his unpretentious warmth and always gave of himself generously. He added a lasting dimension to my life. He was a great teacher and a true Italian-American champion.

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(Reprinted from *Newsday*)



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