

Vol. 5, No.1 Spring/Summer, 1992

# THE Italic Way

The newsletter of the Italic Studies Institute

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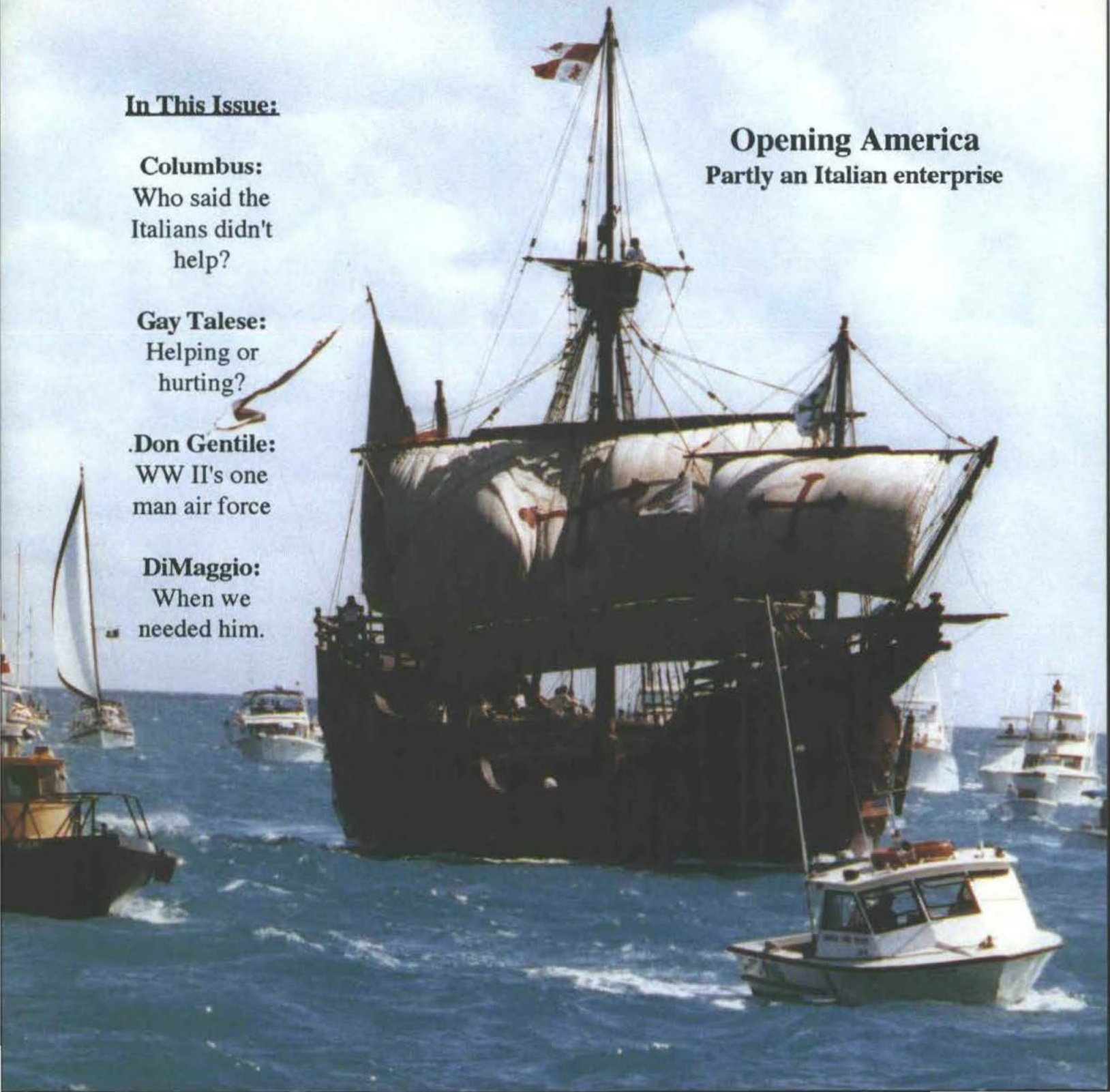
**Columbus:**  
Who said the  
Italians didn't  
help?

**Gay Talese:**  
Helping or  
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**Don Gentile:**  
WW II's one  
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**DiMaggio:**  
When we  
needed him.

**Opening America**  
Partly an Italian enterprise





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## Letters

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

### INSTITUTE VIDEO GETS PRAISE

Thank you for supplying a copy of your video entitled *America: The Italian Legacy (Chapter I: Law and Equality)*.

I have reviewed it and congratulate you on an excellent work. Through the National Italian American Bar Association and other national ethnic organizations of which I am a member, I will inform others of it. If possible, I will also attempt to bring it to the attention of personnel at the U.S. Department of Justice for inclusion in a program that we are attempting to formulate concerning the impact of Roman Law on American Jurisprudence.

Again, thank you for sending me this excellent video.

**Ronald A. Cimino,**  
Natl. Italian American Bar Assn.  
Washington, D.C.

I am most grateful to the Institute for your kindness in sending me the video documentary on the Italian Legacy. It is a masterful presentation and I thank you most warmly for permitting me to have a copy.

**Edward J. Mortola,**  
Chancellor Emeritus, Pace U.,  
Pleasantville, NY



**Monica Navia of Sacred Heart Academy on Long Island. Winner of our first Latin language award.**

### MOTHER OF ALL LANGUAGES

On behalf of the Administration and the Language department in Sacred Heart Academy, I wish to thank you for the check and the commemorative coin which was given to Monica Navia at our Graduation Senior Luncheon on June 3rd.

As a teacher of Latin, I am personally grateful for the work of the Institute in fostering and promoting Latin studies and I pray that such commendable endeavors will continue for many years to come.

**Sister Mary Sheridan,**  
Sacred Heart Academy,  
Hempstead, NY

### BASTA TO ITALIAN-BASHING

As Italian-Americans, my family and I are very much aware of the Italian-bashing we see—everywhere in the media Italians are being portrayed in a stereotypical and unflattering light.

As you well know, many of us are highly educated and professional people. Yet we are all shown as having comical accents, flaring emotions and holding down menial jobs. We resent this and want it to stop. There are so many times we have seen and heard it. Our son — in his college class — heard it from a teacher.

We are proud of our heritage. If we protest as others have, we can gain a fair and more realistic picture of our culture and our people. Is there any organization that does this? We do write letters but one family's impact is easy to ignore.

Please let us know if there is any group we can work with on this important issue.

**Paula Bellino Corso,**  
Lake Worth, FL

*(Ed. - Your letter has been referred to the Commission for Social Justice, the anti-discrimination arm of the Order, Sons of Italy. )*

\*\*\*

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# POST SCRIPTS

## MEET COLUMBUS' AMBASSADOR OF MUSIC

The profile story of Professor Charles Gabriele, of Palm Coast, Florida, in the Summer 1989 issue, described his "Christopher Columbus Suite," and the many lands where he has conducted the Suite. Since that story, the Christopher Columbus Quincentenary Jubilee Commission designated the Suite as official music of the Quincentenary Jubilee and Professor Gabriele has continued to direct here and abroad.



During his 1990 presentation in Italy, the vice mayor of Genova, Honorable Claudio Burlando, presented to Gabriele a medal and plaque inscribed "to the Music Ambassador of Columbus." To date, he has conducted his tribute to Columbus in every region of Italy except three, which he will cover before October 1992.

A unique invitation to conduct came from the community of Dronero, a small city in the province of Cuneo (*Piemonte regione*). Gabriele refers to Dronero as a "summer paradise." It is not con-

**Prof. Gabriele's tireless efforts have rewarded him with concerts in 17 of Italy's 20 regions. Here, he conducts his original music in Emilia-Romagna**

gested, is at a delightful altitude, and has no heavy traffic. Its history dates back to the 12th century and the people are very pleasant, but it does not have a band! Professor Gabriele borrowed a band from another community and Dronero responded by presenting an outstanding, colorful tribute to Columbus. It converted its Cinema Iris into a concert hall ornate with flowers and publicized the special Columbus concert in the media and by sound

trucks. The cinema stage is too narrow for a big concert band, so the percussion section played from a couple of loge boxes!

During his Italian tour, Professor Gabriele auditioned a number of bands to decide which would perform in the USA on Columbus Day and week in 1992. (For further information, write to Professor Charles Gabriele, P.O. Box 350746, Palm Coast, Florida 32135.)



**Gabriele with Vice-Mayor Claudio Burlando in Genoa.**

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# All'Italiana

## LIRE TO THE RESCUE

Despite the media-hyped "sick man" image (see Media Madness) being played up by its "friends", Italy is in the forefront of helping the new Russia. The Italians have pledged over \$1 billion in export credits to the Yeltsin government. This places Italian generosity right behind the U.S. and Germany. The hard-pressed British have promised about \$144 million, with strings.

## SPACE YO-YO

Last August saw a couple of Italian firsts in space. Two Italic astronauts reached the heavens in Russian and American ventures. Italo-French researcher Michel Tognini took to a Soyuz spacecraft on a 12-day mission while Franco Malerba of Italy joined the crew of the U.S. space shuttle Atlantis. Malerba's mission was the first joint effort between NASA and the Italian Space Agency to test the "tethered" satellite concept.

As envisioned by the Italians, the tethered satellite is to be a remote generating station tied, or tethered, to the mother ship by a 12-mile cable. In theory, such an arrangement could pave the way for permanent space stations and a Mars landing. The Italians invested almost \$400 million dollars to build the generating satellite while NASA took charge of the cable and reel mechanism. As luck would have it, the cable became stuck on the reel and the Italian satellite only drifted some 850 feet away from the spacecraft.

However, it did manage to generate 36 volts of power (the plan was 5,000 volts) and did not adversely affect the spacecraft by whipping around in space as feared.

Although otherwise successful, Atlantis failed as a "fishing" expedition.

## BATHING: THEN & NOW

According to the new book, *Baths and Bathing in Classical Antiquity* by historian Fikret Yegul, the ancient Roman was supplied with 300 gallons of water per day versus only 192 gallons for the modern New Yorker. Moreover, the typical public bath contained libraries, exercise rooms, theaters and any water temperature desired. Poor and rich alike had ac-



Italy's maternity leave policy grants mothers 20 weeks leave at 80% salary.

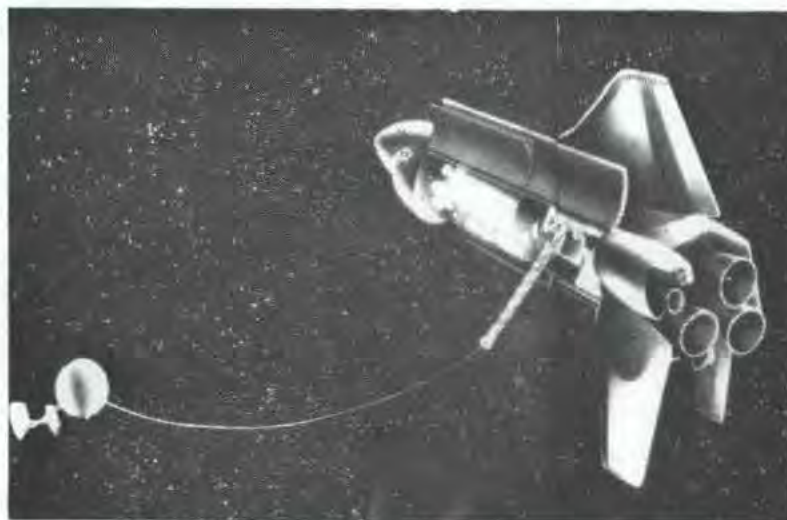
cess to the baths and women had their own hours.

Manhattan's Grand Central Station is the architectural cousin of the Baths of Caracalla in Rome. But don't try taking a shower there.

## MAMMA LEAVE

If you are going to be pregnant do it in Denmark, Italy or Luxembourg. In fact, any country in Europe is more generous to mom-to-be than the United States. Italy mandates that expectant working mothers be given 20 weeks of maternity leave at 80% salary. Denmark requires 28 weeks at 90% salary. The United Kingdom grants 40 weeks but less than half is paid leave. The Italians even allow mothers to take two hours off each day to go home and feed their infant during the first year.

Not all Italian companies appreciate the government's generosity, however, and smaller firms may screen out potential mothers during hiring. Nevertheless, major employers such as Fiat consider maternal leave the norm. Italian taxpayers seem to be a lot more tolerant of the perk than American taxpayers, according to some observers.



The week that was. Two Italic astronauts in orbit. However, NASA's faulty cable reel nixed the Italian satellite test.



# All'Italiana

## SICILY IN AGONY

The martyrdom of top Italian crimefighters Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino has thrown Italy into crisis. Italians from Sicily to Milan have had enough of the Mafia. They are demanding a stronger government response to its savage terrorism.

In America, most see the mafia as an integral part of Sicilian life. A recent segment of the television program *Nightline* invited a representative of the FBI, and author Nicholas Pileggi, a self-styled expert on organized crime, to participate. After a *Nightline* correspondent opened the show with the ritual video which depicted Sicily's stark beauty and "violent" history, substitute host Forest Sawyer began his discussion with the "ex-



The mafia declares war on Italy. Judge and Signora Giovanni Falcone, the first victims.

perts." Curiously, neither expert mentioned how Italy's most pernicious terrorist group, the Mafia, was reintroduced to Sicily by the U.S. Army in World War II. The Allies used American gangster Lucky Luciano to rejuvenate the ole boy network of Sicily, to cover amphibious landings and to weed out the Fascist infrastructure. Nor did the experts recall that Mussolini's special prosecutor Mori all but wiped out the mafia within six months back in the 1920's. It all goes to show that the mafia roots aren't that deep. Rather, the soil is too fertile. Will the Italian government rise to this challenge as they did to the Red Brigades? Italians are aroused and determined as before—a good sign.

## STONE AGE ITALY

He took a hike in the Alps about 5,000 years ago and never came home. By sheer luck, however, the mummified corpse of a late Stone



But he doesn't look Italian.

Age man was found last year along with his worldly goods. Since he managed to die on the Italian side of the Alps, he is considered an Italian mummy rather than Austrian. Whether the ancient man lived on the Italian side of the Alps remains to be learned. What is already known is that he carried a type of flint and copper axe that originated in Italy.

Italian authorities are selecting over 36 teams of scientists from around the world to continue the study of the mummified remains.

## SELLING ITALY

Jumping on the privatization bandwagon, the Italian government is desperately trying to sell off government-controlled industries to offset the huge national debt. Why not? Everybody else in Europe has been doing it and capitalists around the world say it is the orthodox thing to do. The energy group ENI and even the giant IRI conglomerate are on the block.

True, these huge holding companies have evolved into overstuffed political porkers but they were the vehicles for the post-war economic miracle that got Italy to the number five position of world economies. They were, frankly, designed as part of Fascism's corporate state during the late 1920's and 30's. With at least 51% government control these conglomerates marshalled Italy's meager resources toward national goals.

## VICTORY AT SEA

Italian power boat *Il Destriero* (The Charger) won the 154-year old Blue Ribbon for record time in crossing the Atlantic (West to East). Capt. Odoardo Mancini's sea machine made the 3,000 mile crossing at speeds that reached 65 knots. Italy last copped the prize in 1933 (East to West). That year, the oceanliner *Rex* took 4 days, 13 hours to make its crossing. *Il Destriero* took only 58 hours, 34 minutes.

\*\*\*\*



# 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.]

## EDUCATING ITALY

Some critics say the testing was flawed. But a test of students around the world, sponsored by the U.S. Dept of Education, has disturbed some American educators.

One example of the results: although the United States spends the highest percentage (GNP) of money on educating their youth, American kids placed near the bottom in standardized science and math tests. Italian youngsters ranked higher than American students and even outpaced the French, Scandinavians, and Scots. They edged the Israelis in math and matched them in science.

What disturbs the educators is that Italy spends less on education yet turns out more competent students.

## CANCELLED CZECHS, et al.

Lombard League take notice! The world is going to pieces. Czechoslovakia is no more. Neither is Yugoslavia and the old USSR. Spain is beset by Basque and Catalan separatists. Even the United Kingdom has its disaffected Scots and Irish.



Is this how some northern Italians would like to see themselves?



Children from war-torn Bosnia-Herzegovina find refuge in Italy after being airlifted to Milan by the Italian military.

A vocal minority would also like to see an Italy of independent regions. Yet, unlike most countries of the world, there is more to unite Italy than to destroy it. One major achievement recently announced is that Austria has finally given up its claim to Alto Adige (South Tyrol). Historically Italian since Roman times, the region was reconquered by Italian arms in World War I. Even Hitler shied away from crossing Mussolini over the region with its large German-speaking minority. In fact, the Fascists got Germany to repatriate many of their minority north. Today, Italy has granted bilingual status and a job quota system to the Germano-Italians. Alto Adige is now firmly Italian.

As for the other starry-eyed Italian regions, know ye the voice of your forefathers: There is but one Italy and Rome is her capital.

## SECURITY SECRET

Shhhhhhhhh. The best kept security secret in the West is that the Western European Union force, the new military

arm of the 51-nation Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) will be under Italian command. NATO is working in concert with the Western European Union to monitor the international sanctions levied on Serbia for its aggression in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Naval forces have been deployed in the Adriatic and the Mediterranean. Italy's key military role in this crisis has been downplayed as

usual. News of the Italian command post was buried in most American newspapers. To date, no one has been able to stop the suffering and genocide in that torn land. Can an Italian hand restore peace and sanity? Stay tuned.

## OLIVETTI BURGER

McDonald's Corporation has seen the future and it's Italian.

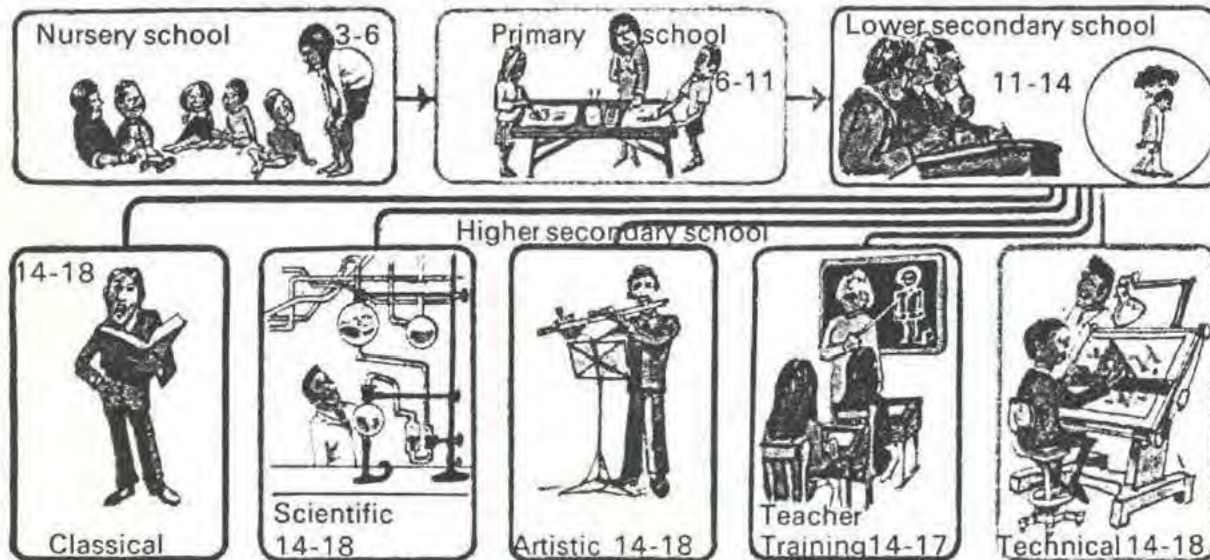


Ringin' up the sales on Italian computers

# World Notes



## The Italian school system



The Italian educational system is centralized and rigid.  
But the results are surprising.

The international hamburger chain wants an Olivetti computer in every store. So it just signed a \$300 million contract with Italy's office machine giant to furnish and install some 50,000 workstations in all McDonald outlets in the U.S. With almost nine thousand fast food shops around the country, Olivetti will need ten years to complete the job. Olivetti's chairman, Carlo De Benedetti, hailed the deal as the largest made by his company in the United States. Italian computers already have a major share of the U.S. banking market. Despite a worldwide recession, Olivetti has outpaced all its European rivals in maintaining a competitive edge. Can the Big Marco burger be far behind?

### CUOMOFARE

Ideas for welfare reform range from cradle-to-grave socialism to let-them-

eat-dirt. Breaking the cycle of poverty or even reestablishing two-parent families has stymied the best minds in the country. Nevertheless, New York Governor Mario Cuomo may be on to something enlightened.

Back in 1988 his administration launched an experimental project called the Child Assistance Program (CAP) in seven upstate counties. Instead of penalizing single parents for working while collecting welfare, the program allows them to build income and accumulate savings. The incentive appears to boost morale as well as independence. Cuomo is encouraged by the results and is pushing for expansion of CAP into the heartland of welfare—New York City.

### THEY SAW THE RIGHT

August, 1992 saw the passing of two men who refused to bow to authority when morality was at stake.

For Judge John J. Sirica, that authority was President Richard Nixon. And what was at stake was the United States Constitution. It was Sirica who broke open the Watergate Scandal and ordered Nixon to release his secret tapes. Judge Sirica died at age 88.

For Giorgio Perlasca, a commodities agent for the Italian government in wartime Hungary in 1944, the authority was Nazi Germany. Perlasca did his duty to humanity by saving some 5,000 Jews from certain death.

Creating a position for himself as a Spanish diplomat, Perlasca was able to forge citizenship papers for would-be victims of the holocaust and facilitate their escape from Budapest.

The State of Israel formally recognized Perlasca's achievements in 1989.

\*\*\*\*





## Editorial

### RESTITUTOR RES PUBLICAE

On August 15th America lost Judge John J. Sirica, Restorer of the Republic.

We honor Judge Sirica here because it was his relentless determination to find the truth that led to the Watergate Scandal in 1972. That scandal forced the resignation of a president of the United States and shook our republic to its foundations. But, it created a new America.

Sirica, born of immigrant parents from Naples, was 68 years old when he was thrust on the national stage. He could have accepted the Watergate burglary for what is appeared to be—a second rate break-in. Instead, his instincts nagged him into a number of decisive actions that broke a web of silence and political intrigue, unbelievable to trusting Americans.

Because of Judge Sirica the United States became a stronger democracy and, more importantly, a wiser one. JLM

### FASCISTOPHOBIA

During the 1970's Italy faced down the Red Brigades. Their blatant violence, culminating in the murder of former Prime Minister and celebrated statesman Aldo Moro, forced the Italian government to reorder its priorities. The state reluctantly assumed powers that its fascistophobia otherwise forbade. The victory was absolute and Italy went on to become the 5th greatest economic power in the world.

Today, it is the mafia that rears its head. At least three southern regions of the Italian nation are the object of Rome's counterinsurgency. The fact is, the mafia, terrorists of the 90's, has taken to the field. Unlike Japan, where organized crime (Yakuza) is legal and integrated in the economy of the nation; or unlike Columbia where the government is hostage to the drug cartel, Italy coexists with its criminal menace out of fascistophobia. But that is changing.

The ghost of Fascism forever haunts the new Italy. A one party state with a powerful executive has been a nightmare to all but a few conservatives. However, with the realization that internationally financed criminals can literally seize control of whole nations, and that even the northern regions of Italy are not immune from the dons, Italians are being forced to face their nightmare. Anti-crime weapons that we take for granted—wire-tapping, undercover stings, and racketeering laws—are only now being adopted by the Italian government. Italy is years behind other democracies in its police powers. It must now catch up if it is to destroy the mafia threat.

Italians are fed up with coexisting with criminals and crooked politicians. In Sicily, tens of thousands of decent citizens have taken to the streets in protest. Should anyone believe that the mafia is so deeply rooted even in Sicily, note two things. One, it is Sicilians who are at the forefront of the struggle against the mafia. Martyrs Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino were but two who fought to rid this cancer from Italy. Two, during the Fascist era it took Mussolini's chief prosecutor a mere six months to clean out Sicily. Sadly, the mafia was reintroduced by the United States Army in 1944 - fascistophobia was their reason. RAI, JLM

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# Forum of the People



## An Interview with Gay Talese

by Bob Masullo

The following interview with author Gay Talese was conducted in San Francisco on February 26, 1992, by Bob Masullo, a reporter for the *Sacramento Bee* and host of the weekly "Festa Italiana" radio program heard on KJAY in Sacramento. Mr. Masullo is also a member of the Italic Studies Institute.

The interview was prompted by Talese's latest book, *Unto the Sons*, which deals with the Italian-American experience in general and the Talese family in particular. Many critics have called it "the Italian Roots." (See our review in this issue.)

**WHEN I FIRST SAW YOUR BOOK, I MUST ADMIT, I HAD A TINGE OF ENVY. I'VE WANTED TO DO SOMETHING SIMILAR. IT TOOK YOU 10 YEARS TO DO IT, RIGHT?**

Right. Getting the history down right was time consuming. I love the history. I didn't know that much about it before. I didn't know much about Garibaldi; I didn't even know much about Mussolini, except that he was a source of great embarrassment.

**BUT YOUR FATHER USED TO TALK ABOUT ITALY ALL THE TIME.**

All the time. I ignored it. I ignored everything Italian. I ignored even things about music, all the greats. I didn't want to hear about Puccini and Verdi. I didn't want to listen to their music. I didn't want to hear Italian spoken. I did not want to know about soldiers fighting with Mussolini's army and that they happened to be relatives of ours. I rejected that all. I wanted to be an American.

**WHAT MOTIVATED *UNTO THE SONS*?**

Sometimes I'd write about Italians and I was always interested in Italian subjects. I mean, I didn't say I'm Italian, you're Italian, but you know if I wrote about an Italian prize fighter, a Joe DiMaggio, a Frank Sinatra or some of the gangsters, like Frank Costello, what I was doing.

**DO YOU FEEL YOUR CHARACTERS SHOULD BE MAJOR FIGURES?**

No, I don't think that... I am paying attention, at great length, to what I believe has been so long ignored. Which is the history of the people who came off the boat. I'm writing about Italian "boat people." And I'm writing about these boat people in a way to say, "Yes, they ARE Italian boat people. But we are all boat people in this country."

And the Pilgrims were boat people, Plymouth Rock, all that, it's part of the story of this country, and I'm trying to say we're all so separate. The melting pot isn't working. It never was meant to work. It is really a nation of very separate people.

**AND YET IN CALABRIA AND IN ALL OF SOUTHERN ITALY, THERE ALSO IS AN OPPRESSION, FROM THE NORTH. IS IT THE SAME KIND OF OPPRESSION WASP SOCIETY GIVES ITALIANS IN THE UNITED STATES?**

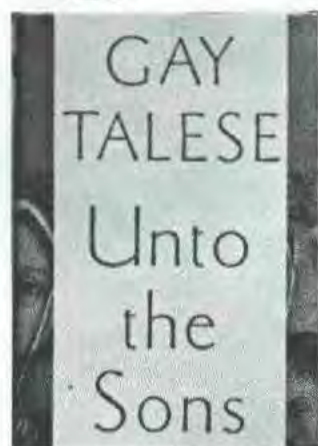
Let me tell you something about this WASP society of ours. I write in this book about being called "wop" and "dago." Just yesterday I get this from my editor. (Talese shows a fax of a page from the February 24, 1992, *New York Observer*.) They refer to me as a "wop" in this newspaper. In New York! In 1992! and it's really quite amazing, in the sense that: "How far have we come? How far have I come?"



(Continued page 16)



## REVIEW



### UNTO THE SONS

by Gay Talese  
(Knopf, 635 pages, \$25)

Reviewed by Bob Masullo

A best-selling American author of Italian ancestry writes his *magnum opus* on the Italian-American experience.

This should be cause for cheering in the Italian-American community....until one reads the book.

Gay Talese's *Unto the Sons* has some merit. Italian-Americans should not ignore it, if only to refute Talese's distortions.

*Unto the Sons* is a flawed work.

I like Talese. I did long before this book. As a journalist, I have stood in awe of his ability to marshal facts in an interesting, compelling manner. A pioneer in "new journalism," he has offered writers of all lineages a standard of excellence to rally around.

But I have long been wincing at his choice of subjects. His fascination with Italian-American criminals, members of what he simplifies and glorifies as "the mafia," has always struck me as excessive. This reached a pinnacle in *Honor Thy Father*, his account of life in the Bonannos' actual and criminal families. His leering diversion into American sexuality in *Thy Neighbor's Wife* didn't improve things, but that's another matter.

His ignorance—or denial—of Italian-American discomfort with the

crime stereotype is, for a man of his intelligence, appalling. True, on the surface level, he objects to it. But he also glories in it. He is befuddled by objections of Italian-Americans (even his own father's) to his writings about Italian-American criminals.

*Unto the Sons* is not about crime, save for a few, very minor passages. Nevertheless, it shows other ignorances, other insensitivities, regarding the Italian-American ethos and Italic civilization. Garibaldi gets a going-over. Southern Italy is pictured as a "fountainhead of dark fantasies."

Talese uses his own family as a mir-

France. We read seemingly endless accounts of Talese's Ambler, Pennsylvania, relatives.

Some, of course, would make great magazine articles, Talese's forte. For example, the tale of his father smashing his model airplanes, following the American bombing of Monte Cassino in World War II, would make a superb magazine piece.

But because his stories are about minor events or—sorry to say—minor people, they have insufficient drama to hold one's interest in this 600-plus page epic.



Imagine a Jewish writer claiming that Murder, Inc was the lineal descendant of Joshua and King David. Talese has managed to rub out his entire Roman heritage in one sentence.

ror for all Italian-Americans. This is one of the book's major failings. The story of one family, no matter how worthy, cannot tell the whole story of a people. His father, Joseph Talese's experiences in coming to America and setting up a tailor shop in Ocean City, New Jersey, are not universal. How could they be? No single family can bear the kind of weight he puts on his own.

As compelling as many of Talese's vignettes may be separately, they offer the reader little as a package. We learn of cousin Antonio's fawning obeisance to

Further, by his own admission, Talese backed into Italian history. He knew practically nothing of it before he started research more than 10 years ago. He learned much, but not enough. This is especially noticeable when he gets into ancient history. To say that the *mafiosi* have the last drops of "predatory Roman blood" coursing through their veins is a calumny against our common ancestry.

Too often his historical details are murky. One frequently wonders why he bothered to include them since they




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clutter the narrative.

As with Italian history, Talese has backed into his Italian-American conscience. Unlike most aware Italian-Americans, he did not start by reading Schiavo, Gambino, Mangione, Barolini, Grizutti-Harrison, et al, and gradually build up to a visit to Italy and a *Roots*-type search. He started with the latter. In fact, he does not even seem to know most Italian-American writers. He has often told interviewers "the only Italian-Americans who are writing today are me and Mario Puzo."

Puzo? Just to cite him shows more than a fair amount of insensitivity. The truth is that other Italian-American writers have not had the benefit of the massive promotional campaigns Talese and Puzo have had. That's what

makes them different, less well known. It might benefit Talese (Puzo is probably beyond hope) to ask why this is so.

And yet, and yet . . .

### His ignorance... of Italian-American discomfort with the crime stereotype is... appalling.

Talese is a masterful stylist. His sentences flow like streamers, colorful and seamless. He is, without question, one of the greatest writers of non-fiction in English — or any language. That cannot be denied. That beautiful style is evident

in many passages of *Unto the Sons*.

More importantly, despite the unusual route, Talese's Italian-American conscience is developing. It still may be at an immature level but it is light years ahead of where it was when he penned *Honor Thy Father*. Such progress within one so talented should be encouraged.

Talese has said he hopes *Unto the Sons* inspires other Italian-American writers to "tell our story." It may. And for that, too, he is to be applauded.

He has said he plans one, maybe even two sequels himself. Wouldn't it be wonderful if they reflected a truly adult, truly enlightened Italian-American world view?

\*\*\*\*

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## Focus

# AMERICA: PARTLY AN ITALIAN ENTERPRISE

by John Mancini

Popular history would have us believe that Christopher Columbus achieved success with only the clothes on his back and the blind faith of a Spanish queen. Rejected by his own kind, Columbus (so the legend goes) defied the flat-earth folk to demonstrate that the world was round. And George Washington never told a lie.

\* \* \*

*"The discovery of America was in part an Italian enterprise."*

Thus wrote Latin American historian German Arciniegas in his book *Amerigo and the New World* (p. 131, Knopf, 1955). These words are heresy to those who cling to

the belief that Isabella hocked her jewels to pay for the historical voyage. They are even more provocative to those who deny Columbus' Italian roots. Even today among Italic people, the pride in the discovery of the New World has been reduced to defending the ancestry and honor of one beleaguered man—Cristoforo Colombo. The complex and fully documented history of that voyage of discovery is all but buried with the bones of the Great Navigator.

According to all accounts, the man Cristoforo Colombo was a sailor from Genoa, born of Italian Christian parents. Any other genealogy is wishful thinking. A religious man—anyone who has been to sea can understand why—his Catholicism reached fanatical proportions in Spain where Muslim, Jews, and Catholics were mutually exclusive. Having gone to sea at an early age, Colombo probably did not receive a formal education. In fact, not one document written by him in Italian (or the Genoese dialect) has been found. Yet, he later learned to speak and write Portuguese and Spanish. There are even notations in his hand in Latin and Hebrew (along with classical Greek, these languages were studied by Renaissance men).



**Not only did these Italian navigators open the Americas, but they launched four European empires.**

Although no Italian writing by Colombo has been found, it is clear from his constant relations with his brother, his Italian investors, and the learned men with whom he dealt in Italy, that Colombo must have used Italian.

What is also striking is that Colombo had a strong need to assimilate in Spain. He married first a Portuguese then a Spanish woman. He used the Hispanic form of the Latin for "pigeon" (Colon) which was the translation of Colombo. So thoroughly did he convert his ethnicity that one suspects his motives in trying to dispel the image of foreigner in a very nationalistic Spain. (Remember, his voyage coincided with the expulsion of the Jews and the end of the 800-year Arab occupation.) Colombo was a determined businessman who eventually wore out the patience of his Spanish sponsors. Despite his shrewd deals with the Spanish crown and his hispanicized trappings, Colombo was still thought of as a foreigner and died poor and disillusioned.

### What shaped Colombo?

#### What motivated him?

Opportunities arise from problems. In the late 1400's the problem was getting to the spice islands of the East Indies. That was (and is) where pepper came from. For Europeans, pepper and cloves and other spices meant the difference between merely consuming food and eating. Italian merchants of Genoa, Venice, Pisa, and Amalfi (near Naples) controlled the trade in spices since before the Crusades. However, in 1453 the Turks captured Constantinople and effectively impeded the flow of Oriental products to Europe. The Por-



# Focus

tuguese, with the aid of Italian navigators like Cadamosta, blazed a new trail to the East around Africa. In effect, they created a new monopoly. To outflank the Portuguese was now the intent of the Italian merchant community.

Colombo's goal was to obtain backing for a voyage westward to reach the fabled East. He not only wanted to outflank the Portuguese but also wanted to carve out a niche in the Orient as had fellow Italian Marco Polo two centuries before. (An annotated copy of Polo's book was always with Colombo.) While Polo traveled overland, this Genoese was certain that a ship crossing the Atlantic could reach Asia in a few weeks. Renaissance scholars like Toscanelli of Florence had studied the ancient works of Ptolemy, an Alexandrian Greek geographer, and determined that the circumference of the earth was such that the Asian mainland was a short voyage across the Atlantic. Moreover, Colombo was inspired by the works of the ancient Roman author Seneca which stated,

*A time will come in after years,  
when Ocean will loosen the shackles of things  
and the vast earth will be revealed  
and Tethys will disclose a new world  
and Thule (Iceland) will no longer be the Earth's  
boundary.  
(Medea, 375-79)*

*For how much space is there from the farthest shores  
of Spain to India? A distance of very few days, if a  
favorable wind attends the ship. (Natural Questions,  
Praef. 13)*

## Finding a sponsor

Among the learned of the fifteenth century there was no question that the earth was round — only a question of its circumference. Fortunately for Colombo, the American continents existed, otherwise, Toscanelli and Seneca would have inspired Colombo to an untimely death on an endless sea. Asia was over thrice the distance that they had calculated.

So here is the foreigner Colombo first in Portugal and then Spain, inspired by his fore-



Among Colombo's inspirations was the haunting predictions of the Roman scholar Seneca

bears Seneca and Polo and his contemporary Toscanelli, but very much in need of investors. Documents show that he was in constant contact with the Italian merchants in Lisbon, Cadiz and Seville attempting to exploit their influence with the Portuguese and Spanish monarchs. The Portuguese would have none of his schemes. As for Ferdinand and Isabella, they were broke. Defeating their Islamic enemies had depleted their resources. Even their learned scholars

thought Colombo and Toscanelli harebrained in thinking Asia was around the corner. Yet, Isabella must have been intrigued with the possibility of thrusting her new nation-state into international commerce. She demanded that Colombo and his Italians put up earnest money — between a quarter and two-thirds—before she would commit Spain.

The records show that Colombo's *paesani* came through. Berardi, Capetel,



The pre-Columbian American paradise had its dark side. Tens of thousands of innocents were sacrificed regularly in bloody religious rites.

(Continued page 15)

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## America (continued from p. 13)

DiNegri, Centurione and others staked Colombo on that historic voyage. Even then, Isabella needed to borrow her share from a Spanish Jew named Santangel and the Italian Piniello. Thus was born the voyage of discovery, partly an Italian enterprise.

Colombo, his mentors and his investors were certainly not the end of Italian enterprise. Amerigo Vespucci, Giovanni Cabotto and Giovanni da Verrazano later spearheaded the American explorations of the Portuguese, English and French. That the continents are named after Vespucci was not so coincidental for it was he who first contradicted Colombo's claim of finding Asia and instead proclaimed the discovery of a New World. It was Cabotto who planted the English and Italian (Venetian) flags on North America, an event that allowed a backwater island nation to plant 13 colonies. Finally, Verrazano recorded his entry into New Harbor decades before the Dutch laid their claim under Henry Hudson.

That the poor descendants of those Italian entrepreneurs who opened the Americas were treated as undesirable immigrants four centuries later was a historic irony. Clearly, the deepest roots of European America are Italian—an embarrassing truth to many elitists.

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### Columbus: the Controversy

The quincentennial of the opening of America has brought with it a charge of racism. Descendants of native Americans and even some white clergymen have called for a reflection on

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**Clearly, the deepest roots of European America are Italian—  
an embarrassing truth to many elitists.**

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the devastation wrought by Europeans starting with Columbus. As they picture it, pre-Columbian America was a harmonious society in tune with nature. Columbus and his posterity arrived to exploit the natives, commit genocide, import African slaves and pollute the environment.

Both the Europeans and the native Americans were people of their time. If we cannot forgive Columbus and the Spaniards for their conquests than we ought not to forgive the native Caribs for being cannibals or the Aztecs for practicing human sacrifice (in one incident some tens of thousands of native Americans were reportedly sacrificed on the completion of one Aztec pyramid). Native Americans have Europeans at an advantage for we know precious little about their pre-Columbian atrocities. Conquest and slavery surely existed before the arrival of mercenary whites.



**Columbus was smeared with a touch of the Black Legend perpetuated by Protestant England to defame Catholic Spain. In truth, North American Indians and blacks fared no better than their Latin American counterparts.**

What rankles more, however, is the smug attitude of Anglo-Saxon revisionists who have always pointed out Latin cruelty ("the Black Legend") in the Americas while glossing over their own genocide. The National Council of Churches carries on that revered tradition. By a questionable majority, that body

has condemned Columbus and his Catholic ways. Yet, the Council's condemnation was backed only by Protestant members, even the Greek Orthodox refused their support.

If among whites there is still a question whether Latins or Anglo-Saxons were the most cruel perhaps the Council of Churches can take a census of mestizos (half Indian, half white) on both continents. Their higher numbers in Latin America may be indicative of a slower or less thorough extermination. Likewise, the Council can recheck the dates for the abolition of black slavery between North and South America. Latin America came to its senses fifty years before our own democracy.

All of this just goes to prove the old adage of the pot and the kettle.

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## Talese (continued from p. 9)

### WHY DIDN'T YOUR FATHER TEACH YOU TO SPEAK ITALIAN? AND WHY AFTER ALL THESE YEARS DIDN'T YOU LEARN IT?

Good questions. He spoke Italian to my mother so they could have secrets from me. So that was it. It was a language of conspiracy between parents against me and, I guess, with my sister it was the same thing. Why didn't I learn it? I didn't learn it because I was embarrassed about being Italian. I wanted to be an American.

### OF WHAT YOU LEARNED, WHAT WAS YOUR BIGGEST SURPRISE, AND YOUR BIGGEST DISAPPOINTMENT?

I dredged up a lot of things I'm not happy about because they weren't happy things. You go back and relive your adolescent years and a lot of that is just simply sad. But I learned a lot about myself. I learned what history did, what role history plays in families and how the past, the historical past clings to us even though I'm not from Maida, I've no connection to Maida. I don't speak the language. Still, I feel I am connected to Maida. When I went to Maida I felt very at home. Strangely at home. More than I do in Ocean City, New Jersey, on my own property, where I was born. That was the strangest thing to me.

### YOU TALK ABOUT SOUTHERN ITALIAN PESSIMISM. WHY DO YOU THINK IT EXISTS?

I have it myself. In a part of the world where you're forced to live on the top of mountains, subjected to earthquakes through recorded history, and the people have a sense of history. They see evidence of history all around them... So they see fallen empires. They see fallen everything. It's still there. They have a sense of history because they trip over it. The whole land is misshapen and crooked because of the earthquakes. And the malarial water! The invasions! You could not protect yourself. You could not protect your nation. You say, why the pessimism? Hah.

Then there's the religion. It always speaks of darkness. Paradise is only after death. Why do southern Italians always look to heaven to solve all their problems? My father was always praying to Saint Francis of Paola. Did you ever see an uglier saint? And grim. The denial of pleasure. You see a good looking woman and you jump in icy water to keep your thoughts pure.

### HOW TYPICAL IS THE TALESE FAMILY EXPERIENCE OF ITALIAN-AMERICANS GENERALLY? I THINK IT MAY NOT BE THAT TYPICAL BECAUSE YOUR FATHER HAD A TRADE. THAT WAS AN ADVANTAGE MANY ITALIANS DID NOT HAVE.

His father didn't. His father died of asbestosis. I think my family is very typical. To be a tailor isn't part of the landed gentry. We make clothes for people. We're part of a service class. We are bent on our knees measuring other people's garments.

### ARE YOU ON FRIENDLY TERMS WITH ITALIAN-AMERICAN INTELLECTUALS?

Oh yeah. With the Italian Cultural Institute, for example, that's in New York City, 68th and Park Avenue. I'm very active in that organization. Let's take the (National) Italian American Federation [actually, *Foundation*] of Washington. I was there about a week ago. I made a speech there.

### ARE YOU GOING TO WRITE MORE ON ITALIAN-AMERICANS?

I have to worry about how much longer I'm going to be around. Since I don't know, I don't know how many books I can do. But I want to stay with the subject. The next book would concentrate more on the American experiences of Italian-Americans. This history was necessary to set up what I want to do.

### WHY DO YOU THINK IT IS THAT MOST OTHER ITALIAN-AMERICANS WHO TRIED WRITING HAVE NOT REALLY SUCCEEDED? FOR INSTANCE RICHARD GAMBINO, WHOM YOU CITE IN YOUR BIBLIOGRAPHY.

He's one of the good ones.

### YES, AND HE GOT MINIMAL RECOGNITION.

It's because the Italian-Americans don't read enough to support their writers. Maybe that's one explanation. But I can't tell you for sure.

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**“...Italian-Americans  
don't read enough  
to support their writers.”**

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Italian Amb. Boris Biancheri, Justice Massaro (wearing collar decoration), and NY Consul General Alberto Boniver.

### ITALY HONORS JUDGE MASSARO

The highest of all Italian civilian decorations, *Grande Ufficiale dalla Repubblica Italiana*, was recently conferred upon NYS Supreme Court Justice Dominic R. Massaro.

Among Justice Massaro's past accomplishments have been serving as a New York City human rights commissioner, and publishing a widely-acclaimed treatise on Cesare Beccaria, the 18th Century father of Criminal justice.

Justice Massaro is presently completing his term as chairman of the Conference of Major Italian American Organizations.

## FUTURE ISSUES OF THE ITALIC WAY

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- **MAFIA**  
- Strangers among us



# Perspectives

## DiMAGGIO AND ME:

### The Price We Paid

By Samuel J. Gulino

It was raining in Jamestown, New York but in Detroit—where the Yankees were playing the Tigers—it was sunny and clear. My lifelong buddy and I were huddled close to the radio listening to the play-by-play and enjoying our Saturday away from the rigors of fifth grade.

Although television was not a household item, almost every home in town had a radio—despite the depression. My radio time normally was spent listening to the likes of Jack Armstrong, Charlie McCarthy (aided slightly by Edgar Bergen) and Jack Benny. As a ten-year-old, I played a lot of pebble-strewn sandlot baseball, but I knew little of the major leagues.

Nevertheless, when my friend rooted for the Tigers, my competitive instinct triggered a contrary response. (Besides, I liked the sound of the word, “Yankees” — the way the last syllable smacked against my palate.) In one corner of my young mind I sensed a subtle connection between Yankees and Americana.

Later in the game, after hearing names like DiMaggio and Rizzuto, I made a paradoxical, but even stronger connection between the Yankees and my own ethnic background. On that day I became a Yankees fan—not knowing I would sometimes pay a heavy price for my devotion.

As I grew into my teens, it became clear to me that the predominantly white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant community in Jamestown hated the Yankees almost as much as they hated the sizeable Italian minority who shared their town. Their reasons appeared to be two-fold: First of all, the Yankees featured two stars with Italian surnames: Rizzuto, who was one of the best in the game and DiMaggio whose

greatness was apparent to almost everybody. Second, the Yankees were perennial winners and that’s reason enough to hate anybody. A lot of my youth was spent (or possibly misspent) defending the Yankees against attacks from those I considered bigoted and poor losers. It was always the same old tired refrain: “The Yankees are richer than any club in baseball and they buy pennants.” (Sound familiar?); “Look at the cruel way they discarded Babe Ruth at the end of his career.” (Cruel, maybe, but not unique to the Yankees then or now.); “Musial is better than DiMaggio and a helluva lot better looking.” (He was great, but not better than DiMaggio and the Cardinals’ record was in no way comparable to the Yankees’); “Next year, the \_\_\_\_\_ (take your choice) “will beat hell out of the Yankees”; (In those days, it hardly ever happened despite the support and fervent wishes of myriad foolish dreamers.); “If the Yankees had any real honor

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**... a quintessential  
American hero... could be  
brazenly and shamefully  
libeled.**

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and integrity they’d do what Connie Mack did with his Philadelphia Athletics (in the early 1900’s) for the ‘good of baseball.’ They’d break up the Yankees and give somebody else a chance to win.” (Team owner Mack was not dumb: he was a little on the cheap side and grew tired of “high salaried” players with



“...a paragon of laziness.”  
(Life Magazine, 1939)

“prima-donna” attitudes.)

Satisfied with my retorts and smug about the success of the Yankees, I continued to idolize them. But as they kept winning year after year, the sons of Italian immigrants in Jamestown — a real baseball-minded town—were even more resented by those who considered themselves the more authentic Americans.

Such smallness of thinking may be hard to believe today, but in such hard economic times—when pleasures were few and vicarious thrills even more needed—baseball was an important part of many peoples’ lives.

In my young naive mind, with exposure to precious little outside of my own city of 42,000 people, I believed the prejudice against Italians was primarily local and not to be found among more sophisticated people in other parts of the

(Continued on p. 28)

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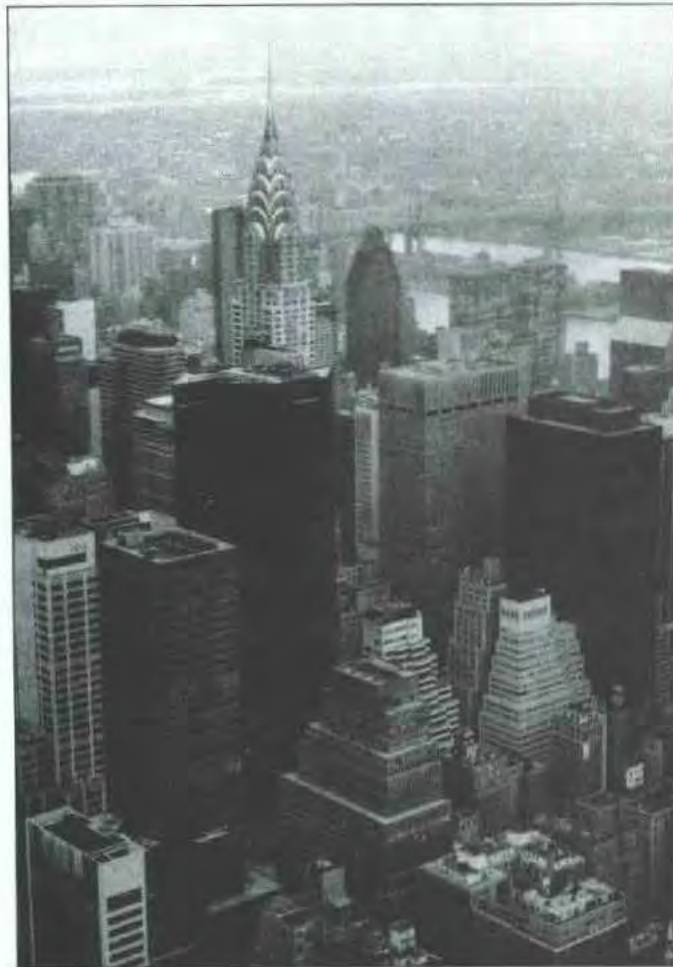
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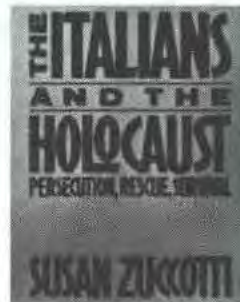
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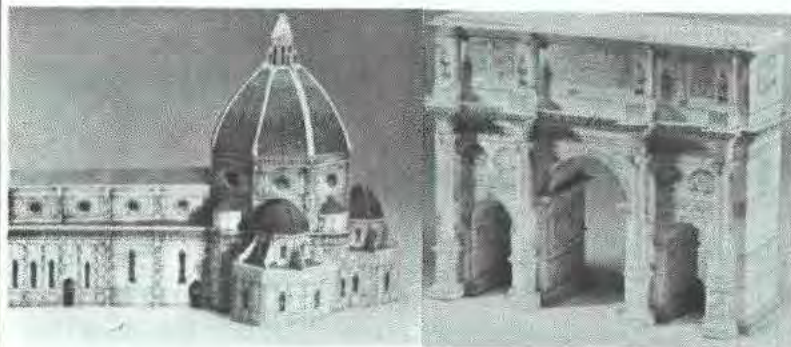
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# Media Madness

## F.B.I. Joining Investigation Of Mafia Killings in Sicily

**ITEM:** A team of FBI agents are assisting Italian police in collecting evidence against mafia murderers. (Photo added)

**COMMENT:** Trumpeted almost like a Marine landing this story of FBI involvement is meant to give Sicilians new hope in their life and death struggle with the mafia. Fresh from their victory over local thug and cement price-fixer John Gotti, the FBI is seen as a white knight. There is certainly enough crime in America to keep the FBI occupied. And, in any event, we should never forget that the U.S. Army reintroduced the mafia to Sicily during World War II to weed out the Fascists.

If it makes you feel any better, the FBI was founded by Italian-American Charles Bonaparte.

By RALPH BLUMENTHAL  
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, July 31 — United States law enforcement officials have become heavily involved in the investigation to unmask the killers of two Italian crusaders against organized crime, lending scientific expertise and offering to compel testimony before a Federal grand jury.

In an interview in Washington Friday, the Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation voiced confidence that American and Italian investigators, working together, would track down the assassins. Speaking with controlled emotion of the "savagely brutal, vicious" car bombings that killed the two magistrates, who had worked closely with the American authorities over the years, the Director, William S. Sessions, compared the collaboration the international investigation of the terrorist bombing of Pan Am Flight 103.

now the killers knew the movements of the secretive officials.



Police Lapses Suspected in the Killing



**ITEM:** A business article penned by *New York Times* reporter Roger Cohen, in Rome, sets his Italian mood: "Italy is a land of plots and counterplots, of unsolved crimes and unresolved mysteries."

**COMMENT:** Let's recall Signor Cohen to the open and guileless USA. Let him figure out the Iran-Contra mystery, the military-industrial complex, the October Surprise, the S & L scandal, the Inslaw-Justice Dept conspiracy, and the whereabouts of Jimmy Hoffa. There is certainly enough melodrama here at home for such an impressionable reporter.

**ITEM:** (The Fat Lady Sings) *Barron's* reporters Laura Colby and Andrew Rosenbaum sum up the state of Italy's privatization of major industries. Trying to be ever so creative, Colby and Rosenbaum end up doing the stereotypical opera-shtik to set the condescending tone of their piece. This London and Paris-based team call Italy's attempt to privatize the "wimpiest sort" which doesn't equal the "valiant Thatcher-esque privatization program." (Photo added)

**COMMENT:** Where do these journalist clowns come from? Last time we looked, the Italian economy had left merry ole England in the dust. Truth be known, the corporative system of government participation in major industries that brought Italy to the #5 position in the world was developed during the Fascist era. Multi-party politics has wreaked havoc with it but the system mobilized Italy's precious resources quite well over sixty years.

Can we expect to see a summary of Britain's economic decline as a Benny Hill segment? Or is that insulting?

## The Fat Lady Sings Privatization, Italian-Style

By LAURA COLBY and ANDREW ROSENBAUM

ROME — Italy, the country that gave the world opera, is now listening to a chorus of government and business leaders over the past several years about whether the long-armed banks and industrialists that make up an estimated 40% of its economy. Now, the fat lady is about to sing.

Earlier this year, Rome was allowing almost all of its public services to be made partial private and the list of those making offerings is growing. By year-end, the government plans to raise 15 trillion lire (\$12 billion) by selling stakes in the energy and electronics, among other things, and a national debt more than 100% of the size, in percentage terms, than that of the U.S.

Italy has no choice but to use money to reduce the deficit, at least a little, by the middle of this decade, or it will be elec-

Ferrerie dello Stato, a noteworthy for \$40 million in annual losses, not to mention dismal service—a few might be worth a line worth of a year of benefits and 1





# News of the Institute

## THE WINNER IS...

The winner of the Plenary Council's first Incentive Award, drawn from entries received, was Lena Cernigliaro of Port Washington, Long Island. A check for \$1,000 was mailed out in September. Stay tuned for our next Incentive Award program.

### FUNDRAISING SUCCESS

The strength of the Institute was demonstrated this past May with the results of our fifth annual dinner dance. Despite a dismal economy in the New York Metropolitan area our dinner committee under the guidance of Louis Mantia (photo) managed to reach all its financial goals. A key strategy for this success was, ironically, raising ticket prices from \$250 per seat to \$300, which offset a reduction in ticket sales. *Congratulazioni Lou!*



Dinner Chairman Lou Mantia (2nd from left) is flanked by John Mancini (Sec. of Programs, I.), President Al Crecca, Governor John Santora, and Vice President Mike Carbone.



A view of the party-goers at the Waldorf

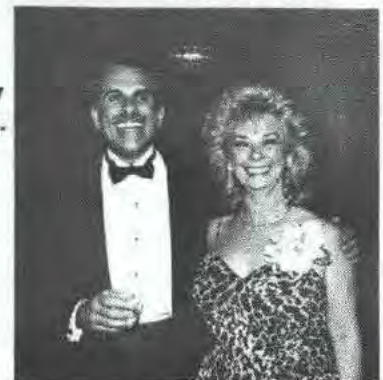


Vice President Mike Carbone (2nd from left) joins Goldies group, The Classics



VP Mike Carbone, Gov. John Santora, Tom Piazza, Tony DiMauro, and Pres. Al Crecca.

Awareness co-chairman Mary Ann Minucci with Lou Mantia.



### PROJECT ITALIA

Our video, *America: The Italian Legacy* is being reviewed as a training film at the U.S. Dept of Justice in Washington to introduce concepts of Roman Law. Slowly, it is also reaching audiences in Connecticut, New York, and California (Sacramento). The video, narrated by former Vice Presidential candidate Geraldine Ferraro, will hopefully become a staple in American education demonstrating origins of citizenship and equality of women.



### LOUIS MANTIA ELECTED GOVERNOR

The Council of Governors welcomed Louis Mantia into their ranks in grateful appreciation for his commitment to the cause of Italic studies. Lou works for a major real estate company in Manhattan where he manages a portfolio of prime office properties. Married with three children, Lou and his wife Jessica live on Staten Island. Lou's term as governor will be three years.

### ADVERTISING CAMPAIGN PLANNED

Unquestionably, the major problem the Institute faces in growth is lack of publicity. Our programs of youth education, films, and newsletter need to be trumpeted more. Even if we were to sign up 1% of the Italian-American community that would be over 20,000 members. Plans are in the works for print advertising using famous people and for cable television ads. Finding even that proverbial 15 minutes of fame is harder than you think.

### COMMITTEES APPOINTED

President Al Crecca has finalized his choices for Plenary Council committee slots. Each chairman will be allotted a budget and objective. **Social:** Pat Grecco, **Development:** John Mancini, **Fundraising:** Tom Piazza, **Intergroup:** Nick DiVito, **Assistance:** Mary Ann Minucci, **Business & Career:** Tom Lacorazza, **Membership:** Mike Romano.



Newly elected Governor, Lou Mantia (l.), receiving the Ara Pacis award from President Al Crecca.



Tom Lacorazza  
(Business & Career)



Pat Grecco  
(Social)



John Mancini  
(Development)



Tom Piazza  
(Fundraising)



Mary Ann Minucci  
(Assistance)

### FALL PROGRAMS OFFERED

In September and October the Aurora Program will be offering its Level I and II Italian studies courses for 5th and 6th graders simultaneously in New Hyde Park and Floral Park, Long Island. Coming also will be our new *Trip To Italy* language course for teens and adults. This five session quickie will be available in Manhattan and Floral Park.

On Saturday, September 19th, the Institute's second annual picnic will take place at the Platzl Brauhaus in Pomona, New York. Tickets are \$50 for adults, \$20 for children ages 3-12. Contact the office for reservations.

### SCHOOL INCENTIVES

Three Long Island schools have participated in our Aurora achievement prize in Latin. The prize consisting of our Ara Pacis (Altar of Peace) commemorative medallion and \$25 cash was awarded to **Monica Navia** (Sacred Heart Academy, Hempstead), **Frank Petrusiello** (Chaminade H.S., Mineola) and **Jennifer Domm** (Garden City H.S.). Latin and Italian prizes will be offered nationally, as will subsidies for Latin and Italian clubs.

### THE ITALIC WAY

Although in its 5th year of production, our newsletter needs a full-time staff to enhance its coverage and roll off the press on time. The governors and Plenary Council have agreed to make the newsletter a top priority in the coming budget. Nevertheless, readership must increase substantially to realize its great potential.

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Photo  
unavailable



Nick DiVito  
(Intergroup)

Mike Romano  
(Membership)



## PROFILES

### Maj. Don Gentile: The Italic Terminator

by Rosario Iaconis

Before film hero Arnold Schwarzenegger littered the silver screen with celluloid cadavers, before Tom Cruise became a cinematic aerial idol in *Top Gun*, an Italian-American air ace named Don Salvatore Gentile was fearlessly blasting German Luftwaffe pilots out of the air in World War II.

Like Joe DiMaggio's 56 game hitting streak, Gentile's obliteration of 30 Nazi planes was a feat for all time. It surpassed even World War I ace Captain Eddie Rickenbacker's total of 26. Yet for all his ferocity in war, Gentile remained the quiet, unassuming boy from Piqua, Ohio.

Born on December 6, 1920 to Italian immigrants, Gentile excelled in sports, car racing and flying. Although his parents wanted Don to go to college, they indulged his aerial idiosyncrasy. At the age of seventeen, he stepped into his first airplane and discovered that "the air to me was what being on the ground was to other people."

After that initial ecstasy, the young Italian-American wanted to conquer the heavens. He became a serious aviator and acquired a reputation as a cocky daredevil. Brazenly and defiantly he would buzz the skies over Piqua in a prophetic display of things to come.

The clarion call to action, however, came in 1939 when Gentile read the blaring headlines declaring that Adolph Hitler had invaded Poland. While others debated and some like

Lindbergh favored isolation, Gentile saw an opportunity to serve the causes of freedom and flight. It was at that precise moment that Gentile found his life's calling.

Because hostilities between the United States and Germany had not yet occurred, Gentile joined the Royal Air Force (R.A.F.) of Great Britain. The young pilot was one of a few select Americans to join the fray before Pearl Harbor. The beleaguered British were not certain of victory against the formidable Luftwaffe and sorely needed American pluck.



Maj. Don Gentile, America's first World War II ace in Europe

Gentile's indomitable fighting spirit, canny intelligence and 20/10 vision served him in good stead. After a rocky training period, in which his risky style shocked the more reserved British airmen, the cocky Ohioan proved his mettle was the equal of his moxie. His words were harsh, no doubt a result of dehumanizing combat:

*"... I was sure I had instilled in them [German pilots] that I was their master and was going to kill them. I had some experience in instilling this feeling into the Germans."*

Indeed, after a devastating low-level bombing mission over the heart of Berlin in March 1944, Gentile had participated in the destruction of six enemy aircraft and the protection of an American Flying Fortress. On another occasion, Gentile took on two German Focke-Wulf 190's over the forests of Compiègne, where Hitler had humiliated the French into accepting surrender. Outmatched and bereft of ammunition, he

emerged unscathed. Although he notched no new victories, Gentile considered this his most critical dog-fight:

*"It showed me what I had learned and it taught me what I was. After it I felt there was no German alive anywhere who could keep me from killing him when I had an even break in the fight; or if the breaks went against me and he got them all, I felt I could keep him from killing me."*



The North American P-51B Mustang, Maj. Gentile's warplane

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## DiMAGGIO

(Cont'd from p. 18)

country. And like so many others during the Great Depression, my blissful ignorance was sustained by the hard times. Putting enough food on the table (in our case, for a family of six) was the overriding concern, the major worry. We barely could afford the cost of a daily paper and magazines were out of the question.

That's probably why I was spared from reading the libelous statements made against Joe DiMaggio in a May 1, 1939 *Life* Magazine article. (Ironically, only six weeks before the Hall of Fame in Cooperstown was dedicated.) I only recently heard of the piece and when I located it on microfilm, I was shocked. Under the byline of Noel F. Busch, *Life* had this to say about DiMaggio: "Although he learned Italian first, Joe, now 24, speaks English without an accent and is otherwise well adapted to most U.S. mores. Instead of olive oil or

smelly bear grease he keeps his hair slick with water. He never reeks of garlic and prefers chicken chow mein to spaghetti...." (How nice of Joe to spare Busch, who reeks himself of an offensiveness far greater than the smell of garlic.) And thus spared, Busch carries on.

"Joe DiMaggio's rise in baseball is testimonial to the value of general shiftlessness.... His inertia caused him to give up school after one year in high school.... He is a paragon of laziness."

While praising Joe as "The best all-around player," Busch wanted to make sure we understood the inferiority of his Italian character. In a photo of DiMaggio and Joe Louis at DiMaggio's restaurant, the caption reads: "Like heavyweight champion Louis, DiMaggio is lazy, shy and inarticulate." (Why not jab blacks, too?)

To make sure no Italian was excluded, the author had this to say: "Italians, bad at war, are well suited for milder competitions."

Such stunning stupidity was validated

and given nationwide circulation by one of America's leading magazines. But sadly, it was in keeping with the times. It was, no doubt, read, believed and even applauded by thousands of ignoramuses.

If we look back on what life was like 50 years ago, all of us could find shocking examples of hurtful prejudice, much of it worse than what happened to Joe DiMaggio. What his case so painfully dramatizes is that a quintessential American hero — a man widely admired for his ability, character and all-around class — could be brazenly and shamefully libeled.

I missed it, thank God. Though it may seem exaggerated or childlike to chronicle my relationship with a player and his team, and equate it with so much emotion, they always symbolized something precious to me. At a time when I needed it most — even though it was not their intention I'm sure — Joe DiMaggio and the Yankees helped me to maintain my dignity and to overcome the bigotry of my neighbors. \*\*\*\*

## Gentile (from p. 26)

These and other aerial exploits struck more than a little fear and quite a bit of admiration in the hearts of the enemy. The reverberations were felt as far away as Berchtesgaden. Legend has it that German Reichmarshall Herman Goering gladly would have traded two Luftwaffe squadrons for "the Italian Gentile" and his wingman John T. Godfrey.

Supreme Allied Commander, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, who awarded Captain Gentile the Distinguished Service Cross, America's second-highest award, called the dauntless Italo-American "a One-Man Air Force." FDR gave him the sobriquet "Captain Courageous." For a time, Captain Gentile was the nation's avenging angel, a star spangled superman of the air.

The coldly reserved British, however, were less than effusive. Whereas the 23-year-old pilot received adulation and wide newspaper coverage in the



Gentile with entertainer Bob Hope at Debden Air Base, England, 1943

United States, the official English policy was one of aloofness bordering on disdain. Winston Churchill did not single out Captain Gentile for bravery in his own right but felt compelled to include Gentile's wingman, John T. Godfrey — undeniably an asset — in his praise. Winny referred to the duo as the "Damon and Pythias" of the twentieth century. Perhaps Gentile's Italian origins rankled the British prime minister.

In all, Captain Gentile decimated a total of thirty German aircraft. That five of these planes were knocked out on the ground against heavy anti-aircraft flak should not detract from Gentile's accomplishments. But, according to Edward

Jablonski, author of *Air War*, the American Fighter Aces Association recognizes only "aerial victories" against "piloted aircraft". This accounting made Gentile's final score 25.

Captain Don Salvatore Gentile ultimately received another Distinguished Flying Cross, as well as the Silver Star, four Air Medals, and a bevy of medals from the Italians, French, Belgians and British. His tally of medals was 26. The nation's highest award, the Medal of Honor, has long eluded America's most intrepid airman. And while infantryman Audie Murphy and Pacific ace Pappy Boyington got their legends on the silver screen, Hollywood has never documented the exploits of this fightin' Italian.

Gentile died after the war attempting to save a passenger in a two-seater training jet. It seems fitting that he died an aviator's death, for Don Salvatore Gentile had the *right stuff*.

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