

THE ItalicWay

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The magazine of the Italic Institute of America



TARGET ITALY

Five threats to its image

IN THIS ISSUE

The Italic Way

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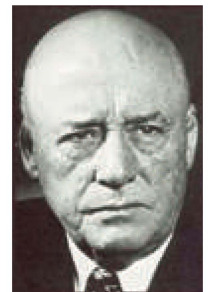
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Corrections

Wrong photo. In our story about the Taliaferro Family in the last issue, we used an incorrect photo of the late Speaker of the House Sam Taliaferro Rayburn. Here is the correct photo. We thank member Richard Vanucci of California for correcting this mistake.



Sam Taliaferro Rayburn,
 former Speaker of the House

Tid Bits

THROUGH A STRANGER’S EYES

Someday, that sleeping giant called “the Italian American community” may wake up and appreciate what others find in our ageless heritage.

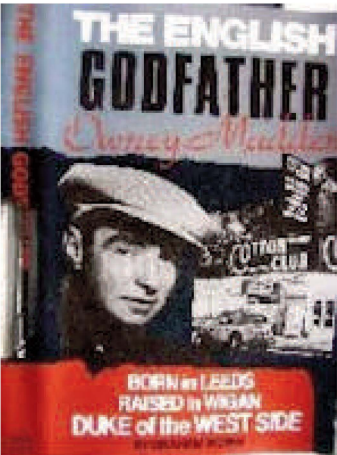
In an obit for the late Maurice Sendak, famed childrens’ book author (*Where the Wild Things Are*), it noted the gloom of his childhood, exacerbated by the death of relatives killed during the Holocaust. But his gloom was always lifted, literally, whenever he visited his Sicilian American neighbors in his Bronx apartment building. Quote Sendak: “They laughed, and they drank wine, and they grabbed me, and I sat on their laps, and they had a hell of a good time. And then you come back to my house and you have this sober cuisine and not so rambunctious family life. And I really did have a confusion. I thought that Italians were happy Jews!”

In another Bronx story, Gac Filipaj, a 52-year-old Albanian who fled the civil wars in Yugoslavia during the early 1990s, earned a four-year degree at Columbia University in New York while working there as a janitor. His major? Classical literature, inspired by one of his heroes, the Roman philosopher and statesman Seneca. Quote Filipaj: “I love Seneca’s letters because they’re written in the spirit in which I was educated in my family—not to look for fame or fortune, but to have a simple, honest, honorable life.” He now wants to pursue a Master’s Degree in Roman Studies.

MEDIA MATTERS

PBS CONCEDES

A PBS documentary on jazz great Cab Calloway hit a nerve when an on-screen scholar noted that the Cotton Club in New York's Harlem was "owned by Italian mafia gangsters." Our Institute president, Bill Dal Cerro, a jazz expert, dashed off a letter to the documentary producer and to PBS questioning them for such a falsification of history. In fact, the club was owned by an English American gangster named Owney "the Killer" Madden. The scholar fully admitted that he erred and knew better, stating that Italian stereotypes had short-circuited his memory.



Our Institute asked that the documentary be reedited for future broadcasts around the country. The following statement from PBS affiliate WNET in New York was soon issued to us:

"The corrected version of American Masters Cab Calloway: Sketches is being re-fed to the 350+ PBS affiliate stations today (May 31st). It is this version, and only this version, that will now be available for rebroadcasts of the program."

- Susan Lacy, Executive Producer



Once again, this proves that the scarlet letter of *The Godfather* is still borne by Americans of Italian heritage. Bill Dal Cerro's persistence and the surprising honesty of these media folks lay bare the depth of such stigma. The sources of this propaganda continue to pollute the media as "art." Says Bill Dal Cerro, "The producers at PBS should be commended for treating our concerns with respect—a rarity. But although we can claim it as a small victory, the beast of stereotyping is still amongst us."

KITCHEN CAPOS

We have often said that most of our media image problems stem from our own side. There are way too many Italian Americans who promote and encourage a mob identity. Chef Mario Batali is a perfect example of this. He has publicly noted that critics of *Godfather* movies are losing out on a beautiful art form. In one television tour of an Italian neighborhood in the Bronx, he scoffed at *Godfather* critics when he bought some cannoli and quoted the line "leave the gun, take the cannoli."



Joe, Lydia, and Mario

Well, it seems that this well-fed chef takes more than *cannoli*. FoodFellas Batali and Joseph Bastianich (Lydia's son) recently offered \$5.25 million to settle a lawsuit by their restaurant employees, 1,100 of them. It seems these lovers of mob art skimmed 4% - 5% from the working guys' tip jars, just like a mob shakedown. Note: Batali and Bastianich admit no wrong-doing – just like the real mob guys. A judge must approve the deal.

Maybe these tip-dippers would appreciate a new mob movie about wiseguy foodies, working title: *Mob Chefs*. It could only enrich the image of the Italian cooking business. There are already Mafia cookbooks to accompany the series.

A CRIME FAMILY?

Convicted felon Bernie Madoff's brother just copped a plea formally making him an accomplice in America's biggest illegal pyramid scheme (est. \$18 billion). The fact that these two con artists are actually related to each other technically makes them a "crime family." We say technically because American law enforcement, including the FBI, does not label anyone other than Italian Americans as "crime families." Try as we may, the Italic Institute cannot seem to convince anyone that using crime family to label Italic mobsters, who more often than not have no blood ties to each other, is blatant ethnic profiling. Can't we share "crime families" with other ethnic groups like we share "fascist," "Ponzi" and "mafia?"

MEDIA MATTERS

PALEO-PONZI

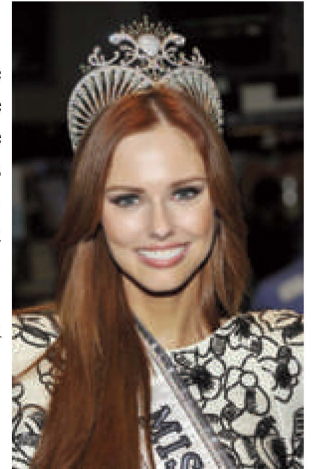
Speaking of pyramid schemes, a new book claims that the so-called Ponzi scheme has deep roots in Anglo-Saxon America. Ever hear of a guy named Ferdinand Ward? His great-grandson Geoffrey Ward has taken out bragging rights on old Ferd, as he was known. Charles Ponzi was a piker compared to Ferdinand Ward. Back in the 1880s, thirty-five years before the Ponzi scheme, Ferd managed to blacken the name of former President Ulysses S. Grant, close a few banks, and cause the Panic of 1884 that crashed Wall Street. The book is *A Disposition to be Rich*. It is not likely to replace Ponzi with “a Ward Scheme.” Everything sounds better in Italian...unfortunately.

MISS USA



For the second year in a row, Miss USA happens to be Italic. Olivia Culpo (left), a 20-year old from Rhode Island, played the cello (also Italian) and impressed the judges in her purple bikini and evening gown. She was politically correct enough to answer the daring question, “Would it be fair for a transgender male to win the Miss Universe Contest?” with a yes.

Last year’s winner of Miss USA was a natural born female named Alyssa Campanella (right).



POWER MEETING



Forbes Magazine has published its 2012 list of the World’s Most Powerful Moms. In #1 position is U.S. Secretary of State Hilary Rodham Clinton (one child). Coming in at #6 is Italian-born Sonia Maino Gandhi (two children), President of the Indian National Congress Party. Here we see the two meeting recently at Gandhi’s home.

Among others on the *Forbes* list were President Dilma Rouseff of Brazil (#2), Indra Nooyi, CEO of Pepsico (#3), Sheryl Sandberg, COO of Facebook (#4), Melinda Gates, Co-Founder of the Gates Foundation (#5), and Michelle Obama, First Lady of the United States (#7). Clearly, the term “powerful” has many definitions. The fact that Mrs. Gandhi heads the party that rules a nuclear nation and one billion Indians should give her give a few more points. But *Forbes Magazine* is primarily a chronicler of wealth.

VISIT OUR ARCHIVES

The public now has an opportunity to read all the old issues of *The Italic Way* on-line. Our Webmaster Tony Buttitta in Chicago has just installed a search engine on our homepage (www.italic.org). You can find issues back to the first one in 1988. Search for a whole issue or look up a fact – just type in a keyword or subject.

If you are curious to know what Italian Americans were doing and thinking in the 1930s, take a nostalgia tour through our collection of *Atlantica Magazine*, on-line. You will be amazed how reflective and intellectual our community was back then. Some of the feature writers you will find are Giovanni Schiavo, future author of *Four Centuries of Italian American History*, the bible we still use today, and Peter Sammartino, future founder of Fairleigh Dickenson University in New Jersey. *Atlantica* carried no editorials but covered important issues and chronicled local events and personalities. This time capsule reveals concerns that still ring true today. As far as we know, only the Italic Institute retains this archive of *Atlantica*, but only 40 issues covering 1930 – 1934.

All'Italiana

IN MEMORIAM



Actor **Ben Gazzara**, 81, was born Biagio Anthony Gazzara in Manhattan. His talents were apparent in film, television and on the stage. He launched his stage career in 1951, landing the part of son Brick in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* in 1955. In 1959, he had a major film role with Jimmy Stewart in *Anatomy of a Murder*. His television stardom came with the series

Run for Your Life (1965-1968). He once admitted that his casual attitude toward acting cost him many famous roles. By the 1980s he was drawn to Italian cinema. He had a villa in Umbria and was conversant in Italian.

Philosopher **Frank Cioffi**, 83, famously attacked Sigmund Freud for pseudoscience in the 1970s. Born in Little Italy, Manhattan, Cioffi's mother died in childbirth and his father soon after. He was raised by his grandparents. He attended Oxford University on the G.I. Bill and taught English and Philosophy in England, the United States, and Singapore. Although Freud has had many critics, Cioffi's review of Freud's case studies using a logician's insight proved to be a game-changer in the scientific community. Cioffi contended and proved that Freud had, perhaps not intentionally, manipulated his patients' childhood memories. (Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar).

Renato Dulbecco, 97, won a Nobel Prize for Science in 1975. His work in linking cancers to genetic mutations opened new vistas in research and treatment options. In 1986, he urged a worldwide effort to catalog human DNA. This resulted in the now famous Human Genome Project that came to fruition in 2003. He graduated from the University of Torino, served in the Italian 8th Army in Russia as a medical officer, and came to the U.S. in 1949. Intrigued by one of his student's thesis linking mutations to viruses, Dulbecco became an early opponent of tobacco and environmental hazards. He became an American citizen in 1953.

Italian jurist **Antonio Cassese**, 74, was considered the architect of the modern international criminal justice system. As a professor of law in Florence and at Oxford, he urged the international community to revive the World War II concept of judging war crimes and applying them to contemporary conflicts. In 1993 he was appointed the first president of the International Criminal Tribunal established by the United Nations to investigate war crimes in the former Yugoslavia.

He pioneered the principle of also applying international justice in internal conflicts such as civil wars or any government-backed pogroms.

Former Washington state governor **Albert Rosellini** (rose-LEE-nee) passed away at age 101. He served from 1957-1965. Among his accomplishments were the Highway 520 "floating bridge," erected under budget and now named for him; the University of Washington Medical School, and cleaning up medieval conditions in state prisons, juvenile homes, and mental institutions. In the 1970s he tried a political comeback but was smeared with a "Godfather" image for his close association with an Italian American strip club owner. It ended his political career. He worked and drove until age 99.

Actor **Ernest Borgnine**, 95, was born Ermes Borgnino in Connecticut of northern Italian parents. His film career spanned sixty years. His breakthrough role was as a sadistic sergeant in *From Here to Eternity* (1953). In homage to his heritage he played the lead role as an unmarried Italian American butcher in *Marty* and later as heroic New York Police Lt. Joseph Petrosino in *Pay or Die*. His characters ran the gamut from the pillaging Ragnar in *The Vikings* to a good-natured PT boat captain in the television series *McHale's Navy*.



Entrepreneur **Jeno Paulucci**, 93, was born Luigino Francesco Paulucci in Minnesota. He parlayed his experience in the family grocery business into developing canned Chinese food under the name Chun King in the 1950s. He sold the company for \$63 million in 1966. Two years later he pioneered the frozen pizza industry under the name Jeno's. He sold out in 1985 for \$135 million. In 1975, he and other Italian American activists founded NIAF, the National Italian American Foundation in Washington, DC.

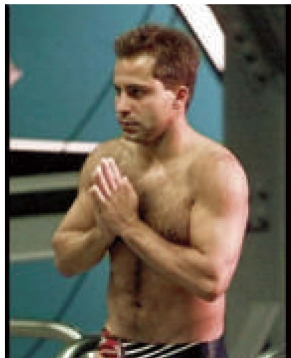
The sports world lost four prominent men: **Angelo Dundee**, 90,



was born Angelo Mirena in Philadelphia. He followed his brother into boxing and became a cornerman while serving in the Army Air Corps during WW II. He trained boxing greats Carmen Basilio, Sugar Ray Leonard, and Mohammed Ali to become world champions.

Football coach **Joe Avezzano**, 68, helped the Dallas Cowboys win the Super Bowl in 1993, 1994, and 1996. Ironically, he died in

Milan, Italy, while coaching a new team in the Italian Football League.



Mark Lenzi, 43, won the 1992 Olympic Gold Medal for diving in Barcelona. He was the first ever to earn 700 points in an 11-dive competition, and the first American to successfully complete a forward 4½ somersault in competition. In high school, his father wanted him to give up diving to win a wrestling scholarship. They argued and Mark left home. After he won his first diving competition and garnered five scholarships, his father saw the light.

University of Pennsylvania's immortal football coach **Joe Paterno**, 85, led his Nittany Lions to a record 409 victories over his 46-year tenure. His spot in the Sports Hall of Fame was earned with two national championships, five unbeaten seasons, and five Bowl victories. He gave back to the university with family donations of \$4 million over the years. His amazing career, however, may be tainted by his lack of leadership off the field in the Jerry Sandusky pedophile case.

Medal of Honor winner **Mike Colalillo**, 86, showed his mettle in Germany in 1945. As a 19-year-old private first class, he led his squad to counterattack a German position. He inflicted 25 casualties on the enemy, saving his unit.



Two famous attorneys exited this world: **Robert Morvillo**, 73, specialized in defending white collar defendants. Among his clients were Martha Stewart, John Zaccaro (husband of Geraldine Ferraro) and Maurice Greenberg, chief executive of AIG. Despite defending the rich and famous, he still considered white collar crimes to be just as onerous to society as the blue collar variety.

Thomas Puccio, 67, was famous for prosecuting politicians caught in the 1980s Abscam stings, when federal agents pretended to be wealthy Arabs looking to buy congressional favors. In private practice, his clients included society's Claus von Bülow, accused of killing his wife - a win, and Stanley Friedman, a Bronx Democratic leader accused of graft - a loss (against young Rudy Giuliani). Puccio's advice: "Not losing is more important than winning."

GLOBAL QUAKE

The earth shook twice in the Emilia-Romagna Region last May and June. Twenty-four people were killed by the magnitude 6 quakes that also destroyed priceless historic buildings, some from the 13th Century, and forced 15,000 residents from their homes. If that weren't enough, the tragedy knocked out a vital segment of Italy's economy. The area contributes 1% of Italy's gross domestic product and accounts for nearly \$4 billion in annual taxes. It is the manufacturing center for disposable medical devices used in dialysis, transfusion and surgery, exported around the world. It is also the Parmesan cheese capital. Losses in cheese alone are estimated at \$50 million. As part of the relief effort the central government suspended taxes on businesses and residents, and delayed mortgage payments. To raise money for restoration, cash-strapped Italy increased gasoline taxes around the nation.

TRIMMING THE LEGIONS

It has fallen on Italic shoulders to reshape the future United States military establishment. Defense Secretary Leon Panetta and Army Chief of Staff General Ray Odierno have the unenviable task of downsizing the American war machine. While Panetta's forte is budget-cutting and big picture politics, Odierno is the man who had boots on the ground in Iraq and helped bring that frustrating conflict to conclusion. Between the two of them few lessons were lost. We are likely to see more special operations and less "shock and awe," more image-building than body counts. Despite the anticipated reduction in naval battle groups, Panetta wants to make sure Communist China doesn't think the Pacific is its lake. For Odierno, 80,000 less troops will mean more coordination with his fellow service branches. Both men can fall back on their pragmatic and humanist Italian roots to get the job done.

NOT RELATED

Italian researchers have concluded that the Alpine Iceman known as Ötzi was not a *cugino* or even a close relative of any other modern Europeans. The team led by Professors Franco Rollo and Luca Ermini of the University of Camerino found from DNA analysis that the 5,300 year-old man found frozen in 1991 belonged to an extinct branch of Europeans. Other insights into Ötzi: he was 46 years old when killed by an arrow on the Italian-Austrian border, he had Type O blood, a predisposition to heart disease, was lactose intolerant, and may have had Lyme Disease. Other than that, he was a fine specimen of Bronze-Age manhood.





World Notes

CENSUS FIGURES

According to a *Bloomberg News* interpretation of U.S. Census data, more people claim to be of German lineage than any other white group, 49.8 million. Although this is a decrease from the 1980 census (see below), German Americans are more than a match for the skyrocketing Hispanic population which is estimated at 50.5 million as well as Asians (14.7 million). Where all these Germans are hiding is anyone's guess. But the easiest ones to spot are the Amish *volk* (pictured). We may call them "Dutch" but they are really *Deutsch*.



The Irish and English have also had a few deserters since 1980. But they are still far ahead of Italian Americans. Nonetheless, the *paesani* have grown by 2.6 million since 1980. Why? We know they aren't sneaking across any borders. And their birthrate isn't what it used to be. One guess is that mixed marriages have produced offspring who prefer to identify as Italian.

Ethnicity	1980	2010
German.....	58 million.....	49.8 million
Irish.....	39 million.....	35.8 million
English.....	33 million.....	27.4 million
Italian.....	15 million.....	17.6 million

BITTER CUP

Italy may not be faring well in high finance these days but it still has its eye on the ball. At the 2012 World Cup of Soccer Italy's Azzurri (Blues) managed to make it to the finals against a magnificent Spanish team. Beating out Ireland and Germany, Italy failed to break through Spain's defenses. What was different this year was having the first black player on the team: Mario Balotelli, an ethnic Ghanian who was adopted as a child by his foster Italian family.



SALTY TALK

In a recent *New York Times* opinion column, Gary Taubes, researcher and author, put salt back on the table for discussion. We have all been instructed that too much salt can be unhealthy. But Taubes is starting to piece together some data that may contradict this. One study by Italian researchers four years ago revealed higher death rates for heart attack victims who had reduced their salt intake. Says Taubes, "New evidence suggests that eating less of it can actually worsen health."

PRESIDENT'S ADVOCATE

Maybe President Obama's ultimate secret weapon in persuading the Supreme Court to uphold the new healthcare law was Donald B. Verrilli, Jr., U.S. Solicitor General. General Verrilli had the task of representing the Congress and the president before the nine judges. It wasn't easy as we know, especially when a fellow Italic jurist compares mandatory healthcare to forcing Americans to buy broccoli, as Antonin Scalia famously did. Verrilli's performance at the time had its thumbs up and down from the media and court



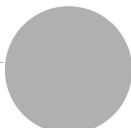
watchers. Even satirist Jon Stewart skewered him. Still, fellow attorneys who run the gauntlet daily had nothing but praise for Verrilli. It was Verrilli's analogy of mandatory personal health insurance as a tax that won over Chief Justice John Roberts.

Just so you don't think it was a fluke, Verrilli also argued against the controversial Arizona immigration law. While not a complete victory, the court bought most of his points, including Scalia. The law was severely cut down.

ITALIANS DO IT BETTER

So says the Simon Wiesenthal Centre in Jerusalem about bringing former Nazi war criminals to justice. Italy and the United States are the poster boys for cleaning up Hitler's gang. The Italians not only convict ex-Nazis captured on their own soil but those like Michael Seifert who reside in Canada and was extradited to Italy for crimes there in 1944-45. Between 2005 and 2007, Italy has convicted 21 Nazis *in absentia*.

Low on the Wiesenthal rating list are nations like the United Kingdom, Germany, Australia, and Canada, which lack the political will to pursue Nazis.



EURO PUZZLE

Trying to figure out a way to stem the debt crisis in Europe has strained the best financial minds. There's the problem of rewarding profligate nations like Greece and binge-spenders like Ireland, Portugal, and Spain. The Germans don't want to bail everyone out even though it was their lending that created the crap shoot. The Italians, heavy in old debt and no economic growth, find themselves trying to steer the stubborn Germans to leave some of their euro winnings on the table. Mario Draghi (center), new head of the European Bank, and Mario Monti, Italy's new prime minister (left, with German Prime Minister Angela Merkel), are trying



to convince the Germans to create a sort of FDIC to strengthen European banks. Even Italian American Stephen Cecchetti is lending a hand as chief economist for the Bank of International Settlements. His recent report minced no words warning of a “virulent and advanced convergence of problems” if the 17 national banks within the euro zone are not tied together. Will the Germans finally listen to their Italian allies?



Monti clearly won a major concession last June when Germany agreed that bail-out money will go directly to troubled banks rather than their national

government. The advantage is that the bail-out money would not add to the nation's debt but to the bank's.

SERVING THE WORLD

“Italian engineering” may not be a buzz phrase in the United States but the Yankee tinkers at the Long Island Rail Road have a new appreciation for it. In 2010, the LIRR installed a \$56 million state-of-the-art signal system made by Ansaldo STS of Genoa. Known for hi-tech rail road projects around the globe, the Italian firm modernized the LIRR's antique manual switching system that was an embarrassment to the nation's busiest commuter railroad. But on September 29, 2011, a lightning storm grounded out the system leaving thousands of commuters stranded for 12 agonizing hours. Accusations of inferior design put Ansaldo on the defensive. That was until an investigation revealed that LIRR personnel had jerry-rigged their own part onto the network that allowed a lightning surge to blow the system. So much for Yankee ingenuity.

Just west of the LIRR terminal in Penn Station lies the Hudson River. Italian engineering is also being utilized



to bury new power cables under the river bed. The *Guilio Verne* (“Jules Verne”, pictured), one of only two ships in the world capable of laying so much heavy cable across ocean floors and deep river beds, is trenching and installing Italian power cables (made in Naples) to keep Metropolitan New York powered up.

And finally, the huge machines being used to dig new water and rail tunnels under Manhattan are also of Italian design and manufacture. Italian engineering goes back to the Etruscans.

STRONG ALLY

The United States invaded Afghanistan under the NATO umbrella in 2001, in response to the World Trade Center massacre. Italy has done its duty admirably since 2004.

While other allies have withdrawn in frustration Italy maintains a force of some 4,000 troops. It has lost 44 service members but plans to stay beyond its official 2014 pull-out date. Italians will train the



Afghan police and military and continue the various humanitarian projects it has introduced. Italians, as they have done over a century of military occupations, place heavy emphasis on building schools, health facilities, infrastructure, and agriculture.

WHAT'S A BOSON?

There hasn't been this much excitement since Italian American scientist Enrico Fermi proved in 1942 that the atom could be controlled, ushering in the Atomic Age. The new buzz word is the boson – the smallest particle of matter. First conjectured by English physicist Peter Higgs, finding such an elusive piece of the universe has been the dream of physicists for decades. The Higgs boson was finally “discovered” after about 800 trillion proton-proton collisions (whatever that means!) at various laboratories. Three thousand physicists divided into two teams accomplished the breakthrough. Those teams were headed by Italian scientist Fabiola Gianotti, (upper right) and Italian American scientist Joe Incandela (lower right).



Editorials



FROM THE CHAIRMAN'S DESK

Rosario A. Iaconis

ROMNEY'S REJECTION OF ROME ECHOES OBAMA IN 2008

In bygone presidential elections, candidates from both of the major political parties would vie for the Italian, Irish and Jewish vote by either visiting or extolling the three I's : Italy, Ireland and Israel.

Such naively simplistic electoral strategies have long since disappeared—at least when it comes to Italy and Italian Americans.

In 2008, candidate Barack Obama journeyed to Britain, France, Germany, and Israel. Mr. Obama chose to bypass the Seed of Aeneas. When he ascended to the Oval Office, however, President Obama gained a broader understanding of and deeper appreciation for Italians. From Nancy Pelosi, Leon Panetta, Janet Napolitano and Medal of Honor recipient Salvatore Giunta to Italian newsmakers Sergio Marchionne, Mario Draghi, and Mario Monti, the Commander-in-Chief has learned firsthand how vital the scions of Italy truly are.

Now it's Mitt Romney's turn to ignore the Italians. The 2012 Republican presidential nominee's obligatory foreign tour included the UK, and Poland.

Of course, Mitt swung by the Mediterranean for a confab with Benjamin Netanyahu in Israel. Bypassing our stalwart ally Italy, whose troops help maintain peace on Israel's northern border is a egregious diplomatic slight.



FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

Bill Dal Cerro

JAZZING THINGS UP

Honestly, we don't go looking for anti-Italic slights in the American media. As a think tank, we would much rather focus on positive initiatives like our *Italic Way Magazine* and groundbreaking research. But the bias is so overwhelming—it foments such a tidal wave of negativity—that we often feel like plankton being chased by Moby Dick. And who wants to get swallowed up?

What is most disconcerting is that this bias can, at times, involve even the smallest minutiae of information about our community. As shown on page 2, a PBS documentary on the great African American entertainer Cab Calloway erroneously reported that the famed Cotton Club in Manhattan was owned by "Italian mafia gangsters," when, in fact, it was run by Owney Madden, a vicious Anglo gangster from Leeds, England. Luckily, the Institute picked up on this error and had it corrected. The truth was respected.

We commend the producers at American Masters for their gracious response to our concerns; and yet, we noted that in the newly edited version of the program Madden wasn't named nor was his ethnicity, a curious revision. It shows the double standard that we have complained about for decades. The extent to which endless mob movies have permeated the public's consciousness, even amongst the intelligentsia, should disturb even the most complacent Italian American.

CAN YOU SEE THE DIFFERENCE?

The Italic Institute of America is celebrating its 25th anniversary. We were founded in 1987 as a think-tank and resource for discerning Americans who want a deeper understanding of their classical heritage. Membership and donations energize us. And they are tax-deductible.

Italic Institute of America, PO Box 818, Floral Park, NY 11002, (516) 488-7400. Website: italic.org

Forum Italicum

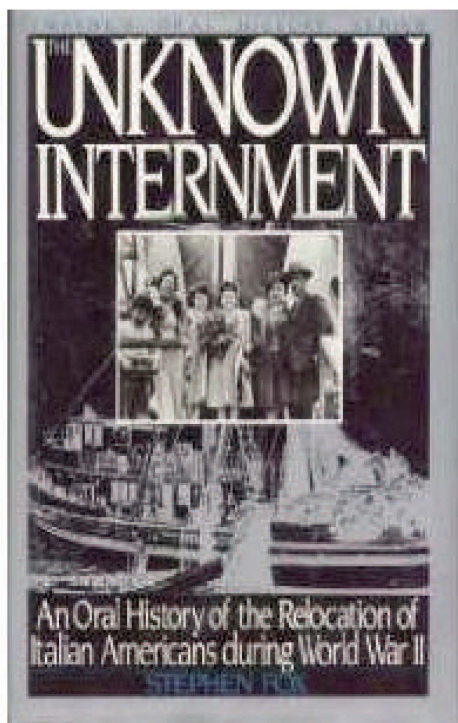
Unfinished Business: Why We Still Deserve an Apology for 1942.



An opinion by John Mancini, Co-Founder

In November, 2000, President Bill Clinton signed into law H.R.2442 concerning the wartime violation of Italian American civil rights. It was the culmination of an effort that began with a fellow named John Krollpfeiffer, a filmmaker whose German and Italian grandfathers were both victims of civil rights abuses in 1942 instigated by Executive Order 9066.

This was the same order that interned over 100,000 Japanese-Americans. It impacted 600,000 Italian Americans, requiring them to carry identity papers and restricting their travel (including nuclear physicist Enrico Fermi). For 10,000 Italian American men, women, and children, living too close to the Pacific coast, the Order meant eviction from their homes, confiscation of their fishing boats and radios, and loss of jobs. About two hundred community leaders were jailed as suspected Fascist agents. People were fired from government jobs, and businessmen were locked out of their establishments (the DiMaggio restaurant on Fisherman's Wharf was off-limits to Joe's father.) Four elderly men committed suicide rather than endure the shame.



Krollpfeiffer was looking for funding to make a documentary on this subject. As the Italic Institute could not afford the estimated \$500,000 to produce such a film we thought it more appropriate that the United States Government pay for it as an act of atonement. The Japanese American community had managed to squeeze over \$1 billion in reparations from Uncle Sam.

In pursuit of this atonement, our Institute initiated a

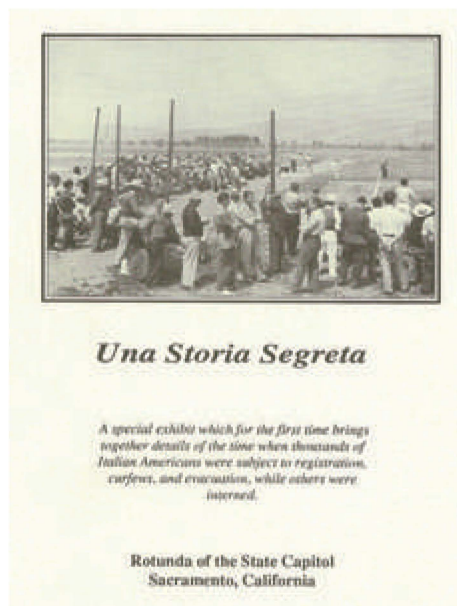
dialogue with Congress in 1995. Our point of contact was the junior senator from New York, Alfonse D'Amato. We never actually met or spoke with D'Amato, working instead with one of his assistants. The man who wrote a book on his heritage (*Pasta, Power, and Politics*) had the reputation for persistence and finding money ("Senator Pothole") and now runs a successful lobbying firm showed little interest in our quest. It wasn't until then-Midwest representative Bill Dal Cerro discovered that a couple of U.S. senators skimmed \$1 million of taxpayer money for Steven Spielberg's *Shoah Project* that we got anything close to cooperation out of D'Amato. (see issues XXV and XXVI for details)

The logic was that if Congressional funding for a Holocaust documentary, a horrific act not committed by our government, was

***The United States of America
must be big enough to
admit its mistake.***

appropriate, then a documentary of the 1942 persecution of Italian Americans, something that was committed by the U.S. government, should also be funded by Congress. D'Amato wrote to his fellow Republican Arlen Specter (R-PA) who had tapped the U.S. Library budget for Spielberg. Unfortunately, Specter did not see our logic. He and Senator Boxer (D-CA) made sure their favor to Spielberg was not an open invitation to other ethnic groups.

Our last shot was an appeal to the Japanese community for a share \$50 million fund that Congress had set aside to educate Americans about E.O. 9044, the same order that caused the suffering of Italian and German Americans. Surprisingly, we were



(Cont'd. on p. 24)

Brochure from the
1994 exhibit
"A Secret History" displayed in the state
capitol
rotunda in
Sacramento, CA.

Nashville's Italic Stars

KATHY MATTEA:

Country Girl with Roots in the Boot

by Bob Masullo

There may be few *paesani* in Nashville and fewer still among Music City's pickers and singers. Fortunately, though, "few" is not the same as "none."

Take multi Grammy- and Country Music Association-award winner Kathy Mattea as Exhibit A (strumming at the right).

Other country and/or folk Italic stars include Roseanne Cash (daughter of country legend Johnny Cash and Vivian Liberto), Ani DiFranco (daughter of scientific researcher Dante Americo DiFranco), Tim McGraw (son of Betty d'Agostino and recipient of the National Italian American Foundation (NIAF) Special Achievement Award in Music in 2004), Jo Dee Messina (daughter of Boston area businessman Vincent Messina), and Taylor Swift (partially Italian on her father's side).

Of these Mattea is, almost certainly, the one who most strongly identifies with her Italian roots, though she also has Welsh, Dutch and American Indian blood coursing through her veins. She says proudly that her Italian heritage is "a big part of how I think of myself." If she could be fluent in another language it would be Italian, she says, "so I could converse properly with my dad and granddad."

Her favorite food — both for cooking and eating — is Italian. A sign on her kitchen wall, which she hand-lettered, reads: "*Mangia la minestra o salta la finestra!*" ("Eat the soup or jump out the window!"). "It's what my grandmother used to say to my dad if he complained about dinner."

Mattea brags that she makes a pasta sauce which "is now legendary in our family ... it takes me back home instantly and I always have a double batch in my freezer. I also am the keeper of the family ravioli recipe, ceremoniously given to me by a couple of my aunts, and occasionally I'll get out the pasta roller and make a batch. I once made it for the entire band, crew, and all their wives, about 25 people!"

Born Kathleen Alice Mattea in South Charleston, West Virginia, 53 years ago, she has been singing professionally since 1983. Her classically trained, piercingly soulful contralto voice has earned her numerous accolades, including the CMA Single of the Year Award in 1988 (for *Eighteen Wheels and a Dozen Roses*), the

CMA Female Vocalist of the Year Award in 1989, and the Grammy award for Best Female Country Vocal Performance in 1990 (for *Where've You Been?*).

Mattea, as a West Virginian, was exposed to country music from early childhood. But her first brush with it as a performer was in 1976, while in college, when she joined the amateur bluegrass band Pennsboro. Two years later she moved to Nashville, thinking she'd make it as a songwriter. She did some backup singing for Bobby Goldsboro while looking for a break. To pay the rent she



also did some waitressing and served as a tour guide at the Country Music Hall of Fame. In 1983, on the strength of demos she had sent out all over town, Mercury records signed her. Her first few recordings did not do well but in 1986 her album *Walk the Way the Wind Blows* became her first hit. *Love at the Five and Dime*, which was taken from that album, became her first Top 5 single hit (peaking at No.3).

Her biggest hits came in the 1980s and 1990s (when she was in her 20s and 30s). Mattea recorded 41 singles and 30 of them made Billboard's country music charts. Four made it to No. 1:

Goin' Gone (1987), *Eighteen Wheels and a Dozen Roses* (1988), *Burnin' Old Memories* (1989) and *Come from the Heart* (1989). She's recorded 17 albums, most of which also charted.

As a country music veteran, she continues to record and tour regularly today. Her most recent album, *Coal* (2008), which was nominated for a Grammy, is a paean to her home state of West Virginia and the role coal mining played in her family. Country music critic Scott Sexton said its songs are "like hearing a story about life told through the eyes of someone who lived it; possibly the best album of Kathy's career." Her follow-up album, *Calling Me Home*, due out about the time you read this, widens the sense of place as it explores the musical heritage of her entire region, Appalachia.

Mattea notes that unlike Loretta Lynn, she is not a "coal miner's daughter" but "a coal miner's granddaughter." Both of her grandfathers were miners but her father, John Mattea, escaped the mines thanks to the generosity of an uncle who paid his way through college.

The songs of *Coal* and *Calling Me Home*, are not terribly different from Italian folk songs, especially Neapolitan ones like *Torna a Surriento* ('Return to Sorrento'), which regale one's home territory, and *Santa Lucia Luntana*, (a section of Naples) which express the innermost feelings of working people. Mattea now lives in Nashville, because that's where most country music business is conducted, but it is clear that her heart is still in West Virginia and she returns there frequently.

“My dad was first generation (to be born in America) and spoke Italian before he spoke English,” Mattea notes. “He called me ‘Little Wop’ (lovingly) and talked a lot about his heritage. My grandfather, a stone mason by trade, came to West Virginia along with a bunch of Italians, just after the turn of the last century. He first built coke ovens for the coal mines. The mines at that time were booming, so he went underground because the money was better. There were many Italians in that small coal-mining town. My grandpa never learned to speak English very well. Dad had to translate for us alot.”

Mattea’s Italian ancestors came from Mazze and Coron, a pair of villages near Torino (Turin), in the region of Piemonte, in Italy’s northwest.

“I haven’t been to northern Italy, but I’ve spent some time in Rome and a few small towns outside Rome,” Mattea responded when asked if she ever visited. “We (she and songwriter husband of 24 years, Jon Vezner) especially love Sperlonga, a small town carved out of a mountain, literally. When I first set foot in Italy, a lot of what I had seen and heard as a kid suddenly made sense, in a different way. It was like a bunch of Tetris pieces just fell into place. Everything from the taste of my Aunt Julia’s food, to the furniture in the houses of my Italian relatives.”

Mattea says she only speaks “bits” of Italian, although “I have taken voice lessons for 30 years, and have sung many Italian arias, as a foundation to understand singing.” She adds, “I would love to record something in Italian. It sings so beautifully. The language itself is like music.”

Her grandfather and father, however, spoke the Piemontese dialect rather than standard Italian. “A lot of their words would be clipped at the end,” she says. Her father called her his *bambin* rather than *bambina*, for example.

As a singer, Mattea is extremely conscious of accents and pronunciation. And it should be noted, in this regard, that when she speaks there is only the slightest trace of a West Virginia accent. She may be from “the hills” but she is well educated, having studied engineering at the University of West Virginia, and is usually articulate in standard American English. But not always.

“I was in a grocery store during my college years,” recalls Mattea, “and kept running into an older man with every pass down the aisles of the store. We exchanged pleasantries and when he spoke, I said, ‘You have an accent, where are you from?’

“He replied, ‘You have an accent. Where are you from?’ I said, ‘Well, I’m from



West Virginia, but you’re from Italy. Do you speak Piemontese?”

“His eyes got big and round like saucers, and he started talking fast to me in Italian. I had to explain to him that no, I didn’t speak the language, but his Italian accent when he spoke English was exactly like my grandpa’s.”

When not singing Mattea spends much of her time as a social activist, a very courageous one. In a musical genre where right-wing politics are the norm, she has gone around the country presenting a slideshow based on former Vice President Al Gore’s film, *An Inconvenient Truth*, which warns about climate change; campaigns against coal mining practices involving the removal of mountain tops (not a widely appreciated position in Appalachia because it can cost jobs), and is a country field pioneer in raising money for AIDS-related charities.

“My dad died of cancer a few years ago,” Mattea said, concluding our interview with a revealing tale:

“I spent a lot of open-ended time with him while he was sick, just listening to his stories. There was one he told that I had never heard before.

“He was working in the local hardware store, owned by his oldest sister and her husband, Julia and Amerigo Gianinni. A crotchety old-timer came in and asked, in a heavy Italian accent, for ‘cream paint.’

“Dad gave him a can of cream-colored paint.

“He came back about an hour later, cussing. ‘You damma dumma! I ask for cream paint, you gimme cream paint.’

“Dad said, ‘Yes, cream paint!’

“He kept saying ‘You damma dumma!’

“Finally my Aunt Julia came out to see what all the yelling was about. She asked him in Italian (I don’t know why Dad didn’t), and he said, ‘Verde! Verde!’

“He wanted green paint!”

“My dad laughed so hard he started to cry. He threw back his head and all his teeth showed.

“I loved that moment so much. There were lots of stories like that. My dad and all his sisters (he had five) would sit around after Sunday dinner just going at it in Italian. I love those memories.”

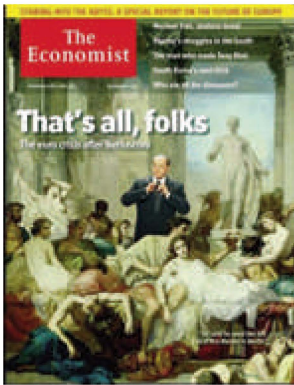
[Bob Masullo is a retired journalist. For many years he was an arts and entertainment critic for *The Sacramento Bee*.]

Roots in the Boot (from the top): Jo Dee Messina, Ani Di Franco, Taylor Swift, Roseanne Cash, and Tim McGraw

Target Italy:

by John Mancini with Rosario A. Iaconis

How many Italian Americans know anything about Italy other than stereotypes or family lore? The fortunate few who have visited the Magic Boot possess a broader perspective of their ancestral homeland. Unfortunately, many are dreadfully ignorant. And most Americans remain ill-informed when it comes to *il bel Paese*. Indeed, Italy and the Italians are perennial targets of derision in the Anglo-Saxon-Teutonic world, of which we are a part.



The English sport of Italobaiting is alive and well. It sets the tone in much of the English-speaking world.

Lately, the critics have been particularly virulent.

When the ill-fated Costa Concordia ran aground and its captain abandoned ship without his passengers, a German editorial asked rhetorically, “Was anyone surprised that it was an Italian ship?” An English chap I used to work with many years ago humorously referred to Italians as “the waiters of Europe.” Italians are often deemed to be minor leaguers or lacking in manly virtues.

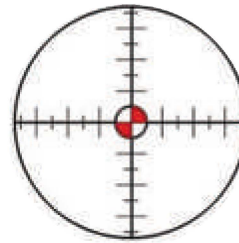
Anyone exposed to histories of the Second World War knows exactly what we are talking about. That same attitude that Italians can't seem to get it right applies to the serious arts of governance, civic virtue, military skills, and moral rectitude. Of course, there is well earned respect for Italian cuisine, fashion, cinema, sports, the arts, and sporting cars. But overall, these talents are deemed to be individual achievements accomplished in spite of a deeply flawed national character.

In all fairness, much of this attitude is reinforced daily by Italians themselves. It is also often echoed by Italian Americans who are privy to all the whining of friends and relatives in Italy. If there is one undeniable truth, it is that Italians are never satisfied. It is their nature to be critics. As the old saying goes, they cry even with two loaves of bread in their arms. The problems begin when non-Italians pick up on these negative vibes.

When NBC-TV's *Law & Order SVU* needed to retell the true story of French diplomat Dominique Strauss-Kahn's cheap sexual encounter with a New York cleaning lady, it recast him as a prominent Italian political figure. Clearly, the producers wanted to avoid

any legal or religious recriminations in making the character French or Jewish. They couldn't make him a Bill Clinton or John Edwards, both domestic frat boys. But the audience would certainly accept an Italian lech. In their eyes, it rings true.

But criticism of Italy has now become more serious than such incidents. Italy is feeling the sting of bad image in a host of ways that threatens its very way of life. It has also become the target of open borders and global upheavals. How resilient is our ancestral homeland? How will it adapt without losing its core values and its millennial heritage?



**#1
Italians
can't function
as a nation.**

FALSE

In his 2011 book *The Pursuit of Italy*, British author David Gilmour echoes the oft-sung refrain that reunifying Italy was a huge mistake, that Italy's greatness stemmed from its fragmentation as regions and city-states. Gilmour saturates his target with every English pub dart he could find and throws in lots of Italian ones to dignify his barrage.

According to Gilmour, Italians are a mishmash of ethnicities, bits and pieces of every invader, slave or sojourner that washed ashore. Italy is made up of thousands of fragmented, sectional, egotistical geographic entities distrusting and disparaging of each other. Italy is bureaucracy risen to an art form. Anyone can round up a host of Italians in ten minutes to corroborate Gilmour's harsh assessment. But would that correspond to reality — historical or otherwise?

Gilmour could just as well explain to us why a bird can't possibly fly, but fly it does. And that may be the point of all the negative nabobs who forever predict Italy's demise. They don't understand how Italy continues, how it always ranks among first-class nations. Don't the Italians know they cannot fly? Despite his ravings you could bet the farm that Gilmour would love to live in Italy, even in so-called Camorra territory. And it's not just because the cooking is good.

The common denominator among all the nay-sayers is a blissful

While Gilmour awaits Italy's demise, the UK's own Scotland is ready to bolt.

Five Threats to its Image

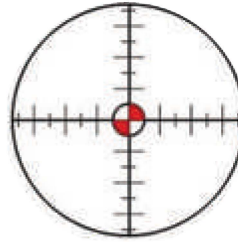
ignorance of their own sins and shortcomings. Gilmour's home turf, the United Kingdom, is itself a fragmented realm, consisting of Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The UK is literally made up of four previously independent nations with four diverse ancestral languages. Even Italy's 20 regions spoke dialects of Latin, not linguistically separate tongues. These regions were joined under Rome two millennia ago and have shared the same religion and much DNA since then. Only one region, Trentino/Alto Adige, has a cohesive ethnic minority—Germanic—that was restored to Italy as spoils after the First World War. These South Tyroleans have been given a degree of autonomy but some want independence. Not surprisingly, their Teutonic motivation is primarily to lower taxes.

Gilmour also mentions the "separatist" movement of Padania in northern Italy as evidence of Italy's fragmentation. Wishful thinking on his part. Unlike the South Tyrol, Padania never existed. It's a fantasy name invoked by a foul-mouthed hospital orderly a few years ago to protest northern tax money going to southern regions. That orderly, Umberto Bossi, recently resigned from the Padania movement amid accusations of corruption. The irony, in this case, is that Bossi considers himself an ethnic Celt trapped in Latin Italy. Perhaps Mr. Gilmour, as an Englishman, shares Celt-itude with Bossi, one of the many tribes that washed ashore in England along with Normans, French, Angles, Saxons and Jutes and our own dear Italic people who manned the civilizing Roman legions.

So while Gilmour awaits Italy's breakdown into regions, the UK's own Scotland is preparing to bolt the Kingdom with a referendum this year. If it bolts, it will take its North Sea oil reserves and 4 million "Brits" with it. As for the rest of the UK, Wales is dirt poor, Northern Ireland is an ethno-religious cauldron, and merry ole England will need more than ever its ethnic cousin, the United States, to keep it propped up. Sound harsh? It's basically Gilmour's tone.

There is a long list of nations that will fall apart before Italy. Remember, the United States lost 750,000 people keeping its Union together. Spain is only part Spanish, part Basque and part Catalan. It would have split long ago had Francisco Franco not applied a heavy thumb. Belgium wasted 18 months without a central government as Dutch-speaking Flemish stared down French-speaking Wallons. They compromised by electing ethnic Italian prime minister Elio Di Rupo, who speaks French.

Bottom line: Italy was born under Rome 222 years before Christ and will stay that way.



#2
Italy is going bankrupt.

FALSE

The most challenging and immediate crisis now facing Italians is the euro zone implosion. It began with financial failures in Greece and Ireland last year. These small nations, as did Italy and eleven other European countries, gave up their old currencies to join the rigid euro system. For the Greeks and the Irish it meant living on other

'Bankrupt'
(originally an
Italian phrase:
'broken bench')

Italian debt will
cost the young.
What country
hasn't already
mortgaged its
future?



people's money. Billions of euros as foreign loans saturated Greece, Portugal, and Ireland, allowing the Greeks to hold the unaffordable 2004 Olympics and maintain a welfare state. Meanwhile Ireland and Spain took loans to build housing and

infrastructure they only dreamed about earlier. It all came crashing down, of course. But the debris splattered on Italy.

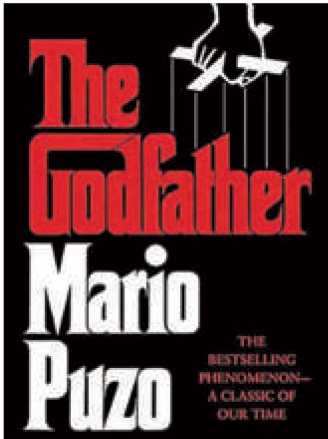
Italy has an exceedingly high-debt-to GDP ratio, but it is still solvent. Yet the crash of Greece, Ireland, Spain and Portugal now means that Rome has to pay abnormally high interest rates to maintain that debt. It would be like your bank raising your mortgage interest rate because your neighbors stopped paying theirs. Unlike those other countries, however—including the debt-ridden United States—more than half of Italy's debt is held by Italian citizens rather than foreign lenders.

That doesn't mean Italy is not in economic trouble, but it is far from a basket case. Using the euro instead of its old lira means Italy cannot devalue its currency, the traditional method of lowering debt by spurring business through increasing exports. So, the Italians are tightening their belts, chasing tax evaders, and down-

(Cont'd. on p. 16)

The Godfather:

by Bill Dal Cerro and John Mancini



A gifted writer with a gambling habit created a Mafia mythology in 1968 that grew to become a secular religion among many Italian Americans. Among them are filmmakers Francis Coppola and Martin Scorsese.

This year marks the 40th anniversary of Francis Ford Coppola's Oscar-winning epic *The Godfather*. Since 1972, this film has had a special place in America's heart. Over the years we have been told that the saga represents family, honor, and the immigrant struggle.

We are likewise told that *The Godfather* restored a more traditional America after the tumultuous decade of the 1960s – the Vietnam War, racial strife, political assassinations, rampant drug addiction, and domestic chaos. In short, America needed a return to an era of rules and reasonable men.

The Godfather, its defenders say, isn't really about criminals, or

even Italians. It was, and remains, a work of art that wove our nation's immigrant roots with the struggles of capitalism and the eternal quest for justice. To underscore this point, Mario Puzo, author of the original book and co-writer of the movie, quoted Honore de Balzac's famous statement that "behind every fortune is a crime." The Italian underpinnings were seen as superfluous.

Even Marlon Brando, a stalwart liberal, when asked before the film's release about the stereotyping of Italians as gangsters, simply rationalized it: "This is a film about American capitalism." One could also say the same about the heroic cowboys who regularly wiped out Native Americans in John Ford movies, clearing the way for the vast Caucasian real estate acquisition.

It is a simple, brutal fact that such "enabling" attitudes are what led *The Godfather* to become the single most regressive cultural and political influence on any American ethnic group since D.W. Griffith's civil war epic, *Birth of A Nation* (1915). It may have advanced the art of the film but it also set Italian Americans back nearly 100 years, resurrecting the crude, amoral stereotypes of the community first created by turn-of-the-century "yellow journalists." What was once considered prejudice was—and still is—considered "art."

Setting aside any talk of quality, an objective look at *The Godfather* reveals more harm than good. Shall we count the ways?

- It criminalized the history of the Italian American immigrant experience.
- It reaffirmed the prejudicial belief that criminal behavior is an essential aspect of Italian culture.
- It distorted the way Italian Americans viewed themselves (and still does).
- It frustrated Italian American artists in Hollywood who have tried to present Italian culture in non-stereotypical ways.
- It influenced the way "objective" journalists report on crime.
- It emboldened ambitious state's attorneys to view Italian surnamed criminals as meal tickets.
- It deflected the focus of the FBI from pursuing more dangerous criminal groups such as drug cartels, street gangs, and Al Qaeda.
- It stifled the careers of several national Italian American politicians.

Worst of all, it has created a billion-dollar spin-off industry which has since spread to every conceivable media outlet in America -- television, books, theater, advertising, cable, video games, and even, as of 2004, children's programming: *Shark Tale*, an animated film which caricatures Italian Americans as surely as the racist — and now banned — Disney cartoon *Song of the South* caricatured African Americans in 1946.

What was once considered prejudice is now "art."

If *The Godfather* was the answer to a battered America's prayers, it was also, first and foremost, a perverse inspiration to many Italian American males.

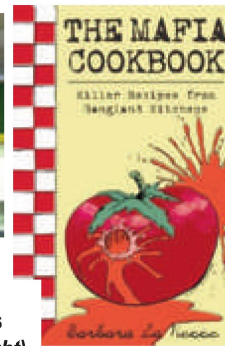
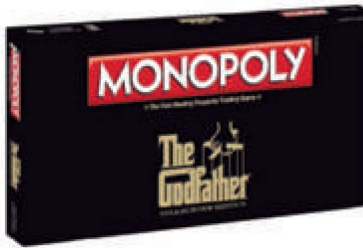
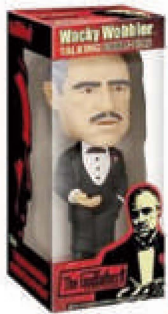
THE SHAME IS OVERCOME

The 1940s and 1950s were, for Italian American males, eras of public humiliation, an outgrowth of the seeming incompetence and cowardice of Italy's armed forces during the Second World War. Joe DiMaggio and the world of sports only carried so far in a man's world. World War II still loomed large during this era. History



Mario Puzo and Francis Coppola with Paramount Studio execs

Assessing the Damage



Forty years of propaganda has made Italian criminals an integral part of Americana. New ground was broken when Steven Spielberg used Italians as gangster sharks in a 2004 children's animation, *Shark Tale* (far right).



was what the English and Anglo-Americans said it was. Jokes and zingers abounded, as they still do, denigrating Italian military prowess.

Similarly, in this country, Italian American soldiers, although they comprised the largest ethnic fighting force overseas, found their accomplishments overlooked and seldom lauded. Heroes like Sgt. John Basilone and ace fighter

pilot Don Gentile were overshadowed by Hollywood's chosen golden boy, Audie Murphy. Images in American popular culture were no better, be they the bumbling immigrant in *Life With Luigi* or a talking mouse on *The Ed Sullivan Show* named Topo Gigio. Ominously, the only Italian men treated with any degree of seriousness in the media were Italian crooks, whether real (appearing at the U.S. Congressional hearings of the 1950s and 60s) or rehashed (television's popular *The Untouchables*).

The salvation for Italian American males came with the publication of Mario Puzo's 1968 pulp novel, *The Godfather*. There was no surrender or white flag in the gang wars. Instead of columns of war-weary Italians shrugging off to prison camps, "men of honor" defended their turf to the death ("we go to the mattresses!"). When brought to the big screen in 1972, *The Godfather* restored the macho to the Italian American male image.

Jewish Americans also suffered during this period, and well before, from the stereotype of the sedentary nebbish until Israel's spectacular victory in the Six Day War (1967). Thereafter, the Israelis became world-class fighters, and American Jews still bask in the reflected glory.

MACHO TURNS TO RIDICULE

While American Jews rose up the ladder of respect on the shoulders of the Israelis, as well as their own political and financial hegemony in this country, Italian Americans found that *The Godfather* wasn't the magic makeover for which they had hoped. Puzo's gimmicky novel, amplified via Coppola's grand opera theatrical film, devolved into comical spin-offs and shallow, self-serving parodies (e.g, HBO's *The Sopranos*). Even once-respected terms within Italian culture — 'godfather,' 'family,' 'soprano'— are now sources of mockery by non-Italians. Ultimately, the Italian American gangster has become an overweight, blue-collar guy with a goofy nickname and only a passing command of the English language.



It has been a perverse inspiration to many Italian American males.

Forty years after *The Godfather*, the Italian American gangster is anything but intimidating. His crimes pale in comparison to other ethnic groups who perpetrate billions in Medicaid fraud, financial schemes, identity theft, and drug trafficking. These crimes dwarf the sums that Italian thugs still gain from sports betting and loan sharking. There is little macho left in the aging wiseguys whom the FBI regularly parade before the media. Some of these goons have only nicknames to separate them from their suburban neighbors.



Vocalists such as Jerry Vale cashed in on his Italian heritage to peddle the *Mob Hits* series.

Instead of an Italian American version of Robin Hood or Billy the Kid, the "made men," both then and now, are usually high school drop-outs, pathetic shadows of the "men of honor" the cinema has conned us with. It is instructive to note, for exam-

(Cont'd. on p. 29)

Target Italy (continued from p.13)

sizing their welfare state to demonstrate a commitment to keep a balanced budget. Italian politicians have even put their squabbling aside and installed a “technocrat” government under Prime Minister/economist Mario Monti to whip the nation into shape.



“Mamma’s boys” are living with their parents into their 40s. It may be bad for the birthrate but it is saving Italians financially.

That sort of self-discipline is nearly impossible in the United States where our Congress is stalemated by party ideology or controlled by interest groups.

As a result of Monti’s reforms (both the austerity and growth-oriented measures), Italy will boast a primary budget surplus in 2013. In fact, Super Mario’s brinkmanship at a recent EU conclave forced German Chancellor Merkel to blink — and agree to more direct ECB funds in saving ailing European

banks.

Yet, we see Italy constantly depicted as a disaster waiting to happen. That fear is peddled by stereotype-trained American journalists and British Empire zombies who mimic WW II propaganda. One of the more insulting tracts appeared in *The Economist*, an English journal, on June 11, 2011. The 16-page “special report” essentially panned Italy as a viable nation. With subheadings like ‘The Economy: Forever Espresso’ and ‘Institutions: Tangled Webs’ the report dripped with disdain. Essentially, the authors rated Italy an economic mess and its people devoid of the moral scruples necessary for a modern state. One can only wonder what motivates so-called professionals to write off a nation that has been continuously relevant to world history for two millennia. You can see by this summary below how debt relates to various countries. Italy needs to try harder but things aren’t so bleak:

<u>Nation</u>	<u>Debt</u>	<u>% of DGP</u>	<u>Major Lenders</u>
USA	\$14.5 Trillion	100%	China, Japan, France, Germ.
Italy	\$2.5 Trillion	121%	France, Italian citizens (65%)
UK	\$1.86 Trillion	81%	Germany
Japan	\$12.8 Trillion	233%	Japanese citizens

Italy still retains a culture designed to withstand shock. It is the norm for adult children to continue living at home. Often considered babying by “macho” societies, the custom nevertheless allows

the family unit to live cheaply. Moreover, it means these children are not carrying mortgages — less debt to drag them down or to pass on. Student loans are a rare bird. With a student population of 1.8 million, less than 3,000 students apply for loans each year, of which only a few hundred are granted. Italians don’t seem to believe education should put you in debt. They prefer attending state-supported universities. Healthcare is also not a budget buster to Italian families, as this is a government perk.



Italian children are not all steered to college and into student debt. The educational system has tracks leading to trade schools and office professions as well as university degrees.

On the dark side, the euro crisis and global recession has caused some 17,000 small businesses in northern Italy to fail since 2009. An Italian small business association claims that 32 businessmen have committed suicide this year alone. Banks are seeing deposits slowly withdrawn for supposedly safer havens (there is nearly a run on banks in Spain and Greece). Public employee lay-offs have decimated the labor force. Some of Italy’s regions, like our states, have serious financial problems. But these are all common experiences throughout industrialized nations these days.

Years ago, Italians could immigrate to escape this sort of economic reality and send precious dollars home. And while mass immigration is no longer possible, Italy is trying to adapt to the global economy. Italians are coming to terms with an English-speaking world. Future Italian doctors, engineers, businessmen, and a host of other professionals will need to know English. English-only degree programs are in Italy’s future. Italian students want them, foreign students who study in Italy want them. Already, some 50,000 foreign students enroll in post graduate English-only courses in Italy. The prestigious Polytechnic Institute in Milan is set to convert all its programs to English-only by 2014. It plans to hire at least 150 English-speaking professors by then.

Bottom line: Italy wants to maintain its status as a first-rate nation. It has the will and the means to adapt and survive. Above all, it has the creativity and persistence. Nevertheless, poor image and baseless panic could undo the best of intentions.

(Cont’d. on p. 18)

The Girandoni Gun

by Rosario A. Iaconis and Louis Cornaro

In his 1996 book *Undaunted Courage*, Stephen Ambrose chronicled Lewis and Clark's famed exploration of the Louisiana Purchase. Despite his impressive detail, Ambrose wasn't quite sure who designed and produced the strange gun that kept the so-called Corps of Discovery from the clutches of hostile Native Americans.

Many experts now believe that the weapon was produced by a man named Bartolomeo Girandoni, an Italian gunsmith who labored under the Austrian yoke in northern Italy at the end of the 18th Century. The Girandoni Air Rifle could fire off 22 rounds in thirty seconds without reloading or using gunpowder. It was smokeless and nearly noiseless. In an age of muzzle-loading, single shot Kentucky rifles and the need to 'keep your powder dry,' such a weapon was a wonder. All 22 rounds could be loaded at one time through a side breech. The stock acted as a compressed air chamber releasing enough air to 'fire off' each round in quick succession.

Girandoni supplied 1,500 of his rifles to the Austrian Army. But, according to Dr. Robert Beeman of Beeman's Precision Airguns, the rifles had a controversial history. Their withering fire on the battlefield against French troops prompted Napoleon to threaten Austrian soldiers with summary execution if captured with an air rifle. But the Austrians themselves may have dropped the Girandoni as too complicated to be maintained by common sol-

diers.

In 1803, before entering America's *terra incognita*, Meriwether Lewis purchased the air gun from Isaiah Lukens, a Philadelphia gunsmith. Lewis later gave a demonstration of the weapon to some frontier settlers, firing off seven rounds. The settlers were so impressed that they passed the rifle around for inspection. In doing so, another round went off by accident and grazed a female bystander. The woman was unhurt. But the men were astonished by the effectiveness of such a quiet gun.



A typical encounter to impress the Indians. Lewis and Clark had the difficult task of announcing to the locals that the Louisiana Territory had a new landlord. They used much pomp and ceremony, and not a little intimidation and whiskey.

The need for this amazing weapon was clear to Lewis. His expedition to map out the vast Louisiana

Territory would take him into Indian country for two years (1804-1806). He would encounter tribes that few Anglo-Americans were familiar with. He needed to bring gifts, trade goods and weapons,

Lewis would unveil the Girandoni air rifle and demonstrate the gun, much to the amazement of the Indians.

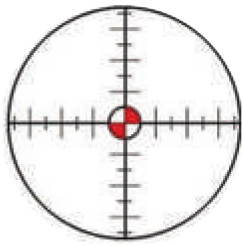
Bartolomeo Girandoni's hi-tech air rifle could shoot 22 rounds in thirty seconds without gun powder or reloading.



in addition to his river boats, tents, tools, food, medicine, and whiskey. His standard weapons were only capable of firing two rounds a minute, depending on the skill of the rifleman. A number of tribes would have similar muskets acquired from French and Spanish fur trappers and replenished by remote trading posts. The Corps of Discovery needed a weapon that would impress even those Indians.

It became standard operating procedure to approach any gathering of Indians along the river shore with a formal parade ceremony. A color guard was formed in dress uniforms,

(Cont'd. on p. 25)



#3 *Italy is run by graft and crimelords.*

MOSTLY FALSE

Italy is the home of many home-grown crime syndicates: the *Mafia*, *Camorra*, *Sacra Corona*, and *Ndragheta*. Though they are headquartered within their respective Italian regions, we are told that their tentacles reach throughout Europe and around the globe. Twenty years ago, the murder of two Italian prosecutors in Sicily by the *Mafia* shook Italy to its core. Italians know they have an unending problem with crime syndicates, corrupt politicians, and an intimidated public. They understand that Fascism temporarily cured the problem but that it returned with the Allied invasion, the drug era, and the multi-party system. Nevertheless, Italy is not Mexico in terms of bloody drug cartels. Neither is it Japan having *Yakuzas* with business offices. And who has heard of the Brothers' Circle, the umbrella group of mainly Jewish and Israeli criminals from former USSR republics? The FBI considers the *Yakuza*, *Camorra*, Zeta Drug cartel and Brothers' Circle to be a significant concern to the United States, not to mention their home countries. Their global reach brings drugs, slavery, toxic waste, and murder.

Roberto Saviano, an Italian native, wrote a book in 2008 cataloging in murderous details how the *Camorra* ravishes the region of Campania and Naples itself. Italy is also beset by foreign syndicates like Romanian and Albanian gangs. Chinese gangs run the docks of Naples, Saviano informs us. One can imagine what America was like in the 1920s and 30s to get a feel-



ing for the multi-ethnic anarchy enveloping Italy today. Italy is the point of entry for illegal aliens fleeing Africa. Not all of them continue on to more prosperous France or Germany. Most bring a new dimension of poverty. Some bring criminal elements that add to Italy's domestic woes.

Just how much of Italy's crime is due to political or bureaucratic corruption is anyone's guess. Something called the Corruption Perception Index lists Italy as #69



on its corrupt society scale (the U.S. is #24 and Somalia is dead last at #182). But note the operative word is "perception." Is Italy really more corrupt than the United States or does it seem that way? In 2008, an Italian small business association announced to the world that 7% of the Italian economy was illegal. That whimsical estimate certainly adds to the "perception" of a corrupt Italy.

The Carabinieri are paramilitary national police. They don't always walk around in tri-cornered hats.

No well-informed American would judge Italians knowing the shenanigans that pass for democracy here.

Do we really know what goes on in our own country, the United States? No well-informed American would ever judge Italians knowing the shenanigans that pass for democracy here. Bid rigging and kickbacks are no strangers to Congress or corporate America. The drug trade and illegal weapons and the atmosphere that allows them are just as much an American as Italian problem. They flourish with bribes, apathy and intimidation on both sides of the Atlantic. While we have untouchable guardians such as the FBI and the IRS Italy has the *Guardia di Finanza* (a paramilitary IRS) and the *Carabinieri* (national paramilitary police). You would be hard-pressed to find even the most cynical Italian who would question their integrity and commitment.

Bottom line: Organized crime is a universal problem. It is a lingering stain on Italian society that will always thrive in a democracy, especially during hard economic times. Italy needs to do a better job both in combatting it and lowering the hype.

(Cont'd. on p. 20)

Illegal aliens bring Italy foreign gangs as well as innocent refugees. Imagine the IRS combined with the Coast Guard and you'll have *La Guardia di Finanza*

GIOVANNI CABOTO: ENTREPRENEUR

by Louis Cornaro

Italian Americans are a peculiar lot. They worship their immigrant roots with passion and tolerate the most inane images of themselves. The American media has dug up just about every low-life guido and *cafone* that was ever produced by our community and added enough nails to our proverbial coffin to build a city. To counter this, many of our social organizations lean heavily on Christopher Columbus, the Great Navigator. But ole Chris has taken it on the chin for decades now, being claimed by Jews and Greeks as one of theirs. Meanwhile, he is denounced by Native Americans, African Americans and many historians as the author of slavery, genocide and every sin white people visited upon humanity in the Western hemisphere. Still, Italian Americans understandably consider him their hero.

This year, Italy is celebrating Amerigo Vespucci on the 500th

Benjamin Franklin's 1775 essay *Vindication for the Colonies* argued that Americans were indebted to Cabot, not England.

anniversary of his profound revelation that Columbus didn't just discover islands close to Asia but rather a New World. Again, Italian Americans should be pumped with pride over that landmark event.

Lost in all history is lowly John Cabot. Maybe because his anglicized name still fools people, Giovanni Caboto deserves a lot more credit for what he directly gave English-speaking America. Italian Americans must elevate this man to his true



On June 24, 1497, on the North American coast, possibly Newfoundland, Giovanni Caboto with son Sebastian plant the flag of Venice. The flag of England waves beside it. Records indicate that this voyage was 100% Italian financed. (This is a photoshopped version of an original by Canadian artist JD Kelly 1862-1958)

stature. For he, more than Columbus and Vespucci, made the United States what it is. His personal investment in America, made exactly 515 years ago, should still be paying us of Italian stock enormous dividends.

AMERICA OR VENETIA?

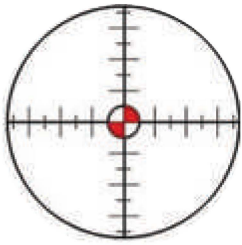
Neither Christopher Columbus nor Amerigo Vespucci set foot on North America. But John Cabot did. His landing on June 24, 1497, a scant four and a half years after San Salvador, set the course of events that led to the Thirteen Colonies and English as our dominant language. So why do we celebrate Columbus when Cabot was the man who opened North America, brought the English language to the New World, and single-handedly launched the British Empire?



Although he planted two flags and sailed well south beyond his royal commission, Cabot's Italian investment put England on the road to empire.

Not generally known is that John Cabot also figured largely in the American Revolution. A clever rebel named Benjamin Franklin wrote an essay in 1775 to the effect that Great Britain had no right to claim North America based on Cabot's discovery. In his essay, *Vindication for the Colonies*, Franklin rebutted the assertion by the English government that all the colonies were "settled at the expense of Britain" starting with John Cabot. Franklin argued that Cabot paid for his voyage of discovery, not King Henry VII. This meant that the colonies were settled on Cabot's investment not the King's. It was an interesting interpretation but Parliament didn't buy it. What Franklin overlooked was the fact that Cabot's commission only applied to lands above the 50th Parallel, today's

(Cont'd. on p. 22)



#4 Italy is a political circus.

NOT QUITE



Prime Minister Mario Monti meeting with the more important political parties that keep him in office. Diversity and consensus is how parliamentary systems operate.

If there is one target that attracts lots of arrows toward Italy it is its political system. Often called a political circus or musical chairs, the Italian Republic seems to have passed through the old days of falling governments and a new prime minister every month. Still, it is the parliamentary form of government that Americans cannot seem to grasp. If anything, the Italian system with some 16 political parties is a better expression of democracy than our own. Let's face it, we are still using a constitution from the 18th Century that apportions senate seats equally to every state regardless of population, and elects a president from an Electoral College instead of direct voting. Those, in themselves, deny majority rule. And while an Italian voter can find a party with an ideology 90% of which matches his own, Americans are lucky to find 50% of their desires with only two parties to choose from.

We were always told that a two-party system means less horse-trading and more stability. That's not what passes for government in today's Washington, DC. The words gridlock and spitefulness better describe our federal system. Since the Second World War our "superior" system has given us the Vietnam War, two seedy presidents, the Iraq fiasco, and a \$14.5 trillion debt. Should we really laugh at the Italians? Italians didn't have to wait two years until his term ended to oust Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi. Within a month of their economic crisis this year Italians had a new team of technocrats in office to mobilize the nation. That sounds like a viable system.

Beppe Grillo is a comedian who started his own political movement based on personal integrity and idealism. Didn't Jon Stewart and Steven Colbert try something like that in the U.S.? Good luck!



Speaking of Berlusconi, the world press had a field day magnifying his sensual proclivities — the poster boy of Latin naughtiness. Even Italians were turned off by his social hijinks and anti-feminist attitude. Although Berlusconi wasn't caught red-handed in anything, he epitomized the shady Italian politician, much as former prime minister Giulio Andreotti is still immortalized for alleged dealings with the Mafia. In comparison, the United States had a president resign his office for obstruction of justice, another one was impeached for literally getting caught with his pants down, and a presidential candidate was put on trial after secretly fathering a baby. Elsewhere, Moshe Katsav, a former president of Israel, was convicted and is serving jail time for rape. Italian politicians don't look as shady when you move the camera back and see the whole panorama.

Italian parliamentary members are certainly no saints, but we mustn't forget the African-American congressman who had \$400,000 of ill-gotten gains stuffed in his freezer. Or lobbyist Jack Abramoff, the man who inspired the movie *Casino Jack*, who had a good part of our Congress in his back pocket, and who brought down Republican heavies like former majority leader Tom DeLay. We could go on but you see the point.

Bottom Line: No form of government is perfect. Italy's republic was designed to avoid another Mussolini. Like any government it needs compromise and consensus. So far, Italy has shown the flexibility and consensus to survive.

(Cont'd. on p. 26)

**Americans don't seem to grasp
how a parliamentary
government works.**



In Italy, when parties get into trouble they reinvent themselves with new names. On the left is the "Refounded" Communist Party. In the center is the Northern League's pipe-dream for a "State of Padania." Berlusconi's old *Forza Italia* is now the People of Liberty

Italy and the Holocaust

Sneak Preview by Louis Cornaro

In the course of researching our forthcoming white paper, *Italy and the Holocaust*, we have come across much information that has been “sidetracked” in the history books. Among the notable



Nazi troops reoccupying Germany's region of Saarland in 1935

events we have dealt with in previous issues of *The Italic Way* was ‘Hitler’s First Defeat’ by Italy in July, 1934, when Premier Mussolini mobilized Italian armed forces to prevent Hitler’s annexation of Austria. (see issue XXXV). Although Jews were not Mussolini’s primary concern at the time, his saving of Austria also saved some 200,000 Austrian Jews from Hitler’s clutches, including such celebrities as Sigmund Freud, actress Heddy Lamarr, and businesswoman Evelyn Lauder. This singlehanded feat in blocking the first Nazi takeover of an independent country was not lost on the international Jewish community. Unfortunately, it has certainly been lost to most historians and the media. Mussolini had already received praise from an association of Jewish newspaper editors in the United States in September, 1933, a year before saving Austria. The editors hailed the Italian dictator as one of twelve “Christians” who aided Jews. “He demonstrated that Fascism does not tolerate racial and religious persecution.” Mussolini was, in fact, the go-to guy for many Jews around the world during the early 1930s.

As a result of the First World War, the German region of Saarland was still occupied by the Allies in 1934, under French administrative control. A plebiscite was scheduled for 1935 to determine if

the inhabitants wished to join France or return to the German *reich*. Approximately 5,000 Jewish Germans were living in Saarland at the time and had no illusions about how the vote would go. Witnessing just 18 months of Nazi control in Germany from the safety of the French-administered Saar made it quite apparent that Saarland Jews had no future under the Third Reich. They planned to leave *en masse*.

The problem was that Nazi policy would only allow immigration from German soil without assets. In short, Jews in the Saar would have to abandon homes, stores, and personal property to escape the Nazis. This would make them indigent refugees, not a practical calling card at foreign borders.

Nahum Goldmann of the World Jewish Congress sought Italy’s help in protecting the assets of Jewish residents from Nazi confiscation. He met with Mussolini on November 13, 1934. He left a very detailed memorial of that meeting. They spoke in French, as Goldmann preferred. Goldmann set the agenda: the fate of Jews in Germany, the problem of the Saar, the Jewish question in Austria, and the Jews in Poland. Goldmann wrote: “Mussolini answered as follows: ‘I shall force Germany to allow the Saar Jews to leave with their money.’ He took a large block of paper and a pencil, tore off a sheet and wrote: ‘Saar-Jews –Emigration.’ ‘That’s it,’ said Mussolini, ‘consider it done.’”

As it happened, the League of Nation’s commission for the Saar, the so-called Commission of Three (Italy, Spain, Argentina), was headed by an Italian, Baron Pompeo Aloisi. What became known as the ‘Resolution of Rome of 1934’ did, indeed, demand that Hitler allow Jews to leave the Saar with their assets. Still smarting from his July defeat by Mussolini

(Cont’d. on p. 24)

Some 5,000 Jewish Germans were living in the Saarland at the time of the referendum.

The German region of Saarland, lower left, was held by France after World War I. Italian and British troops were stationed there to oversee a referendum in 1935.



John Cabot (continued from p.19)

Canada. Anything south of that was not necessarily covered by the commission. But more on this later.

John Cabot did, indeed, make his historic journey as the agent of an English monarch. But his royal commission required Cabot to pay for the trip himself, and entitled him to rule all the lands he found. In feudal terms, Cabot was a vassal of the King, obligated to share profits and pay taxes but having exclusive possession of his new domain. England, at the time of Cabot's landing, was more than satisfied with the vast cod fishery he found offshore of the new continent. It freed English bellies from the Icelandic monopoly. For this, Cabot was given a cash stipend each year. As for coastal Canada, New England and all the southerly regions, it would be another century before the English asserted a claim based on Cabot's exploration. They were inspired to do so only after the French had penetrated the hinterland along the St. Lawrence River. Jamestown was only founded in 1607 and Plymouth in 1620.

So, who was this entrepreneur/explorer John Cabot? A citizen of the Venetian Republic, Giovanni Caboto was probably born in Gaeta, Italy, a seaport south of Rome where the main boulevard is named for him. He settled in Venice and later emigrated to Bristol, England. It is noteworthy that he remained a citizen of Venice, ultimately planting in American soil the banner of St. Mark (Venice's seal) alongside that of England's.

Like Columbus in Spain, Cabot depended on Italian investors to bankroll his voyage. These investors were bankers and merchants from various Italian city-states in residence overseas. Seville was an Italian merchant colony in Spain while Bristol was its counterpart in England. (London's financial district Lombard Street was named for Italian bankers from the region of Lombardia, Milan.) Unlike Columbus, who only had to raise two-thirds of his capital privately, the rest coming from the Spanish crown, Cabot had to raise 100% privately. Newly found records from a Florentine bank have Cabot listed as receiving a loan from the Bardi Company, for example. In some cases, the Italian investments were an oblique way of securing better relations with one of Cabot's powerful friends, papal diplomat Giovanni de Carbonariis. Whatever the motives, these financial arrangements were extant enough to catch Ben Franklin's eye two centuries later.

Cabot's vehicle of discovery was the *Mathew*, named after his wife Mattea. (The fact that he dared to cross the Atlantic with only one

ship lends credence to a self-financed venture.) He probably brought along his son, Sebastian, who definitely accompanied him on his second voyage and who later served Spain as well as England. In this first crossing Cabot Sr. made landfall somewhere along the Canadian coast. One account has him also sailing as far south as Chesapeake Bay and even Florida, something he more likely did on his second voyage in 1498.

Cabot did not refer to his new lands by any particular name. The continent had not yet been named for Amerigo Vespucci. That wouldn't happen until 1507. In light of Cabot's inaugural landing and the fact that he planted the flag of Venice on these shores, a more appropriate name would be Venetia. (As in the United States of Venetia?) Had the name Venetia been used, South America could today be just "America." (Vespucci did, indeed, set foot on that continent.)



The 1997 replica of Cabot's ship *The Mathew* out of Bristol, England. The ship was named after Cabot's wife Mattea and probably had a partly Italian crew, including Cabot's son.

John Cabot made a second trip to his realm but took an unauthorized detour south, down to Chesapeake Bay, from whence he returned home. His little sojourn added most of our east coast to the future British Empire. Not long after his return, John Cabot died, passing his rights on to his family, all residents of England but still citizens of Venice.

What Franklin overlooked in his *Vindication* was a directive in Cabot's commission restricting his exploration to northern waters, that is, Cabot was supposed to remain on the same parallel as England's southerly coast. This would be the 50th Parallel or above what is now the Canadian border. The commission specifically states that Cabot was to explore the "eastern, western and northern sea" (he was not to head south). Strictly speaking, this would prevent him from going below the latitude of the English homeland, that is, 50-degrees north latitude. Henry VII did not want to trespass on Spain's or France's parallels. This effectively limited the King's claim to only Canada. The territory from Maine to Virginia was, technically, outside the King's commission and, by assumption, Cabot's realm. However, soon after Cabot's voyages, the French took a liking to Canada and the Great Lakes. All bets were off. English colonists moved in all along the east coast, as far south as Georgia. The English crown became the lord of this new empire.

Great Britain eventually relinquished its claims to the United States and Canada in the 18th and 19th Centuries, respectively. But there is no record of Cabot or his family renouncing their title. Under current international laws, title would have passed through the surviving Cabot family to their nation of citizenship, Venice. From 1866 until this day, Venice has been a part of Italy.

You may draw your own conclusions. *Viva Venetia!*

Carmen Finestra



by Anthony Vecchione

**Hollywood Producer,
Creator, and Writer**

Every year thousands of idealistic writers head to New York or Los Angeles with dreams of becoming television writers. It's a cutthroat, competitive business and, in the end, only a few are fortunate enough to live their dream.

Harrisburg, Pennsylvania native Carmen Finestra is a gifted and talented writer/producer who has carved out a niche in the entertainment field with an impressive resume as a writer and producer on some of television's most highly regarded and successful programs.

After graduating from Penn State in 1971, he moved to New York and did standup comedy, acted off-off Broadway, and was a production assistant for television producer Joe Cates. In 1976, Cates gave him his first writing job on the *Johnny Cash Summer Series*, where he met Steve Martin. Carmen later wrote comedy material for Martin's act, as well as two comedy specials. Finestra has worked as a writer/producer ever since. He was supervising producer of *The Cosby Show*, co-creator and executive producer of *Home Improvement*, the Tim Allen sitcom, and in the feature film world, executive producer of *Where The Heart Is*, starring Ashley Judd and Natalie Portman, as well as *What Women Want*, with Mel Gibson and Helen Hunt.

Carmen has won three Writers Guild of America Awards, a Peabody Award, and has been nominated for two Golden Globes and six Emmy Awards. In 1991 he was made a Penn State Fellow, and in 1998 a Distinguished Alumnus. In 2010, he was given the Pennsylvania Association of Broadcasters Gold Medal Award.

A creative force in the entertainment field for more than three decades, Finestra is proud of his accomplishments. But he is also proud of his Italian heritage. Finestra's parents emigrated from Penne, Abruzzo, and he acknowledges that his Italian heritage has had an impact on his work.

Finestra has strong opinions about how Italian American

characters are portrayed on television and in the movies, and he offers some advice on how to make those images more positive and reduce antiquated and harmful stereotypes.

IW: Was your upbringing in Pennsylvania "ethnic" or more assimilated? Or both?

CF: I was raised in Harrisburg, Pa. There really wasn't an Italian section here, like there was in New York or Philadelphia. My parents came from Italy, so they represented many wonderful Italian traits - family, food, and hard work. It had a great influence on me.

IW: What connection, if any, do you have to your Italian heritage?

CF: I feel very connected to my Italian heritage, and have visited the town (Penne, Abruzzo) where my parents came from. I remain involved in Italian celebrations here on Columbus Day. We have an annual banquet in Hershey, Pa. I've been a speaker and MC on various occasions. I have many friends of Italian heritage in this area.

IW: How did you land a gig writing for the *Cosby Show*?

CF: One of my former roommates in New York, Elliot Shoenman, became head writer, and hired me. I had already been writing in the television industry for about eight years, prior to that.

IW: Has your heritage impacted your writing/character development?

CF: My Italian-American heritage has drawn me to characters
(Cont'd. on p. 27)

"The media doesn't give you much to hear about or focus on when it comes to successful Italian Americans."



Carmen Finestra was co-creator and executive producer for this highly successful series starring Tim Allen.

Holocaust (continued from p.21)

in Austria, Hitler caved in to this demand. Such protection was not given to the Jews of Germany proper, nor to Austrian Jews after the Nazi annexation in 1938.

In a 1988 paper on this subject, German author Katharina Best wrote this sequel to the story:

“In fact there was one year of grace after the plebiscite. An agreement of the League of Nations with the German government came into being, due to the pressure of a number of states. The so-called “Resolution of Rome” of 1934 ensured for the Jews of Saarland that no restrictions whatsoever would be allowed on account of their race, language or religion. They could sell their property and take the proceeds with them out of the country without hindrance.

The resolution was nevertheless limited until the end of February, 1936. The short time to cope with the extensive preparations pressed on in a hurry. Nevertheless the Resolution of Rome paved the way to emigration for the Jews of Saarland under relatively favorable conditions in comparison to the Jews in the Reich.” —[*The History*

of the Former Synagogue-Communities of Dillingen and Nalbach]



Nahum Goldman of the World Jewish Congress sought Italy's help in protecting Jewish assets in the Saarland. He met with Mussolini on November 13, 1934. He left a very detailed memorial of that successful meeting.

The Resolution of Rome is the second example of Italy's leadership role in reining in Nazi Germany. The first was stopping the attempted annexation of Austria in July, 1934. These were no small feats. And they were followed logically by the so-called Stresa Front, a summit called by Italy in April, 1935, to contain Nazi Germany. These concrete steps should have been the cornerstone of an anti-Nazi coalition. But they weren't, primarily because throughout the 1930s some politicians in Great Britain and France saw Italy as an adversary rather than a former ally of

the First World War. As the decade wore on, they saw Fascism and Nazism as a single ideology, much the way the United States saw Chinese and Vietnamese communism as monolithic. That simplistic assumption brought torment to Southeast Asia and our own nation. In the Europe of the 1930s these attitudes would have devastating effects

on the Jews, and the world. Yet, who even acknowledges the need to examine them? Certainly not American scholars. ****

**Many facts have been
“sidetracked”
in
history books.**

Forum Italicum (continued from p.9)

summarily rebuffed. So much for the melting pot.

To put our quest into perspective, in 1997 a documentary, *Barbed Wire and Mandolins*, was produced in Canada fully funded by the Canadian government in atonement for the very same injustice perpetrated on Italian Canadians during World War II. Moreover, Prime Minister Mulroney publicly apologized to that community.

Just when we had run out of options, I received a call from John Calvelli, a staffer in New York Representative Elliot Engels' office. John had followed our struggles in *The Italic Way Magazine*. He invited me down to Washington to discuss a draft resolution to be introduced in the House by Elliot Engels and Rick Lazio, another Representative from New York. At my insistence a funding clause was added to the bill (Section 4 Paragraph 4) for a future documentary. So as not to jinx the resolution the funding clause was written as a suggestion - 'the sense of Congress.'

The resolution made its way through the House and, as noted above, was signed by President Clinton in 2000. Basically, it called for an investigation by the U.S. Department of Justice of FDR's E.O. 9066 as it applied to Italian Americans. Illinois Representative Henry Hyde, who chaired the Judiciary Committee in the House, was lobbied by a number of groups to call a hearing. Witnesses were summoned, including Joe Di Maggio's brother

Dominic and singer Ezio Pinza's wife, to testify on the negative effects of the Order on their families. By the following year, the Dept. of Justice produced a superficial report which fulfilled the Resolution.

There was never funding for a documentary nor even an apology from the President or any part of the government. Except for some California history textbooks, a traveling exhibit (*Una Storia Segreta*) curated by California activists Rose Scherini and Carlo Visante, and a book by Stephen Fox (*The Unknown Internment*), the 1942 Persecution is still as much a secret as it was since the end of the Second World War. On a recent trip to the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library in Hyde Park, NY, I noted that the one reference to his Executive Order 9066 only mentions the persecution of Japanese Americans.

It is not too late to set things right. Our community still has enough activists and politicians to lobby the president, especially during an election year.

Our fathers and uncles more than proved the loyalty our of community to this country with their sacrifice during the war. The United States of America must be big enough to admit its mistake. ****

Girandoni Gun (continued from p.17)

flags, drums, and flintlocks, and a volley fired off. Lewis would then give a speech, translated somewhat by French- or Spanish-speaking Indians, announcing that the natives now had a new White Father in Washington, DC. Understandably, the Indians were less than pleased by the news. They were more interested in the Corps' trade goods and gifts. Lewis and Clark usually passed out tobacco and beads. But the Indians expected muskets, balls, gun powder, and whiskey. As expected, this was the low point in the encounter. It was then that the captains offered the menacing warriors some whiskey and "brought out their magic show," as Stephen Ambrose puts it. That show began with the air rifle, "to the astonishment of the Indians," and perhaps a solar power demonstration with a magnifying glass and dry leaves. This routine was to be repeated throughout the 3,700 mile journey.

Paul Schreier, curator of the National Firearms Museum,

"Without the Girandoni, any of the tribes could have overcome the 36 to 38 members of the expedition."

reconstructs the way the air rifle engendered both trepidation and respect:

"Meriwether Lewis would unveil the Girandoni air rifle and demonstrate the gun, much to the amazement of the Indians. It could fire 22 times in 30 seconds and struck fear that caused intimidation amongst the tribes, and they quickly spread the word. Lewis would demonstrate the gun with every new encounter and the Indians, not knowing how many more of these guns were in their longboat, repressed their aggression, traded with the expedition and allowed them to pass. Without the Girandoni, any of the tribes could have overcome the 36 to 38 members of the expedition, taken their muskets, pistols, power

Note the ball-like stock on the rifle being held up. This would be Capt. Meriwether Lewis about to demonstrate the remarkable Girandoni Air Rifle. Lewis had some problems with the rifle losing air compression when he first bought it. But he learned to maintain it properly.

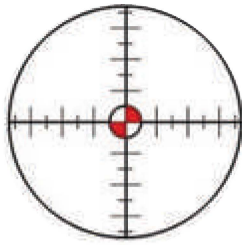


A two-year journey covering 3,700 miles, round trip, required all the technical know-how of the age. Among the innovative accessories Lewis and Clark brought along were collapsible boats, a chronometer for fixing longitude, mosquito netting, 'portable' (dried) soup mixes, and the Girandoni Air Rifle.

and other supplies and used them against their neighboring tribes and greatly alter the course of land procurement for the fledgling new country."

If, indeed, Lewis and Clark owed their safety in large part to the Girandoni Air Rifle it should be accorded its rightful place in American history, along with the Winchester, the Colt, and the Smith & Wesson as winners of the West. The Girandoni was there at the start.





#5 Italians are in ethnic decline.

TRUE

In the long term, Europe's most serious problem is its changing demographics. This is especially true in Italy where the birthrate is 9.06 per 1,000, not even replacement level (in 1928 it was 26 per 1,000). To make up the shortfall in labor and to maintain the tax base, Italy has welcomed immigrants. In the past ten years legal immigration has increased three-fold. There are almost 4 million foreigners residing in Italy – 6.3% of the population. And these are just the legal aliens. In Milan and Torino, Chinese surnames Hu and Chen make the top-ten in phonebooks. Verona has lots of Fernandos and Warnakulasuriyas from Africa.

Newly released census data estimate that Italy's population is now 59.5 million (28.7 males, 30.7 females). Northern Italy has 46% of the population, the central regions have 19%, and the south and islands have 35%.

Meanwhile, like all the developed nations, Italy faces a floodtide of illegal immigration. Over 50,000 desperate refugees have reached Italian shores either to escape African turmoil or to transit the peninsula for France, Germany, or the UK. Incurring additional costs for sea patrols and internment centers during this time of economic crisis is frustrating to government authorities. To add insult to injury, the European Court of Human Rights has censured Italy for sending back some political refugees, actually issuing fines of nearly half a million dollars to compensate some "victims."

The face of Italy has changed drastically. There are over 1.5 million Muslims and 500 mosques scattered across the country. Chinese immigrants occupy one of Rome's famed seven hills and number possibly 100,000 throughout Italy. Gypsies, Romanians, Albanians, and Africans — both northern and sub-Saharan — are common anywhere you travel. With them come new values or a lack of them. New crime syndicates have entered Italian society and racial/ethnic issues are becoming a sad part of Italian life.

Both Catholic officials and conservative Italians do not like where the country is headed. The Moroccan government and the



Muslims at prayer in Palermo and Rome



Chinese residents protest in Milan

dreaded Muslim Brotherhood have strategic plans to expand Islam into Italy by encouraging immigration and constructing mosques. Plans for new mosques invariably meet local opposition, more intensely if the Muslim Brotherhood is known to be underwriting it. Italians point to Spain as a telling example of Islamic intentions. There, the Moroccan government subsidizes not only mosques but Islamic courts (Sharia Law), schools, and private police. One Barcelona-based imam preaches that Islamic values must be accepted as "European" and that Western Civilization should be described as Islamo-Christian.

Reportedly, many left-leaning Italians encourage Muslim expansion as a way to neutralize the Vatican's sway on Italian politics. If this is true, it may very well be a strategy of suicide.

Bottom Line: Italy and most of Europe are paying the price for two fratricidal world wars that decimated their populations. While the United States has coped with racial and ethnic problems over the centuries, our vast land mass has mitigated some problems. Italy may find that open European borders and limited territory will not be so forgiving. ****



that are good fathers, hard workers, and strong family-types. That is what I enjoy writing most.

IW: Why is it so difficult for Italian Americans to pull off a “Cosby” or a film like “Dances With Wolves”—that is, a cultural work that finally does away with long-accepted stereotypes?

CF: The success of the “mafia” genre - *The Godfather*, *The Sopranos*, *GoodFellas*, etc. - makes it a salable theme. When MTV cast *Jersey Shore*, they made no bones about the fact that they were looking for “Guidos and Guidettes.” In other words, they were looking for stereotypical buffoons. They weren’t looking for Italian American pre-med students at Rutgers. The success of that show has hurt just as much as the mafia-style programming.

IW: I notice that your body of work doesn’t include any mafia themes or other negative stereotypes generally associated with Italian-Americans. What is your take on those who claim that in the mainstream media there is very little balance when it comes to portraying Italian Americans the way they are in the real world. [doctors, lawyers, teachers, writers, scientists]?

CF: There is no question that there’s no balance. Frankly, there’s hardly any example of the media depicting intelligent, successful, law-abiding Italian Americans or discussing them. You pretty much have to stumble upon it, by realizing that when they talk about Chris Christie and Andrew Cuomo, that “hey, those are Italian Americans”. Generally, politicians of other ethnic groups that have been persecuted in the past are often identified by their ethnicity, e.g. Barack Obama, Marco Rubio, John Kennedy. I’ve never heard anyone refer to Nancy Pelosi as an “Italian American.” Unless someone of Italian descent has a high place in the media, e.g., Maria Bartiromo of CNBC, you never hear much discussion of Italian Americans. Scalia and Alito on the Supreme Court are only spoken about because of their conservative decisions. But Sonia Sotomayor is always identified by her ethnic background. I think that’s valuable, because otherwise you only think of Italians as the people on *Jersey Shore* and *The Sopranos*. As for *Mob Wives*, that’s just another example of awful stereotypes. The media doesn’t give you much to hear



The *Bill Cosby Show* was the first series to showcase African American professionals as characters.

about or focus on when it comes to successful Italian Americans.

IW: What is your remedy for correcting the negative portrayals?

CF: The remedy would be a great Italian American family show, possibly a drama, featuring a professional, like an Italian American doctor, working at a hospital, and showing motivated, dedicated children pursuing high-profile jobs, such as law or finance. Portraying them honoring Italian holidays, perhaps being involved in their church (soup kitchens, etc.). Also, showing perhaps hard working grandparents who came from Italy and made their way through hard work would be helpful. I guarantee, though, the network would be clamoring for some cousin to be in the mob.

IW: It seems that there are very few Italian Americans in the comedy world given their population. Adam Carolla and Lisa Lampanelli come to mind. Folks like Pat Cooper (Pasquale Caputo) were strictly ethnic and insulting at that. Are there people behind the scenes that we don’t know about?

“... I guarantee, though, the network would be clamoring for some cousin to be in the mob.”

CF: Let’s not forget Jay Leno (half-Italian) and Ray Romano. Both have been very successful. Jeane Garafolo is well known, but I don’t see much reference to Italian themes, values, or attitudes in her work. Mario Cantone has found his own niche. The late

Richard Jeni was successful. Lisa Lampanelli is someone I have no respect for. It’s easy to succeed if you want to be trashy and dirty, as the *Jersey Shore* cast has discovered.



What Women Want starring Hellen Hunt, Alan Alda (l), and Mel Gibson (r),

Jen Celotta, a sitcom writer, has had great success with *The Office*. I worked with her on *Home Improvement*. Adriana Trigianni worked on *The Cosby Show* one season, and has written many successful and positive books about Italian American families.

IW: Whatever happened to Father Guido Sarducci? I’m referring to the witty character Don Novello created on SNL?

CF: I guess Novello concentrated on other things like acting and writing books (*The Lazio Toth Letters*). He probably didn’t want to be pigeonholed into that one role. He has a website, though, and says he’s available (Cont’d. on p. 28)

Finestra (cont'd. from p.27)

for personal appearances as Fr. Guido Sarducci. It was a great, fun character. We could use him now in our political and cultural discourse

IW: Is there affirmative action for TV characters? We see lots of minorities represented in fields we usually don't see in real life.

CF: There is a major effort by studios and networks to depict positive minority roles, and to see that they are cast in shows, often in positions where they are not normally portrayed. No effort is made to do that for Italian American characters, however.

IW: Our chairman's father was a scientist — a chemist, in fact. Aside from a brief reference to Italian astrophysicists in *The Big Bang Theory*, why are Italian and Italian-American professionals absent from TV and the silver screen?

CF: The people who make decisions on that see how much money they can make from all the things they produce where Italian Americans are mobsters or buffoons. *Jersey Shore* now has a spin-off.

IW: Did you ever propose an Italian version of the *Cosby* show?

CF: I'm afraid I never did. I have always tried to make writers I worked with aware of the Italian American stereotypes they would so easily suggest be put in things we were writing, and generally dissuade them from doing it. I have usually created things in collaboration with other writers. And they have been positive shows. I would love to see someone like Tom Fontana, a very good Italian American writer, try a show with positive Italian American characters. It's ironic, and also refreshing, that one of the best shows they did on *Everybody Loves Raymond* was their visit to Italy, and that was all the brainchild of the very talented Jewish American writer, Phil Rosenthal.

IW: Is there a tacit acceptance of anti-Italian depictions in Hollywood? Is there any overt typecasting?

CF: I wouldn't say it's overt. It's just so ingrained in their minds that Italian Americans are "like this" that they just go along with it. Naturally, when they cast these characters, they look for the most overt stereotypical types, assuming the audience wants to see that. A lot of Italian American actors know they'll get work if they can portray those types of people. It's a vicious cycle.

IW: What do you say to Italian American actors, producers, and writers who insist that negative stereotypes aren't harmful?

CF: Michael Imperiole said he didn't think *The Sopranos* really hurt Italian Americans. In his view, it didn't stop them from being

accepted at colleges or joining any professions. He misses the point. When impressionable, young Italian-American boys see the foul-mouthed goons on *The Sopranos* being glorified, or see how the buffoonish macho behavior on *Jersey Shore* is celebrated in the media, it could easily give them a false idea of what they need to be like as Italian Americans to be noticed or admired. This could lead to all the wrong behavior, and that ultimately could hurt them in their life choices. Almost every portrayal of Italian Americans in the popular media portrays them as anti-intellectual. How can that negative stereotype not have a bad effect?



IW: Have you ever communed with Garry Marshall about the travails of being an Italian writer/creator in the media?

CF: I've never met Garry Marshall. It's interesting that "The Fonz" was both a stereotypical but also positive character in *Happy*

Days. Almost all of Marshall's Italian characters in his shows (Laverne DeFazio and her father, Frank, as well as Carmine Ragusa) were hard working, honest people, even if they weren't highly educated. The dumb ones on *Laverne and Shirley* were not Italian Americans. Tony Danza is another example of that on *Who's the Boss?* But Marshall didn't create that.

IW: Dean Martin was quite proud of his Italian roots. He even objected to the way Italians were stereotyped in *The Godfather*. Did your paths ever cross?

CF: No. Loved Dean, though. He was a good example of the types of Italian American entertainers we had at one time - Sinatra, Perry Como, and Julius LaRosa - who openly discussed their Italian roots. One could say the same for athletes like Joe DiMaggio and Rocky Marciano. Of course, that was also a time when many of the original Italian immigrants (their parents and grandparents) were alive. We have to face the fact that with the vast majority of immigrants no longer Italian, the culture is being dissipated. It's all the more reason to fight to keep the culture alive, and the positive aspects of it. It's also the reason to fight against the portrayal of stereotypical Italian characters, otherwise that's all people will associate with the great Italian people who made America strong. Frankly, the loss of the kind of values those Italian immigrants had has weakened our society.

The Godfather (cont'd from p.15)

ple, that real-life wiseguys, impressed by the “classiness” of the fictional Don Vito Corleone in *The Godfather*, began cleaning up their own verbiage and dressing in three-piece suits. And the real-life inspiration for the fictional Don Vito Corleone—another Vito, the New York crime boss Vito Genovese—was far from a kind, grandfatherly figure. He murdered people, made millions off of heroin, and died in prison. One can’t imagine him cavorting happily in a tomato garden with a child.

In short, “reel” Italian gangsters overtook “real” Italian gangsters in the public’s imagination. Even though 99.9% of Italians, here and in Italy, had nothing to do with crime or criminal gangs, *The Godfather* became the holy gospel of the Italian immigrant experience, and the kick-ass Corleones became role models of toughness to Americans from all walks of life.

One can only imagine what Coppola must think now when he sees his classical dialogue and nomenclature applied to doddering street thugs.

Objective journalists delight in playing up Italian thugs’ nicknames, or quoting lines from the movie while covering court cases. FBI agents and up-and-coming state’s attorneys know that prosecuting Italian surnamed gamblers will move them up the career ladder. Politicians such as former New York mayor Rudy Giuliani, who prosecuted mob guys, frequently mimics Don Vito Corleone at public fundraisers—not to scare people, but to amuse them.

Essentially, Coppola’s work of art launched an age of ridicule.

A DEEPLY FLAWED CULTURE?

Talk to any average Italian American across the nation and ask him if anyone in his family is a criminal, associates with criminals, or raises his kids to be criminals. The answer will be a largely resounding, “No. We’re good Americans.” Why, then, do so many of them embrace a film that portrays them as bad Americans? How can they not see that the fictional Don Vito Corleone, as former New York governor Mario Cuomo once pointed out, is basically a caricature of their own fathers, grandfathers, and great-grandfathers who were genuine “men of honor”—that is, hard-working Americans? Why do they not distinguish between the form of *The Godfather* (its cinematic skill) and its content (the negative imagery)?

In addition to living vicariously through its tough-guy characters, millions of Italian Americans—men and women—still worship *The Godfather* because it provides a nebulous sense of



The Godfather pioneered the blending of Italian culture with criminals. Here, Michael Corleone’s first child is baptized, complete with Latin liturgy.

Essentially, Coppola’s work of art launched an age of ridicule

pride about their heritage. In truth, they probably know very little, if anything, about Italy or Italian culture. Watching *The Godfather* provides them, they think, with a direct pipeline to it. (“Yes, I’ve been to Italian weddings like that”....“I love cannoli”....“My grandfather had a tomato garden just like Don Vito’s”).

Watching a film is much easier than actually reading a book or traveling to Italy.

This “dumbing down” isn’t unique to Italian Americans, of course; however, the extent to which they refuse to move beyond the godfather image is disturbing. One can understand, if not condone, culturally ignorant Italian Americans from the post-WWII era embracing the macho of mafia lore, but there is no such excuse today. Assimilation has taken place. We live in an era of so-called sensitivity. Stereotyping is no longer accepted.

Sadly, what the previous generation has passed down to the current one is the same sense of ethnic fatalism characteristic of their immigrant grandparents—who, to be fair, were also cruelly caricatured by the popular media over a century ago. It is basically the psychological equivalent of a shoulder shrug, a gesture which echoes the sense of shame and low self-esteem likewise inflicted upon their greenhorn ancestors: “Don’t make waves...Stop speaking Italian...We are inferior...We’re lucky that America let us come here.”

In fact, the Founding Fathers of our country rejected their English homeland and took inspiration from another nation: Italy. It was from classical Rome and the Italian Renaissance that people like Jefferson, Franklin,

and Adams took succor. There is even a real “godfather,” if you will, who guided our new nation: the political writer Filippo Mazzei, who provided his Virginia neighbor, Thomas Jefferson, with feedback and ideas for the Declaration of Independence.

The rejection of classical Italian culture, or even an appreciation of notable Italians throughout American history, is what has led to the current erosion of any sense of genuine ethnic pride. It is a long, sad slide from real people like Mazzei to the fictional Don Vito to the panoply of goombas, guidos, and reality show rejects who permeate every American media outlet today.

CINEMATIC SCARLET LETTER

If the media is your source of knowledge, Italian Americans top the chart for criminal mischief. Thanks to *The Godfather*, America doesn’t enjoy hearing about the endless war on drugs against Hispanic and Asian criminals. Corporate crime is multi-ethnic and boring, and Eastern European mega-thieves who regularly fleece America have little cultural romance about (Cont’d. on p. 30)

Godfather (cont'd. from p.29)



This classic scene of Don Corleone with his grandson in an Italian American garden allows the viewer to feel the humanity in this thief and murderer. Both Puzo and Coppola reached deeply into their love of heritage to imbue gangsters with traits of their good relatives.

them. But these criminals needn't fear the spotlight when a don or a wiseguy hits the newsprint. In the media's eyes, thirty-year-old mob crimes consistently outrank today's mass murders or terrorist bombings. Don Vito Corleone's fictional shadow looms large.

In his seminal book, *The Story of English*, writer Robert MacNeil explains why: "Hollywood's love affair with gangster movies has ensured a wide dissemination of criminal slang. The fact that these words—in the minds of many—now come with Italian accents, has to do with the power of the media, not the mafia."

Such distortion and derision came much earlier, however, in a template magnified by no less than the U.S. government, which held a series of three Congressional hearings on gamblers and low-lives during the post-WWII era: the Kefauver Commission of 1954, the Valachi Hearings of 1963, and the President's Commission on Organized Crime of 1967. Such Congressional hearings, if held today, and if focused on other ethnic groups, would immediately be denounced by the media as fostering negative stereotyping.

The results of those investigations, skewed toward a secret criminal organization called *La Cosa Nostra*, allegedly run by Italian Americans and controlling crime in all fifty states, took hold of the public imagination. Puzo's novel and Coppola's film added the mythology and the cultural texture just as Da Vinci and Michelangelo transformed the Bible from words to paintings. Scholars who exposed the media's obsession with Italian criminals, such as Professor Dwight Smith in his 1974 book *The Mafia Mystique*, were lonely voices in the wilderness. Solid research can't compete with Hollywood hype.

Predictably, most Italian Americans fell for the hype; they were all-too-eager to embrace this grafting of their culture to outsized criminals on the big screen. It was magic to see "an Italian story" sweep America. Pizzerias, delis, and gift shops became amplifiers of the message that the Italians were the big shots. Move over Murder, Inc., stand aside Asian Tongs. Suddenly, other ethnic crime syndicates were minor league. It is noteworthy that no other American ethnic group has ever achieved the cinematic status of Italians in crime, despite scattered attempts by various filmmakers (e.g., *The Yakuza* by Sydney Pollack, *Once Upon a Time in America* by Sergio Leone, and *The Road to Perdition* by Sam Mendes).

AMERICA'S ETCH-A-SKETCH

Unlike pioneer filmmaker D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* (1915), the scandalous civil war epic which demonized African Americans, *The Godfather* won't "sleep with the fishes" very soon. As demonstrated by that last sentence, the film's famous catch-phrases, and its story of family loyalty, have become part of accepted Americana. It is even a favorite film of President Barack Obama — a cutting irony, given that a former president of the United States, Woodrow Wilson, praised Griffith's racist masterpiece ("It is history written in lightning!"). Times and sensibilities have changed, and yet the idea of Italians-as-criminals holds strong. The content of the film isn't seen as prejudicial at all. Indeed, in the film *You've Got Mail*, Tom Hanks's character refers to *The Godfather* as "the source of all wisdom."

A few years ago, the American Film Institute voted *The Godfather* the second-greatest American film of all time, after *Citizen Kane*. It has even crept into *Sight & Sound* magazine's famous "Critic's Poll," a Top Ten list of all-time great movies voted on by critics around the world every ten years. Yet, in the final analysis, is *The Godfather* truly an

original work of art, or of propaganda masquerading as art—a blurring of fact and fantasy?

Propaganda is a technique whereby facts are selectively omitted in order to collectively influence an audience, either to buy a product or, in this case, to accept an image of a community. And propaganda quite often uses stereotypes—that is, a limited way of looking at a particular ethnic group, over and over again.

In 1968, when a down-and-out novelist named Mario Puzo needed to erase some gambling debts, he knew that writing a mafia story would catch on enough to make some money. Newspapers and TV Congressional hearings had long conditioned public perceptions. What he could not have predicted is that, when his pulp novel was finally turned into a movie, he had successfully melded Italian culture and criminality into one.

As it turned out, the film broke box-office records, and it remained, for over a decade, one of the highest-grossing American movies of

(Cont'd. on p. 31)

Godfather (cont'd. from p.30)

all-time, surpassing even *Gone With the Wind*. To add icing on top of the cannoli cake, American film critics, with few exceptions (John Simon and Stanley Kauffmann among them), praised Coppola's work as "the greatest gangster movie ever made in this country" (so wrote the *New Yorker's* Pauline Kael).

FIRST DO NO HARM

Some high-profile Italian Americans did pan the film, particularly singers Tony Bennett (born Anthony Benedetto) and Dean Martin (born Dino Crocetti). Bennett called the film's linking of crime with Italian culture "pernicious," adding, "It gives the impression that organized crime is all Italian, when, in fact, it consists of many nationalities." Martin didn't like what it did to the Italian people: "There was no call for that," he told reporter Kay Gardella of the *New York Daily News*. "I've met gangsters in real-life, and they weren't Italian. They were an Irishman, a Jew, and an all-American type."

In 1974, the St. Louis priest and social activist Father Sal Polizzi told *TIME Magazine* that "every time someone uses the word 'mafia', they take away my civil rights." Thirty six-years later, in 2010, Father Polizzi—whose parents were first-generation Sicilians—hadn't changed his views: "Can you believe they've been showing that movie all day on cable, and on Thanksgiving on top of it? What an absolute disgrace. I still go out of my way to tell people that [*The Godfather*] is an insult to both my mother and my father."

In 1987, the *Chicago Tribune* columnist Mike Royko, a non-Italian, even coined the phrase "The Godfather Syndrome." Royko, who was defending then-New York governor Mario Cuomo against charges of "oversensitivity" for speaking out against anti-Italian slurs, noted how Coppola's film perpetuated a stereotype so powerful that it made objective journalists view Italian surnamed politicians with suspicion.

Indeed, there is a veritable laundry list of Italian American pols whose careers were hampered by "The Godfather Syndrome":

Senator John Pastore (D-RI), a popular potential VP candidate for President Johnson's reelection campaign (he was nixed after aides pointed out that his "eye-talian" last name would be a handicap, given the 1963 Valachi organized crime hearings);

Joseph Alioto, the dynamic mayor of San Francisco in the 1960s who successfully sued *LOOK Magazine* for defamation for associating him with criminals, but who later lost bids both for California governor and a possible VP spot with Jimmy Carter;



Making Michael Corleone a war hero was another propaganda tool Puzo used to give the Corleone Family "American" credentials.

In real life, his ilk would be counterfeiting ration cards, running a black market, and helping the Allies restore the Mafia to Sicily.

the late Albert Rosellini, the reform-minded governor of Washington State during the 1960s whose comeback bid in the mid-70s was derailed by "Godfather" caricatures;

and the late Geraldine Ferraro (D-NY), the first female vice presidential candidate on a major ticket (1984), whom ABC-TV's Sam Donaldson challenged on national television to prove her family wasn't in the *Cosa Nostra*.

Even intellectual former Governor Mario Cuomo, once considered a serious contender for the U.S. Presidency, refused to proceed with a campaign in 1991, citing concerns about how negative media coverage would affect his family. It remains to be seen if his son Andrew, the current New York governor, will be able to transcend "the Godfather Syndrome" should he make his own planned bid for the White House in 2016.

MEDIA LAND VS. REALITY

Anyone who watches the myriad cable stations finds a fiber-optic America that is a lot different than the one we actually live in. Nearly every TV series and movie is overloaded with minority and female super characters, whether on a fictitious police force, a hospital staff, or legal practice. Judging by these shows, America has successfully transcended racism, anti-feminism, anti-Semitism, and homophobia. But one group still remains a stock character in Media Land: the Italian American. Need a mobster? Need a white guy with serious flaws? Need a bumbling comical sidekick? These voids are filled easily with characters having Italian surnames.

The Godfather saga and its progeny continue to dominate the cable stations regardless of how dated they are. *The Godfather*

(Cont'd. on p. 32)

Not a few Italian American political careers were hampered by "The Godfather Syndrome."

Godfather (cont'd. from p.31)

saga of the 1970s can usually be found at least once a month somewhere on cable. And there are always *Godfather* festivals and anniversaries to put the series in a weeklong loop. It is easily more prevalent than the *Wizard of Oz*, *Casablanca*, and *Gone with the Wind*. Such an immortal presence, along with reruns of *The Sopranos*, *My Cousin Vinny*, *Analyze This*, and *GoodFellas*, ensures that succeeding generations of young Americans are being imprinted with Italian stereotypes.

Despite the abundance of Italian American lawyers, doctors, teachers, police officers, firemen, businesspeople, sports figures, and military types in real society, you will rarely find them on television or in the cinema. Italian media stereotyping is so ubiquitous that even Italian American actors have internalized the negativity and generally play non-Italic roles. Screenwriters use formulas to create characters. Why waste valuable screen time to

There were no good Italians in The Godfather saga, unless you count the peripheral wives and youngsters.

develop a suspicious character when you can give him or her an Italian name? The audience expects it and is always rewarded.

Remember, there were no good Italians in *The Godfather* saga, just different degrees of thieves and murderers unless you count the peripheral wives and youngsters. Ditto *GoodFellas* and *The Sopranos*.

In 2015, the Italic Institute of America completed a sampling of over 1,500 Hollywood movies made about Italians since 1928. Two statistics about *The Godfather* stood out:

- There was a sharp increase in films featuring Italians as gangsters after the film's release (81%), an increase which shows no signs of slowing down forty years later; and
- Of more than 500 films featuring Italians as gangsters, 87% of those movies portrayed fictional mobster characters with no basis in reality — in short, phony stereotypes, dreamed up by hack Hollywood screenwriters.

Like a virus, this pattern has since spread to American culture in general: advertisements, TV shows, and fictional novels continually feature evil or corrupt characters with Italian surnames or mannerisms. And, since the media make absolutely no attempt to balance such blanket negativity, “reel” Italians continue to overwhelm “real” Italians, an irony which would have dazzled—and

surely sickened — a writer like Luigi Pirandello (himself a Sicilian). The fact that there are more Italian cops than Italian crooks in America is seen as fantasy.

Filmmakers who have tried to fight this tsunami of negativity quickly found out what they were up against.

In 1996, for example, actor Stanley Tucci, frustrated at endless stereotypical portrayals of Italians on-screen, made *Big Night*, a comedy-drama about two Italian immigrant brothers in 1950s New Jersey (Tucci and Tony Shalhoub). Studio heads, although they liked the script, were uneasy about financing the film unless Tucci “put a mob guy in it”—which, in their minds, made the film more palatable to audiences, more believable as an “Italian” story. Tucci refused. *Big Night* was eventually financed independently.

In a tragic irony, the people who have fostered this now-institutionalized prejudice were the Italic brains behind *The Godfather*: Mario Puzo and Francis Ford Coppola.

In 1999, just before he died, Puzo came clean about his motives: “Italian criminals never called each other godfather. Never. It was a term that I made up. I wanted to create a romantic myth, like the cowboy.”

And in 2003, in an interview in *Cigar Aficionado* magazine, Coppola shocked even his interviewer when he admitted that he didn't know anything about Italian criminals. Quoth Coppola: “I just assumed that Italian criminals were no different than regular Italians. I based them on my Italian relatives, who, of course, were not criminals. (Ed. note: Coppola's father, Carmine, was a respected musician in Arturo Toscanini's renowned NBC orchestra of the 1930s and 40s.) It was like making a film about Jewish traditions without knowing any Jewish traditions.”

* * *

CODA

It took decades, but D. W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* was finally put into proper context. It is rarely, if ever, shown; indeed, an announced screening in L.A. back in 2003 was canceled by the mere hint of a possible protest. It is now confined to art-house theaters or film study classrooms, where critics and instructors alike are careful to distinguish between the film's undeniable artistry (form) and its blatant racism (content).

In yet another example of cultural irony, the “D. W. Griffith Award,” given annually to a respected Hollywood filmmaker, had Griffith's named removed in 1999. It was seen as unseemly to give out an award tied to a filmmaker who managed to distort and uglify the soul of an entire American ethnic group via a single film.

And one of the chief proponents behind the change? Francis Ford Coppola!
