

Italy under Fascism



**WAS FASCISM THE FINAL CHAPTER
IN THE REUNIFICATION OF ITALY?**



ITALY UNDER FASCISM

THE QUEST TO RECREATE ROMAN ITALY

CONTENTS

Introduction.....	2
The Birth and Ascent of Fascism.....	3
Dealing with Conflicting Powers.....	9
The Corporative State.....	13
Romanization.....	18
Forging a Nation.....	22
Mass Indoctrination.....	28
The Cult of the Leader.....	32
National Discipline.....	36
Empire Building.....	41
Global Image.....	44
Collapse in 1943.....	49
Summary & Conclusion.....	55
Bibliography.....	57

This report is published under the aegis of Project Italia, the media arm of the Italic Institute of America, Inc., PO Box 818, Floral Park, NY 11002, ©2025 by the Italic Institute of America, Inc. All rights reserved. Project Italia is a trademark of the Italic Institute. Reproduction without permission is prohibited.

Direct all inquiries to: ItalicOne@italic.org. Website: www.italic.org

INTRODUCTION

Let us first address the myths and distortions which undermine any rational study of Fascism and its application to Italian society after the First World War.

Fascism is not synonymous with dictatorship or Nazism. Mussolini was a self-taught intellectual who saw Italy as a laboratory for fascism which had roots in the 19th Century in France and Italy. He was creating an operating system suited specifically to Italy. He and a handful of intellectuals, foremost among them Giovanni Gentile, sought to remake not merely Italian society but also the Italian character. Hitler didn't need to change the disciplined Germanic character, only give it direction. He didn't have to revamp German society, only apply Nazi control to existing institutions and underlying prejudices.

By the 20th Century, Italy was a mixture of ethnic roots, racked by two millennia of invasions and political divisions that was overlaid with papal rule. Poverty and Catholicism, mostly in the South, had left the masses ignorant and cynical. Fascism first needed to restore a memory of the glorious Roman past, then reinstitute those previously successful Roman values via mass indoctrination. Italians were to be disciplined and warlike.

Mussolini was able to achieve a remarkable working relationship with the Church, the House of Savoy, and the Italian masses by solving a number of problems that had plagued the nation, sometimes for centuries. Among these were ending political chaos, using a Fascist Militia to control the streets; ending labor strikes by imposing mandatory arbitration; reclaiming marshland to create 147 new towns; negotiating the *Lateran Accords* with the Pope to establish Vatican City (so ending the Church's claim to Rome) and suppressing organized crime plaguing Sicily and southern regions.

These were only some of the problems addressed that gained Fascism the consensus of 44 million Italians. Without destroying the monarchy or the Church, Fascism created a new platform from which to remake the nation. Fascist theory and economic necessity tied strategic industries such as shipbuilding, energy, and steel together with government participation. Supersized holding companies were formed to allow

Rome to direct the nation's resource use but still retain private ownership.

During the Depression, these adaptations were recognized by President Franklin Roosevelt, who sent representatives to study Fascist reforms. The NRA (National Recovery Act) of 1933 was FDR's attempt to replicate Mussolini's authoritarian powers to harness American industry and regulate labor; however the U.S. Supreme Court would not let the NRA stand. In 1935, it unanimously declared the law unconstitutional, ruling it was an infringement of the separation of powers.

Mussolini was neither a maniacal dictator nor a clown, as many histories paint him. The first ten years of his rule made him an international sensation, his name synonymous with excellence. (Cole Porter's original lyrics to *You're the Top!* were "you're the top, you're Mussolini.")

"Making the trains run on time" has been the subject of ridicule in so many histories of Fascism. Meant to downplay a Fascist accomplishment, it is collaterally an insult to the Italian character. The basic tenet of Fascist histories is to portray Mussolini as a modern day Don Quixote who tried and failed to convert 44 million Italians from hardscrabble peasants, cooks, and singers into a people to be reckoned with. This meme reached its height with the Second World War. Again, the insult was not solely to Mussolini and Fascism but to the Italian people themselves.

This report also examines the background and agents that caused the collapse of the Fascist government in July, 1943, when Mussolini was arrested and imprisoned by King Victor Emmanuel. That ill-planned act arguably plunged Italy into a nightmare worse than just its predictable defeat by the Allies.

Finally, many of the revelations and perspectives herein should not be construed as apologetic or biased just because they do not conform to existing histories. The Fascist Grand Council brought down Fascism in 1943 as the reality of national defeat by the Allies became obvious. This may be the ultimate proof that Fascism was not a blind cult but a purely Italian expression embraced by a variety of men.



The Birth and Ascent of Fascism

TURMOIL & REGIME CHANGE

THE ROOTS AND BIRTH OF FASCISM



The liquidation of Czar Nicholas and his family by Communists was not lost on Italy's monarchy.



The 1917 Communist takeover of Russia and Lenin's 1919 goal to export Communism gave birth to Fascism.



Palmiro Togliatti, a founder of the Italian Communist Party in 1921, promoted societal chaos.

“FASCISM IS NOT AN ARTICLE FOR EXPORT.” -MUSSOLINI

The word “fascism” was derived from the Latin *fascēs* meaning a bundle of rods which represented the power of Roman officials to punish lawbreakers. Wooden rods were used for minor offenses. An axe was mounted on the bundle to represent the death penalty.

The word *fascio* is also Italian for a bundle or group. In the late 19th Century, Sicilian workers banded together in so-called *fasci* in labor struggles.

The Fascist movement was founded in 1919 by Mussolini and other veterans of the First World War. The *Partito Nazionale Fascista* (PNF) was launched in Milan in 1921 to compete in elections. The *fascēs* symbolized the party's intent to restore Roman martial values to Italy and to impose order on the chaotic aftermath of the war.

The First World War, even in victory, had drained the nation financially and spiritually. Political turmoil, spilling over from the Russian Revolution and the realization that the old European order had sent millions of the working class to their deaths, left Italians anxious for change. Socialists precipitated factory and agricultural strikes that paralyzed the nation. They hit the streets and mocked war veterans as dupes and enablers of the old order. They were joined by ex-soldiers who suffered from brutal treatment by their officers. Some 750 soldiers were summarily executed during the war to instill discipline in the ranks. After the war thousands of Italian POWs returning from Austrian and German prison camps were

again interned by the Italian military until 1919 to weed out those who had deserted.

Fascism became the refuge for patriotic veterans. The anthem of the new party was *Giovanezza* (“Time of Youth”) adopted from the nationalist movement headed by poet and war hero Gabriele D’Annunzio (next page). The song meant to convey leadership by a new generation with vigor and ideas to transform and lift the national spirit.

It was from D’Annunzio’s nationalist group that Fascist slogans evolved such as *Me Ne Frego!* (“I don’t give a damn!” [about death]) and *A Noi!* (“To us! [the power]”). So too, the new Italian cheer *Eia Eia Alala!* (like Hip-hip-hurrah).

Squads of veterans, who trained as shock troops (*Arditi*) during the war and now called *squadristi*, countered Socialist and unionists in the streets and factories. Communism, which was then ravaging Russia and seeking violent extension into western Europe, sought to control the other leftist elements.

Using clubs (*manganelli*) and the laxative castor oil, the Fascists soon dominated. Unlike the Leftists, Fascists became allies of factory and land owners because they defended traditional society—capitalism, religion, and labor peace. The House of Savoy saw Fascists as less of a threat to the monarchy than the rising Communist one. Indeed, Lenin had just murdered the Romanovs.

THE MARCH ON ROME



Before Mussolini there was Gabriele D'Annunzio (above). The poet and war hero set the tone and the trappings of pre-Fascism. D'Annunzio defined the new, aggressive Italy when he and his followers illegally occupied the free city of Fiume.



Fascist Party leadership during the March on Rome:

(l-r) Italo Balbo, Emilio De Bono, Mussolini, Cesare De Vecchi, and Michele Bianchi

Mussolini's four subordinates were known as the *Quadrumvirate*.

MUSSOLINI WAS NOT ELECTED BUT APPOINTED

In 1919-20, Italians had a preview of what veterans would do under inspired leadership. Gabriele D'Annunzio, a poet and national war hero, launched an unauthorized invasion of the 'free state' of Fiume adjacent to Italy's Istrian peninsula on the Adriatic Sea. The city contained a largely Italian population but had been declared an independent entity by the Versailles Treaty in 1919, at the behest of U.S. President Woodrow Wilson. D'Annunzio rejected the agreement and his occupation caused international complications.

D'Annunzio was a proto-Fascist, and his violent nationalism was adopted by the new Fascist Party. Fiume was later annexed by Italy's Fascist government in 1924.

D'Annunzio had hit a nerve with his actions and his labeling Italy's World War I meager gains at Versailles as a "mutilated victory." Just as Germans saw Versailles as a *diktat* rather than a treaty, Italian nationalists saw it reneging on the Secret Treaty of London (1915) that brought Italy to the Allied side with promises of Germany's African colonies and lands along the eastern Adriatic (i.e. Dalmatian Coast).

Seen together—the mutilated victory, the threat of Communism, and the civil chaos—Italy was ripe for new leadership.

On 28 October 1922, the Fascists began a "March on

Rome" from all parts of Italy to topple the parliamentary government of Prime Minister Luigi Facta. Clearly, Facta could not control the chaos that enveloped Italy. Facta asked the King for military intervention but was refused, no doubt the monarch feared the bloodshed and the optics of his active duty troops fighting war veterans. On October 30th, the King appointed Mussolini prime minister without consulting Facta.

That Mussolini's "coup" was relatively bloodless was due to the King's intervention. Visions of the 1917 Russian Revolution and the on-going Red vs. White civil war, which didn't end until 1923, were still haunting European minds, especially those of the remaining monarchs like the Savoyes. Better a bloodless right-wing coup than a bloody civil war and possible Communist counterrevolution as occurred in Russia.

"We may congratulate Italy that she has so far escaped bloodshed. The discipline of the fascists has been good, their success in the occupation of important towns was immediate, and the action of the King perhaps averted what chance there was of civil war."

[*The Guardian*, editorial of 30 October 1922]

Thus began what the Fascists called the *ventennio*, the 20 years of Fascist rule, 1922 - 1943.

GRAND COUNCIL OF FASCISM

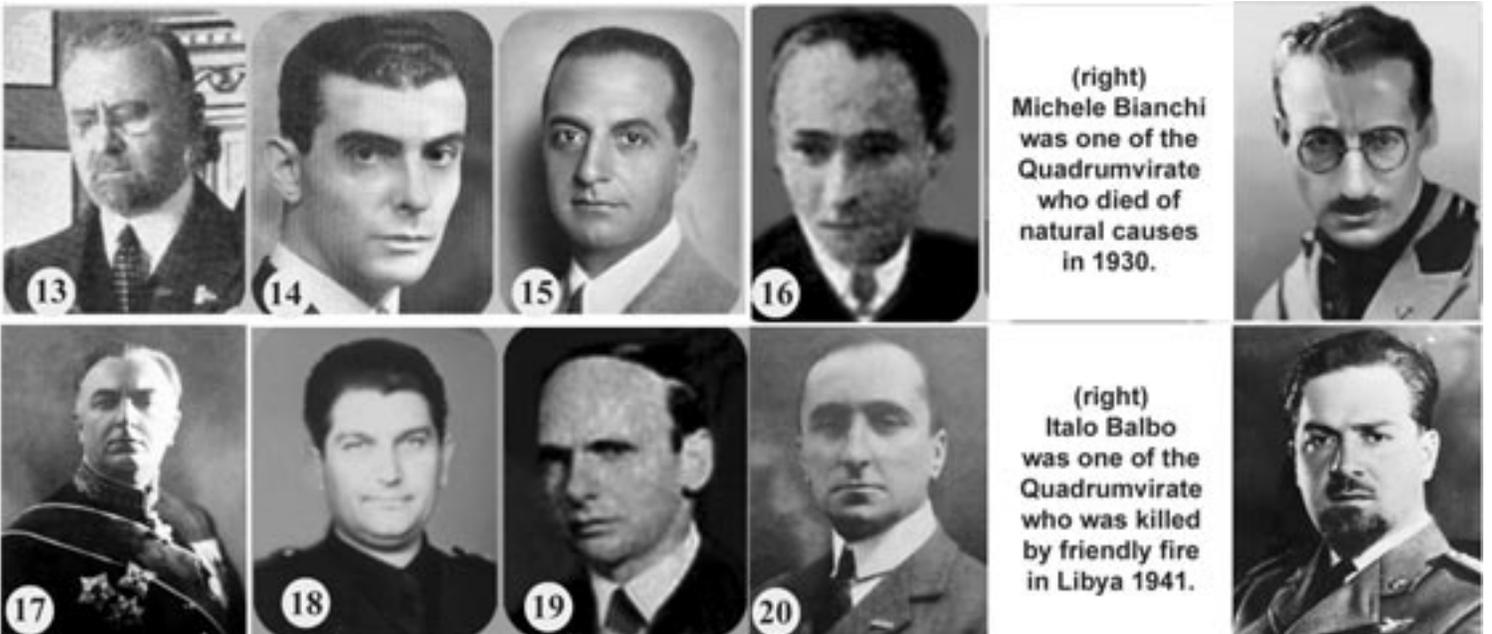


THE GRAND COUNCIL WAS AN ADVISORY BODY

Organized in 1923 as a quasi-government body, the Grand Council legally became part of the government in 1928. Membership was limited to 20 or 30 Party members serving 3-year terms. However, the Quadrumvirate* were permanent. Meetings were to be monthly, but Mussolini regulated the schedule. Sessions usually began at 10:00 PM with Mussolini presiding. It was described as the “*brain, heart, and arm of the Fascist Revolution.*” [Corriere della Sera, 15 Nov. 1927]

Due to deaths, term limits, or Fascist Party service category, members of the Council varied over the course of Fascist rule. Neither Mussolini nor the Party or King gave the Grand Council more than a consultive and delegative power over the Head of Government (i.e. Mussolini).

*The original Quadrumvirate in 1922 were De Vecchi (5), De Bono (9), Balbo and Bianchi (see below)



(right)
Michele Bianchi
was one of the
Quadrumvirate
who died of
natural causes
in 1930.

(right)
Italo Balbo
was one of the
Quadrumvirate
who was killed
by friendly fire
in Libya 1941.

THE VOTE THAT DOOMED FASCISM

Members at the Meeting 25-26 July 1943

- 1 - ALBERTO DE STEFANI
- 2 - ALFREDO DE MARSICO
- 3 - ANNIO BIGNARDI
- 4 - CARLO PARESCHI
- 5 - CESARE MARIA DE VECCHI (Quadrumvirate)
- 6 - DINO ALFIERI
- 7 - DINO GRANDI
- 8 - EDMONDO ROSSONI
- 9 - EMILIO DE BONO (Quadrumvirate)
- 10 - GALEAZZO CIANO
- 11 - GIACOMO ACERBO
- 12 - GIOVANNI BALELLA
- 13 - GIOVANNI MARINELLI
- 14 - GIUSEPPE BASTIANNI
- 15 - GIUSEPPE BOTTAI
- 16 - LUCIANO GOTTARDI
- 17 - LUIGI FEDERZONI
- 18 - TULLIO CIANETTI (Reversed his vote next day)
- 19 - UMBERTO ALBINI
- 20 - GIACOMO SUARDO (abstained)

The Motion of July 24-25, 1943

The immediate restoration of all state functions is necessary, assigning to the Crown, to the Grand Council, to the government, to the Parliament, and to the corporate groups the duties and responsibility established by our statutory and constitutional laws; invites the government to beseech His Majesty the king, to whom turns the loyal and trusting heart of the whole nation, to assume effective command of the Armed Forces of land, sea, and air for the honor and salvation of the homeland, under article 5 of the Constitution, the supreme initiative that our institutions assign to him, and which have always been throughout our nation's history the glorious heritage of our august House of Savoy.

- Dino Grandi

IN JULY 1943, AT ITS FINAL MEETING, THE COUNCIL WITHDREW ITS SUPPORT OF MUSSOLINI.

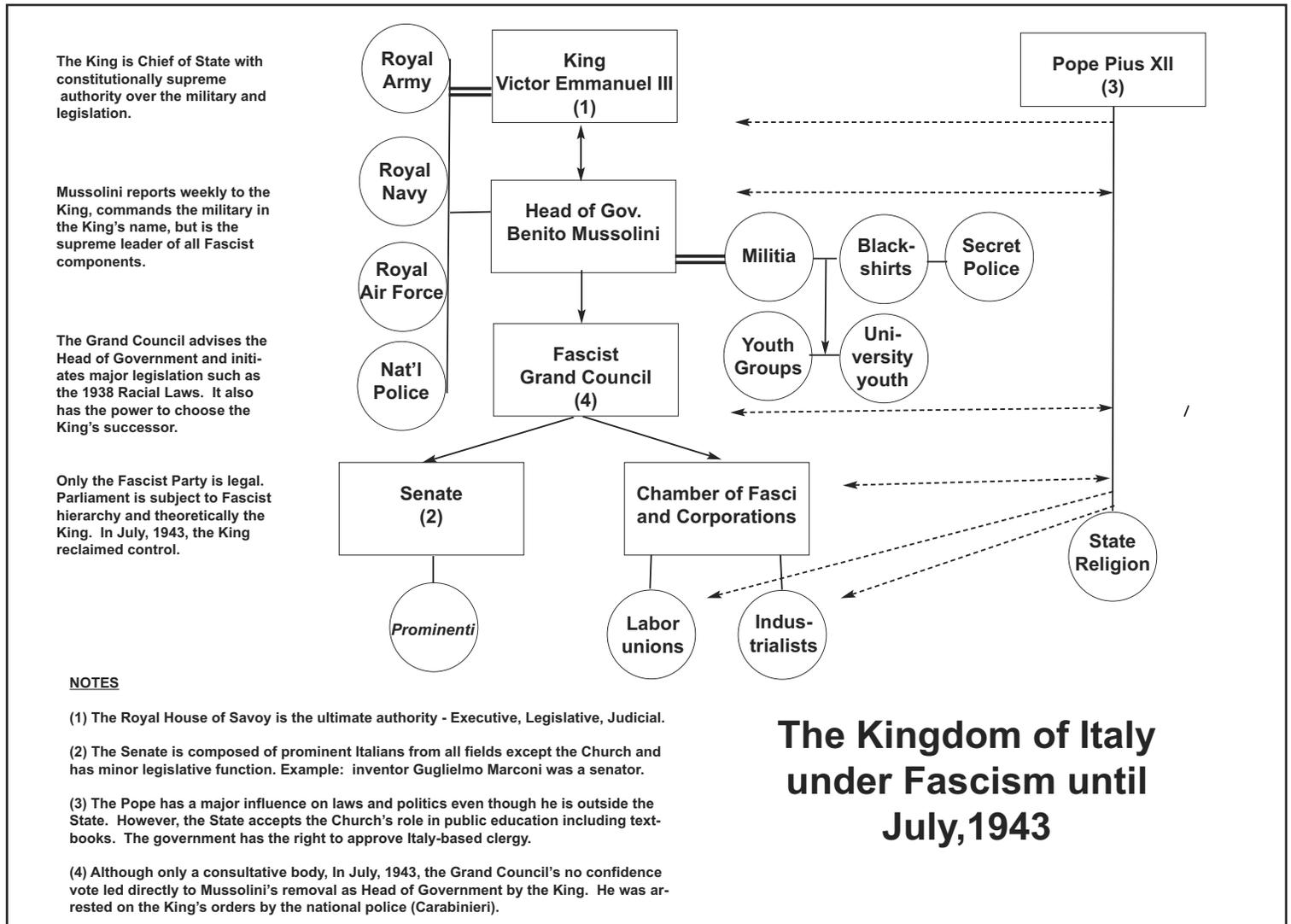
The 28 men pictured on these pages were the members on 25 July 1943, in attendance for the crucial vote that doomed Fascist rule. The 20 listed on p. 6 voted against Mussolini. At the time, Mussolini considered the vote non-binding and only advisory. However, he realized that the 'vote of no confidence' put the regime at risk. (see p.52)

Members who voted to keep Mussolini in power on the night of 24-25 July 1943 (see p.52)

- 1 - ANTONIO CASANUOVA
- 2 - CARLO ALBERTO BIGGINI
- 3 - CARLO SCORZA
- 4 - ENZO EMILIO GALBIATI
- 5 - ETTORE FRATTARI
- 6 - GAETANO POLVERELLI
- 7 - GUIDO BUFFARINI GUIDI
- 8 - ROBERTO FARINACCI



A NEW POWER STRUCTURE



ITALY WAS NOW A DYARCHY: DUAL POWER PLUS A POPE

One overriding characteristic of Fascist rule was that it was not forced on Italians. Not all Italians accepted or supported it during its 20-year control, but few governments, including liberal democracies then or now, imprisoned or executed as low a number of “subversives” as Fascist Italy. Mussolini preferred internal exile (*confino*) for dissidents. Even during wartime, soldiers were not decimated to “motivate” performance.

Mussolini was a popular leader, even as his Fascist Party *apparatis* were often accused of nepotism, bribery, and intimidation. To label him a “totalitarian dictator” is without foundation. Although he controlled the media, the secret police, and Parliament, he did not control the military (the King's preserve) or the religious pulpits. Mussolini's entire rule depended on a working relationship with the

House of Savoy and the Pope. Compare this to the Nazi regime which had no monarchy, established church, or hierarchy above Hitler.

Mussolini reported twice weekly to King Victor Emmanuel, right up to his final day and subsequent arrest by that monarch. That the King himself was under the *Duce's* “spell” for twenty years and rubber stamped Fascist policies and even wars, still does not make Mussolini a totalitarian dictator. In fact, his political demise was initiated by a vote of no confidence by the Fascist Grand Council in July, 1943, but even this was not binding constitutionally.

Technically, the King exceeded his own powers (see p.11), a justification by Mussolini for forming his rival Salò Republic in 1943.

Dealing with Conflicting Powers

A ROCKY RELATIONSHIP WITH THE HOUSE OF SAVOY



PM Luigi Facta wanted the King to stop the Fascist March on Rome with the Army. Instead, the King dismissed Facta.



King Victor Emmanuel III remained the Head of State, eventually ousting the Fascist dictator in 1943.



When Hitler visited Italy in 1938, the King was his host. The protocol irked Mussolini and Hitler.

UNTIL THE DAY HE LOST POWER MUSSOLINI REPORTED TO THE KING BI-WEEKLY

Problems with the monarchy began in 1923 when Fascists became a major party in Parliament. A Grand Council of Fascism was established with consulting powers that infringed on the monarchy's powers. On 12 January, the Council abolished the *squadristi* (armed squads) and established the Fascist Militia (Voluntarily Militia for National Security) to formalize its legal status.

By 1925, Mussolini was essentially a dictator, but not totalitarian. The Fascist song *Giovanezza* was played along with the *Marcia Reale* as the national anthems. Rules for the military required the Roman salute if not wearing a cap. The Royal Air Force was considered a Fascist development and all airplanes carried the fasces symbol along with the Savoy banner.

To counter the *Carabinieri* (paramilitary police), which owed their complete loyalty to the King, Mussolini launched the OVRA, a secret police (*Opera Vigilanza Repressione Anti-Fascismo*) loyal only to him.

In 1928, the *Statuto Albertino* (i.e., the 1848 constitution), which the House of Savoy imposed on the partly reunified Italy in 1861, was overridden by new Fascist laws. The Grand Council of Fascism was made the ultimate au-

thority of the State with the power to choose the King's successor after death or abdication. Victor Emmanuel was appalled by this "violation" of traditional heredity, but publicly accepted it. The Grand Council had only an advisory capacity over Mussolini, a distinction that would confuse events in 1943 (see p. 53).

In 1938, the Fascist parliament bestowed the rank of Marshal of the Empire on Mussolini and Victor Emmanuel. It was meant to honor Mussolini for establishing the Empire with the conquest of Abyssinia in 1936. To make the honor more palatable to the King—the military's Commander-in-Chief—he was included in the honor. But, according to Mussolini's memoirs, "*The King was white with rage.*" No such designation existed in Italy, and as a military rank it was a royal prerogative, not legislative. Again, the King berated Mussolini but accepted the title publicly.

Also in 1938, diplomatic protocol angered Mussolini during Adolf Hitler's state visit to Italy. Hitler was diplomatically a guest of the King and protocol required that the Prime Minister (Mussolini) stand aside at all ceremonies. The King no doubt knew the effect on the *Duce* and must have relished in his embarrassment.

CONVERTING TRADITIONAL ITALY



Count Galeazzo Ciano married Mussolini's daughter Edda, which gave Mussolini ties to the aristocracy. Ciano would become Italy's Foreign Minister. (Right) Ciano with Hitler in 1939.



Irish assassin Violet Gibson grazed Mussolini's nose.

THE YEARS 1925 AND 1926 SOLIDIFIED FASCIST RULE THROUGH INTIMIDATION AND LUCK

On 6 April 1924 Italy saw its last free election. The Fascists had led the government since October, 1922 but were not in full control. In the interim, Mussolini had solved the Fiume issue (see p. 5 and p.45) giving a boost to Fascist popularity. The election results gave 355 seats to the Fascists, leaving the other parties with only 160 seats.

Fascism was legally ascending to dominant political power. Mussolini's political and diplomatic credentials were on the right course until 11 June 1924. On that day, the Socialist parliamentarian Giacomo Matteotti went missing (photo on p.35). An investigation was undertaken and in mid-August Matteotti's body was discovered buried in a ditch outside of Rome.

Matteotti had died or was killed during a kidnapping by rogue Fascists. Mussolini had his first political crisis.

On January 3rd, 1925 Mussolini addressed Parliament on the 'Matteotti Affair.' Rather than perform any acts of contrition to calm the opposition, Mussolini took responsibility for the death but dared the opposition to remove him, such was the power of his Militia. In protest the Socialists and other opposition boycotted Parliament, which only increased Fascist voting power.

Within three days opposition clubs, offices, and groups were dissolved by the Fascist Interior Ministry and the press severely curtailed. Dictatorship was in progress.

Mussolini's political power was enhanced by four unsuccessful assassination attempts (see p.37). He gained the sympathy of the Italian people as well as a near religious

belief in his destiny to lead. (In contrast, Adolf Hitler would later achieve dictatorial power with the 1933 burning of the Reichstag and subsequent "Enabling Act.")

King Victor Emmanuel now understood that he was becoming a figurehead, nominally Head of State. However, he was still the Commander-in-Chief of the military and national police (*Carabinieri*). Yet, he offered no opposition to Mussolini so long as the nation prospered and remained at peace.

What is overlooked in explaining why Fascism remained popular in Italy was the lack of alternative ideologies. Liberal democracy was seen as weak. The post-World War I period of civil disorder was a failing comparable to the inflationary nightmare liberal Weimar Germany underwent in 1923. The USSR revealed the barbarity of Communism with the execution of the Czar's family and the unnecessary famines in Ukraine. Even the United States presented no grand example from the Wall Street crash (1929) to the spreading Depression of the 1930s.

In 1930, Mussolini's daughter Edda married into royalty with Count Galeazzo Ciano. It was the only concrete tie Mussolini, son of a blacksmith, had with the aristocracy. It also bonded his government to the House of Savoy. Members of Italian aristocracy did not all agree with the transformation of the nation. Likewise, many generals hedged their loyalties throughout the years of Fascism. By 1943, with World War II closing in on Italy, these forces would lead to Mussolini's overthrow, promoted by his own royal son-in-law Ciano.

THE LATERAN ACCORDS



Mussolini signed the Lateran Treaty on 11 February 1929. His popularity soared among Italians, as well as Catholics across the globe and world leaders.



Settling the 'Roman Question' affected Catholics around the world. News of the treaty was a front page story.

THE CHURCH AND THE ITALIAN NATION RECONCILED

The Lateran Treaty, as it is known, settled a long-standing and bitter grudge between the popes and the Kingdom of Italy.

The "Roman Question," as it was called, stemmed from Italy's reunification (1860-1870). By 1870, the House of Savoy controlled all of Italy except the city of Rome, which was ruled by the Pope and defended by French troops. When France went to war with Prussia that year, French troops evacuated Rome and Italian troops moved in. The Pope considered himself a victim of Italian aggression, which had also taken the Church's lands in central Italy (four regions known as the Papal States). In protest he ordered all Catholics not to collaborate with the new Italy. He and his successors confined themselves to an area called the Vatican and even refused to use St. Peter's balcony to address the masses, lest they accidentally see 'Savoy' Rome in the distance. The popes hated the Savoyes and vice versa. The Seat of Catholicism was no more, just a group of buildings without sovereignty. The popes didn't travel beyond their miniscule domain, whether to other parts of Italy or beyond.

This situation hit home during the First World War (1915-1918) when the Italian government barred enemy diplomats from Germany and Austria-Hungary from visiting the Pope. Moreover, Catholics throughout Italy participated in the war effort contrary to the Pope's wishes. Things were getting complicated.

Enter Mussolini. Undertaking secret negotiations, the Fascist government and Pope Pius XI's representatives achieved an understanding known as the Lateran Accords. Formalized as a treaty between two sovereign states it was signed by Mussolini and the Pope's secretary of state.

The Pope's domain was recognized as a separate nation within an area to be named Vatican City. In return, the papacy recognized the Kingdom of Italy. Mussolini's government agreed to pay the papacy something like \$82 million for the regions it once possessed in central Italy. Further, the Kingdom adopted Roman Catholicism as the state religion, including restrictions on divorce and birth control.

The Corporative State

THE THIRD WAY

AUTARCHY: BUILDING A SELF-SUFFICIENT NATION

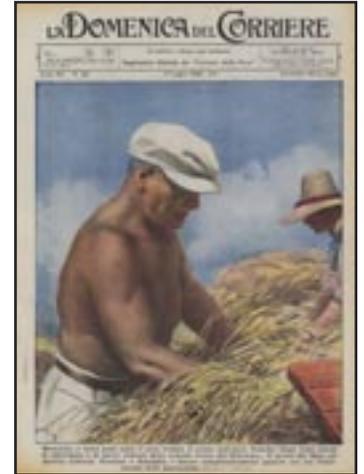


A FIAT tractor. By 1936, Italy became an industrialized nation.



The Cancano Dam at Alta Valtellina was completed in 1928.

Propaganda cover of Mussolini participating in the Battle for Wheat launched in 1925.



TACKLING OLD PROBLEMS AND MODERNIZING

Few can deny that *il Duce* became a human dynamo, tackling every problem that plagued Italy.

The economic downturn after the First World War and Italy's debt situation saw many industries near collapse. The only savior in many cases was government loans, but they came with strings—51% ownership. (Communism is 100% government ownership, Capitalism is 0% government ownership.) Fascism created major government institutions and state holding companies in Manufacturing (IRI), Real Estate (IMI), Energy (ENI), the National Institute for Exports and the Italian Institute of Tourism, to name a few, to direct capital and production goals in these vital industries.

Despite their Fascist origin, these corporate structures survived the war and helped produce a second economic miracle in the post-war Italy in the 1950s and 60s.

Fascist economic policy was to transform Italy into a world power without labor upheavals. Unions are forbidden under Communism and grudgingly tolerated under Capitalism. The Corporate State recast unions as syndicates tied with management within that industry, both controlled by the State. In each industry ("corporation"), a government council acted as a sort of supervisor and judge to establish work rules and conditions, formulate general policy and settle any disputes which arose in labor negotiations. Strikes and lockouts were made illegal.

Mussolini secured huge loans from the United States to build more hydroelectric dams for energy-poor Italy. The

peninsula could only produce 10% of the coal needed to energize the country, hence the need for hydroelectric. By 1929, 75% of the electricity in Italy's north was generated by clean hydroelectric. The South lacked water sources to match this proportion.

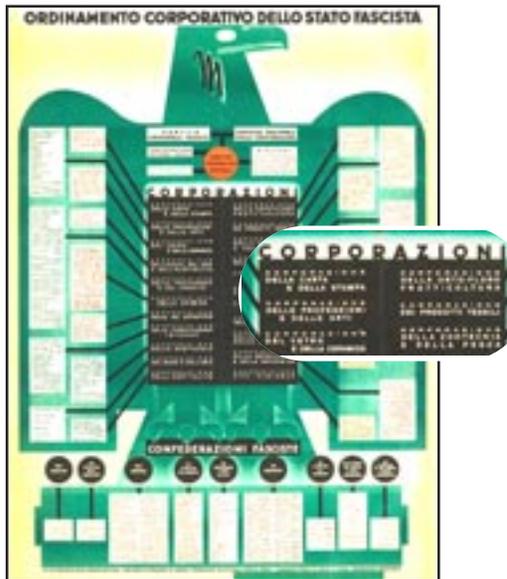
Banking was also reformed and centralized, and a reliable statistical service established for the first time. Fascist economic policies and reforms soon achieved very impressive results. In 1924, the national budget was balanced for the first time since the reunification of Italy in 1870.

Mussolini launched the *Battle for the Lira* at this time to strengthen Italy's global image. The goal of 90 Lire to 1£ (British Pound) allowed Italian industries to import more raw materials, and discouraged consumers from importing non-essential products. Italy's credit rating rose.

In 1936, Italy entered the ranks of the world's industrialized nations as the percentage of the population engaged in agriculture or related activity fell below 50 percent for the first time.

Mussolini launched a program of public works unprecedented in modern Europe, the highlights of which included a modern system of electric railroads. By 1938, much of Italy's malarial marshland had been drained, reclaiming some 350 square miles of unused land for agriculture and for scores of new towns, also reducing the curse of malaria. The new agricultural land helped win what was called the "Battle for Wheat," begun in 1925 to make Italy self-sufficient in grain with 5,000 new farms.

THE CORPORATE STATE



The Corporate State was explained in this clever poster.



The Italian Senate (upper house) remained a body of prominent Italians appointed by the King. Inventor and Fascist Guglielmo Marconi was one such member.



Fascist deputies meet in Parliament.

CONVERTING PARLIAMENT

“Fascism should more appropriately be called Corporatism because it is a merger of state and corporate power” -Mussolini

Pure capitalism did not work in pre-Mussolini Italy. Nor did it work smoothly in boom & bust America without some government regulation and safety nets. Post-WWI Italy was engulfed in almost constant economic turmoil characterized by a phenomenal number of strikes and worker violence. Weak parliamentary governments teetered on collapse and were reduced to the role of an ineffectual bystander; daily life was often chaotic. Even the trains didn't run on time.

The Corporate State was Mussolini's "middle way" between Communism and Capitalism. This way stressed 1) the collaboration of labor, business and government, 2) economic planning to best use limited resources, and 3) an industrial policy which promoted and subsidized promising new industries.

The Corporate State was the economic and social foundation of Fascist Italy. In March 1939, the Chamber of Deputies (lower house) was renamed the Chamber of Corporations wherein Italians were represented by their livelihoods, not geographically as before—for example, farmers and the food industry were represented in Parliament by the same Agriculture Corporation. The Italian economy was classified into twenty two confederations or corpora-

tions, one for each distinct occupation or business, comprised of both employers and employees. Private corporations were free to pursue capitalist goals but could not work against national interests. They were not allowed to control radio or newspapers.

Among the larger industries that were assigned a Corporation were: Agriculture, Manufacturing, Commerce, Internal Transport, Internal Communications, Sea & Air Transport, Banking & Insurance, Professions & Artists.

The Corporate State legislated minimum wages, paid vacations, the eight-hour workday and the forty-hour work week. It created a comprehensive system of social services through the Fascist National Institute of Social Welfare (INFPS). Welfare was not conceived as a public function, but carried out by the Party which targeted recipients based on political and population goals. The Institute oversaw pensions, disability, and owned hospitals, clinics, convalescent homes, thermal baths, even some resorts. Its social security funds were used for land reclamation, industrial redevelopment, and even to prepare settler colonies in Africa. By the 1940s, the Institute was financially overextended and did not survive the war.

The Fascist intellectuals who launched this corporative design were never able to complete the conversion or see the results of their radical overhaul. The war ended the experiment.

AUTARCHY THROUGH COLONIALISM



Italian residents in Italianized Benghazi,
Libya circa 1930



By the First World War total area of
Germany's African colonies ranked
third behind Great Britain and France.

THE BRITISH EMPIRE MODEL

The mass migrations of impoverished Italians solved many problems for a newly reunified Italy prior to Fascist rule. Fewer Italians relieved pressure on scarce farmland and reduced the mouths to feed. Cash remittances by the immigrants from North and South America brought in needed foreign exchange and were counted on in Italian budgets. Moreover, Italian exports grew as these overseas communities maintained a demand for traditional foods and cultural items. The Italian merchant marine expanded in tonnage as “birds of paradise”—emigrants who crossed the Atlantic for work, returning to wives and family frequently—and exports increased.

After the First World War, the United States severely restricted Italian immigration. In addition, assimilation eroded many of the ties second and third generations of Italian Americans had with the *homeland*. The Fascists now viewed Italy's “surplus” population as a means to replicate the secret of the Roman Empire: colonization. That empire was perpetuated by the export of the fecund Italic people throughout the Mediterranean, to govern and to romanize the native inhabitants. (see p.43)

In modern times, the empires of Great Britain and France had created self-sustaining economic models, albeit mercantile, that provided each mother country with natural resources, raw materials, and labor. But neither country had the surplus population to colonize posses-

sions in India, Indo-China, or Africa. Their hold on these colonies was tenuous but still viable after the war. In contrast, post-war Italy had only coastal Libya, Eritrea, and Somaliland to exploit. In truth, these were among the least promising in African resources.

However, if these possessions were fully pacified and prepared for settlements, Italian colonists could apply their ingenuity and myriad skills to make “deserts bloom” and discover natural resources.

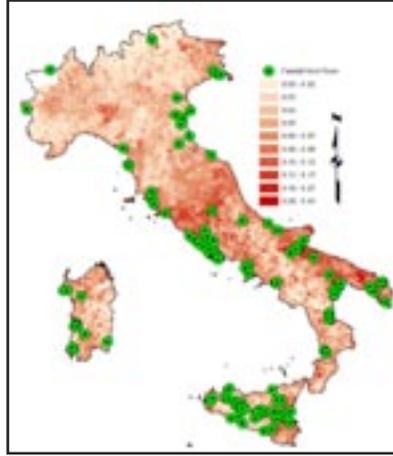
Moreover, in Fascist eyes Africa was not fairly or permanently allocated after Italy's victory in the First World War. The French and British took control of the extensive German colonies of what are now Namibia, Burundi, Rwanda, Tanzania, Togo, Ghana, and Cameroon.

There was one other potential colony coveted by Italians even before Fascism: Abyssinia. It was the only fully independent state in Africa; actually an empire ruled by the dominate Amharic ethnic group. It was not a happy place, as oppression of minorities prevailed and slavery was rampant—some 2 million enslaved by one British estimate. An Italian incursion in 1896 led to the annihilation of a force of 12,000 at the Battle of Adowa. The stain on Italy's honor would haunt the nation. Mussolini would later take revenge. (see p. 44)

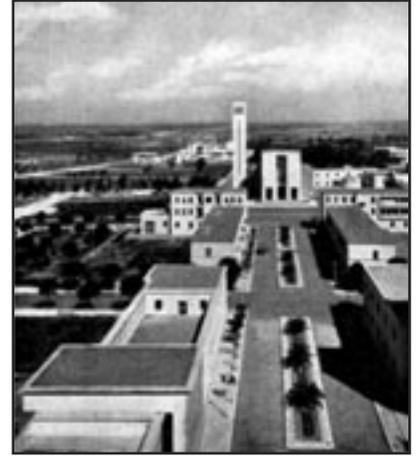
PROJECTS TO RAISE THE MEZZOGIORNO



The new city of Carbonia, Sardinia



Fascists created 147 new communities throughout Italy (green). The square at Sabaudia, a town which was founded in December, 1933, and built in less than nine months.



RECLAIMING LAND, NOT IMPOUNDING IT

“BONIFICARE LA TERRA PER BONIFICARE L’UOMO, BONIFICARE L’UOMO PER BONIFICARE LA RAZZA.”
 (“Reclaim the land to reclaim the man, reclaim the man to reclaim the race.”)

The regime depended on support from both landowners and peasants. Seizing and redistributing large estates was a Communist strategy abhorred by Fascists. Yet, arable land was a very limited commodity in mountainous Italy. For centuries, the Italic people had to contend with malarial marshland, especially in the south. Among these were the Pontine Marshes in Lazio, the Foggia Plain in Puglia, and southern Sardinia.

On December 24, 1928 the Mussolini Act was passed for the development of rural areas. The goal was to increase farmland and create a land-owning peasantry. The reclaimed lands would also redistribute the population from crowded regions and eliminate malaria. As a bonus, the new inhabitants would be that much more loyal to the regime.

The Pontine marshes had been drained by the Volsci, an ancient Italic tribe. But with their subjugation by the neighboring Romans, the drainage system was destroyed and the land reverted to a wilderness of bottomless bogs with humid swamps teeming with malaria. It remained

that way into the 20th Century.

What had vexed both the popes, who ruled the Pontine until 1871, and the Italian government before Fascism, became a propaganda victory for Mussolini. Beginning in 1928 his engineers launched the reclamation that eventually created the new province of Littoria (now Latina) in 1932, and towns Sabaudia in 1934, Pontinis in 1935, Aprilia in 1937, and Pomezia in 1939.

In the Puglia Region, Borgo Mezzanone was founded in 1934 on the Foggia Plain. Further development was interrupted by the Abyssinian War.

On the island of Sardinia, land reclamation created the towns of Mussolinia (now Arborea), Carbonia, and Fertilia. The *Duce* attended the founding of Carbonia in 1938.

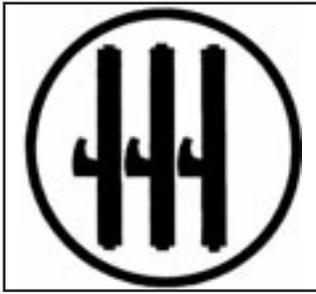
By 1943, 91 hydroelectric reservoirs were built in the north’s Po Valley. This power production, along with agricultural improvements, led to the construction of major infrastructures such as the dams regulating the outflow of the lakes Maggiore, Como, Iseo, and Garda.

Fascist reclamation improved health as it destroyed malaria-carrying wildlife; it created thousands of jobs during the Depression, and increased farm land.

Romanization

TRANSFORMING THE NATIONAL CHARACTER

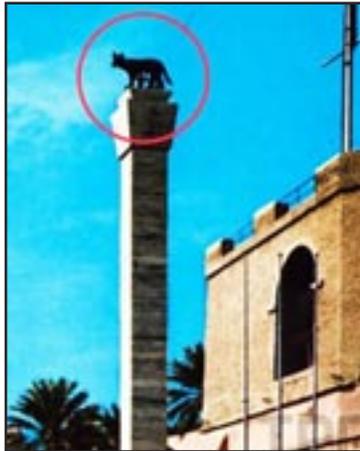
RECREATING A ROMAN MENTALITY



The new Air Force markings



The Roman eagle was part of Fascist regalia.



Gifts by the regime to remind overseas Italians of the Roman heritage. The She-wolf in Tripoli (Libya), in Uruguay, and Cincinnati, OH, to name a few.

THE SYMBOLS OF ANCIENT ROME RETURN

It cannot be emphasized enough that Mussolini wanted to awaken whatever Roman DNA remained in Italians. He often raged at a culture that had buried its ancient warlike roots in favor of the arts and *la dolce vita*. He often complained how “too many opera singers” and “too many mandolins” dominated the image of Italians around the world.

Historically, the decline of the Roman Empire has been blamed on the development of a slave economy in Roman Italy’s south, which diluted or replaced the old warrior Italic stock. As a consequence of this, and because the Italic people of the north had succumbed to a luxurious lifestyle, Roman leaders were forced to rely on mercenaries to guard their borders and to wage war. Military recruitment in ancient Italy become nonexistent, hastening the collapse. Mussolini, of course, knew this history was why his task was so difficult. He likened his immense labor to Michelangelo sculpting with clay instead of marble: “*He would only be known as a potter!*”

He conceded on occasion to his son-in-law Galeazzo Ciano that the Roman spirit was stronger in the north than the south, in the mountains more than the plains. His plan was to “romanize” the children through the *Balilla* program (see p.28), and to toughen those of military age by recruitment into the Fascist Militia (Blackshirts) and through colonial conquests.

The pacification of Libya was the first test of Romanization. (See p. 44 for details) Just as the homeland was being Romanized, the colonies were to be the training ground for the imperial mind-set. Both the French and British had achieved this mind-set by ruling the “lesser breeds” with an iron hand. Ancient Rome may have softened with age, granting citizenship to all free males in AD 212, but Rome was a hard master until pacification and colonization were complete before that benefit was awarded.

No facet of Italian life escaped Romanization. When Italians toasted to *Cent’anni!* (“100 Years!” of life), Fascists responded with *Meglio vivere un giorno da leone che cent’anni da pecora!* (“Better to live a day as a lion than 100 years as a sheep.”)

The Roman she-wolf (“*Lupa*”) was no longer just an icon of the capital city but became a constant reminder of the ancient empire throughout Italy. She-wolf statues were erected in the colonies and given as gifts to cities around the world. The Roman eagle became a military insignia and part of the Duce’s uniform.

Blackshirt formations adopted Roman nomenclature: **Legion** (regiment), **Cohort** (battalion), **Century** (company) **Maniple** (platoon). The *fascies* adorned every uniform. A new military march was composed: *Il Passo Romano* (the Roman Step), and soldiers marched to a modified goosestepp.

MORE ANCIENT REVELATIONS



Four maps of the stages of the Roman Empire lined a portion of *Via dell'Impero*. The fifth was of the new Italian Empire (above).

Via dell'Impero (The Imperial Way) was built for Fascist military parades. (right) As the boulevard looks today.

“...[ROME WAS] THE DOMINANT THOUGHT AND INSPIRATION OF MY WHOLE LIFE.” -GIUSEPPE GARIBALDI

Not all ethnic Italians appreciate the debt they owe to Roman Italy. It was the Romans who first unified the peninsula over a period of 500 years, culminating in 222 B.C with the subjugation of the Celtic tribes of the Po Valley. “...from the Alps to Sicily Italy was one.” –Will Durant (historian). Emperor Augustus made Italy the center and beneficiary of the Empire, formally dividing it into ten administrative regions.

Roman Italy survived barbarian conquest in the hearts and minds of Italian scholars, poets, and leaders, including the Popes who continued to rule parts of it without interruption into the 19th Century. It was clear to the patriots who reassembled Roman Italy—Mazzini, Garibaldi, Cavour, and Victor Emmanuel—in the 19th Century that they were resurrecting (*risorgimento*) Augustan Italy.

Italians could not escape the visual evidence of their past greatness in the ubiquitous ruins that dotted every village and city. Revealing even more ruins in Rome would demonstrate to Italians the true grandeur of their legacy. To this end Mussolini ordered archeologists to raze whole neighborhoods in the quest for ancient Rome.

Much as Napoleon III had levelled medieval Paris to produce the grand boulevards and buildings of the French Second Empire, Mussolini created the *Via dell'Impero* connecting the Colosseum to the *Vittoriano* (the monument to the reunification). It was, and still is, a grand boulevard used for parades, now called *Via dei Fori Imperiali* (“imperial forums”, which line either side of it).

Italians were informed weekly by newsreels as their Roman past was unearthed: temples, palaces, baths, forums, even the huge sumptuous barges Emperor Caligula used for bacchanal feasts on nearby Lake Nemi.

Romanizing Italians required a restoration of Rome itself, not merely as the capital of Italy but the eventual capital of the new Italian Empire and the seat of Western Civilization.

“It is destiny that Rome again takes her place as the city that will be the director of the civilization of all Western Europe.” -Mussolini

UNEARTHING ANCIENT ROME



The Altar of Augustan Peace (13 B.C.)
in its new home today in Rome.

One panel depicts the Earth Mother (today's Mother Earth) holding infants representing Italia and the Empire. The theme of Madonna with Child clearly predates the Christian era and the Renaissance.

Construction on the Altar began with a ceremony on 4 July 13 B.C. Artists sketched the attendees at that ceremony which included the family of Augustus, right. Note the two impatient children. The sketches were sculpted in bas relief and presented to the public on 30 January 9 B.C.



THE ALTAR OF PEACE LINKED EMPIRES

With the conquest of Abyssinia and the proclamation of the Italian Empire in 1936, the Fascist regime needed a symbolic connection (and continuity) to the Roman Empire.

Archeologists knew of a pagan altar long-buried beneath a modern Roman *palazzo*. Known as *Ara Pacis Augustae* ("Altar of Augustan Peace"), it was mentioned in Emperor Augustus's autobiography *Res Gestae* ("Things Accomplished"). Augustus recorded that the Senate commissioned the Altar to commemorate the end of the Roman civil wars and the beginning of world peace (*Pax Romana*). The Roman Empire was officially launched when Gaius Octavius Caesar became Caesar Augustus, the first *imperator*. The Altar was begun on July 4, 13 B.C.

The year 1938 was to be the 2,000th anniversary of the birth of Augustus. It was fitting that the Altar be the centerpiece of the celebration. However, only pieces of the Altar had been recovered over the centuries, the bulk of it remained buried. Recovery efforts began in the sixteenth

century but technology was such that the *palazzo* above it would collapse during excavations, as the Altar was covering a underground stream. All recovery attempts came to a halt in 1903.

In February, 1937, Mussolini ordered new recovery efforts using the latest technology. Utilizing refrigeration and structural reinforcement, the stream was frozen and the Altar extracted without damage to the *palazzo*. This feat and the Altar's restoration are considered "*a crowning achievement of Italian archeologists*" (Henry V. Bender, M.A.) Not to mention Italian engineering!

On the 23rd September, 1938, the birthday of Augustus and the date on which the Augustan year ended, Mussolini inaugurated the Altar in its newly-built museum as the city turned out and Fascist Youth drummers lined the building roof. Newsreel footage and narrative linked Emperor Augustus to the new "Founder of the Empire" (Mussolini).

Forging a Nation

COMPLETING THE REUNIFICATION

FRATELLANZA NAZIONALE



Southern poverty was worsened by natural disasters like the Messina Earthquake of 1908.



The Great War had soldiers of the *Mezzogiorno* defending northern Italy. It spawned a national unity that was a model for Fascism.



The belief that Italians north and south were separate ethnic groups can get quite derogatory.

FASCISM WAS THE FINAL CHAPTER IN THE REUNIFICATION OF ITALY

It has been a theme of classical Italian dreamers from the time of Machiavelli to resurrect not just a unified Italy but the Roman character that created it.

With reunification, Italian leaders tried to address the “flaws” in the Italian character especially in southern regions that hindered the growth of a modern state and its drive to acquire colonies. Those ‘flaws’ included individualism, materialism, skepticism, indiscipline, and indolence. The so-called *la dolce vita* (“the sweet life”) and *dolce far niente* (“sweet to do nothing”) that were and are synonymous with Italian culture were anathema to Fascist philosophy.

There was clearly an intersection of Fascist ideology and Catholic doctrine. The Church’s autocratic structure easily transposed into the Fascist state, as did the glorification of the 2-gender family and encouragement of fertility. Even the Church’s Italic foundations and ties—politically and symbolically—to the Roman emperors allowed for close collaboration with Fascism. Caesar Augustus, himself a *Pontifex Maximus* launched the Roman Empire with a reaffirmation of the Italic pantheon of gods.

To spur on this “resurrection” of the Roman spirit, the Fascist hymn *Giovanezza* (“Youth”) not so subtly began replacing the national anthem (*Marcia Reale*—Royal March) at ceremonies. The Royal March was mostly in-

strumental, its lyrics were strained and glorified the monarchy. *Giovanezza* was easily vocalized and addressed the ‘new Italian.’ Here are some excerpts:

Nell'Italia nei confini, (Within Italy’s borders,)
son rifatti gli Italiani, (Italians have been remade,)
li ha rifatti Mussolini (Mussolini has remade them)
Fratellanza nazionale (National brotherhood)
D'italiana civiltà. (Of Italian civilization.)

Fascism had to contend with a deep-seated belief by many in the north that southern Italians were a different ethnic group. To wit, Italic people blended with the slave population that labored on ancient Roman *latifundia* (grand estates) and later with Arab and Spanish occupiers. In contrast, northerners were more Roman, Germanic, and Gallic. Compounding this view was the fact that southern Italians were a different nationality during the Bourbon Kingdom of the Two Sicilies (1816 - 1861), accentuating the north-south division.

The south became more impoverished with the reunification as the treasury of the Two Sicilies went north and taxation rose with the North’s colonial ambitions in Africa. Moreover, new mandatory schooling for southern children removed sons and daughters from family farms. Mass immigration to the Americas skyrocketed.

‘MAKING ITALIANS’



Basic education was a Fascist priority. This teacher wore his dagger to class.



Compulsory military service mingled the regions and discouraged dialects.



Kingdom of Sardinia's Prime Minister Massimo d'Azeglio.

He had a low opinion of the reunited Italian people as “most being crafty the rest timid.”

TWENTY REGIONS NEEDED UNIFORMITY

“L'Italia è fatta. Restano da fare gli italiani.”

- Massimo d'Azeglio

(“We have made Italy. Now we must make Italians.”)

The often quoted words of the Sardinian prime minister who preceded Count Cavour during the *Risorgimento* period prioritized the mission of Fascist leadership.

Youth education was essential. Primary and secondary schools needed to be standardized. After-school programs were to continue patriotic indoctrination. Physical education was separated from scholastic schooling and given nationalist goals

Under the pre-Fascist Casati Law, the goal was to create a uniform middle class, to eliminate dialects and create an educated citizenry. Still, illiteracy plagued the nation into the 20th Century. It stood at 80% in 1861, when Italy was reunited, and took more than 50 years to go down to 40%, prior to Fascism.

Italy was still an agrarian nation until 1936. Family farms required children to help with crops and livestock. Mandatory education removed this essential labor from

the family, causing high truancy rates, especially in the newly conquered South.

In 1923, the Fascist Gentile Law raised the compulsory age of education to 14 years. After the first five years of primary instruction, students attended middle school (*Scuola Media*), which would put them on a track to basic vocational training (*avviamento al lavoro*), or depending on the IQ and interest of the student, to higher level skills, or academic pursuits.

After middle school (age 14), the brightest students entered high school (*Liceo Classico*), with the specific goal of training Italy's future leaders in technology, commerce, industry, and scholarship. The *Liceo Classico* was the only secondary school that gave access to all types of universities. This Gentile structure has been modified but is still the basic design of Italy's education system. (Note: Giovanni Gentile was murdered by Communists in 1944.)

Dialects were even harder to stamp out before the advent of mass media. Fascism pioneered mass media as a tool for homogeneity. (see *Cinecittà* p. 31)

POPULATION BABY BOOM



“What are forty million Italians compared to ninety million Germans and two hundred million Slavs?”
– Mussolini 1927



“The demographic campaign brought with it free medical assistance for the needy as well as free meals and clothing, summer camps for children, and protection of unwed mothers...” – Laura Fermi, Jewish wife of physicist Enrico Fermi

MOBILIZING ITALIAN WOMEN

“The fate of nations is intimately bound up with their powers of reproduction. All nations and all empires first felt decadence gnawing at them when their birth rate fell off.” – Mussolini

Ancient Rome was able to conquer an empire because it had assembled a population of 6 million Italic people as citizens and allies with its dominance of the Italian peninsula. This number exceeded that of its foreign enemies, enabling Rome to field many legions and produce colonists to secure conquered territories long term.

To recreate that empire, Mussolini required an Italian population sufficient to mobilize “8 million bayonets”—from 40 million in 1927 to 60 million Italians by 1950. His “*demographic campaign*” included tax incentives (and penalties on bachelors), subsidies, and prizes for large families.

In November, 1933, 2,620 couples were married *en masse*, each receiving a gift from the Duce in exchange for their promise to produce “a *balilla* (youth cadet) within a year. “On Christmas Eve, 1933 the capital hosted the first Mother’s and Child’s Day. Ninety-three of Italy’s most prolific mothers, one from each province, were assembled to be honored. Together they had produced 1,300 children, an average of 14 offspring.

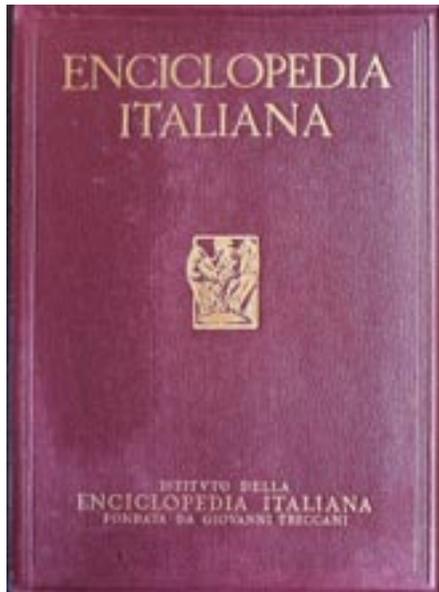
Still, the Fascist demographics never matched the

birthrate of the previous century. The birthrate in 1936 was 112 per 1,000 women, far from the 147 in 1911. After the fall of Fascism, the 1950 population had only risen to 47.5 million, not 60. The war years, no doubt, dampened reproduction. The Italian Army of World War II only fielded 4 million “bayonets.”

On this issue, Fascism was one with the Church, which forbade contraception. In fact, the newly married were given copies of Pope Pius IX’s 1930 *Casta Connubi* (of Chaste Wedlock) by Fascist officials. The encyclical is still considered an essential papal ruling on marriage, the family, and society. It prohibited artificial birth control and abortion, and condemned reproductive sterilization.

In 1992, Victoria De Grazia provided a study of women’s experiences under the Fascist dictatorship and analyzed the regime’s ideology with a gender-oriented approach. Fascist propaganda manufactured two female images: one was the *donna-crisis* (woman-crisis): she was cosmopolitan, urbane, skinny, hysterical, decadent, and sterile. The other was the *donna-madre* (woman-mother): she was national, rural, floridly robust, tranquil, and prolific. Propaganda exalted figures of mythical women as “the bearers of numerous children and the mothers of the soldiers.” The Fascist woman had to commit to her family’s needs by also devoting herself to the nation. During a public speech, Mussolini stated, “*Go back home and tell the women I need births, many births.*”

THE NORTH-SOUTH DIVIDE



The encyclopedia included an extensive explanation of Fascism written by philosopher Giovanni Gentile. Gentile also revamped Italy's education system (p.24). Although a Fascist, his contributions were celebrated in a 2024 postage stamp.

Surprisingly, the dividing line between North and South was not at Rome but at the Po River Valley, according to American eugenicists. The "Aryan" North had more Germanic and Frankish DNA

EQUALIZING ALL THE REGIONS

The Savoys conquered the Bourbon south and also annexed the Papal States of central Italy. The people of Lazio, Umbria and Le Marche had essentially been living in a theocracy for centuries. They suffered much the same as the Bourbon south from an educational and progressive deficiency.

In his book *Blood of My Blood*, scholar Richard Gambino recalls these events as related to him by his Sicilian grandparents. Reverence for Garibaldi remained, but few southerners had any use for the Savoys. Between new taxes on donkeys and evictions from small land holdings, the new order brought dislocation and new burdens on the southern masses. Mandatory public education caused problems for small farmers as their children could no longer help full time. According to various authors even Garibaldi later regretted the consequences in recreating Italy.

The First World War accentuated the tensions as millions of southerners were shipped north to defend the Alpine and Po regions.

Such were the regional divisions Fascism had to remediate. Emphasizing the ancient unity of Roman Italy was one tool, as was a national encyclopedia, Italianizing diverse ethnic provinces, and the elimination of dialects.

The Institute of the Italian Encyclopedia was founded in Rome in 1925 by Giovanni Treccani, with the philosopher Giovanni Gentile as editor-in-chief. The first publication by the Institute was the *Enciclopedia Italiana*, with over forty thousand biographies of Italians who had contributed to the artistic, cultural, political, scientific, religious, literary and economic history of the country, from the fall of the Western Roman Empire to the Fascist Era.

To combat the divisive use of dialects, Mussolini founded LUCE, the newsreel service of the new Italy. Announcers used only standard Italian (Florentine). Italian movies, which always favored dubbing to subtitles, were subject to Fascist language requirements that dubbed over any dialects by Italian actors. To ensure a steady production of quality movies, Mussolini had *Cinecitta`* (Cinema City) built in 1937 (see p. 30).

To level its new society, Fascism sought to manifest the "national brotherhood" with the elimination of the formal address. Traditional etiquette required the plural form of "you" (*voi*) with strangers, officials, and social "betters" instead of the familiar form "*tu*". Now only the "*tu*" form was to be used, leveling society.

ITALIANIZING GERMANIC AND SLAVIC REGIONS



The city of Pola in Istria still has a Roman amphitheater. It is now Croatia.



This Victory Arch is still standing in Bolzano, formerly S. Tyrol. The four columns are actually fasces.



Hitler's desperation for an Italian alliance drove him to repatriate ethnic Germans from the former South Tyrol.



The yellow areas were promised to Italy in the secret Treaty of London.

GREATER ITALY MEANT CULTURAL DOMINANCE

After World War I, under the Treaty of Rapallo (1920) between the Kingdom of Italy, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (later Kingdom of Yugoslavia) Italy obtained almost all of Istria with the city of Trieste. Using new laws and some violence, a program of Italianization was launched.

By 1925, the use of Croatian and Slovene languages were prohibited in the administration and in courts. In retaliation Yugoslavia attempted a policy of forced Croatization against the Italian minority in nearby Dalmatia (an area the Allies promised to Italy in 1915). In response, the majority of the Italians there opted to relocate to Italy.

Also awarded to Italy for its sacrifice in the First World War was the Austrian region of South Tyrol with its Italian minority centered in Trentino. Renamed Trentino-Alto Adige, the now-Italian region underwent an Italianization that included wholesale population transfers.

In the late 1930s, as part of his seduction of Mussolini, Hitler offered to remove the German-speaking community from the region. This was an amazing offer considering Hitler's goal in *Mein Kampf* was to reunite all ethnic Ger-

mans throughout Europe along with the lands they occupied.

As part of the Italo-German understanding, in October, 1939, some 200,000 Germanic people in Alto Adige were offered relocation to Greater Germany or dispersion to southern Italy, where the Fascists would Italianize them. It was a cruel choice for abandoning their ancestral home. Nevertheless, about 75,000 German-speakers opted to leave the region. To replace them thousands of Italian settlers entered the region in numbers not seen since it was a Roman possession. Today, the Germanic portion of Alto Adige is autonomous with guarantees of language and cultural independence.

In April 1939, Fascist Italy made Albania a protectorate. The Italian quest to control Albania, the eastern gate to the Adriatic Sea, predated Fascism. Albanians are neither Slavic nor Greek but "Illyrians," an ethnic group that was ruled by Rome and even provided military leaders who rose to include five Roman emperors who saved the Empire from barbarian invasions during the 3rd Century AD. Venetian influence lasted centuries afterward.

Italianization began with Albanians "accepting" King Victor Emmanuel as their sovereign on 12 April 1939.

Mass Indoctrination

SUBSUME THE INDIVIDUAL

REGIMENTING THE YOUNG



A 6th grade textbook with an inspiring interview with *il Duce* (left) and depiction of future mothers and soldiers (right)



'*Sabato Fascista*' (Fascist Saturday) was a required activity for ages 5 through 18. (left) Jumping over bayonets was probably voluntary.

LIBRO E MOSCHETTO, FASCISTA PERFETTO! (BOOK & MUSKET, PERFECT FASCIST!) CREDERE, OBEDIRE, COMBATTERE! (BELIEVE, OBEY, FIGHT!)

“Fascist education is moral, physical, social, and military: it aims to create a complete and harmoniously developed human, a fascist one according to our views.” – Mussolini

In 1926, the State began competing with the Church for the spiritual control of Italy's youth. The ONB (*Opera Nazionale Balilla*) was launched to make soldiers rather than saints. Sundays were for religion but Saturdays were for martial pursuits.

Children aged 6 to 8 were enrolled in the *Figli della Lupa* (Children of the She-Wolf). Boys aged 8 to 13 were enrolled in the *Balilla*, named for a child hero of the *Risorgimento*. Girls of that age group had the *Piccole Italiane* (Younger Girls). When the boys reached 14 to 18 they were assigned to the *Avanguardisti* (Advance Guards); and the girls *Giovane Italiane* (Young Girls). The boys were to be warriors and the girls mothers of warriors.

On Saturday the working day was interrupted at 1:00pm, so that the afternoon was dedicated to "activities of a predominantly pre-military and post-military training nature,

as well as others of a political, professional, cultural and sporting nature.

The Church, prior to the ONB, had a monopoly on Italian children with the *Catholic Action* after-school programs. When the Pope lamented the State's entry into the youth market, Mussolini's brother Arnaldo, a newspaper editor, assured him that Fascism and Catholicism shared the same Roman origins and global ambitions.

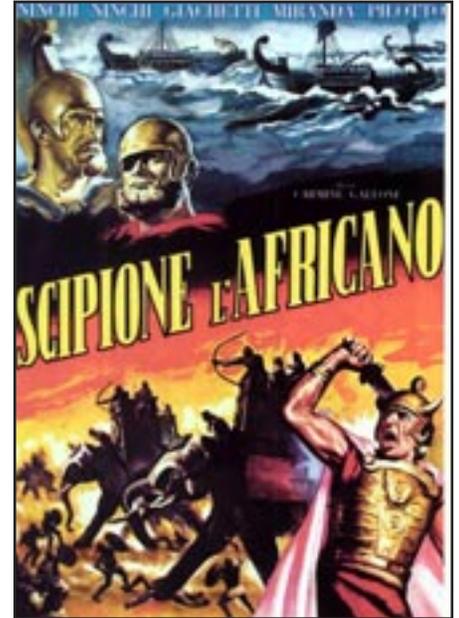
University students also came under the Fascist banner with *Gruppi Universitari Fascisti (GUF)*. Students were encouraged through debating competitions to ponder military matters, colonial designs, and Fascism itself. During the war years, these students volunteered for service and eventually formed the *Giovani Fascisti* battalions that fought in Africa and elsewhere.

A more popular program adopted from other political parties was *dopolavoro* ("after work"). Citizens who signed up had a national recreational network of clubs, bars, sports facilities, libraries, and vacation lodges. The program attracted almost three million members by 1936.

NEW IMAGES ON FILM



The Duce is behind the camera this time.



FILM STUDIOS TO RIVAL HOLLYWOOD

The Italian feature film industry had reached its low point in 1931. To sustain it and establish a permanent location to produce propaganda films for the regime, Mussolini built *Cinecittà* (Cinema City) on the outskirts of Rome. The studios were opened in 1937 by the *Duce*, his son Vittorio, and his head of cinema Luigi Freddi.

It was on April 21, 1937, an anniversary of Rome's founding, and the studio lost no time in producing *Scipio Africanus* (1937) the story of Roman General Cornelius Scipio's victory over Carthage, an African power, in 202 B.C. The film came on the heels of the Fascist victory in Ethiopia. The epic showcased the technological advancement of filmmaking. Seven thousand people were involved in the filming of the battle scene and live elephants were brought in as a part of the re-enactment of the Battle of Zama.

After the war, *Cinecittà* became the go-to studio in Europe for epic movies. *Ben Hur* (1959) was filmed there, *Cleopatra* (1963), *The Agony and the Ecstasy* (1965), Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet* (1968), Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* (2004), Thomas Berger's *Conclave* (2024), and many other epics.

NEWSREELS

In 1924, the first Italian mass newsreel *Giornale LUCE* was born, under the slogan "*Il cinema è l'arma più forte*"

("Cinema is the most powerful weapon"). In English LUCE means "light" but the letters stand for *L'Unione Cinematografica Educativa*. It is the oldest public institution in the world for the diffusion of cinema as an educational and informational tool

The illiteracy rate was still significant at the time, so the regime initially provided newsreels on a weekly basis to be shown in theaters and in open public squares at night. Production and frequency increased as Italy's wars required continuous popular support.

For the two months between July 1943, when Mussolini was arrested, and the following September when the Germans rescued him, the *Luce* newsreels took the side of Badoglio's new government. But as soon as Mussolini's Social Republic was founded the *Istituto Luce* was moved to Venice, once again as the Fascist propaganda tool until 1945.

Between the second half of the 40s and into the 50s, *Luce* documentaries became a training ground for Italian film directors like Fellini, Visconti, Olmi, Cavani, and Bertolucci.

Since 2013, the Luce Archive Fund has been included in the UNESCO Memory of the World Register with over 5 million visual records of the 20th century.

THE WINNING SPIRIT



The Italian soccer team gives the Roman salute at the 1934 World Cup. Italians won in both 1934 and 1938.



A portion of the *Foro Italico* sports complex outside Rome. It was built to host the 1940 Olympics which never took place.



Primo Carnera, World Heavyweight Boxing Champion. He won more fights by knockout (72) than Mohammad Ali (37) and Rocky Marciano (43)

FROM THE OLYMPICS TO RACING, ITALIANS MUST BE FIRST

To carry Fascist ideology into the physical sphere, sports became an obsession. The results of Mussolini's determination to tone up the kingdom were seen when Italy scored second at the 1932 Olympics in Los Angeles, its highest ranking ever.

In anticipation of hosting the 1940 summer Olympics, Mussolini had the *Foro Italico* (Italic Forum) sports complex built between 1928 and 1938 in Rome on the slopes of Monte Mario. Of course, the outbreak of World War II shut down the Olympics for the duration. Italy finally hosted an Olympics in 1960 at *Foro Italico* which survived the war.

World Cup Soccer was another venue to show off the new Italy. The Fascists organized a national recruitment effort to assemble the best athletes in the nation. Italy won the World Cup in soccer two years in a row, 1934 and 1938, a record few nations have achieved.

Il Duce himself practiced what he preached. In his prime he was undoubtedly the most physically fit of the world's statesmen. Swimming, riding, fencing (he supposedly fought duels in his early days), running, tennis, and skiing were his personal preferences. As a veteran of the *Bersaglieri*, an infantry unit famous for running in pa-

rades, Mussolini insisted that his subordinates follow suit—which accounts for all those old photos of middle-aged Fascists leaping through fiery hoops on the athletic field or running to greet the *Duce*.

Besides his personal examples, *il Duce* also promulgated a Fascist regulation in 1927 that organized all sports clubs into thirty-two federations, some more obscure than others: *Federazione Italiana Atletica Pesante* (literally: heavy athletics such as wrestling, judo, hammer) or *Federazione Italiana Pallavolo* (volleyball), and so on. This system remains intact today to form national teams for international competitions.

Fascist Italy could brag having the first European World Heavyweight Boxing champion for one year. Primo Carnera reigned from 29 June 1933 to 14 June 1934. His boxing record was 103 professional fights, with 89 victories, 72 of which were knockouts. Due to his extraordinary physical stature, standing 6'-6" and weighing up to 270 lbs., he was nicknamed "The Ambling Alp." For breakfast, he consumed a quart of orange juice, two quarts of milk, nineteen pieces of toast, fourteen eggs, a loaf of bread and half a pound of smoked ham.

The Cult of the Leader

PERSONIFY THE NATION

AN INTIMIDATING DICTATOR



Gaetano Salvemini



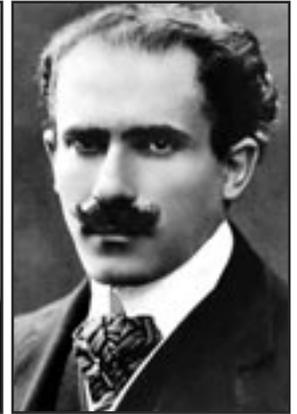
Giacomo Matteotti



Laura and Enrico Fermi



Count Carlo Sforza



Arturo Toscanini

BUT POLITICAL EXECUTIONS WERE RARE

Popular histories and documentaries have portrayed Mussolini variously as a jackal, a coward, a thug, a strutting dictator, or a pompous clown. Canadian journalist Gwen Dyer described him as “*hollow to the core.*” British diplomat Antony Eden called him “*a gangster.*” These descriptions cannot explain how Mussolini achieved power or held it for twenty years without resorting to mass imprisonment and executions on the scale of Hitler or Stalin.

As revolutions go, the Fascist ascent to power was relatively nonviolent. The political murders of Don Giovanni Minzoni in August 1923 and the kidnap/murder of Giacomo Matteotti in June 1924, were probably the work of local Fascists acting without Mussolini’s orders. Clearly, those murders threw his ministry into crisis. But his opponents made the mistake of protesting the Fascists in Parliament by absenting themselves, taking to Rome’s Aventine Hill, leaving Parliament to the Fascist deputies.

On January 3rd, 1925, Mussolini made a speech to the all-Fascist Chamber accepting as Fascist leader responsibility for the murders but warning of the power of his movement. The opposition did not return to Parliament, and Italy plunged into the iron grip of the Fascist dictatorship.

In May 1931, American anarchist Michele Schirru was arrested and executed in Italy for plotting to kill Mussolini. The next month, Angelo Sbardellotto was arrested and executed for a similar plot.

However, the preferred weapons of the regime were voluntary exile or *confino* - internal exile. Conductor Arturo Toscanini, a Fascist supporter soon turned against the

regime when ordered to open concerts with *Giovanezza*. He self-exiled to the U.S. Similarly, physicist Enrico Fermi self-exiled while in Sweden receiving a Nobel Prize. Another was Count Carlo Sforza. He was appointed by the King as ambassador to France in February 1922 but resigned from office nine months later to protest Mussolini’s ascension. He led the anti-fascist opposition in the Senate until being forced into exile in 1926. While living in exile, Sforza published anti-Fascist tracts right to the end of Fascism.

Jewish opponents like Carlo and Nello Roselli launched the anti-Fascist *Giustizia e Libertà* movement even before the regime turned anti-Semitic in 1938. At the start of the Spanish Civil War (1936) the group collaborated with the Republican-Communist government to subvert Italian troops fighting for nationalist Francisco Franco. In 1937, the brothers were assassinated by French fascists, likely ordered by Rome.

One famous case of *confino* was Luigi Barzini Jr., journalist and scion of a prominent family, who was discovered spying for the British in 1940. He was exiled to Porto Stefano in Tuscany, a resort area where he lived comfortably.

In the matter of homosexuals, they were relegated to the resort island of San Domino in the Adriatic Sea where former exiles admitted that life was not all bad and the day-to-day routine was comparatively relaxed. The Fascists had unwittingly created a place where the men could be openly gay, free of the stigma that normally surrounded them in devoutly Catholic 1930s Italy.

MUSSOLINI HA SEMPRE RAGIONE

(“MUSSOLINI IS ALWAYS RIGHT”)



In 1935 Mussolini invited France and Great Britain to a meeting in Stresa, Italy, to discuss how to deal with the new Nazi Germany. Great Britain broke this united front by signing a separate naval treaty with Hitler in June.



Mussolini’s “strong action” saved Austria in 1934. Hitler backed down. Mussolini showed the way.

**“I AM DESPERATELY ITALIAN.
I BELIEVE IN THE FUNCTION OF LATIN-NESS.” -MUSSOLINI**

Mussolini was a gambler, forever taking chances to further his dream of Italy as a great power and master of the Mediterranean. He lived and thought like a Roman, only grudgingly admitting that modern Italians didn’t always have the stuff that made ancient Italy mistress of the world.

Looking back on his tenure in power, only the defeat in the Second World War was his losing gamble, and cause of his death. However, for some twenty years his gambles paid off and earned him respect by the Italian people. His successes were political, diplomatic, and military.

In confronting Greece over the murder of five Italian border commissioners in 1923, he received an apology and 50-million lire in reparations. In settling the borders with newly-created Yugoslavia, he peacefully annexed the embattled city of Fiume to Italy in 1924.

When he stood up to Germany’s new Chancellor Adolf Hitler in 1934, preventing the annexation of Austria, he was hailed as Europe’s hero. He was again hailed in 1938 when he convened the infamous Munich Conference that gave Europe almost a year of peace.

When at the start of the Ethiopian War in 1935 he bluffed Great Britain by sending two army divisions to Italian Libya, a visual threat to Britain’s Suez Canal, which kept the canal open for Italian troop transports. He further stared down the League of Nations preventing an embargo of vital fuel oil.

Perhaps we can better understand him by some of his quotes. They reveal a realist and a cynic.

“War alone brings up to their highest tension all human energies and imposes the stamp of nobility upon the peoples who have the courage to make it.”

~~

“To make a people great it is necessary to send them to battle even if you have to kick them in the pants. That is what I shall do.”

~~

“State ownership [communism] means state monopoly, concentrated in the hands of one party and its adherents, and that state brings only ruin and bankruptcy to all.”

~~

“You must always be doing things and obviously succeeding. The hard part is to keep people always at the window because of the spectacle you put on for them.”

~~

“Yes, a dictator can be loved. Provided that the masses fear him at the same time. The crowd loves strong men. The crowd is like a woman.”

~~

“There is no revolution that can change the nature of man.”

~~

“Everything within the state, nothing outside the state, nothing against the state.”

THE SUPERMAN



The doting father who produced children that served the nation.

Vittorio (l) and Bruno (r).

The ultimate “Casanova,” who also spoke German, French, and some English.

Latin culture has always elevated the man on horseback, the *Condottiere* of the Renaissance or the title *Cavaliere (knight)*.



MUSSOLINI BECAME AN IDOL

He played to every Italian dream: the *condottiere* on horseback, the seducer of women, the solution to every problem, the saint who served without enrichment, the man of destiny who survived assassinations, the protective lover, the father of his nation.

His fan mail required a special department to process the mountains of letters. They lauded him, blew the whistle on local corruption, begged him for favors and even money. The book *Fascist Voices* (2020) by Christopher Duggan put to rest any accusations that Mussolini ruled by fear. Even regime failures were blamed on his underlings by rank and file Italians: “*If only the Duce knew..*” was a common refrain before the war, and during its early setbacks.

Mussolini had a private fund from which he dispensed cash to needy villages or individuals after local party members verified the need. In many ways, the *Duce* took the role of a benevolent monarch away from King Victor Emmanuel.

Both Winston Churchill and his wife Clementine praised Mussolini’s charm and demeanor upon meeting him in 1927. Said she, “[he has] *the most beautiful golden brown piercing eyes...he fills you with the most pleasurable awe..*” Winston was charmed by “*...his gentle and simple bearing and by his calm, detached poise...*”

Sir Winston Churchill, according to historian David Reynolds, “*entertained a lingering respect throughout his life [for Mussolini].*” Churchill often described Mussolini as “*great,*” and reflecting on how the *Duce* had trans-

formed Italy concluded, “*It is, perhaps, just as well for the world that Signor Mussolini was not born a German.*” The inference being that Germany might have won the war under Mussolini. Coincidentally, this scenario was a common joke among Italians during the war.

A major factor in Mussolini’s popularity and image as a “man of Providence” was the result of four assassination attempts from 1924-27. The first was a foiled sniper plot by Socialist Tito Zaniboni. The second was by a deranged Irish woman, Violet Gibson, whose bullet grazed *Duce’s* nose. Months later anarchist Gino Lucetti threw a bomb at Mussolini’s car, wounding bystanders but not the *Duce*. Finally, 15-year old Ateo Zamboni was lynched by a Bologna crowd after he fired a shot at Mussolini’s open car. (Of course, some believe these attempts were pre-arranged to destroy all political opposition.)

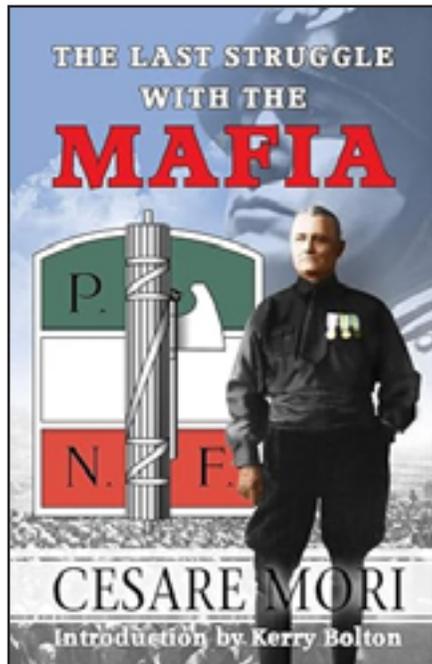
Mussolini openly shared the burdens he placed on the Italian people. His daughter Edda served on a hospital ship that was torpedoed in the Adriatic during the war. His sons Bruno and Vittorio served during the Ethiopian War. Bruno was killed in 1940 while testing a new bomber. When the attack on Greece failed, he sent top party members, including his son-in-law Galeazzo Ciano, to serve on that front.

Unlike the First World War, Mussolini refused to decimate the ranks to stem desertion or retreat. It was only after his ouster and return to power in 1943 that he took revenge on Fascist “traitors,” having four of them tried and shot, including Ciano.

National Discipline

CLAMPING DOWN ON NONCONFORMITY

SICILY WAS TAMED BY FORCE



The “Iron Prefect”
Cesare Mori



Sicily was named for the Sicels, an Italic people that first inhabited the island. Before Rome took possession of it in 241 B.C. the island was divided with Semitic Carthaginians on the western half and Greek colonies on the east.

In modern times, the western Mafia (Palermo) was the more violent branch.

THE MAFIA MET A DICTATOR

A disciplined Italy required the elimination of criminal organizations from southern Italy and Sicily where they took root during the many invasions and occupations over the centuries. The Fascist State could have no secret societies.

These criminal organizations flourished to fill the vacuum over the centuries as foreign rulers came and went. Central authority was ineffective, leaving large landowners to fend for themselves. Landowners utilized the gangs to intimidate sharecroppers and to protect their investments from other gangs and social movements that advocated the break up of the *latifondi* (large plantations). These extra-legal gangs also thrived with the consent of local governments who feared them or depended on the gangs for votes and stability.

In Sicily, the term for these gangs and secret societies was the Mafia. From the time of the reunification (1860-1870) the Mafia was alternately considered “freedom fighters,” rebelling against the Savoy invaders, or “*banditti*,” common thieves and murderers. The new Italy instituted military conscription, which was considered a new form of oppression. Draft dodgers added to the ranks of the Mafia. A similar intrusion on the population was an

increase in taxation and the Coppino Law for mandatory child education—taking family labor off the farm.

Sicily was treated more like a colony than a redeemed region. Brute force was used by Piedmontese officers to extinguish resistance to the new State. Mass arrests and summary executions terrorized the people. Still, the central government was unable to extend full State control over the island until Fascism.

Mussolini visited Sicily in 1924, before assuming full dictatorial powers. It cannot be substantiated, but many believe he was ill-received by local Mafioso Mayor Francesco Cuccia and saw first hand the power of the Mafia. Months later, with full dictatorial powers, Mussolini appointed Cesare Mori, a Northerner who previously had held office in Trapani during the First World War, as Prefect of Palermo with plenary powers extending to all of Sicily.

Mori considered the Mafia not one centralized organization but rather many gangs—cattle rustlers, extortionists, et. al.—in loose association. Although he was a Fascist, he made no distinction if he suspected a corrupt politician, even Fascists. His stern determination to rid the island of *mafiosi* and his ruthless methods earned him the title of the Iron Prefect (*il Prefetto di Ferro*).

“NOTHING OUTSIDE THE STATE!”



Cesare Mori is still a legend in Italy. Dramas have been made of his success against the Mafia for television and the movies. Here, a scene of Mori (left) confronting mafioso Vito Cascio Ferro upon his capture in 1926.



The real Don Vito Cascio Ferro was convicted in 1930 and sentenced to life imprisonment.

Before Prefect Mori, Don Vito had been tried 69 times for some 20 murders, theft, extortion, and violence. He was acquitted each time thanks to intimidated judges, corrupt politicians and wealthy landowners.

He died in prison during the war.

“Your Excellency [Mori] has carte blanche, the authority of the State must absolutely, I repeat absolutely, be re-established in Sicily. If the laws currently in force hinder it, it won’t be a problem, we’ll make new laws. – Mussolini

MUSSOLINI DID NOT EXPORT MAFIOSI

Mori effectively neutralized the “Mafia” with massive round-ups and mass trials. His dragnets took in criminals and victims alike. He would often hold families hostage or cut off a village’s water and food supply until *mafiosi* surrendered or turned in their accomplices. By 1927 Mori had arrested over 11,000 suspected *mafiosi* and associates. Such radical measures even alarmed Mussolini who insisted that the detainees’ families be cared for.

Yet Fascist power did what no other government before or since has accomplished—the state was undisputed master of the island. The major difference between the brutal tactics used in the 1860s was that Fascism viewed Sicilians as Italians not colonials as the Piedmontese Savoys had done. Sicilians were ‘Italian’ for over sixty years and service in World War I had solidified that identity.

Mori’s victory is now considered by many a temporary one, that he did not destroy the Mafia only suppressed it. The conditions of Sicily—the poverty and cultural flaws—were never ameliorated by Fascism.

It is also said that Mori’s work led to *mafiosi* fleeing Sicily for the United States. But, according to the FBI “[the mafia] became established in the United States through the immigration of some of its members in the latter 1800’s.” [see End Notes]. Moreover, the The Immigration Act of 1924 choked off much immigration from southern

Italy during Mori’s campaign.

Most, if not all the original members of the so-called Five Families of *La Cosa Nostra* came to America as children or illegally before Cesare Mori’s campaign. In short, Fascist Italy did not export criminals to the U.S. The founders of the so-called Five Families left Italy before Cesare Mori’s crackdown:

Gaetano **Lucchese** - entered the U.S. in 1911, age 10

Giuseppe **Bonanno** - illegally entered U.S. in 1924

Carlo **Gambino** - entered the U.S. in 1921, age 19

Vito **Genovese** - entered the U.S. in 1913, age 15

Giuseppe Profaci (**Colombo** Family) - entered the U.S. in 1921, age 24

Charles (Lucky) **Luciano** - entered the U.S. in 1906, age 9

The Allied invasion of Sicily in 1943 undid all that Mori had accomplished. Under the direction of Charles Poletti, a former New York State Lt. Governor, the Allied occupation authorities “unknowingly” released *mafiosi* from the jails to replace Fascist officials. The Allies also reintroduced Italian American criminals like Lucky Luciano to interface with their Sicilian ilk. Sicily’s problems today stem in large part from this de-Fascistification.

PACIFYING THE MEZZOGIORNO



Major Vincenzo Anceschi of the *Carabinieri* made short work of the *Camorra* of Campania using similar draconian methods as Prefect Mori in Sicily.



The port city of Gaeta was originally part of the Campania Region. Mussolini transferred it to the Lazio Region in 1927 to keep it from *Camorra* influence. It remains part of Lazio today.

NEITHER THE CAMORRA OR 'NDRAGHETTA THRIVED DURING THE FASCIST ERA

The Bourbon police of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies didn't have the will or resources to tame the various mafias in southern Italy and Sicily. So, they hired them to be the police. Logically, who knows who the crooks better than other crooks? This was the system Garibaldi found in 1860.

The new Savoy government would have none of this collusion and tried over sixty years to eliminate these "*banditti*" which also included Bourbon subversives.

In the Campania and Calabria regions these *banditti* groups had names. Outside of Naples it was the *Camorra*, in Calabria the *Ndrangheta*.

When the Fascists came to power in 1922 these regional mafias were targeted for elimination. In 1925, Mussolini appointed Fascist Prefect Cesare Mori to handle Sicily (see pp. 37 & 38). But the *Duce* was just as shocked by the *Camorra*'s reign of terror in central Italy, concentrated in the Province of Caserta outside of Naples. There, a plague of murder, arson, and theft was

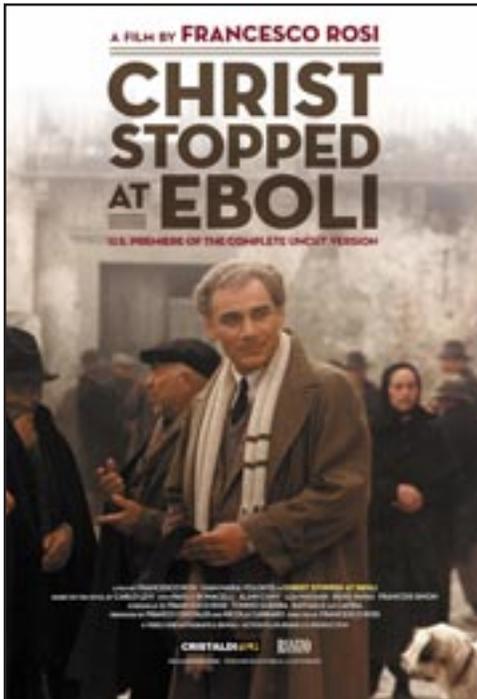
as bad as in Sicily. To deal with this, he sent Major Vincenzo Anceschi of the *Carabinieri*.

Both Mori and Anceschi unleashed the all-powerful Fascist State on the so-called "Men of Honor." Thousands were jailed until Sicily and Caserta were pacified by 1929.

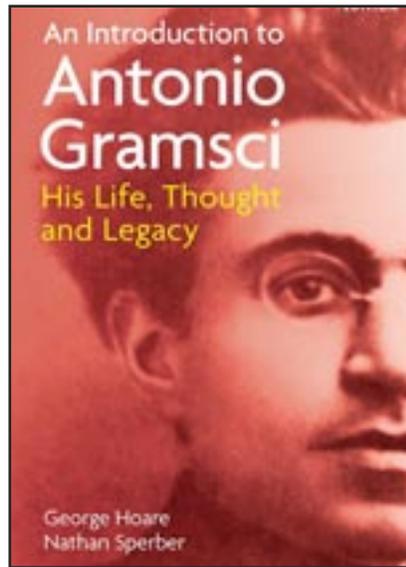
As a double measure against the *Camorra*, Mussolini redrew the regional map of Campania. The governing of Caserta was assigned to the Province of Naples. But Caserta's port city of Gaeta, birthplace of explorers John Cabot and Enrico Tonti, was transferred to the new Province of Latina in the Lazio Region. As for the *Ndrangheta* of Calabria, its leaders quickly got the message and played dead until after the fall of Fascism.

With Italy's defeat in 1943, the *Mafia*, *Camorra*, and *Ndrangheta* were resurrected to ply their trades once more. Politically, Gaeta remains in Lazio, but Caserta as a regional Province was restored in 1945.

THE RACIAL LAWS



Carlo Levi's short exile in southern Italy became a book and movie.



Gramsci had Albanian roots. He still influences leftist activists with his theory of attaining Communism by subversion of traditional culture.



Carlo and Nello Roselli were violently anti-Fascist and sought to assassinate Mussolini. They were murdered in France by French fascists in 1937 after subverting Italian troops in Spain. The fact that they were Jewish influenced Mussolini's 1938 Racial Laws.

OPPOSING FASCISM WAS RARELY A DEATH SENTENCE

By 1927, Mussolini had an infrastructure for internal security. The Political Police Division (*Polpol*) operated a network of thousands of informers both in Italy and in Italian communities abroad. It worked closely with local police to identify dissidents and gauge any popular dissatisfaction. The Organization for Vigilance and Repression of Anti-Fascism (*OVRA*) was a secret police organization to suppress, by legal and illegal means, potential and active enemies of the regime. No doubt these forces committed some heinous acts but there is no evidence that they committed atrocities on the scale of the *Gestapo* in Nazi Germany.

Political enemies and nonconformists (eg homosexuals) were rarely executed. Many were imprisoned (eg. Communist theorist Antonio Gramsci) or sought exile (Palmiro Togliatti). Togliatti and his Communist cohorts were pure Stalinists, actually inspired by Stalin's 1937 purges to exterminate Fascists. While living in Moscow he acquiesced in the barbaric mistreatment of Italian POWs in Russia.

The more common penalty was internal exile (*confino*). The most famous example of this is dissident Carlo Levi who was exiled to an impoverished town in southern Italy. He chronicled his 9-month exile in his book *Christ Stopped at Eboli*. He was released early and returned to

his life in the north.

By 1938, with pressure from his militant party members and his own fears of Italian and international Jewry as well as race-mixing in the African colonies (Italian journalist Indro Montanelli infamously bought a 14-year-old Abyssinian girl to "marry."). Mussolini had his Grand Council draft a Racial Charter which was the basis for the Racial Laws. Moderate Fascists on the Council were able to mitigate the laws to allow many exemptions.

Historian Renzo De Felice estimated that some 12,000 Jewish Italians, out of a population of 45,000, were exempted from the harshest measures. Still, the laws gave loyal Jewish citizens second-class status. However, those who were removed from public schools and universities were permitted to set up their own schools.

Nevertheless, about 6,000 opted to immigrate, including Laura Fermi and her non-Jewish husband and nuclear physicist Enrico Fermi.

Others, like Nobel Prizewinning neurobiologist Rita Levi-Montalcini, remained in Italy with her family. Although banned from university facilities, she conducted her research unmolested at a home in the countryside until 1943, then fled to Florence to escape the Germans.

Empire Building

A PLACE IN THE SUN

PACIFICATION AND SETTLEMENT



Captured Libyan rebel leader Omar al Mukhtar before execution. Thousands of his people were interned in camps as the British had done to the Boers in South Africa thirty years before.



This Gaddafi-financed film was banned in Italy in 1982.



Mussolini is introduced to a Somali or Eritrean sergeant deployed to Libya. Like other European powers, Italy used colonials as auxiliaries.

THE 1930s WERE STILL ABOUT EMPIRES

Libya: Acquired in pre-Fascist 1912 after defeating the Turks, Italians found they could only govern the coastal areas, as Arab and Berber tribes controlled the interior. At the time the area was divided into Cyrenaica (east) and Tripolitania (west).

In October 1920, Italy signed an accord with the Arab Senussi tribe to disband their military arm in return for Italian financial support. However, the Senussis did not comply with this order, and by the end of 1921, relations deteriorated.

Because of political unrest in Italy at the time, forcing the issue in Libya was delayed until the Fascists took power. Mussolini had to demonstrate to Italians the same discipline overseas as the British and French exercised in their colonies. He gave General Rodolfo Graziani, a Fascist, the task of pacifying the region and expanding Italian rule to the hinterlands.

The 1981 Libyan-financed film *Lion of the Desert* dramatizes Graziani's methods which included building a demilitarized zone 200 miles long to separate Arab forces, interning the nomadic population, and pioneering armored vehicles in desert combat. By 1929, the rebel leaders had been executed and the region under full Italian control. Italian colonists were brought in to Italianize

what was now unified as colonial Libya.

Albania: This Balkan nation was part of the Roman Empire then-known as Illyria, inhabited by an ancient indigenous people neither Greek nor Slavic. They provided military leaders and emperors during the 3rd and 4th Centuries (Emperor Constantine the Great was part Illyrian). During the Middle Ages Venice asserted significant influence on this region. Moreover, Albanians migrated to southern Italy over the centuries blending with Italians. Fascist ideology considered these connections as proof of Albania's special attachment to Italy.

In 1939, Mussolini landed troops in Albania declaring the country a protectorate. Strategically, this closed entry to the Adriatic Sea and gave Italy a foothold in the Balkans in response to Hitler's absorption of Czechoslovakia and possible entry into that region.

The ultimate plan was to colonize and Italianize Albania. The enthroned King Zog was sent into exile and Italy's Victor Emmanuel was "voted" the King of Albania. Italy's defeat in the Second World War ended any Italianization. However, Albania remains a sphere of influence for Italy and Albanian migration, legal and illegal, is on-going today.

CREATING AN EMPIRE



In 1896, an Italian force led by Gen. Oreste Baratieri was outnumbered and wiped out by Abyssinians.

As a result, the French and British gladly lost an African competitor. Young Mussolini swore revenge.



Italians who distinguished themselves in Africa during the 19th Century:

Romolo Gessi (left) served the British and liberated some 30,000 Black slaves in Sudan.

Pierre Brazza (right) condemned European treatment of Africans and founded Brazzaville in the French Congo.



Wounded and dead Italians were mutilated at Adowa. Revenge took forty years. The 2-pronged campaign (1935-36) was over in nine months.

An Italian wife donates her gold wedding band to support the war. Over 35 tons of gold were collected and 114 tons of silver.

THE CONQUEST OF ABYSSINIA WAS THE APEX OF THE REGIME

Although pre-Fascist Italy had possessions in Africa and the eastern Mediterranean, it was not officially an empire. Libya and the Dodecanese Islands were won in 1912 as a result of the Italo-Turk War. However, the Italian victors only held the coastal regions of Libya and were unable to defeat the native tribes inland.

Eritrea and Somaliland on the Horn of Africa (above map) were originally commercial ventures to support merchant shipping in the Red Sea to Asian markets. Before Fascism, Italians made treaties with local warlords and eventually extended their control with military actions and understandings with the neighboring British colonies.

In May 1889, the Ethiopian Emperor Menelik signed the Treaty of Wuchale with Italy recognizing Ethiopia's sovereignty so long as Italy could control Eritrea. The Italian—but not Amharic—version of the Treaty prohibited Ethiopia from foreign negotiations except through Italy,

effectively making the realm an Italian protectorate. Menelik later denounced the treaty. With arms secured from the French, war broke out culminating in Italy's disastrous defeat at Adowa in 1896.

Mussolini was 13-years-old when he learned of Adowa. He knew Italy had to avenge that shame and in 1935 as the *Duce* he fomented a border incident to conquer the only remaining independent nation in Africa.

With half a million soldiers and a modern military, the conquest took only nine months. Air transport overcame the vast distances of Ethiopia. Aerial bombardment and poison gas hastened the conquest.

An embargo by Britain and France did not bar Italian troop transports from the Suez Canal nor stop fuel sales.

On 9 May 1936, Ethiopia was officially annexed and the Italian Empire proclaimed.

Global Image

DISPELLING STEREOTYPES

TACKLING STEREOTYPES



Italians, Remember! (l) Before Fascism, strikes crippled the railroads. (r) Now, Full steam ahead!



By example: Mussolini wanted Italians to drive and fly.



In 2024, Italy celebrated the 100th anniversary of the first *autostrada* (super highway) in the world. Connecting Milan with Varese, about 50 miles.

MAKING THE TRAINS RUN ON TIME

As a journalist by trade, Mussolini was keenly aware of media images. He detested the images of Italians as only singers, mandolin players, cooks, and crooks. Italian newspapers were easily controlled to project new images of a Fascist Italy. Italians were being remade and Romanized (see pp. 19-21). However, the foreign press and tourist needed to see actual changes to confirm this new image. The post-World War I social and economic chaos that crippled Italy had to be made right if images were to be changed.

Stereotypes of Italy and Italians go back centuries in the English-speaking world. To deride Fascism and minimize Mussolini's accomplishments, the phrase "*He made the trains run on time*" is a time-honored putdown still in vogue today among pundits and historians.

Behind this snarky observation is a derogatory view of Italians in general: Italians don't follow rules, punctuality and discipline are not Italian traits. Victoria de Grazia, a Columbia history professor observed that the British "*...considered the hopelessly refractory [unmanageable] Italians governable only by dictatorial means.*" [NY-Times, 1994] In short, Italians just played along with Mussolini. Making the trains run on time suggests a very low standard of excellence in Italy, which is absurd on any level.

Prof. de Grazia went on to write, "*His regime built magnificent central stations and upgraded the main lines on which businessmen, politicians and comfort-minded*

tourist sped between Milan and Rome." Express trains were "*engineering marvels*" as new bridges and tunnels allowed faster speeds. "*...in 1934, the 11.5-mile double-tracked tunnel through the Apennines between Bologna and Florence was the second-longest in the world.*" [David Dudley, *Bloomberg News* 15 Nov. 2016]

What historians minimize in "trains running on time" is that Fascist Italy banned strikes, the main reason train schedules suffered from slow-downs and work stoppages. Under Mussolini's corporative state, unions were not eliminated but subject to mandatory arbitration. (see p.15)

Mussolini was very much like the former U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt in that he was very physical and demonstrative in grasping modern times. Roosevelt was the first president to ride an airplane. Mussolini actually became a pilot. Likewise, the *Duce* took to automobiles. Road-building was prioritized leading to Italy's pioneering of modern highways.

The world's first superhighway for automobiles was the Milan to Varese *autostrada* opened in 1924: "*the first real high-speed toll road designed exclusively for cars, and the predecessor to Germany's autobahns and our own interstate highway system.*" [David Dudley, *ibid*]

Ultimately, trains, planes, and autos had the Fascist stamp and the Italian people would master them, setting world records. New images would replace stereotypes.

AN ASSERTIVE ITALY



Mussolini seized the Greek island of Corfu in 1923 to demand reparations for the murder of Italian General Tellini (above) and four others while surveying the Albania-Greece border.



The 4-Power Pact of 1933 signed in Rome included France, Great Britain, and Germany. It was Mussolini's framework to resolve Germany's grievances over the Treaty of Versailles.

FASCISM'S FIRST INTERNATIONAL TESTS

Mussolini was only 39-years-old when he became Prime Minister. His first diplomatic conference outside of Italy was in November, 1922, at Lausanne, Switzerland to meet the English and French representatives to discuss war-torn Turkey. He was ill at ease, especially having to converse in French and his rudimentary English.

Later that month he journeyed to London for a German reparations conference. The dreary capital depressed him and he swore never to return there. Except for a later trip to Locarno in 1925, the *Duce's* European travels only extended to Germany just before the war.

Mussolini's first international crisis confronted him less than a year since becoming Prime Minister. A boundary dispute between Albania and Greece required the attention of a Conference of Ambassadors in Paris, which appointed an Italian commission to visit Albania. On 27 August 1923, Italian General Tellini and his commission team were assassinated while on Greek soil.

Mussolini issued the Greeks an outrageous set of demands and only five days to comply. The Greek response was totally unacceptable, and on 31 August, the Italian Navy occupied the Greek island of Corfu. The crisis was adjudicated by both the League of Nations and the Conference of Ambassadors. Italy's demands were deemed too harsh but by September the Greeks had conceded enough to warrant Italy's evacuation of Corfu.

put him at odds with the League of Nations, but it raised his popularity among Italians .

On 27 January 1924, Mussolini negotiated a settlement with Yugoslavia over the contested city of Fiume (see p 5) and parts of the Dalmatian coast. As a result, Fiume was annexed to Italy and the Italian-Yugoslav borders confirmed. For this diplomatic triumph the King awarded Mussolini the Collar of Annunziata which gave him the title "Cousin of the King."

Conceived a year before Hitler came to power, Mussolini drafted a "4-Power Pact"* with France, Great Britain and Germany intended to peacefully resolve border issues and problems with the 1919 Versailles Treaty. A watered down version was signed in 1933 by all parties including Hitler. It was later the basis for the Munich Conference of 1938.

In 1934, Mussolini succeeded in preventing Hitler's annexation of Austria* by sending Italian troops to the border and warning Hitler, "*Hands off Austria!*".

In 1935–1936 Mussolini provoked the Ethiopian War* making that country an Italian colony in a new Italian Empire.

In 1936–1939 Mussolini committed Italian armed forces to support Gen. Franco's rebellion against the Communist-dominated Spanish Republic*. Franco was victorious.

(*See Vol. 2 *Italy between the Wars*)

The settlement was not fully to Mussolini's liking and

DEMONSTRATING TECHNOLOGY



Guglielmo Marconi aboard the *Elettora*



The *Rex* held the Atlantic crossing record from 1933-35.

Mussolini hailed the Balbo flight as purely a triumph of Italian engineering, downplaying any heavenly guidance that his Catholic nation would normally ascribe to it.

SETTING RECORDS: LAND, AIR, AND SEA

Even before Fascism, the Italian spirit of competition saw Italians break existing records in automobile racing and in aviation. In 1907, an Italian won the first Peking to Paris (9,300 miles) auto race with a 45-hp Itala. In 1927 the first *Mille Miglia* (1,000 miles) endurance race was held in northern Italy. The quest for speed during the 20s and 30s was the genesis of many post-war luxury sports cars like Maserati, Ferrari, and Lamborghini.

As a maritime power, Italy has an unbroken history of shipbuilding. The trans-Atlantic steamer competition was a way to demonstrate national technology and nautical skill. The passenger liner *Rex* won the Blue Riband title in 1933 until bested by the French *Normandie* in 1935.

In aviation, Mussolini required that all record-seeking aircraft be Italian-made with Italian instruments and engines. In so doing Italy became further industrialized and an exporter of aviation products around the world.

The 1920s saw the advent of dirigibles, in which Italian designer Umberto Nobile stood out. Norwegian Arctic explorer Roald Amundsen reached the North Pole in 1926 using the all Italian-built *Norge* ('Norway') piloted by Nobile. In 1928, Nobile tried to duplicate the feat with the new airship *Italia*. He had the backing of the Fascist regime and

a rank in the new Air Force.

However, the voyage of *Italia* ended in disaster; seven men died and nine were stranded on the ice. Eventually rescued, the badly injured Nobile was evacuated before the other survivors. It was a disaster Fascist Italy did not abide. Nobile returned to Italy a hero to the masses but officially he was denounced for abandoning his crew.

Nobile's superior, Gen. Italo Balbo, never backed the dirigible projects. He focused on fixed wing airplanes. Nobile's disaster was soon overshadowed when Balbo began mass flights of military seaplanes across the Atlantic culminating in a sensational flight of 24 Savoia-Marchettis from Italy to the Chicago World's Fair in 1933. That Italians could execute such a massive undertaking with only Italian equipment and coordination of land, air, and sea resources surpassed even lone aviator feats.

Nobel prizewinner Guglielmo Marconi further enhanced Fascist Italy's technological image. A Fascist until his death in 1937, Marconi had pioneered wireless telegraphy which led to the radio. Around 1930, he began experimenting with short waves and reflected radio waves anticipating modern radar. However, the British, not Italians, perfected that vital military and civilian tool.

UNTO THE 7TH GENERATION

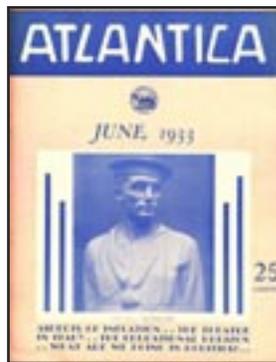


La Casa Italiana

The largest cultural center in the USA



Peter Riccio
Columbia student



Italian Pavilion at the 1939 World's Fair
in New York City

Atlantica magazine launched by
Dr. F. Cassola, M.D. in New York in 1925 and
published until 1940. Fascism in a good light.

ITALIAN 'COLONIES' IN THE NEW WORLD

The influence of Fascist Italy on Italian Americans cannot be overstated. Mussolini spoke of immigrants as “Italian unto the 7th generation.”

The mass migrations from 1865 to the early 20th Century flooded the U.S. with poor and mostly illiterate Italians from the southern regions. These newcomers suffered every abuse and stereotype until Fascism began transforming Italy after the First World War.

That transformation—actual or propagandized with the coming of newsreels—instilled national pride into the otherwise regional immigrants. It especially awakened their American-born children.

The first and more amazing manifestation of Italian pride occurred on the campus of Columbia University in Manhattan. In 1927, the university was gifted by the Italian American Community *La Casa Italiana*, a 30,000 s.f. building. It was conceived by the student Italian Club which found a major donor in the Paterno Family of NY real estate developers. For 63 years *La Casa* was operated by Italian Americans, housed the Italian Language Dept., and provided a venue for Italian groups and students in the Metro NY area.

According to Dr. Barbara Faedda, the current associate

director of what is now the Italian Academy for Advanced Studies, “[Mussolini] was enthusiastic over it, offering to equip the entire house with Italian furniture of various periods, paintings and art objects obtained from the old royal palaces of Italy....And the Casa worked with the Fascist government to arrange for student exchanges.”

However, Dr. Faedda has found archives showing that visiting lecturers were far from unanimously pro-Fascist—Marxist and Jewish gatherings were also held in the building in the 1930s.

One of the students who conceived of *La Casa* was Peter Riccio from nearby East Harlem. His 1929 doctoral thesis celebrated Fascism, but in 1940 he declared his loyalty to the United States. He rose to be a Columbia professor and in 1957 the director of *La Casa Italiana*.

Admiration for Fascist Italy was also apparent in Italian American households. Along with religious icons were often portraits of Mussolini and the King. Italy was still considered a former ally of the First World War. Fascist progress throughout the 1920s and 30s elicited much respect from non-Italian Americans until the Ethiopian War (1935-1936) when immigrant support for the war disturbed many Americans, foreshadowing future persecution.

The Collapse

MUSSOLINI IS OUSTED

FROM MUNICH TO WAR



The Germans take the rest of Czechoslovakia, shown here entering Prague. This was Mussolini's wake-up call.



The French Navy equalled the Italian Navy and even had an aircraft carrier. France's main focus was in the Mediterranean. Italy could not go to war if it faced both the French and British navies.

A THREAT AND OPPORTUNITY LURE THE DUCE IN

If Mussolini believed that the Munich Accord of October, 1938 (which he had arranged) in which Germany was ceded the Sudetenland of Czechoslovakia would placate Hitler, he was totally blindsided on 15 March 1939. On that day, German troops seized the rest of Czechoslovakia. Italy was not prepared for a war. Munich had made him a peacemaker in the eyes of Italians and Europeans. But now, he realized he was duped by Hitler. “...every time Hitler occupies a country he sends me a message.”

He needed to better control Italy's relationship with Germany. More importantly, he needed to keep insatiable Hitler away from the Balkans. On 7 April 1939, Italian troops occupied Albania, a longstanding Italian sphere of influence, and later annexed the country to establish a military presence in the Balkans.

On 22 May 1939, Italy signed the “Pact of Steel” with Germany – a defensive alliance based on the premise that Italy would not be militarily ready to help Germany until 1942. Once again, Hitler was on a different schedule. He invaded Poland on 1 September 1939 provoking a war with Great Britain and France.

Although Fascist Italy declared itself a non-belligerent, an approaching German victory over France in May, 1940 presented Mussolini with a new situation in the Mediterranean. The French Navy would soon be neutralized by the fall of France, leaving only the British to fend off the Italian Navy. Mussolini gambled and on 10 June 1940, took Italy to war, aimed at breaking the British hold over the gateways to the world's oceans at Suez and Gibraltar.

Many historians date Germany's defeat to Italian failures in North Africa and Greece, dragging German arms into sideshows. They curiously omit at least three monumental mistakes made by Hitler that doomed both Germany and Italy:

1. Before invading Poland, Hitler signed a secret pact with Stalin to divide Poland. This “odd-fellows” pact shocked both Axis partners Italy and Japan. Japan, which had suffered in border confrontations with the USSR in Siberia, now felt free to make a deal with Stalin so it could confront the United States in the Pacific. In the winter of 1941-2, this allowed Stalin to transfer his elite Siberian army to stop Hitler at the gates of Moscow. It freed Japan to attack the U.S., which eventually brought it into the European war.

2. Hitler broke his pact with Stalin and invaded the USSR without notice to Italy in June, 1941, before defeating the British. Hence, he dragged Italy into a disastrous two-front war.

3. In his quest to rid Europe of the Jews and Slavs, Hitler launched a genocide on the Eastern Front which cost the Axis support from a potential Ukrainian army and a vast Soviet-hating Russian civilian population that instead became guerilla resistance.

The Eastern Front was the undoing of Nazi Germany, not North Africa or the Balkans. Fascist Italy lost all freedom of action to a murderous and, we now know, a drug-addicted Hitler.

PANIC GRIPPED THE NATION



The invasion and loss of Sicily were bad enough, but the friendly reception given the invaders by Sicilians weighed heavily on the King and Fascists alike.



After the Rome bombing that killed 1,500 civilians, a Fascist painted the message: “*Work of the Liberators.*” Pope Pius XII travelled to the area after the raid and distributed 2 million lire to the survivors.

ALLIED BOMBINGS AND THE LOSS OF SICILY

[Note: The war years are covered in detail in Vol. 3, *Italy at War*]

Italians were understandably war-weary after a decade of wars – from Abyssinia and the Spanish Civil War which spared the homeland but drained the nation of manhood and treasure, to its predictable defeat in 1943.

Two myths were dissolving before their eyes: that the city of Rome would never be bombed because of its holy place in Christendom, and Italy’s geography would preclude invasion from the south. (Napoleon famously said that as a “boot” Italy can only be entered from the top.) Both of these myths were dispelled in July when Sicily was invaded on July 10th (*Operation Husky*) and Rome suffered a devastating air attack on July 19th, (*Operation Crosspoint*) by 150 Allied bombers. The raid killed some 1,500 civilians.

The effect of these disasters went to the heart of the Italian psyche. A people who cherished their millennial accomplishments and civilization now saw the consequences of Mussolini’s decision to enter a brutal war. They saw the inexhaustible resources of the United

States coupled with total war where nothing is sacred or immune from destruction by air.

They feared their own Nazi ally whose ruthlessness and fanaticism was now known. A third myth, of German invincibility, was likewise dispelled.

Fascism and Mussolini had run their course in the minds of most Italians, including many Fascists. The House of Savoy, the ultimate authority over the Kingdom of Italy, had seen the writing on the wall months earlier. King Victor Emmanuel knew well how defeat in the First World War caused the collapse of the Habsburgs (Austria-Hungary) the Romanovs (Russia) and Hohenzollerns (Germany). Savoy needed to save Italy and its monarchy.

The cutting of the Gordian Knot of the Nazi alliance and Fascist control of Italy would be daunting. Although the Royal House had contacts with the Allies through neutral countries and among European royalty, there was a need for secrecy in arranging terms for an armistice without causing a reaction by Mussolini and Hitler.

ILL-PLANNED DECISIONS



The King took command of Italian Armed Forces on 26 July 1943.



German panzers entering Italy at the Brenner Pass. Hitler knew that the King would betray the Axis.

THE OUSTER OF MUSSOLINI ENRAGED HITLER

Many Fascists on the Grand Council had lost their taste for war with the invasion of Sicily and the Rome bombing. Evidence piled up of the low morale among Italian troops. The civilian population throughout Italy had reached their limits of deprivation and Allied bombings (or so they thought!).

These Fascists convinced Mussolini to call a meeting of the Grand Council on the night of 24–25 July 1943 to discuss the grave state of the nation. Dino Grandi offered a motion (see p.7) to return all functions of government to the King, especially command of the military. In essence, the motion would restore Italy to the government of 1922, before Mussolini was appointed Prime Minister and later assumed dictatorial powers.

Mussolini spoke against the motion saying it would “*provoke a crisis of the regime.*” Still, he allowed the motion to be discussed knowing that any vote by the Council was merely a recommendation ultimately subject to Mussolini’s approval.

It may be important to note that the Council members discussed and debated the motion for ten hours – from 5:00pm to 3:00am. Mussolini himself refused to adjourn before a vote, allowing only a 15-minute break.

So, in the middle of the night, the motion was adopted by a majority of the Council (19 to 8, with one abstention). Mussolini now knew who the defeatists were. But, he ended the meeting naively believing the vote was only an intra-party conflict, without political consequences.

What he did not know was that the King was informed of the vote early the next day. Mussolini’s weekly report to the King was scheduled that day, as it had been for the past 21 years. Arriving at the royal palace, Mussolini was immediately arrested (“protective custody”). He was informed that he was no longer Prime Minister and that Marshal Pietro Badoglio had been appointed.

King Victor Emmanuel had done the very same thing in 1922 when he appointed Mussolini. The King neglected to inform the then-Prime Minister Luigi Facta of his firing. Such was the royal prerogative in 1922, but new laws since then effectively made Mussolini’s ouster a *coup d’état* by the King, which would fuel a civil war.

What neither the Grand Council nor the King understood was the deep personal relationship Mussolini had with Adolf Hitler. Once Hitler found out the news he set in motion plans to take over Italy. He knew that without Mussolini the Italians would seek a separate peace and betray the Axis.

Only two German divisions were in Italy, which were evacuated from Sicily. Upon Mussolini’s arrest German troops began pouring through the Alpine passes. After Badoglio’s armistice (see p.53) in September, seven new divisions arrived. By mid-1944 there were 23 German divisions on the peninsula. The King and his allies on the Grand Council had made a fatal blunder that would make worse the war they sought to end.

CHAOS AND RUIN



Mussolini was rescued from his mountaintop confinement by German commandos using gliders on 12 September 1943.

The *Duce* was flown to meet Hitler. Within weeks Mussolini was set up in a puppet republic in northern Italy. Thousands of Italian POWs in Germany volunteered to join Mussolini's new army.



No sooner had Gen. Eisenhower announced the Italian armistice than Germans rounded up Italian military units. Sent off to camps in Germany, the "POWs" were treated as traitors and used for slave labor.

AN ARMISTICE DID NOT MEAN PEACE

The new Italian government under Marshal Badoglio needed more time to negotiate an armistice with the Allies. Their first order of business was to make Hitler believe that Italy would continue the war without the *Duce*. Unfortunately, the Germans knew it was all a ploy. Whole German divisions flooded the Alpine passes starting July 26th to occupy key positions on the Italian boot under the guise of protecting its ally from a possible Allied invasion. The Italian Army was given no orders to prevent this German invasion, the two nations were "officially" still allies.

Badoglio's negotiations with the Allies finally concluded in early September. Italy would have its armistice but the peninsula was to be occupied by Allied armies without resistance from Italian forces. Vague promises were made by the Allies to protect Rome – German forces were already nearby – with an air drop of the American 82nd Airborne Division before any public announcement of the armistice. But, Badoglio was told that Italian forces had to secure Rome and its environs from a German counterattack before any airdrop.

The Italians believed they had until September 12th to secure Rome, the expected date of the public armistice announcement. Shockingly, Gen. Eisenhower broke the news publicly on September 8th, four days early. The next day, the Allies invaded Salerno, south of Naples. The timing of both events was a disaster for the Italians. To make

matters worse, both the *Comando Supremo* and the King abandoned Rome without informing the troops on 9 September 1943.

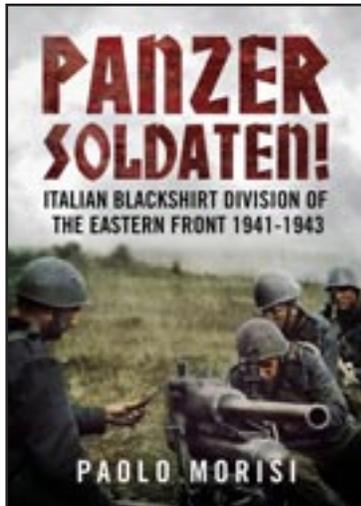
Not only were the Italian forces not ready to secure Rome, but the mere mention of the word "armistice" caused anarchy among Italian military forces in Italy. To the rank and file, the word meant that peace had broken out and soldiers could stand down. Whole units evaporated as soldiers abandoned their weapons and headed for home. Meanwhile German troops continued to pour in unopposed.

The Germans lost no time in rounding up Italian Army deserters for slave labor in Germany. Intact Italian formations were ordered to surrender their weapons and become prisoners. Depending on the commander, Italian military units complied or resisted, both in Italy and in Italian-occupied areas of the Balkans and Mediterranean. Badoglio had only given them a vague order "to resist" without any order to attack the Germans or any coordination of forces: ground, naval, or air.

When Italy switched sides on 13 October 1943, declaring war on Germany, there were nine German divisions on the peninsula, eventually growing to twenty-three.

With such plunders, Italy became a battleground and slaughterhouse for the next two years.

WHERE WERE FASCIST STALWARTS?



In early 1943, three Blackshirt regiments were destroyed on the Eastern Front.



Mussolini claimed that few diehard Fascists remained in Italy to protect him in 1943 as they were fighting overseas.

THE RANKS WERE LEFT LEADERLESS

Unlike their Nazi counterparts, the Fascist “elite” reflected the war-weary depression of the general Italian population. Fascism lacked the fanatical ideology that motivated racist Nazis. The loss of the war only meant changing with the times, not a demise of the Master Race.

In his *Memoirs*, Mussolini asserted that his Fascist Militia and hardcore followers were unable to stand by him because they were overseas fighting as units of the Italian Army. “Over a million Fascists were under arms...Tens of thousands had fallen on the field of battle, among them no fewer than 2,000 Party officials.” (*Memoirs*, p 165) He claimed that those few remaining in Italy were assigned to “social services,” presumably unable to mount a defense of the regime. It was true that Mussolini rarely held his Blackshirt units in reserve. They were portrayed as shock troops rather than palace guards.

In 1940, three Blackshirt divisions were formed with 40,000 men. By 1942, all three were lost in the North African campaign. Two more divisions were formed there and were also lost with the Axis surrender in 1943. Other units stationed in the Balkans and the Eastern Front were unable to come to Mussolini’s defense at the time of his arrest.

More importantly, Mussolini was Fascism. He had no replacement. As was outlined in pages 35 and 36, Italians had little use for the Fascist officials whom they believed were just as corrupt as democrats. The *Duce* was the only honest Fascist in their eyes. The fact that his trusted comrades on the Grand Council, including his son-in-law, voted against him left rank and file party members adrift.

Although Mussolini was deposed, he was still alive as a prisoner of the King. But his reign was at an end and he faced a possible capital trial or capture by the Allies. Even he believed he had earned a respite, a time to write his memoirs.

Unlike Germany, Italy still had a monarchy as well as a spiritual leader in Pope Pius XII. The Grand Council had decided to restore pre-Fascist governance and Marshal Badoglio was a familiar leader, as well as a nominal Fascist. Moreover, Mussolini made no plea for a Fascist uprising. He went peacefully and quietly into confinement. Italians often saw their long history as one of survival. As one neapolitan slogan suggests *O Spagna, O Francia, basta che si mangia*. (“Whether Spain rules us or France, as long as we eat.”) This outlook could encompass foreign invasions as well as the domestic rulers in Rome.

On 12 September 1943, Mussolini was rescued from a mountaintop confinement by German commandos and flown to Germany. Within weeks he was set up by Hitler in a puppet state in northern Italy controlled by German armies. The *Duce* of Fascism had regained power and reorganized his Fascist government as the Italian Social Republic. No king, no pope, no forgiveness. (The details of this short-lived resurgence are covered in our reports titled *Italy at War* and *Italy and the Holocaust*.)

Meanwhile the overthrow of Mussolini’s Fascist rule did not successfully play out as many had hoped. Marshal Badoglio and his allies in the Grand Council had not planned well, as described in previous pages.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

CONCLUSION

This is where most reports on Fascist Italy conform to the conclusion that Fascism was an aberration and stain on the Italian nation. On an episode of the TV series *Biography* broadcast in 1962, host Mike Wallace summed up Mussolini this way *“This man was a reckless political adventurer who arrogantly bluffed his way to power. He lacked courage, he lacked wisdom. Yet for twenty years he ruled the destiny of the Italian nation.”*

Clearly, the preceding pages of this report do not sustain Wallace’s assessment. Fascism’s hold on Italy was more complex. Mussolini ruled by popularity not merely fear. Italians were patriotic.

The *Risorgimento* was only the start of reunification as the famous quote admonished: *“We have made Italy. Now we must make Italians.”* Perhaps a Communist Italy would have achieved that conformity, but Fascism got there first. Italy’s unity today owes much, however it may begrudge the fact, to the structure and nationalism imposed on two generations by Fascism. It also preserved traditional Italian institutions such as Catholicism and Capitalism.

Fascist intellectual Giovanni Gentile considered Fascism as the culmination of Italy’s civilizing mission in the world. As Rome uplifted the barbarians and the Roman Church softened them, so the Renaissance expanded the human mind. The *Risorgimento* reunited Italy after 1,500 years and gave it liberalism. But liberal democracy had degenerated into corruption and factionalism by 1922. Even the post-war Italian Republic suffered from “musical chair” governments, political violence during the “Years of Lead” in the 1970s and “Kickback City” (*Tangentopoli*) in the 1990s, and of course the relentless curse of organized crime which forever seems to challenge Italy’s democratic governments. To dismiss the twenty-years of Fascism as a step backward is to gloss over a millennium of chaotic Italian history before it, as well as the decades since.

The Grand Council vote of July 25-26, 1943 demonstrated that the Fascism had a guidance mechanism not solely in the hands of Mussolini and a handful of subordinates. The men who voted to restore the King’s powers were not fanatics in the Nazi or Stalinist mode. They clearly were reasonable men who sought to save Italy rather than Fascism. Surely,

none of them knew the ultimate consequences of their decision would be civil war.

Historians concede that the wholesale collapse of Italy’s armed forces was hastened by Marshal Badoglio’s criminal incompetence. Over 700,000 soldiers ended up as German slaves (not treated as POWs) within two months, more than had been captured by the Allies during the three years of Mussolini’s command. Starvation and disease decimated their ranks almost on par with Russian and Polish POWs. By war’s end some 40,000 of them died. This was under the Badoglio regime, not Mussolini’s.

That Mussolini negotiated the freedom of thousands of those German-held Italian soldiers and could reconstitute a Republican Army of four divisions that fought to the end until May, 1945 is evidence that the Italian armed forces under Mussolini with their German ally still had the capability of repelling an Allied invasion. In fact, Sardinia and southern France (*Operation Dragoon* in August, 1944) turned out to be the true “soft underbelly” of Europe, not the Italian peninsula.

Nevertheless, Italy’s defeat was inevitable. But even after the Badoglio “switch” Allied aerial bombardment of the North accounted for two-thirds of the 60,000 Italian civilians killed* In short, both the Armistice and the “switch”, as reflected in casualties and the punitive 1947 treaty gained Italy absolutely nothing.

(*see end notes)

Briton Mark Gilbert, author of the 2024 book *Italy Reborn, From Fascism to Democracy*, sums up Italy’s fate after Fascism and the Peace Treaty of 1947:

[Italy] was compelled to accept its own insignificance in the post-war order as a poor, medium-sized Mediterranean state, and to relinquish centuries-long dreams of cutting a bold figure on the world stage.”

We will never know if Fascist Italy would have survived had it remained neutral. Franco’s Spain survived and evolved into a constitutional monarchy. Fascist Italy was too dependent on one man and had no chance to evolve. The Duce found himself abandoned by his own party. He knew his choices.

If I advance; follow me. If I retreat; kill me. If I die; avenge me! It is better to live one day as a lion than one-hundred years as a sheep!

-Mussolini

ITALY UNDER FASCISM

©2025 Italic Institute of America, Inc.

End Notes

Page 40: S M Mc Weeney (1987). "Sicilian Mafia and Its Impact on the United States." *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, Volume 56 (2), 1-10

Page 56: Prof. Matthew Evangelista (2022). *Allied Attacks and Civilian Harm in Italy 1940-1945: Bombing Among Friends*. London, Routledge

Newspapers

NY Times – 8 June 1933, p. 1

NY Times – 18 June 1933, p. 3

NY Times – 18 September 1933 p.3

NY Times – 26 July 1934 p.1

NY Times – 12 June 1935 p.1

Books

Albright, Madeleine, *Fascism, a Warning*, NY: Harper Collins, 2018

Bailey, Roderick, *Target: Italy*, London: Faber & Faber, 2014

Bouverie, Tim, *Appeasement, Chamberlain, Hitler, Churchill, and the Road to War*, NY: Tim Duggan Books, 2019

Brody, J. Kenneth, *The Avoidable War*, New Jersey: Transactional Publishers, 1999

Buchanan, Patrick, *Churchill, Hitler, and the Unnecessary War*, NY: Three Rivers Press, 2008

Ciano, Count Galeazzo, *Ciano's Hidden Diary 1937-1938*, New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1953

Ciano, Count Galeazzo, *The Ciano Diaries 1939-1943*, New York: Doubleday & Co, 1946

Cooper, Duff, *Old Men Forget*, New York: E.P. Dutton, 1954

Cannistraro, Philip, *Historic Dictionary of Fascist Italy*, Greenwood Press, CT 1982

Duggan, Christopher, *Fascism and the Mafia*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1989

Duggan, Christopher, *Fascist Voices: An Intimate History of Mussolini's Italy*, Oxford University Press, NY 2013

Fermi, Laura, *Mussolini*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961

Fromkin, David, *A Peace to End all Peace*, NY: Henry Holt and Co., 1989

Gilbert, Mark, *Italy Reborn, From Fascism to Democracy*, W.W. Norton, UK 2024

Holland, James, *The Savage Storm: The Battle for Italy 1943*, NY: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2023

Lamb, Richard, *Mussolini as Diplomat*, New York: Fromm International, 1999

Maass, Walter B, *Assassination in Vienna*, New York: Charles Scribner, 1972 *Ethiopian Jews*, New York: RoutledgeCurzo, 2003

Mussolini, Benito, *The Mussolini Memoirs 1942-1943*, London: Phoenix Press 1949, 2000

Spencer, Henry Russell, *Government & Politics of Italy*, World Book Company, NY, 1932

Articles

Cabona, Maurizio, *Mussolini and the Jews*, New York: Telos Press, Winter 2006, p. 95-119

Best, Katharina, *History of the Former Synagogue-Communities of Dillingen and Natbach*, 1988, on-line

Giorgi, Chiara (2019). «Social Policies in Italian Fascism. ; *Historia Contemporánea*, 61, 907-932.

Websites

Comando Supremo

<https://storienapoli.it/2021/02/27/camorra-e-il-fascismo-storia/>

<https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/the-fascist-building-in-upper-manhattan>

Wikipedia

Research & Editorial Committee

John L. Mancini, Researcher, Editor, and Curator

Co-Founder Italic Institute of America (educational 501c3) in 1987, Founder and Editor of *The Italic Way Magazine*, 1988 – present. Executive producer of Project Italia educational videos: *Roman Law in America*, and *Italian American Visions*.

Researcher/editor of *Italy and the Holocaust Report* 2015, published by the Italic Institute of America.

Rosario Iaconis, Researcher

Senior Analyst - Italic Institute of America, Adjunct professor Briarcliffe College – history, economics, ethics; feature writer for *The Italic Way Magazine*, contributor to *Financial Times of London*, *NY Times*, *Newsday* et al.

Alfred Cardone, Researcher, Staff writer of *The Italic Way Magazine*

Don Fiore, Researcher, Feature writer for *The Italic Way Magazine* and formerly for *Fra Noi* of Chicago

Andrew Ricci, Design editor

