

The Officers' Log

CHICAGO FILM PROJECT

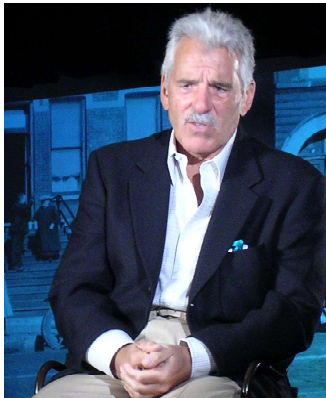
A Tale of Two TV Stations

By Bill Dal Cerro, Vice President

As our members know, in collaboration with Gia Amella of ModioMedia, LLC, the Institute is acting as fiscal sponsor for *And They Came to Chicago: The Italian American Legacy*, the first full-length documentary about the 150-year history of Italians in the Windy City. We are pleased to report that Amella has wrapped up the first leg of production for the film, with interviewees shot at WTTW Channel 11 studios and on location throughout Chicagoland. And the list of financial sponsors is growing. Caputo's/Wiscon Corporation pledged \$15,000 as a corporate sponsor/advertiser. And Amella recently teamed with Linda Dorminey, General Sales Manager at WTTW, to bring in additional sponsors/advertisers.

Among the people Ms. Amella interviewed were Lida Allegrini, who recalled, as a

young child, seeing Italo Balbo's squadron of planes descending at the 1933 World's Fair of Chicago; Donna DeRosa, who spoke about her famous grandfather James Petrillo, the influential president of the American Fed-



Actor Dennis Farina being taped

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ABC's 20/20 MISSES THE MARK

By Tony Vecchione, Treasurer



The ABC News Magazine 20/20 squandered a unique opportunity to reveal to a national, prime-time audience, the insidious stereotyping of Italian-Americans by the mainstream media. In its September 8, 2006 segment on stereotyping in Hollywood, 20/20 producers and host John Stossel chose to diminish just how damaging and endemic the stereotyping of Italian-Americans has become.

The segment opened with an innocuous statement by a spokesperson from the Sons of Italy who was never given sufficient air time to state the facts that support what has become a formula for success for television and movie producers at the expense of an entire generation of Italian-American children.

The fundamental problem with the segment was its blatant lack of balance. While the Asians and Muslims were afforded the dignity of being able to explain how incessant negative stereotypes has harmed their children's self-esteem and self-

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VICE CHAIR MEETS WITH JUSTICE ALITO

"Extreme law is often extreme injustice." - Terentius

In addition to watching the watchmen, Terence (Publius Terentius Afer) urged us to guard against overzealous jurists. Fortuitously for our Republic—as well as the Constitution—the newest member of the highest court in the land, Samuel A. Alito, echoes the legal philosophy of his



Justice Samuel Alito with Rosario Iaconis

ancient forebear.

In both style and substance, word and deed, Justice Alito epitomizes the Roman jurisprudential ideal.

Recently, it was my great good fortune to meet with Sam Alito in his private chambers in the U.S. Supreme Court. Having penned a *New York Newsday* article about the justice prior to his nomination, I was invited for a visit this past September.

After the initial pleasantries and a brief chat about a Yankees-Phillies World Series,

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JUSTICE ALITO, from p.1

we batted about several topics. I asked Justice Alito how he had weathered the vicious attacks and partisan broadsides of the nomination gauntlet. Though by no means a cakewalk, the process was more grueling for his family. Alito's years as a prosecutor and judge had steeled him for the worst.

What he found most vexing, however, was the epithet "Scalito." Essentially an ideological concoction, this code word conflated two jurists who just happen to sport surnames ending in the tell-tale vowel. While clearly perturbed by this ethnic slur, Justice Alito was also visibly upset by the implication of a lack of judicial independence.

"Why not compare me to Rehnquist?" he bristled.

When I mentioned that even some White House figure had wondered why they needed another Italian for the federal bench, Alito completed my sentence before I could utter "quota."

"The president never shared this belief," he mentioned. Still, I reminded the justice that President Bush sorely needed Alito's intellect, competence and breadth of judicial experience—particularly after the Harriet Myers debacle.

Another source of irritation was the charge that Justice Alito's father had not been born in Italy. Nothing could be further from the truth. Striding across his chambers, the justice removed a large plaque from the wall. He sat beside me and read this framed document—given to him by the Italian government—certifying his dad's birthplace in Calabria, Italy.

All of which brought us to the subject of *italianita*. And it was here that Sam Alito waxed most eloquent. "Education is key—at home and in school." I reminded him of the Italic Institute's Aurora pioneering youth program, and he nodded approvingly. We delved into the genesis of his own sense of Italian identity.

This in turn led to a discussion of Sam Alito's semester in the Magic Boot and his thesis on comparative legal systems. I learned that we both enjoyed Joseph J. Ellis's "Founding Brothers." And Justice Alito even remembered this landmark book's reference to Caesar Augustus' pivotal role in Italian and world history.

Sam Alito was as generous with his time as he was passionate about his origins. For me, he shall forever remain the gentleman justice of the U.S. Supreme Court.

CHICAGO FILM, from p. 1

eration of Musicians; and Ed Bernardi, a man who, despite his amazing success as a business and civic leader, ended his interview in tears, poignantly declaring: "I am my father's American dream."

In the next month or so, Amella wraps up the second phase of production, including interviews with Italian Senator-elect Renato Turano, actor Dennis Farina, attorney Ted Grippo and cultural expert Dr. Gloria Nardini. She will then hone her script and begin the editing process with her Emmy Award-winning colleague Martin Nelson. The end product will be a film for the ages: a vivid, emotionally compelling narrative about how an entire people, the Italians, transformed Chicago from an industrial metropolis into a vibrant, modern American city.

Note: *And They Came to Chicago* will first be shown on local NBC station Channel 5 before being broadcast multiple times on

(cont'd next page)

A LONELY MISSION

by John Mancini, Executive Director

Last month I read a press release from a national Italian American organization announcing the winner of one of those “What It Means to be Italian” essay contests. The winner was a teenage girl with a non-Italian surname. She spent the better part of her essay gushing with pride over her ability to swirl spaghetti on a spoon, a feat she learned from an Italian grandfather. That this young lady submitted such a shallow summary of her heritage is less shocking than the fact that some Italian American leaders awarded her \$500 for the piece. Imagine what the other contestants must have written! This same organization ignored our request for a donation to the *Aurora Youth Education Program* months before. A \$500 contribution to *Aurora* would give three children twelve Saturdays of cultural education, without spaghetti swirling lessons.

Another Italian American organization that regularly turns down our modest requests for support of *Aurora* hands their city’s archdiocese an annual check for \$100,000 in tuition payments for Italian American students to avoid public school. Most Catholic schools offer neither Italian language nor Italian culture and history.

The moral of these tales is that Italian youth education is a dead issue among organizations across the nation. Except for the Italic Institute and a handful of cultural centers, acculturating our youth is considered *una cosa pazza* by others. Our community’s “value system” in this regard is unique among ethnic groups. Our interaction with youth is reduced to occasional essay contests and a slew of minor, but highly publicized, scholarships. This approach helps perpetuate our community’s primitive oral traditions. Essentially, ours is a heritage by osmosis.

The results are obvious. Our children and most of our adults are “anecdotal Italians,” that is, their knowledge of heritage is based on cuisine, family lore and media images. As an ethnic group we have eaten our seed and planted nothing for the future. *Aurora* is literally our future, but try to convince most community leaders.

It is a lonely mission that our Institute has assigned itself: to build a new generation. We must focus on growing *Aurora* by ourselves, to build a comprehensive educational system worthy of our ancient and enduring legacy. Perhaps some day we shall awaken the rest of the community. Until that day, let us show the others the way.

P.S. -- Thanks to the efforts of our Aurora staff, especially Tony DeNonno and Angelo Merenda, we hope to have enough legislative grants to offer eleven (11) classes this year, including our new Advanced level. ****

WTTW Channel 11 through 2007. It is an historic achievement: two local Chicago television stations—one commercial, another public – banding together to support an historic broadcast on Chicago’s Italian American legacy.

Kudos also to Amella’s fine crew: Michelle Ferrell, Associate Producer; Beppe Mangione, Sound Recordist; and cameraman Kevin Malone of Long Island, NY. The IIA’s current vice-president, Bill Dal Cerro, is also serving as an Associate Producer on the film.

To learn more about *And They Came to Chicago*, visit www.modiomediamedia.com You can view more photos of interviewees by clicking “On Location.” Donations/sponsorships are also still available, all fully tax-deductible. ****

ABC’s 20/20, from p. 1

perception, Italian-Americans were afforded no such opportunity.

Instead, perennial mob actors were dragged out and disingenuously defended a stereotype that their livelihoods depend upon. Among the issues that 20/20 producers need to be accountable for:

- Why were professional defamers used to rebut OSIA’s spokesperson when no such rebuttals were used against Asian spokesmen?
- Why were Asians permitted to discuss the effect of stereotypes on minors while no such discussion was brought up for *Shark Tale* or the children’s mob novel *Nicky Deuce*?
- Why wasn’t it explained that stereotyping Asians as doctors and martial arts masters is not the same as almost exclusively depicting Italian-Americans as murderers and thieves for more than four decades?
- How is it that television and cinema doctors, lawyers, judges, generals et. al. rarely have Italian character names? Yet in the real world there are thousands of high-ranking Italian-Americans at all levels of society.
- Is there a symbiotic relationship between the multi-billion dollar Mafia media industry and the over-hyped reporting of low-level criminals with Italian names?

Mr. Stossel and his producers at 20/20 can correct their mistake by devoting a whole hour to this subject. A step in the right direction would be to allow spokespersons from the Italic Institute to explain that the American public has become hooked on Italian stereotypes for the financial benefit of a few people. The opiate that they peddle has very little to do with what Italian-Americans are like in the real world.

YES!

I share the values of the Italic Institute.

Enroll me as a member [\$20 check enclosed]

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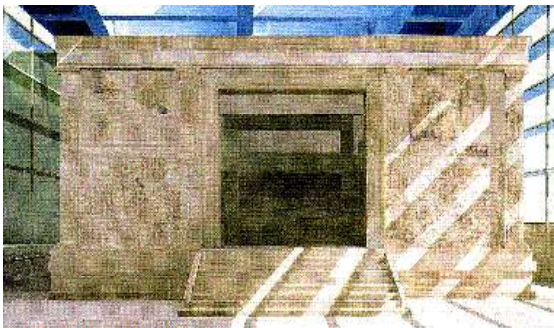
ALTAR OF PEACE REVISITED

Chairman John Mancini's daughter Antonia had one assignment to perform for the Institute on her recent 6-week sojourn in Italy: visit the Altar of Peace in Rome.

For long-time members of the Italic Institute, the *Ara Pacis Augustae* or Altar of Augustan Peace represents the underlying spirit of our organization. Consecrated on July 4th 13 B.C., the Altar was literally the starting point for IIA when it was founded in 1987 on the 2000th anniversary of the Altar. The fledgling Institute sent a delegation to Rome to publicly mark the event and so consecrate the Institute itself.

Back in 13 B.C. momentous milestones had been achieved that prompted the Roman Senate to authorize the Altar. Augustus had finally pacified all of the Roman domain after decades of civil war and insurrections and became its first emperor. Italy, which was politically and geographically unified in 222 BC, had finally become one nation in culture and language by 13 BC.

This year, a new building to house the Altar was opened, hence the purpose of Antonia's visit. Her visit also brought her face-to-face with the family of Augustus, in bas relief, including her namesakes Antonia Major and Antonia Minor, the nieces of the emperor. What other culture can see the actual faces of their ancient forebears?



WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Every so often the Executive Council solicits feedback from our members. Please spend a few minutes with this questionnaire and mail it back to us in the enclosed envelope.

1. How long have you been a member of the Italic Institute? _____
2. How do you perceive the Institute? (choose one)
a) a regular membership organization b) an ideological movement
3. Do you feel that the Institute is substantially different from other Italian American groups? Yes / No
4. If "yes", how are we different?
a) more critical b) more proactive c) more creative
5. Are you intellectually satisfied with the current popular image of the Italian American community?
Yes / No
6. What best describes the Italian American culture? (choose any combination)
a) anti-intellectual b) food-based c) positive and inspiring d) religion-based e) humanist-based f) youth-oriented g) senior-oriented
7. How do you see Italian American culture two generations from now?
a) the same b) worse c) a higher form d) buried by intermarriage.
8. Of all the major organizations, which one holds the best hope of preserving and sustaining the Italian heritage in the coming generations?
a) National Italian American Foundation (NIAF)
b) Order, Sons of Italy in America c) Italic Institute of America d) Columbus Citizens Foundation (NYC Columbus Day Parade)
9. Compared to other ethnic groups such as Jewish Americans, Irish Americans, Hispanic Americans, do you believe Italian Americans wield similar political power? Yes / No

Kindly mail your responses in the enclosed return envelope. We will report the results in our next Log.