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The Officers' Log

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ETHNIC CLEANSING?



When *La Casa Italiana* was donated to Columbia University in 1927 along with a 20,000-volume library by the Paterno and Campagna Families, and endowed with a substantial maintenance fund from the Italian American community, it was the capstone of our heritage. Its mission was to diffuse Italian culture and to elevate Italian Americans. That was then.

In 1990, the Italian Republic bought the 7-story palazzo and turned it over to a clutch of indifferent Columbia academics. Today, *La Casa*, functioning as the Italian Academy, has been essentially cleansed of Italian Americans and shorn of its original mission.

The Italic Institute has been working with the descendants of the Paterno-Campagna family to restore the purpose of *La Casa*. In that quest, we have appealed to Columbia University, New York State's Attorney General and the Italian government itself. We can report that while the Attorney General furnished us with important documentation, Columbia has been less than helpful. And we are still awaiting the Italian "cavalry."

Among the issues we have raised is, one, the whereabouts of the Paterno Library Collection and its restoration to the building. Two, what happened to the original endowment money when the building was sold in 1990? Three, why are there no Italian Americans on the Board of Twelve Guarantors? (One Indian-American was appointed recently.) Four, why aren't the Italian American students of Columbia encouraged to use the building? Five, why aren't annual fellowships at *La Casa* being allotted to Italian Americans throughout the country? Six, why are fellowships awarded for theses that clearly have no bearing on Italic studies? (eg., *Demonology in Ancient Egypt*). There are other issues, but you get the idea.

La Casa has no outreach or on-line capabilities for research. It has no Italian language facilities. It conducts no accredited courses in Italian studies. The Italian language department was relocated elsewhere, decades ago. Even the director is non-Italic. In short, what once housed the premier repository of our heritage is now a multi-cultural and self-serving institution with a "privileged vision of Europe."

What's puzzling is how cavalierly the Italian government, which is sensitive to aggrieved groups, treats its American cousins, the creators of *La Casa Italiana*. This isn't over.

ITALY TAKES STOCK

It has been a bad year for Italy, beginning with the Costa Concordia shipwreck in January. And now, in March, an Italian engineer working in Nigeria was murdered by kidnappers during a botched rescue attempt by British commandos. His death was sad enough but the rescue attempt was made without informing the Italian government. Naturally, the Italians found this insulting, if not criminal. But it feeds into the growing feeling by Italians that they are not being taken seriously, even by so-called allies like the UK. Lucio Caracciolo, editor of the Italian foreign policy magazine *Limes*, stated, "The fact that Italy doesn't have much clout is a fact, not an opinion, in part also because of the negative stereotypes of the past." Says Institute Vice President Anthony Vecchione, "Absolutely true, now do something about them."

Even the Indians are feeling their curry. When Italian Marines guarding a merchant vessel fired on and killed two suspected pirates approaching their freighter in the Indian Ocean, the Indian press exploded in anger. The Marines were arrested and charged with murdering Indian fisherman. India still has

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HI-DE-HO! OH, NO!

by Bill Dal Cerro, President

For those who doubt the durability and power of anti-Italian stereotypes in America, consider three recent, flagrant examples.

In the first—and most shocking—example, a PBS produced documentary on the African American jazz singer Cab Calloway featured a talking head clip of historian Gary Giddins, who noted that the famed Cotton Club in Manhattan was owned by “Italian mafia gangsters.” The Cotton Club was, in fact, owned by Owney Madden, a violent immigrant thug from Leeds, England. When contacted by our Institute via email the next day, Giddins admitted that he knew Madden was the real owner but that, in his own words, he “fell into the mafia stereotype.” The show’s producer, Gail Levin, also reached by email, likewise admitted fault for not vetting Giddins’ quote for accuracy. Their apologies, however, will do little to correct the historical lie, which now lives *in aeternum*.

The second example was reported by the Commission for Social Justice of the Order Sons of Italy. When discussing the Costa Concordia tragedy, Sharon Osborne, the British-born co-host of the gabfest *The Talk*, said that the ship’s beleaguered captain, Francesco Schettino, “should go with the list of Italian war heroes—there are none. Italians are lovers, not fighters.” Clearly, Ms. Osborne has no doubt been programmed by relentless British WWII propaganda, which went out of its way to paintbrush the Italian military as either incompetent or cowardly. Ms. Osborne’s husband, the spaced-out British rocker, Ozzy, is known for such on-stage antics as chewing off a live bat’s head during a concert. His better half, Sharon, is simply batty.

Finally, another talk show host, this time one of our own—Kelly Ripa of the old *Kelly and Regis Show*—participated in an

unfunny six-minute sketch on the Internet website *Funny or Die* called “Bensonhurst Spelling Bee.” In it, three young kids from Bensonhurst, Brooklyn, are asked the “correct” spellings of popular Italian foods (“prazhut” instead of *prosciutto*, for example).

Bad enough, but it gets worse: the sketch also features Ripa’s real-life husband, Mexican American actor Mark Consuelos, and their real-life young son, who plays one of the doltish contestants, dressed in an “Italia” track suit. And the worst touch of all: the two spelling bee judges are played by Lorraine Bracco and Tony Sirico, clearly enjoying their crude, mini-“*Sopranos*” reunion.

One wonders if Ms. Ripa is likewise planning a similar sketch mocking her son’s Hispanic heritage. Perhaps the spelling bee run by U.S. immigration officials.

Unlike General McArthur, anti-Italian jokes never fade away, they keep being passed down to the next generation.

Italic Roots

by Rosario A. Iaconis, Chairman

Erin go — brava?

Actually, you don’t have to sport a brogue or hail from County Cork to celebrate St. Patrick’s Day. ‘Tis a feast that’s a tribute to Western civilization. And the scions of Italy should be among the joyous revelers.

Born of a noble family in Roman Britain’s Bannaventa Berniae, the man who would become St. Patrick was the privileged son of Calpornius and Conchessa, Romans living in Britain.

As a member of the Roman upper class, Patrick received a classical education; fluency in Latin, immersion in the history of the Casesars, and a devotion to Virgil’s Aeneid.

Archaeological evidence of a Roman base at Tipperary supports historians’ claims that extensive trade and cultural links existed between Italy and Ireland. Moreover, the discovery of another fort at Drumanagh, north of Dublin, indicates an Italian presence between 79 and 182 AD.

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a death penalty, although widows need not throw themselves on their husband’s funeral pyre any longer. The Italian Foreign Ministry has accused India of arresting the Marines in international waters. It insists that the accused must be tried outside of India. For its part, the Indian government is not budging and some Indian journalists have taken to retelling old World War II propaganda stories mocking the Italian military. On a bright note, the jailers are allowing the prisoners to eat Italian cuisine delivered from the local consulate.

MAYHEM AT SEA

The news of the Costa Concordia disaster off the coast of Tuscany made news around the globe in January. The tragedy cost the lives of a score of voyagers when Capt. Francesco Schettino ran the cruise ship onto some rocks. The episode was made more appalling when it was learned that the Captain had abandoned ship before the passengers and crew.

Capt. Schettino has become the personification of Italian failings. An editor of the German magazine *Der Spiegel* wrote, “was it a surprise that it was an Italian ship?” It is a common belief in the media that Italian failure or wrong-doing is an ethnic flaw. Notes Institute Executive Director John Mancini, “Be it crime, a short temper, overeating, or a military defeat, the media and the public enjoy dabbling in our DNA.”

“Growing up in the English-speaking world we have heard it all,” suggests Institute Vice Chairman Don Fiore. “But the fallout from the Schettino disaster has demonstrated the open nature of Italian ridicule.”



What the media failed to report or mock back in 2011 was a mutiny on the German training ship *Gorch Fock* (yes a “focker”). It seems that a female cadet had fallen to her death from a mast while sailing off the coast of Brazil. Herr Capt. Norbert Schatz refused to allow his young cadet crew to grieve. (Is that a German trait?) Seventy young German cadets would have none of the Captain’s iron discipline and refused to go aloft. The ship had to put into port and the crew sent home by plane. The incident became a scandal in Berlin, coming on the heels of the Defense Ministry’s cover-up of an accidental shooting of a German soldier in Afghanistan by another German soldier.

“These events certainly would be grist for the media mill had Italians been involved,” says Institute President Bill Dal Cerro, “But one does not ridicule Germans.”

HORSE MANURE?

by Anthony Vecchione

Can a cable series about non-Italian gangsters make it in America? Seems not.

It had all the makings of a hit mini-series. Legendary actors Dustin Hoffman and Nick Nolte led the cast that included veteran character actor Dennis Farina, a former Chicago police officer. Emmy-award winners David Milch and Michael Mann produced it.

Although the initial reviews weren't glowing and the ratings were mediocre, *Luck* was renewed for a second season by HBO. In fact, it was smack in the middle of filming the second episode of the second season when the word came down that the series was cancelled. Why? A horse died on the set. It was the third horse fatality since the series began production.

The producers contend that they maintained the highest safety standards. The American Humane Association's Film and Television unit monitored the treatment of animals used in the production.

Although People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals [PETA] raised questions about safety protocols, to cancel a potentially lucrative series abruptly in mid-production was a shocking move and raised eyebrows in the entertainment community.

Some industry observers were puzzled over the cancellation. After all, it is not unusual for accidents to occur when animals are used in a production.

Producer Milch has a good track record with HBO producing two previous series. Needless to say, people involved in the

series had a great passion for horses. Why would they take unnecessary chances?

Others suggest that the series might not have been cancelled if the ratings were higher. Perhaps. But maybe the more appropriate question to ask is: Was the death of three horses the real reason why *Luck* was cancelled? Or does the plot itself and the characters have something to do with the *Luck*'s demise?



HBO's wiseguys "Chester Bernstein" and "Gus Demitriou" are clearly not ready-for-primetime mobsters.

The story line centers around recently paroled wiseguy Chester "Ace" Bernstein [Hoffman] and his old underworld crony and driver Gus Demitriou [Dennis Farina]. Demitriou buys a promising horse while Bernstein plots to take control of a California racetrack and get back at the individuals who he believes are responsible for sending him to prison.

It is not unusual for stories that revolve around gambling, horse racing, and other so-called "seedy" businesses to be connected to organized crime. In the American

mainstream media, that usually means *La Cosa Nostra*, or some other crime element linked to Italian-American gangsters.

While *Luck* did include some Italian-American casino executives and gamblers, they were marginal characters. Overall, the series didn't have the aura of an Italian-American crime syndicate. In other words, the type that American movie and television audiences have become so accustomed to.

Even radio talk show host Michael Savage subtly alluded to this when the series first aired. He noted *Luck*'s poor ratings and what he described as a poorly developed script and characters. He said that Dustin

Hoffman was not believable as a wise guy while Dennis Farina's character was more credible as a gangster. What did Savage mean by that?

A few days later, a caller to Savage's show who claimed to be a horse trainer from Kentucky [didn't sound like a Kentucky accent to me] echoed Savage's sentiments, stating that the horse racing business was filled with characters that looked and acted more like Farina. [an ethnic Italian playing a Greek American].

After decades of a steady diet of Italian-American gangsters and lowlifes, has the American public been programmed to believe that only Italian-Americans are credible as the bad guys? Is the indoctrination so complete that viewers and critics alike can't accept non-Italian-American characters in sinister roles even though they are present in the real world?

It's tragic that the horses died in the making of a mini-series. Racehorses are regal animals that are deserving of dignity. So are Italian-Americans deserving of dignity. Why was *Luck* really cancelled?
