



# UPDATE

Italic Institute of America  
"Italian Pride on a Classical Foundation"

December, 2021

[www.italic.org](http://www.italic.org)



## Reflections on 35

by John Mancini, Executive Director



In a couple of weeks, our Institute will embark on the 35th year of its mission — promoting a Classical Italian Heritage.

For those of you who have been with us from the early days, you know of our triumphs and frustrations - from our Waldorf=Astoria galas to the "lost" causes in oppos-

ing media defamation and distortions. Along the way, we managed to produce a very substantive national magazine, establish an innovative after-school program for pre-teens, and open a new world of heritage resources online.

Frankly, we haven't set the world on fire, but we have managed to stay financially healthy and remain on message all these decades.

There were plenty of chances to compromise our standards and to dilute our doctrine. But I recall reading a book at an old corporate day job I had that the CEO handed out to all executives. The title was *Built to Last*, and the message was: stick to your original mission.

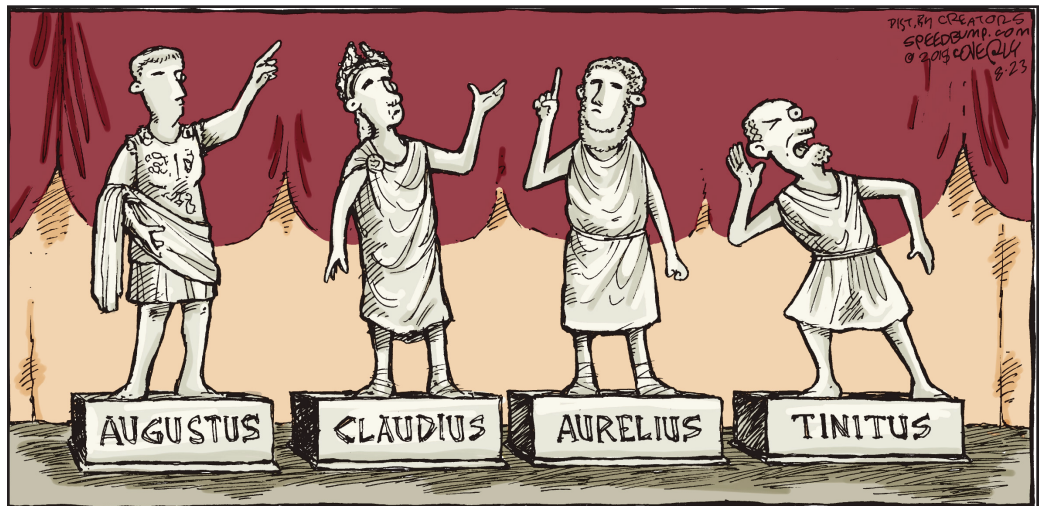
We have done just that, despite internal politics and a vanishing Italian American community. As contradictory as it may sound, it's the heritage not the community that must live. Ancient Rome collapsed but its essence returned as the *Rinascimento* and the *Risorgimento*. That's an amazing example of "built to last."

Thirty-five years and counting!

## Media Coverage

We've been at it since 1987 — calling out the media in defense of our community and heritage. They say "things change" but we haven't noticed anything different in how Hollywood, Madison Avenue, and the print media treats Americans of Italian stock. In a world of "political correctness" we are still considered the exception to the rule. The FBI still finds geriatric mobsters with nicknames and ersatz military titles ("Mafia captain") to feed the hungry press anxiously awaiting perp walks to satisfy nostalgic readers and mob movie buffs.

On page 4, you'll find two published letters that our senior analysts Rosario Iaconis and Bill Dal Cerro wrote to set the media straight on perceptions of Columbus and Italian American celebrities. It isn't often our views are published but it is important the media hears from us.



Even our old-age maladies have classical roots.

## The Endless Paper Chase

We are still pursuing the ever-elusive New York State Assembly grant promised us in 2019. In 2020, the China Virus drove the state's grant managers into lockdown and the virus decimated New York's already empty treasury. The good news: the feds dropped \$16

Billion on Albany in Covid Relief and the grant program was resuscitated. The bad news: we had to start all over again with the online paperwork. Once in awhile we are able to exchange email with a human being, otherwise it's us and the website prompts.

As \$10,000 is at stake, we are assuredly willing to chase the wily grant into 2022, a third year!

## A Warrior and A Pacifist

4-star General **Ray Odierno** passed away in October at age 67. He was first recognized and promoted by a fellow Italian American in 2011.

One of the first acts Leon Penetta performed when appointed Secretary of Defense was to promote Iraq War veteran General Ray Odierno to Army Chief of Staff. Gen.



Odierno had spent over four harrowing years in Iraq, rising to top commander in September, 2008. It was Odierno whose unit captured Saddam Hussein. Odierno was the architect of the now famous "surge" that saved our first victory in Iraq. It was also Odierno who recruited Sunni opposition leaders to turn on their foreign Al Qaeda allies.

After the war, Odierno commissioned a report on lessons learned in Iraq: #1 - Don't depend on the host country's military. It was a tragic lesson lost on our military leaders in Afghanistan this year.

**Dr. Gino Strada**, 73, died last August after a lifetime of performing emergency surgery. In 1994 he founded Emergency, an international nonprofit dedicated to treating victims in war zones. Fervently anti-war, Dr. Strada was born near Milan and practiced in the U.S. for a short time. He and his teams of trauma specialists



brought their skills to Cambodia, Rwanda, Iraq, and Afghanistan, among other embattled areas. They treated some

11 million victims of bullets, bombings, and landmines — overwhelmingly civilians. He proudly wrote: *It's a tiring job, that of the war surgeon. But it is also, for me, a great honour.*"

## Columbus Betrayals

You would think that our community could unite behind at least one hero we lauded for generations: Christopher Columbus. But not all of the 17 million Americans who identify as "Italian" share that opinion. Our free-thinking Hollywood celebs may admit to some Italian blood, but they prefer to float on whichever wind keeps them airborne.

Among our "cousins" in Tinseltown who support Indigenous Peoples Day to replace Columbus Day are actors Mark Ruffalo, Leonardo DiCaprio, and Susan Sarandon. No doubt there are others.

And, how about New York's new governor Kathy Hochul (HO-cull). On the same day she was an honored guest at the Manhattan Columbus Day Parade, her office proclaimed the holiday as Indigenous Peoples Day. Maybe the food was better than at the Iroquois Parade upstate.

## Oldest Bank Retires

How many nations can boast it has the oldest bank in the world? Italy's Banca Monte dei Paschi di Siena was founded in 1472, first lending money to shepherds (*paschi* means pastures) in the surrounding Tuscan hills. The name Siena, they say, derived from the Etruscan tribe *Saina* that lived in the area. Augustus founded the city as *Saena Julia*.

The bank fell on hard times in the past decade after some managerial skulduggery and bad



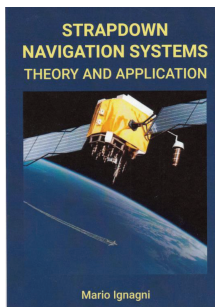
loans. For centuries it was synonymous with Siena — its largest employer and most generous benefactor. Charities, hospitals, and even the famous Palio horse race depended on the bank's regular largesse.

But Italians don't like parting with old things, so the bank's name and legend will live on under different masters — perhaps even foreign ones.

## Interesting Folks

Among our Italic Institute community are doctors, lawyers, businessmen, and folks with special skills and interests. Over the years all of them support us with donations or in-kind contributions. There is plenty of talent in our small community, in fields that would amaze.

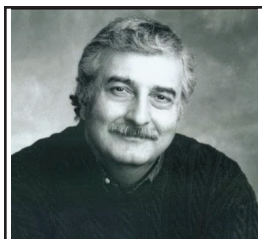
One such talented fellow is **Mario Ignagni** (Eng: ig-NAH-nee) of Minnesota who lends his time to correct Wikipedia entries for us. But his lifetime career has been in the aerospace



industry as a design engineer working on the Apollo Command/Service Module project. His knowledge is extensive enough (40 years worth!) to fill a textbook on aerospace navigation, which he recently published. Is he really retired?



Another fellow who has helped us over the years and has his own initiatives in the community is **Mike Baccarella** of Chicagoland. Mike is an author, artist, and actor. He has published an index of Italian American actors called *Italactors* and a book on the

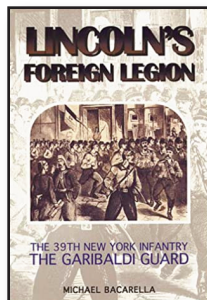


Garibaldi Guard of the Civil War. In that vein, he recently compiled service records of individual soldiers in the Union and Confederate armies. There were plenty of Sicilians in Louisiana during that war to fill the state militia.

As an actor, Mike Bacarella appeared in *While You Were Sleeping* (1995), *The Fugitive* (1993) and *The Relic* (1997), among his many films.

## The Romans Keep Giving

The Roman Empire was not fake news. Ask archeologists on three continents who have uncovered fabulous mosaics, whole cities, and plenty of treasure. The latest find is in Bavaria, where 5,500 coins, 33 pounds worth, were discovered in an old river bed near the city of



## A Reminder

**We are not a membership organization, but rather a resource for anyone interested in the Italian heritage. Our unique perspective begins with Classical Italy, not with the fall of the Roman Empire.**

**You don't need to spend a dime to access a wealth of opinion, history, and information. Just visit our website [www.italic.org](http://www.italic.org) to share our world of things Italian.**

**It's the only Italian American website with a Research Library, a Video Gallery, educational publications, and an interactive blog platform.**

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**Donations are Tax Deductible**

Augsberg. Augsberg was founded by Emperor Caesar Augustus, as the name reveals.

## The Subway Story

When 17-year-old Fred DeLuca wanted to start a business that would pay for his college education, he asked a friend's father for advice. The man urged him to open a sandwich shop like the Italian one he frequented as a youth in Maine. Young Fred took his advice and made him a partner for \$1,000. Today, Subway is the world's largest chain of fast-food restaurants with 40,000 franchises — more than McDonald's or Starbucks.

## David Gets Split

When the Islamic nation of Dubai wanted to display a full-size statue of Michelangelo's *David* at a World's Fair, there was a problem of morality. Female Muslim visitors would be "offended" by *David's* Italian genitalia.

The solution, of sorts, was to place *David* between two floors so the ladies could admire the statue's upper torso and avoid seeing his manhood, which would require a trip to another floor.

Hold that elevator, please!



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



Lady Gaga and Tony Bennett

### **The very real Tony Bennett, not the fictional Tony Soprano, is what being Italian American is all about**

On CBS' "60 Minutes" last Sunday, reporter Anderson Cooper offered a profile of 95-year-old Tony Bennett, detailing the great crooner's struggles with Alzheimer's. For those of us lucky enough to catch Bennett's annual performances at Ravinia over the past decades, it was bittersweet to watch.

Though slowed by the disease, Bennett's performing spark lit immediately whenever he heard music or was in front of a crowd. Bravo, Antonio!

I found it telling, though, that on that same weekend "The Many Saints of Newark" — a prequel to the "Sopranos" TV series — opened in theaters and via HBO. Critics and fans constantly comment on the "Italian" background of the film's characters, all of whom (it's rather embarrassing to have to point this out) are completely fictional. They do not exist.

On "60 Minutes," Cooper never once mentioned that both Tony Bennett and Lady Gaga, his frequent partner for duets, are Italian Americans. Bennett was born Benedetto, Gaga was born Germanotta. Was Cooper obligated to do so? Of course not. Bennett and Gaga are, first and foremost, *Americans*. Their talents belong to us all.

But this does raise the question: Why are fictional Italians presented as violent Neanderthals considered more "authentic" than living legends like Bennett and Gaga?

Talk about "illusion" vs. "reality"!

The novelist Luigi Pirandello, who specialized in that literary theme, would have been disturbed by this. So should we all.

*Bill Dal Cerro, Norwood Park*

## *In Praise of Columbus and Italian Humanism*

Mr. Kasparov is correct in asserting that Christopher Columbus "took outrageous risks and performed incredible feats of exploration to advance modern civilization." But the voyage of the Admiral of the Ocean Sea wasn't simply the story of one man's giant leap. Cristoforo Colombo's perilous trek across the Atlantic represents the triumph of humanism writ large.

Like Amerigo Vespucci, Giovanni Caboto and Giovanni da Verrazzano, Columbus hailed from the land John Milton called "the seat of civilization and the hospitable domicile of every species of erudition." Renaissance Italy gave rise to the rebirth of classical humanism, spawning modern science, art, architecture, political science, capitalism and, yes, the age of exploration.

Warts and all, Columbus was the avatar of modernity. In "Columbus: The Great Adventure," Paolo Emilio Taviani wrote that the Admiral of the Ocean Sea sprang from a flourishing and unified *Italianità*. "Columbus was not an isolated product of fifteenth-century Italian culture, of which Genoa was an essential part. Christopher Columbus of Genoa was the greatest and most spectacular actor at the beginning of the modern age."

Without Columbus—as well as Galileo Galilei, Paolo Toscanelli and Leonardo da Vinci—and the Italian Renaissance, John F. Kennedy could never have pledged "We choose to go to the moon."

Several years ago, astronomer Geoffrey W. Marcy recalled a key moment of discovery in the search for extrasolar planets: "It felt like being on Columbus's ship."

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