



UPDATE

Italic Institute of America
“*Italian Pride on a Classical Foundation*”

April, 2022

www.italic.org



A World in Turmoil

by John Mancini, Executive Director



The year started on some sour notes: a lingering Covid-19 pandemic with all its variants and sub-variants, Russia invaded Ukraine, and our economy is struggling.

But, our Institute is plowing ahead thanks to your generosity and some new grants. We pioneered decentralized operations even before the pandemic, making home offices the key to low overhead.

This *Update* even surprised me with revelations about some of our own associates across the country who are doing positive things in the world of sports and politics. We'll revisit the year 1965 (page 4) and see how much or how little things have changed in fifty-seven years. On the negative side, the American media is marking the 50th anniversary of *The Godfather* – that perverse saga of fictional Italic thieves and murderers. The Italic Institute proudly rained on this parade in a number of mainstream newspaper editorials. You will find them attached.

Finally, The Pinocchio cartoon on this page is a good lead-in to the story of associate Joseph DioGuardi. Joe found, while he served in the U.S. Congress, that he had Albanian roots. Just anecdote-

tally, we all know how diverse Italian DNA is. My own results from an Ancestry test reveal that I have 2% “Greek/Albanian” DNA. Actor Tony Danza has 10%. Of course, Greeks and Albanians are different folks but I suppose they mixed it up in southern Italy. But the point is, we are the sum total of our ancestors, whoever they were. In Joe’s case, it had some amazing results.

Enjoy this issue!

Olympic Medal Count

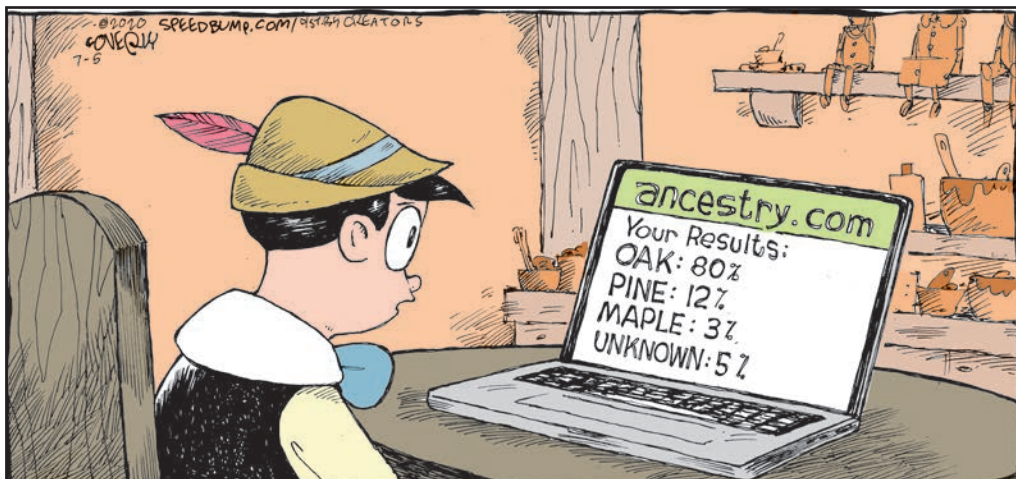
The Winter Olympics in Beijing found Italy's athletes quite competitive. They tied for 8th place with the Netherlands (17 medals), but ahead of Red China, Switzerland, France, South Korea, Finland and fourteen other medal winners.

Sports and physical competition have been a hallmark of Italy since Roman times. Didn't we invent the sports arena (amphitheater)? Thumbs up for Italian athletes!

Italy Recoups its Treasures

We know that Italy is the world's greatest storehouse of art – 3,000 years worth! How much more is illegally outside the country, stolen from Italian museums and

archeological sites? We don't know, but the Carabinieri has a division dedicated to clawing it back. Last December, over 200 ancient artifacts were returned to Italy, some dating from 700 B.C. In all, an estimated \$10



An Italian celebrity finds his roots.

Cartoonist :Dave Coverly

million worth. The culprit in this particular larceny is a 70-year old Princeton graduate and antiquities dealer. He is now under investigation for 160 objects he sold to American museums and private collectors over the course of thirty years. Fortunately, the Carabinieri found the victims to be very cooperative, readily surrendering the objects to the Italians.



Famous Names in the News

She was born Giovanna Carmella Babbo, but America knew her as **Joni James**, a pop vocalist from the 1950s. Joni passed away in February at age 91.



Over a career that spanned 12 years, she recorded almost 700 songs that sold 100 million copies; 24 went platinum, 12 went gold. They

included *Why Don't You Believe Me?*, and *How Important Can it Be?* Her rendition of Hank Williams's classic *Your Cheatin Heart* helped bring Country into Pop music.

He was once King of Naples & Sicily, then of Spain, but he chose New Jersey for his exile. **Joseph Bonaparte**, Napoleon's older brother, did what his brother told him. Although he loved Naples he was reassigned to rebellious Spain. The Spanish didn't like the French or the Bonapartes, smearing Joseph as *Pepe Botella* ("Bottle Joey") meaning an alcoholic, which he was not.

After his brother met his Waterloo (1815), Joseph fled to Bordentown, NJ, where he and his wealth were the toast of the town until he returned to Italy in 1832.

The state of New Jersey just bought Bonaparte's old 60-acre homestead to make it into a state park. The place has a great wine cellar!



Baseball in Italy

One of our longtime associates, Steve Napolitano of Long Island, gets around but we didn't know until recently he was affiliated with a charitable group named the **Italian American Baseball Foundation**. Established in 2016, its mission is to develop and support youth baseball here and in Italy. Baseball may not be the national pastime in Italia but Italian youth has been lured to the game since GIs introduced it during World War II.

The Foundation has taken off with the backing of champs like the late Tommy LaSorda, Mike Pagliarulo, and Mike Piazza.



Team Italia beats Australia 10-0 in a Florida match.

It donates equipment and uniforms to organized youth teams in both countries. There are six Italian teams thus far. It showcases high school players to college recruiters, and runs camps and sports clinics on both sides of the Atlantic. But the Foundation's ultimate goal is to build a baseball/softball academy to combine sports and education.



One happy Italian fan celebrating Italy's victory over Mexico

Funds are raised through donations and special events. And Italian culture is part of the mission. In fact, families are encouraged to join their kids on sports outings in Italy, combining exhibition games with sightseeing in the Homeland.

There are plenty of Italian American sports honorees past and present that have been celebrated by the Foundation. They include players, coaches, executives, and media folks. They haven't gotten around to politicians like Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, who captained the Yale varsity baseball team back when. But give them time!

The next fundraiser will be a golf outing on September 19th at the Engineers Country Club in Roslyn Harbor, Long Island. Details can be found at the Foundation's website: iabf.foundation.

A Man of Three Cultures

Our Institute attracts the right kind of people – they are distinct from those who take heritage lightly or as just an accident of birth. They easily balance the pride of American identity with a passion for their Italian roots.

It isn't often that someone like **Joseph DioGuardi** comes to our Institute with a 3-part identity, all evincing equal passions.

He was already a proud Italian American, with two Italian parents, who had just won a seat in Congress from NY in 1985 when his life's work took a dramatic turn.

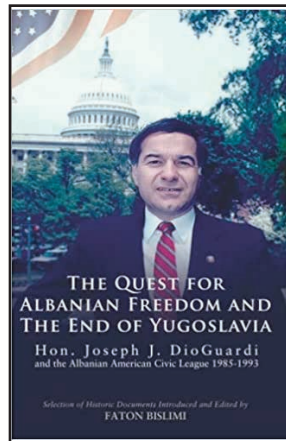
While addressing a multi-ethnic audience, with his immigrant father nearby, a group of Albanian American voters overheard Joe's father speaking in an Albanian dialect. Joe's father had come from an Albanian-speaking town outside of Naples. Within weeks, Congressman DioGuardi became the darling of Albania-America. He was hailed as the first Albanian in Congress. With this honor, he was given the monumental task of saving ethnic Albanians in Yugoslavia's Kosova region from Serbian genocide. Joe not only accepted the task but made it a lifelong crusade.

Joe only served two terms in Congress, a wonder for a Republican in a Democratic precinct – he even managed to beat the famous Bella Abzug in 1986. But in that time, he successfully changed U.S. foreign policy under President Bill Clinton to save Kosova and expose the murderous war crimes of Serb leader Slobodan Milosevic. To succeed, Joe worked closely with Senator Bob Dole as well as Bill Clinton and Democratic colleagues. Such was his reputation that Serbia officially banned him in 1990. In 2008, Kosova declared its independence with U.S. recognition, thanks in great part to Joe DioGuardi's lobbying efforts.

While in Congress, Joe also worked with Black legislators to retroactively award the Medal of Honor to African American soldiers who fought in past wars.

Joe's Italian roots are unmistakable. DioGuardi means "God protects or watches" with origins in Italy's South and Sicily. Joe's maternal side (Paparella) originated in Bari, on Italy's heel. The Albanian community here, in the Balkans, and in Italy couldn't find a better Italic champion.

[The pictured book is available on Amazon and documents Joe's struggles on behalf of the Albanian people.]



A Reminder

You don't need to spend a dime to access a wealth of opinion, history, and information. Just visit our website 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.

Italic Institute of America
PO Box 818
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Donations are Tax Deductible

The Secret of Long Life

Forget the fiber and colorful veggies. An 'expert' on Long Island found the Fountain of Youth in her pantry: "*spaghetti aglio e olio.*" So says Clara Lomangino when asked how she reached the age of 107 last month. Finally, something that makes life worth living!

Italy by Most Common Surnames

Maybe you have a variation of Italy's 20 most common surnames, or maybe it's more common in a different region than your ancestral one.



Our associate Dennis Mancini (brother of our Executive Director) offered copies from 1965 of *The Voice*, the newsletter of The Grand Council of Columbia Associations in Civil Service. It's always good to look back once in a while to judge our progress.

The Columbia Association is alive and well in New York. Their story dates back to the NYPD during the 1930s when the Irish dominated the department and city government. Italian American cops decided to fight City Hall and then-Mayor Jimmy Walker, who eventually agreed to recognize the Association as an anti-discrimination group.

Here are some of the headlines from 1965:

FBI Chief Hoover Agrees With Biaggi on Valachi 'Circus'

Columbia president and decorated NYPD officer Mario Biaggi took to the media to echo Hoover's testimony to the U.S. House of Representative. Hoover claimed that the televised Valachi hearings then bombarding American televisions were unnecessary and that mobster Joe Valachi (below) said nothing that the FBI didn't already know.

Biaggi called the politicians who staged the hearings and made Valachi a sensation were smearing our community by suggesting that *"the crimes of the nation are at-*



tributable to the Italian American minority."

Biaggi appeared on the Jack Paar Show to explain how only 2.5% of the U.S. prison inmates were Italian, while we represented 11% of the population.

Wall Street Journal Explains Slur in Verrazano Bridge Story

Reporter Laurence O'Donnell wrote that most Brooklynites resisted naming the new bridge after an Italian explorer and referred to it as *"the Narrows —or the 'Guinea Gangplank'."* After an Italian American complained about the WSJ repeating such a slur, the editor apologized.

Lindsay's Failure to Include Italo-American on Ticket is Snub to Largest Ethnic Group

This article urged Columbia members to vote for John Lindsay's opponent Abe Beame. Beame won.

Book on 'The Italians' Scored as Defamation

Activist Judge and retired U.S. admiral Michael Musmanno condemned the newly published book *The Italians*, by Luigi Barzini as one big slur on Italy and its people. "[the book] *ties Italy to a stake, piles faggots of ridicule at her feet, sets fire to them with the match of disdain, and burns his country to a crisp.*"

Judge Musmanno did not live to see Barzini's work inspire Mario Puzo's *Godfather* and the Coppola saga, or the myriad defamations thereafter.



1965

'Raffaello' Here on Maiden Voyage

The sleek new addition to the Italian Line fleet arrived in New York with great fanfare. The *Raffaello* (below) joined its sister ship *Michelangelo* - both 900-feet in length with a 1,775 passenger capacity. The twin ships made the NY to Naples run in seven days. Other Italian Line ships were the *Leonardo da Vinci* and *Cristoforo Colombo*. These magnificent vessels were the pride of Italy and also of the Italian American community. And how about the stalwarts that survived WW II - *Saturnia* and *Vulcania* - those were the mainstays of the Italy to New York run in the 1950s!



The Godfather Craze Celebrates 50 Years of Artistic Defamation...

...and we had something to say about it.

With the Italic Institute's unique access to the press, we made our opinion heard in suburban Chicago and Metro New York.

As an added 'rasberry', Senior Analyst Bill Dal Cerro produced a 3-minute video on the subject for Youtube.

Here is the link to enjoy his work:

<https://youtu.be/Yxha6QDsN18>



Wednesday, March 2, 2022

Dear Editor

[In response to your Fanfare celebration of *The Godfather*]

Over the past 50 years, anytime Italian Americans protested *The Godfather* saga as defamation and a distortion of our culture we were told: "Well, ya gotta admit there's a mafia."

Well, ya gotta admit *The Godfather* spawned half a century (and counting) of ethnic-defaming movies and TV series based on stereotyped characters and warped portrayals of Italian culture. Ya gotta admit that *The Godfather* saga has no positive Italian characters to "balance" the thieves and murderers. Ya gotta admit *The Godfather* elevated the image of thieves and murderers. Ya gotta admit that no other ethnic or religious group in this country would allow such Hollywood treatment of its culture for

Italian Americans and the anniversary of 'The Godfather'

On March 14, 1891, in New Orleans, Louisiana, 11 Italians found not guilty in a murder trial were dragged from their jail cells by a crowd estimated to be 5,000 strong, which promptly shot and hanged them. The victims of this massacre were memorialized on April 12, 2019, by that city's current mayor, LaToya Cantrell.

Interestingly, nearly a century later, on March 14, 1972, another assault on Italian immigrants took place, but this time on a cultural level: The epic gangster movie "The Godfather" premiered at the Loew Theater in New York. It broke box-office records, set the standard for movie blockbusters, and is considered an American classic, replete with memorable quotes ("leave the gun, take the cannoli").

The film will be rereleased nationwide on Friday, Feb. 25, as part of its 50th anniversary celebration. But, wait a minute: How was "The Godfather" an "assault" on Italian immigrants?

First of all, before any rational discussion of "The Godfather," two points have to be made.

Point No. 1 is very simple: Liking the film doesn't make anyone a racist, or even anti-Italian. It is possible to appreciate the film's craftsmanship, such as Gordon Willis' famous burnished cinematography, without indulging in the kind of rabid hysteria which inflamed the 1891 New Orleans incident.

Point No. 2 is very important: When well-informed Italian Americans express disdain for the film, they are referring to its negative media image. That is all. In no way, shape, or form are they comparing a fictional Hollywood movie to the genuine historical sufferings of other racial or ethnic groups.

To get back to my main point: "The Godfather" is an assault not only on Italian immigrants, but on Italian culture, period. Film critic Stanley Kauffman of the *New Republic*, one of the few critics to pan the movie, pointed out why: "There's no counterpart to the Corleone family."

Bingo!

What he meant is that there's no balance. Everyone in the film — men, women, and children — are all "connected" to crime or criminal gangs. The only positive character is a non-Italian: Kay Adams, Michael Corleone's wife. As a mathematician might put it: "Italians + crime = Italian culture."

Sorry: Wrong equation.

As a former English teacher, I believe that words matter. My solution on how to combat the negativity of "The Godfather" is to reclaim the very words or phrases which it has cinematically — and unfairly — poisoned. To wit:

Godfather — America does have a real Italian godfather: Filippo Mazzei, the Tuscan political philosopher who gave his next-door Virginia neighbor, Thomas Jefferson, major input for the Declaration of Independence.

Five Families — These five Italian families transformed the American wine industry: Sebastiani, Sbarbaro, Gallo, Mondavi and Martini. A salute!

Consigliere — Charles Manson was sent to prison in 1971 by lawyer Vincent Bugliosi, who was far from a "My Cousin



Bill Dal Cerro
Guest view

Vinny" caricature.

Soldiers — Two of the most-decorated soldiers of World War II were Italian American: Ace fighter pilot Don Gentile (who received the Distinguished Service Cross from Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower) and Marine Sgt. John Basilone (who was awarded both the Navy Cross and a Medal of Honor).

Just Business — A.P. Giannini was to banking what Rockefeller was to oil and Carnegie was to steel — an American giant. And he was ethical to a "t."

"Keep it in the family" (ethnic insularity) — New York Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia appointed Jane Bolin the first Black female judge in the nation (1939). And Barney Ales (Alessandro) was hired by Berry Gordy to turn Motown into a powerhouse within the American music industry (1960s).

Mob Wives — Ella Grasso balanced motherhood while becoming the first female governor in the United States to be elected on her own, without succeeding a husband or being appointed (Connecticut, 1974). The same was true for Geraldine Ferraro (first woman selected as a vice presidential candidate for a major political party, 1984) and Nancy Pelosi (first female U.S. speaker of the House, 2006).

It's time to remove the dark shadows created by "The Godfather." The blood, sweat, and tears of our immigrant ancestors deserve so much better.

* Bill Dal Cerro, bdcerro@yahoo.com, is a former English/Film Study teacher at Fenton High School in Bensenville. He also coproduced a 2007 PBS documentary on *Italians in Chicago* and wrote a 2015 book on the history of *Italian Americans in jazz*.

the entertainment of the masses.

Ya gotta admit that no other ethnic or religious group would allow two or three generations of its children to be raised with an unrelenting fictional criminal image of their roots. Ya gotta admit that *The Godfather* transformed ethnic defamation into an art form. Ya gotta admit that the news media magnify real Italian American criminals beyond their importance.

John Mancini, Italic Institute of America

March 19, 2022

We should revile 'The Godfather'

BE OUR GUEST

BY ROSARIO IACONIS

Beware the ides of March," said the soothsayer to Julius Caesar. Like their ancient forebear, Italian-Americans should have heeded such an augury. For on March 14, 1972, "The Godfather" premiered at the Loew's State Theatre in New York. On March 24, it would open nationwide.

Though widely regarded as a cinematic masterwork, this motion picture resurrected a hoary stereotype, triggering the character assassination of a people that continues to this day.

"The Godfather" is not the stuff of Shakespeare, Sophocles or Pirandello. As cinematic epics go, Francis Ford Coppola's abominable opus is no "Citizen Kane" or "Casablanca." Rather, it should be placed alongside "The Birth of a Nation" and "Song of the South" as cinematic offal we must refuse.

Indeed, this Mario Puzo potboiler-turned-Hollywood flick institutionalized anti-Italian bigotry in the media. The "Godfather" effect — and the reflexive schadenfreude it engendered — reinforced the notion that organized crime is predominantly the province of the scions of Italy. In the ensuing decades, this prejudice became a socially acceptable entertainment industry.

The Russian Solntsevskaya Brotherhood, Colombia's Cali Cartel, Japan's Yakuza and the Mexican Mob are among the largest criminal organizations operating in the United States and across the planet. In 2011, James "Whitey" Bulger — the highest-ranking organized crime figure on the FBI's Ten Most Wanted List — was captured. As author T.J. English noted, Bulger was "an old-style Irish-American mob boss from around the way."

Nevertheless, since the premiere of "The Godfather," there has been a marked increase in films and TV shows featuring Italians as mobsters.

Think "Goodfellas," "Casino," "Donnie Brasco," "Married to the Mob," "Prizzi's Honor," "Mafia Princess," "Honor Thy Father," "The Last Mafia Marriage," "Wise Guys," "Analyze This," "The Untouchables," "A Bronx Tale," "The Sopranos," "Mafia!," "The Family," "Shark Tale," "Zootopia," "Mob Wives," "The Many Saints of Newark," PBS's "Godfathers of the Renaissance" and "Lilyhammer."

A prominent Mafioso in this year's "The Batman" is the fictional Carmine Falcone, portrayed by John Turturro.

Let us forget, Don Vito Corleone was a fictional capo who was somewhat based on Mario Puzo's mother.

El Chapo, a.k.a. Joaquin Guzman Loera — the murderous drug kingpin of the Sinaloa cartel — is a real-life criminal overlord. Arnold Rothstein, who nearly toppled baseball in the Black Sox scandal, reigned as America's first major drug kingpin. Gabriel Kenigsberger is a real-world drug boss with links to Colombia's Oficina de Envigado — an organization connected to the Medellín underworld. He masterminded the flow of cocaine to European crime syndicates, the Japanese Yakuza and Israel's "Jerusalem Mafia."

Journalist Alexander Cockburn noted that following the upheavals of the 1960s, Americans yearned for "a strong image of the family and thus turned with relief to the Family invented by Mario Puzo in 'The Godfather.'"

What makes all this especially rich is that Coppola admitted he had no knowledge of the Mafia: "We staged it," he told Cigar Aficionado. "We just said, 'OK, you sit here and you sit here.' We used common sense and, as I said, I used things I remembered from my family. But I didn't know. I'd never been around a Mafia family. I have no idea. I just assume they're like an Italian family."



Indeed, Paramount's Robert Evans underscored why he chose Francis Ford Coppola to helm "The Godfather": "He got the nod. ... And one thing we did, we smelled the spaghetti!"

Coppola has had no qualms about demonizing a people whose ancestors hailed from the land John Milton called "the seat of civilization."

Like African-Americans and Jews, Italian-Americans have long endured the slings and arrows of outrageous prejudice: From the 1891 mass lynching in New Orleans to the trial of Sacco and Vanzetti to internment in World War II as "enemy aliens."

Even Middle America considers Italians a breed apart.

In 2006, the Sam Rotolo Middle School in Batavia, Ill., staged "Fagged-aboutit" — a children's play that billed itself as "a little mobster comedy." Students calling themselves the "Bada Bing Players" portrayed thuggish characters straight out of "The Godfather" and "The Sopranos."

And talk about strange bedfellows. Both Barack Obama and Donald Trump cite "The Godfather" as a favorite.

Commenting on Geraldine Ferraro during her 1984 vice-presidential campaign, Sam Donaldson declared: "Italian-Americans should expect the press to pursue allegations linking them to the Mafia."

Where are the films, plays and television programs exploring the lives of, say, Filippo Mazzei, who first declared "All men are created equal"; Ferdinand Pecora, whose legal brilliance held Wall Street accountable for the Great Crash of 1929; A. P. Giannini, founder of the Bank of America; physicist Enrico Fermi; International Space Station commander Samantha Cristoforetti; economist Mariana Mazzucato; astronaut Michael Massimino; astronomer Carolyn Porco or Dr. Anthony Fauci?

Isn't about time for the media to leave the venom and embrace the patrimony?

Iaconis is chairman of the Italic Institute of America.