



UPDATE

Italic Institute of America
“Italian Pride on a Classical Foundation”
October, 2024 www.italic.org



Frankly Speaking

by John Mancini, Executive Director



Being in the Italian heritage business is like finding a vein of gold and discovering you’ve stumbled on the Motherload. Italy and its progeny around the world have kept historians and Italophiles busy for ages. There’s no end to the contributions and benefits Italy has poured forth in just two millennia.

As in economics, the future of Italian pride is a matter of supply and demand. The supply will always be there—Italy’s contributions are well-documented. It’s the demand—the desire by each generation to learn of their ancestors and to carry on that legacy.

Our national organizations recognize the problem, how intermarriage and the lack of a ‘proprietary’ religion (eg. Judaism, Greek Orthodox) leave our children and grandchildren without a strong ethnic foundation. Without it our community has been divided and a victim of media distortions. But can our youth be ‘rebooted?’

We have serious doubts that Italian American Millennials or Gen Zs are capable, or interested, in expanding their knowledge beyond food or travel.

Each of our Institute analysts or associates is self-educated, spending decades devoted to Italic studies. We have produced magazines, books, reports, videos, lesson plans, visual aids, blogs, podcasts, and pamphlets over the course of 37 years that could be the basis of a college degree in Italic Studies. Will it end with us?

It is not enough to give students general scholarships or attract young adults with all-expenses-paid conventions, as is being done. Youth needn’t be served; it needs to be acculturated.

Olympics Scored

Italy always seems to make the Top Ten in the Olympics.

This year it may have tied with Germany in Gold but by total medal count Italy edged out Deutschland, Netherlands and South Korea.



	1	2	3	4
United States	40	44	41	125
China	40	27	24	91
Japan	20	12	13	45
Australia	17	19	16	52
France	16	26	22	64
Netherlands	15	7	12	34
Great Britain	14	21	29	64
South Korea	13	9	10	32
Italy	12	13	15	40
Germany	12	13	8	33

Over the years, Italy has won 758 medals in the Olympics, 270 Gold. It’s best performances are in Fencing, Cycling, Boxing, Shooting, Rowing, and Cross-Country Skiing

Swimmer **Thomas Ceccon** (above) won a Gold medal but made the news when he was caught sleeping in a Paris park. He complained that his French dorm had no A/C. He also didn’t like the food.

Italian boxer **Angela Carini** also stirred controversy when she threw in the towel during a match with an Algerian opponent, who was later found to have mostly male DNA. The Algerian’s punches were more than Carini could take.



Two Pioneers

The news is lately dominated by politics and weather events. Will a woman become the next president, can mankind fight climate change? As usual, Italian Americans have played important roles in both subjects.

A 2013 documentary on **Geraldine Ferraro** was rebroadcast recently on PBS. Ferraro was the first woman to run for Vice President on a major party ticket. Her

story was inspirational, and the challenges she faced were mostly due to her Italian heritage. The media was relentless in attempting to tie her and her husband John Zaccaro to organized crime. At one point ABC reporter Sam Donaldson actually claimed the right to question *any* Italian American candidate about Mob ties. Although Ferraro and running mate Walter Mondale lost in 1984, Ferraro won the respect of the nation, advancing women's rights.



In 1991, Ms. Ferraro agreed to narrate our educational video on "Roman Law in America" (screen shot above). You can see that 20-minute video on our homepage (*italic.org*) by opening the *Galleria Italica* icon.

Dr. Ralph Cicerone was one of the first to sound the alarm on the erosion of Earth's ozone layer in 1974 and later on the threat of global warming due to the build-up of greenhouse gases. As a researcher and president of the National Academy of Sciences, Cicerone was the go-to expert on atmospheric deterioration and a nonpartisan consultant to presidents Bush and Obama.



He died in 2016 at age 73. His counsel is sorely missed.

Recently Passed



James Darren, 88, was a singer, actor, and teen idol whose talents entertained America in the Gidget movies of the 1960s and the dramatic TV police series *T.J. Hooker*, among others.

He was born James Ercolani in South Philadelphia where

his Italian family encouraged him to sing publicly as a youngster. His desire to act led him to New York where he met the niece of Hollywood's David O. Selznick while on a elevator. His singing career was capped with *Goodbye Cruel World* which made it to #3 in 1961.

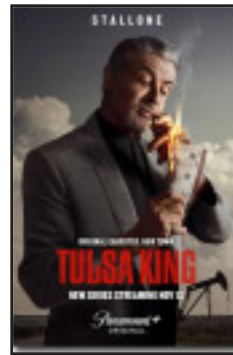


Leonard Riggio, 83, changed the world of bookselling by acquiring book stores, creating the nationwide chain of Barnes & Noble. To attract readers he introduced coffee counters and easy chairs. Amazon beat him to the internet market. He sold B & N in 2019.

He was considered the inspiration for the Tom Hanks chain book store owner in *You've Got Mail* (1998).

Mafia Madness

The Mafia-Media Industrial Complex is beside itself in commemorating two milestones in Italian defamation.



The Mafia industry has taken a major step in substituting the word *frickin* for *f—k* in its standard Mafia dialogue so that a new *Sopranos*-inspired series can air on CBS-TV, primetime Sunday nights.

Starring as a wiseguy in *Tulsa King* has been a life long dream of actor Sylvester Labofish Stallone, even before *Rocky* and *Rambo*. The new series has Stallone's character Dwight Manfredi transplanted to Tulsa, OK, to launch his own crime family among the cowboys and Indians. Not to worry, his old neighborhood *goombahs* go gunning for him there.



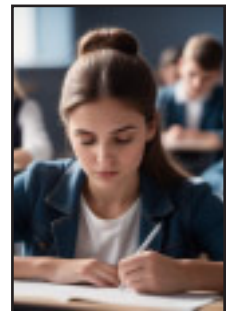
Meanwhile, there's a celebration going on to honor the Mafia Industry's 25th anniversary of HBO's *The Sopranos* where the F-bombs were allowed to flow like water. During the entire 7-year series none of the 'realistic' Mob characters uttered the words *mulanyan*

("shines" was used) or *mazzacrist*. The HBO Mafia was surprisingly sensitive to other ethnic groups.

The above frontpage clipping from the *NYTimes* on July 23, 2000, documented the casting turn-out for *The Sopranos*. Some 20,000 wannabes responded to an ad to play "Italian-looking" thieves and murderers. Something else for our community to 'commemorate.'

Advanced Placement Declines Again

We have been monitoring the high school AP Italian language test for a number of years. Back in 2012, our national organizations and the Italian government paid the College Board \$3 million to create the test in the hope that it would spur more courses in schools and interest by students.



Unfortunately, the test hasn't met the 2,500 minimum number of student-takers required. In 2023, only 2,027 students paid to take the test, down 7% from the year before. Compare this to Japanese 3,089, German 4,373, Chinese 16,491, French 18,645, and Spanish 163,107. Even Latin had 4,535 test-takers.

The Grammar of Food

That was the title of a recent *Wall Street Journal* article about the various dining traditions around the world. The Japanese like their soup at the end of the meal. Turks like olives for breakfast. Columbians start meals with fruit while Italians end theirs with fruit. East Asians have to slurp their noodles, not having forks to twirl them.



To Spoon or Not?

Consider the dilemma of Italic people with their noodles: twirl spaghetti on a spoon with two hands or one-handed on the side of the plate? The 'spaghetti police' consider you *cafone*

if you use a spoon to twirl your pasta. Etiquette demands that you use only one hand.

Sorry, *nonno* ate it with a spoon, more efficient!

Pesce Parmigiano?

Don't you dare add *mozzarella* or grated cheese to seafood in Italy. Cheese with fish is not 'kosher' to our once-pagan ancestors. Avert your Italian eyes while *paesani* here enjoy a Shrimp Parm hero (right).



Cappuccino in the PM?

Eyes will roll in Italy if you order a *cappuccino* after 11:00 in the morning. Milk is a breakfast food. Nevertheless, a *cappuccino* after dinner is like a lower calorie dessert. Enjoy!

To Fold or Not?

Italians will allow you to fold a slice of pizza into a *portafoglio* (wallet), double folded so nothing drips out while strolling along *la strada*. But the correct way to enjoy a *pizza margherita* sitting down is with a knife and fork. Pizza is often dangerously hot; besides, the mandatory thin crust flops down when picked up.



If you have not been eating the *real* Italian way, don't fret. Italic people are creative and don't follow rules blindly. Let your stomach be your guide!

New from Cinecittà

During WW II the British and Americans produced enough propaganda films to make their Italian enemies into clowns.

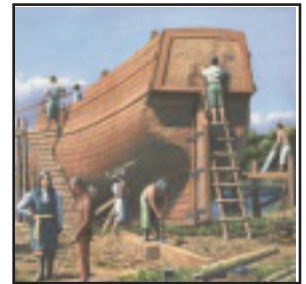
Mussolini's *Cinecittà* ("Cinema City") outside Rome survived the war and Italians began countering that old propaganda with fact-based movies of Italy's military. The films did poorly in the American market compared to neo-realist civilian stories like *The Bicycle Thief*.

Director Edoardo De Angelis hopes his new film *Commandante* will help restore Italy's WW II image. It dramatizes the true story of submarine Capt. Salvatore Todaro, who rescued the survivors of his attacks rather than abandon them to the vast Atlantic. Score another for Italian humanity.



Lost Ship Found?

Divers may have found remnants of the first European ship to sail the Great Lakes in 1679. French explorer Robert LaSalle assigned his second-in-command Enrico Tonti to build and launch *Le Griffon* (r). The ship set out from Niagara on Lake Erie, across Lake Huron to Lake Michigan where it took on a shipment of furs. The ship, without LaSalle or Tonti, never made it home. La Salle was later assassinated by a fellow Frenchman, leaving the Italian Tonti to develop and govern the vast Louisiana Territory for France until his death in 1704.



Don't Keep Us Secret!

Tell your friends and relatives the best kept secret in the Italian American community.

We have the only Italian American website with a Research Library, a Video Gallery, an Italian Jukebox, educational publications, and an interactive blog platform.

Italic Institute of America
PO Box 818
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Donations are Tax Deductible

Inside the Institute

There's a lot that goes on behind the scenes to keep you in touch with your Italian roots. The amazing part is we don't charge for 'membership' or spend every waking hour fundraising and planning galas. Our corporate structure is based on volunteers, independent contractors, and home offices. We don't fly our crew to Italy for 'relationships.' But, even our IRS nonprofit needs donations for internet access, computer equipment, and technical support. Our educational output over the years has hopefully earned your confidence in us.

Connect with Us Weekly

We might be the only Italic national organization with an interactive Blog. Our officers cover a wide range of subjects, all dealing with the Italian experience.

Current Events, History, Culture, Personal Experiences, Science, Biographies, Defamation, the Arts, the Media, and Politics

italic.org

Finances

Both the IRS and NYS recognize the Italic Institute as a 501c3 nonprofit. Our taxing category is "under \$50,000" in revenue. That is a meager existence by any standard.

To put this in perspective, the NIAF and the Sons of Italy have annual revenues in the 7-figure millions.

But, an Institute dollar goes a long way!



A rare gathering of associates: (l-r) **George Ricci**, Financial Sec'y; **John Mancini**, Exec. Dir.; **Bill Dal Cerro**, Chicago Dir.; **Tony Vecchione**, New Jersey Dir.; **Joe Graziuse**, Analyst; and **Frank Cardone**, Special Projects. All unpaid volunteers.

Our Think Tank Bullpen

Not in attendance at the dinner gathering (pictured above, right) but part of the accumulated knowledge of things Italic are these associates:



Rosario Iaconis is our Media chairman with a Facebook presence and tasked to respond to defamation in the press.



Alfred Cardone is a researcher specializing in ancient Rome and the Fascist era.



Anthony Cardillo is our liaison with the Italian government. His past efforts included Italian participation in our Waldorf galas.



Bob Masullo has lived a year in Italy, hosted a radio show on Italian music and made a career in journalism.



Don Fiore specializes in Italian aviation and all facets of Italian history. He lives in Chicago

Key People with Special Talents

Frank Di Piero is Chicago-based and handles special projects and promotions. Frank has mastered the Internet with his own Podcast (*"Keepin' It Real"*) and YouTube channel (*Italian American Minutes*). Each format highlights heritage through interviews or vignettes of historical events.



Rita Mancini has been our Office Manager since the founding. Her skills support every aspect of the business from bookkeeping to proofreading, list maintenance, mailings, and order processing. Working at home means 24-hour availability.



Andrew Ricci is an attorney by day but a design consultant at night. His computer skills and artistic bent make our publications look professional and aesthetically pleasing. His mastery of desktop publishing and Photoshop are indispensable.



Vince Elarde is our Arizona-based technical support. Through the miracle of Team Viewer or Quick Assist, Vince is able to troubleshoot our Long Island computer problems. He's also the guy to select our computer equipment and programs, as well as handle the installations. Internet security is his forte. Hackers beware!



EXTRA! EXTRA!

Here we go again. Another anniversary of some Mob movie or series. This year, critics are ballyhooing the 25th anniversary of HBO's *The Sopranos* for "blazing new trails." The Italic Institute had to point out that it's the same old trail.



The Wall Street Journal (9/11/24)

The Dark, Lasting Appeal Of 'The Sopranos' TV Show

In enumerating the reasons for the success of "The Sopranos," Alex Gibney misses the forest for the Pine Barrens ("The Man Behind the Mobsters on HBO" by John Anderson, Television Review, Sept. 4).

The HBO series didn't hinge on Tony Soprano's Oedipal rage. Nor was it a parable about the banality, corruption and racism underpinning our capitalist society. And as creators go, David Chase can hardly be called a contrarian. The conceit of a blood-thirsty capo undergoing psychotherapy wasn't novel. In the 1999 film "Analyze This," psychiatrist Billy Crystal psychoanalyzes a murderous mobster portrayed by Robert De Niro.

The central appeal of "The Sopranos" was the schadenfreude it engendered among viewers. Italians were depicted as the alien "other," a group of risible yet menacing dunces and dons. It allowed both the literati and the hoi polloi to luxuriate in a safe suburban prejudice.

Watching the depredations of a criminal clan of fictional New Jersey Neanderthals gave viewers a cathartic thrill. It became fashionable to perpetuate the Big Lie about a people whose ancestors pioneered the Pax Romana, the rule of law, accounting, capitalism and modern science.

ROSARIO A. IACONIS

CHICAGO SUN-TIMES (9/17/24)

The Sopranos is a Success! ...in Portraying Italian Stereotypes

Columnists everywhere are celebrating the 25th anniversary of "The Sopranos," the fictional mob series that ran for eight consecutive years on HBO (1999-2007).

But what, exactly, is being celebrated? Was "The Sopranos" truly a groundbreaking work of art? Was it really the greatest TV show in the history of television?

Hype aside, it's time to keep it real, as the kids say. "The Sopranos" enjoyed its huge success for one main reason: It brought institutionalized caricatures of Italian Americans as goons and buffoons from the big screen ("The Godfather" and "Goodfellas") to the small screen (TV).

That is all.

Ever wonder how Italian stereotypes became as baked into the American psyche as mom, baseball and apple pie? Hollywood did start the process in 1915 with films like "The Italian," promoting the idea that Italy was "sending its worst" to America. (Sound familiar?)

But Hollywood wasn't the crucial defamer. It was, ironically, a brand-new invention: television.

The rise of Italian gangs in major American cities from the 1930s to the 1950s coincided with the televised 1954 Kefauver hearings on organized crime. It was the first original "reality TV" show.

Millions of Americans from coast to coast tuned in daily to watch shady-looking crooks with Italian surnames plead the

Fifth Amendment. True drama! To make it worse, movie theaters across the nation broadcast the hearings to millions more who couldn't yet afford a TV set. Free admission!

Caricaturing Italian Americans has remained entertainment ever since, particularly after "The Godfather" promoted such images as "art" in 1972. Then, in 1999, "The Sopranos" brought the stereotypes back home to TV Land. The vicious circle was completed.

It is worth noting that objective journalists during the 1950s called out such prejudice.

In his 1958 book, "Only in America," Harry Golden Sr. wrote,

"Has anyone in our nation, from the very beginning, had a worse press than the Italians? Their gangsters and bootleggers — no more and no less than other groups — have been splattered across the front pages of newspapers for decades. The Italian American has become the stereotype of the gangster. This is not only unfair but untrue."

Still unfair. Still untrue. And the lack of cultural progress is nothing to celebrate.

Bill Dal Cerro,
Italic Institute of America

Chicago Tribune



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SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 21, 2024

BREAKING NEWS AT CHICAGOTRIBUNE.COM

Images of Italian Americans

In her review of the HBO docuseries “Wise Guy: David Chase and the Sopranos” (Sept. 14), Nina Metz uses the word “myopic” to describe “Sopranos” creator Chase’s view of Italian Americans. I commend Metz for bringing up the issue of Italian stereotypes at all. A great majority of Americans, Italian or otherwise, still see these images as perfectly normal.

Her calling out the filmmaker for not confronting Chase on this issue represents true progress. Brava!

A colleague of mine once used a vivid metaphor; fun house mirrors, when referring to Italian American characters in movies and on TV. Carnivalgoers walk past these mirrors and see their reflections — but how accurate are these images?

People recognize bits and pieces of themselves, but their features have been distorted. This is how Italian Americans — those who are truly familiar with their history and culture — view Hollywood’s

view of us. We see gross distortions. That is what “The Sopranos” represents.

Let’s imagine that these fun house mirrors are straightened into objective mirrors that reflect reality. Instead of seeing extremes between goons (pick your favorite mob movie) or buffoons (think of endless TV sitcoms with “dumb Joey” characters), people would see a complex and positive heritage.

We would see political writer Filippo Mazzei, who provided his close friend and neighbor, Thomas Jefferson, with input for the Declaration of Independence. We would see Salvatore Catalano, the heroic sailor who aided a new nation, the United States, in its war against the Barbary pirates. We would see Adelina Patti, a renowned opera singer, invited to the White House by President Abraham Lincoln.

We would see that, over the last 150 years, Italian immigrants have brought their talents to a myriad of things now considered “American,” such as the Bank of America (A.P. Giannini), Planters peanuts (Amedeo Obici), Tropicana orange juice (Anthony Rossi), the Radio Flyer red wagon (Antonio Pasin) and the voice of Snow White in the classic Walt Disney animated film (Adriana Caselotti).

What do any of these real-life Italian Americans have to do with the murderous thugs, gum-chewing bimbos and intellectually challenged muscle heads perpetuated by popular media?

How do we close this Grand Canyon gap between shows such as “The Sopranos” and the historical reality of the Italian American experience? One answer is to replace those fun house mirrors with real ones.

Metz’s observation is a wonderful invitation to start doing exactly that.

Let the refocusing begin!

— Bill Dal Cerro, senior analyst,
Italic Institute of America, Chicago