

OUR ITALIAN AMERICAN HERITAGE TODAY

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ABSTRACT

For fifty years, from 1920 to 1971, Italians were the largest single foreign-born group in the United States. The impact of this exodus was enormous. What is the Italian American heritage today? The mainstream of American culture has been influenced by Americans of Italian origin and qualities thought to be Italian. Nor is it just work, food and family. Music, fashion, opera, movies, art, crime, soccer, even physics, banking and medicine. As Italian Americans, we have a heritage of which we should be proud, in Italy, in America, and in what we have produced together.

Looking to the future, there are two sharp, even dramatic alternatives. One is to say, we have come far – it is time to stop and enjoy what we have. The other is to say, we have indeed come far – and in coming far we learned we must build on our principles to carry us further, and by God, we will not stop. If we allow ourselves and America to stop and drift in the glorification of the past, to wall ourselves in to defend where we think we are, we will be giving up on the ideals that made America the world's magnet. Italian Americans will then become just one of many morally impoverished fragments of a world in retreat.

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Preparing this lecture was something of an adventure. Sometimes it filled me with pride. Other times it was painful. Migration is usually not

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entirely voluntary, and the consequences can be ambiguous. So please bear with me.

In the 1840s, Giuseppe Mazzini, the prophet of Italian unification, wrote a friend "I dare not tell you that I have found parts of London chock full of Italians living in a state of absolute barbarism. They were illiterate and they did not know how to speak. They tried to communicate with me in an incomprehensible gibberish of their local dialects mixed with pidgin English. Italy to them was a foreign country".

Of course, Italy was not to be fully united for another twenty years, and mass migration across the ocean to the Americas would begin even later. But by the early 1900s, Italian migrants and their descendants would account for half the population of Argentina and almost ten per cent of that of both Brazil and the United States. In fact, for fifty years, from 1920 to 1971, Italians were the largest single foreign-born group in the United States.

Italy's census for 1911 revealed that more than one out of every six Italians had emigrated. The impact of this exodus was enormous. Both of my grandfathers wrote books about it. My mother's father, Roberto Michels, wrote *L'Imperialismo Italiano* (Italian Imperialism, 1914) arguing that Italy's emigration was a form of colonial expansion, by which Italian artisans, peasants and workers were bringing progress to Africa and the Americas. For this analysis he drew the ire of Lenin who reviewed the book and called him a "servile bourgeois" for suggesting that imperialism could be anything other than the inevitable byproduct of capitalism. My father's father, Luigi Einaudi, did not waste time on labels. He wrote that the exodus showed that Italy lacked

the environment to allow the development of individual courage and initiative. Only when the laborers of northern Italy and the farmers of the Mezzogiorno fled Italy's inhospitable soil and its starvation wages, and flooded the empty lands of the New World did they unleash their treasures of energy and tireless work (Einaudi 1900: 160).

When in 2003 the then President of Italy Carlo Azeglio Ciampi visited Washington, I was Acting Secretary General of the Organization of American States and had the enormous privilege of hosting him. I said then that of Italy's many contributions to the Americas,

perhaps the most important has been the men and women who have themselves become part of this New World. ... At the start of the twentieth century, migrants with less than modest means and little formal education were the driving force; fifty years later, center stage was occupied by engineers, entrepreneurs and technical specialists who were building with their American peers the infrastructure and institutions of modernity.

That was almost a generation ago. What is our Italian American heritage today?

We are not Italians, and many of us have never been to Italy. We are Americans. But we are also not the original Americans, and we are not like our forebears who first came to these shores. We are Italian Americans, one of the many peoples who immigrated to this New World in search of freedom and a better life.

We have indeed built a new life. But we are not easy to label or describe. We came from different parts of Italy and started at different times. And in the building of that new life, we changed ourselves and changed the world around us. What do we remember of our old life? What did those who came before us contribute? The answers usually come in disconnected flashes. Snippets of family history. Bits of popular culture. Grand exaggerations. Moments of shame best forgotten.

Are these fragmented images and memories of things past tied somehow together? Do they have meaning for our future? What is it that our schools don't teach, but should?

Let me start with some snippets and bits.

The Einaudis were originally shepherds and mountain folk in the Val Maira, one of the poorest valleys of the Maritime Alps, a valley so desolate that when winter comes the population dwindles to a few hundred. My grandfather said that there, above Dronero, Einaudis were as common as stones. In the 1860s, his father, my great grandfather Lorenzo, migrated down from those beautiful but harsh mountains into one of the rich valleys of Italy's Piedmont, where Dogliani is now our family home. His descendants are now spread all over Italy, the United States and Argentina. Other Einaudis fled over the mountains to France, instead of down toward the plains – I know some who went that way wound up in Mexico.

Nothing unusual here. Italians have always been on the move. It is no accident that the Western Hemisphere is identified with Italian explorers, Cristoforo Colombo claimed it for Spain; Giovanni Caboto (better known to us as John Cabot) was the first European to set foot on North America since Leif Erikson; Giovanni da Verrazzano charted the coast of North America; and Amerigo Vespucci gave his name to the New World.

Dogliani, my family's hometown of 5,000 souls, also produced an explorer adventurer: Celso Cesare Moreno, soldier, steamship Captain, adventurer in China, foreign minister of Hawaii for a week in 1880, briefly member of the chamber of deputies in Italy. In 1886, a front-page article in the *National Republican* newspaper of Washington, D.C. entitled "End of Italian Slavery" reported that "a very strong and stringent bill was introduced yesterday in the House of Representatives for the purpose of abolishing Italian slaves and laborers under contract by the cruel Italian padroni".

The article said the bill was introduced by a Congressman from Massachusetts “at the request of Mr. C.C. Moreno”. Now incorporated into 18 USC 1584: sale into involuntary servitude, the *Padrone Act* is a landmark in legislation against human trafficking. In keeping with the maxim that no good deed goes unpunished, Moreno was later indicted for libel against the Italian Ambassador, whom he had accused of collusion in the slave trade of Italians.

Were any of you struck by this reference to Italian “slaves”? I was born here of parents who came in search of freedom from Mussolini’s Italy. I grew up here. My formal schooling is entirely American. I always thought “slaves” referred to Black people. It was not until I was an adult and found an old poster in my grandfather’s library about the ransoming of Italian Christian slaves in North Africa that I realized that I could have once been a slave, too.

The migrants who traveled to America did not leave behind their class differences. Mazzini’s disturbed but also disdainful description of the migrants in London shows a trace of that: they were illiterate, could speak neither Italian nor English, and knew nothing of Italy. He seemed ashamed. And of course, there were exploiters among the exploited. Children were sometimes sold by parents to make ends meet. Some migrants were so poor they obtained passage to America by contracting themselves to unscrupulous go-betweens like the “*Padroni*” Moreno denounced. And there was probably more than a touch of class and regional antagonism in the relations between Moreno, an adventurer from Piedmont, and the Italian Ambassador, a Baron from Naples.

To further complicate matters, in coming to America the new migrants were dropped into a new culture. The United States was divided, like Italy, between urban and rural, and between North and South. The Union had won the Civil War, but the country remained in formation. The original Indian inhabitants had largely been conquered when not exterminated, but in a nation of immigrants the English, the Spanish, the Germans, Swedes and Irish had all gotten there before the Italians. Someone said the Irish came green but soon became white in order to compete with freed former black slaves. Many Italian immigrants were darker than the Irish and had experienced discrimination before they came. Neither white nor black, they clung together in “little Italys” and tried to avoid issues of race. There were some famous lynchings, but Italians were treated better than Black Americans and better also than the Chinese who became the objects of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1888.

And there were other differences among the various waves of immigrants. Only some 5% of the Irish and Swedes went home, but 49% – almost half – of the Italians who arrived in the United States between 1905 and

1920 returned to Italy after a few years. I do not know how many left after Senator Henry Cabot Lodge declared in 1896 that Italians and other recent immigrants belonged to “races with whom the English-speaking people have never assimilated, and who are alien to the great body of people in the United States”. Lodge’s disrespect may have instilled in some a feeling of inferiority and even shame, but it also fueled a burning desire to excel and prove him wrong. Some spent their whole lives denying their Italian origin while being secretly fiercely proud of it.

Migration is a loss for the family who loses a member who emigrates. Repeated enough times, the loss can become an open wound for the sending country and a source of controversy in the receiving country. Such emotions have led to sharply conflicting mythologies. French elites referred to emigrants as the *canaille*, the rabble or dregs of society – good riddance. In America some argued the opposite, that migrants were the best and the brightest, those with the initiative to leave and the talent to make it here. Official Italy for years focused on emigrants as potential markets and sources of remittances. More recently, trying to cope with globalization and its impacts, Piero Bassetti has come up with the concept of “Italics”, which he defined as native Italians, plus Italian speakers, plus descendants of Italians plus Italophiles. He estimated their number, scattered throughout the world, at 200 million, three times Italy’s population. According to Bassetti, Kobe Bryant was an “Italic” because Kobe lived in Italy from the age of six to that of thirteen, spoke Italian, and owned shares in an Italian basketball team.

And while debates raged over who they were, the Italians who lived in Boston’s North End, New York’s Five Points and similar neighborhoods worked like hell and sent everything they could back to family in the old country. Most of them survived and raised new families in America despite the disrespect, low pay, miserable housing, disease and lack of support from the authorities of their new country. One thing was clear: they had no safety net but themselves and their families.

We are now more than a century away from the World War I peak of arrivals. That is four or five generations. More than enough time for the revolt of the second generation against their parents to peter out. More than time enough for the migrants to evolve from Italians to Italian-Americans to American-Italians to just plain Americans. More than enough time for even oral histories to begin to dry up.

Still, there is a lot we can say about our immigrant heritage.

We believe in hard work. That is certainly not unique, as an overwhelming majority of those who come to America come because they do not want to be deprived of the fruits of their labors. But first-generation Italians typically brought with them skills that set them apart: pride in work

of their hands, and the knowhow to plant a little *orto* (kitchen garden) to grow vegetables.

We appreciate food and wine. This is one area in which Americans can proudly draft off Italy's success. Take pizza. When my grandmother cooked pizza in Piedmont, she pronounced it a Neapolitan dish – and her square, thick but light crusts had little in common with the round, cheese tomato and everything else piled on pizza Italy reimported from the United States after the war. Italy's ingredients are fantastic, fresh and brought to market respectfully. But today it is the American version of pizza that is now everywhere in Italy and much of the world. Sometimes, of course, the best of Italy can be grossly misinterpreted, even in food. When the billionaire entrepreneur Gianni Agnelli visited President Kennedy at the White House, he brought as a gift one of Piedmont's greatest delicacies, a very valuable giant white truffle. That night, at dinner, his hosts served the truffle, boiled, like a giant potato.

We value family. A strong family is a source of joy, but it is also a primal need, protection, an insurance policy against prejudice and the difficulties of dealing with others in a new environment whose leaders and authorities are not to be trusted.

And most of us are Catholic, comfortable with its saints and festivities and sensitive to the universalism of the Vatican. It is not by chance that the Pope comes from Argentina. More than 40% of the world's Catholics today are in Latin America. Six or seven years ago, when the lady President of Argentina emerged from the Vatican after meeting with the Pope and said triumphantly the Pope is Argentine, the lady President of Brazil answered just as triumphantly, yes, but God is Brazilian. We of Italian descent could all sit back and smile, knowing Pope Francis is really one of us (his father, Mario Bergoglio, emigrated from Asti, the next county over from ours in Piedmont, and for the same reasons as my father, to escape fascism).

Growing up in upstate New York, I was a fan of the New York Yankees. In 1948, I was thrilled when I saw Joe DiMaggio in a hotel bar. He was as elegant in a suit as in his movements rounding third base after a home run. I could not get enough of those Yankees. They had Frankie Crosetti, Yogi Berra, Phil Rizzuto, and Vic Raschi. I was no good at baseball, but they made me proud.

When I visited Italy, my sporting heroes were different. Gianni Cucelli, the tennis champion whose prime years were stolen by the war. Fausto Coppi and Gino Bartali, the fantastic cyclists who helped restore Italy's pride by winning the Tour de France. We don't know these names over here, not even that of Gerlando Bordin, the only person in history to win both the Boston Marathon and the Olympic Marathon, and whose brother sells the best rabbit livers in Dogliani. When he won the Boston marathon,

Bordin toasted his victory by opening a bottle of Dolcetto di Dogliani wine.

We may not know those names, but the mainstream of American culture has been influenced – dare I say improved – by Americans of Italian origin and qualities thought to be Italian. Nor is it just work, food and family. Music, fashion, opera, movies, art, crime, soccer, even physics, banking and medicine. Most of the time, however, the specific form or shape is American. Consider Frank Sinatra's phrasing: his diction is exquisitely pure American English.

There are downsides. The Italian-born Lucky Luciano personified organized crime – and then the movie the Godfather was built on the insulting stereotype that Italian Americans send people to sleep with the fish. No one stops to think that there are far more Italian Americans in law enforcement than in crime. How many people know there is a bust of anti-mafia judge Giovanni Falcone at the FBI Academy at Quantico? Or that we might learn from the division of labor between Italy's militarized Carabinieri and the Polizia municipale, its essentially unarmed local police? People don't die at traffic stops in Italy.

1. ITALIANS AND OUR FOUNDING FATHERS

The internet and the cell phone have created a culture of immediacy disguised as universal but that is fragmented and unanchored, without the strength of neighborhood or community. Economic history is virtually no longer taught in universities. The teaching of political history is in decline. Black history is controversial. Italian American history is simply absent.

The Italian American Museum of DC challenges this loss of history with a focus on the contributions of Italian Americans to Washington. Entering, the first display includes tools used by artisans who contributed much beauty to this city, from the Capitol to the Lincoln statue, Union Station, the Washington Cathedral, even the marble for the Vietnam Memorial. L'Enfant planned the District with Rome as well as Paris in mind, sketching an equestrian statue inspired by the statue of Marcus Aurelius on Rome's Campidoglio to stand where the Washington Monument now stands. That statue, to have been of George Washington, was never built, but Giuseppe Franzoni's nine-foot sculpture of Liberty, unveiled in 1807, dominated the rostrum of the Speaker of House. It was destroyed when invading British troops burned the House Chamber in 1814.

A replica of one of Franzoni's corn cob capitals is at the IAMDC. But the visitor will also get a glimpse of something less widely known: how

Italian thinkers shaped the basic principles on which the United States was built. Filippo Mazzei and Gaetano Filangieri influenced the drafting of the Declaration of Independence and the US Constitution through correspondence with Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin. Filangieri, a Neapolitan nobleman turned revolutionary, believed that natural rights were “the dictates of universal reason and of the moral code which the Author of Nature has imprinted on the heart of every individual of the human race”. Mazzei, a peripatetic surgeon, businessman and pamphleteer, who briefly ran an experimental farm near Monticello, wrote in a Virginia newspaper in 1774, that “Tutti gli uomini sono per natura egualmente liberi e indipendenti. Quest’eguaglianza è necessaria per costruire un governo libero (Bisogna che ognuno sia uguale all’altro nel diritto naturale)”. Jefferson translated Mazzei into English, then used his concepts to challenge the British King, writing in the Declaration of Independence that “all men are created equal” and “endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights”. A recent book, *The Birth of American Law: An Italian Philosopher and the American Revolution* (Bessler 2014) analyzes the influence of another Italian, Cesare Beccaria. Beccaria’s treatise *Dei delitti e delle pene* (1764) argued that punishments should be preventive, proportionate, swift, and publicly arrived at without the use of torture or capital punishment.

John F. Kennedy said in his *Ich bin ein Berliner* speech (1963) that “Two thousand years ago, the proudest boast was ‘Civis romanus sum’”. For me, the ascent of civilization takes a direct path from Roman citizenship to the U.S. Bill of Rights. There is no Italian Kosciuszko or Lafayette. But ideas do not rust like the sword. In my mind, the rights to which all now aspire began with *Civis romanus sum*: I am a citizen of Rome. I have rights.

2. WHAT MY ITALIAN BACKGROUND GAVE ME

My family made me aware there were different ways of looking at things. My Italian background gave me skills my purely American friends did not have.

This is not a matter of politics or of ideology or even of culture. It is a matter of experience. Take language. How could Americans know how to pronounce other languages if they had never heard foreign tongues spoken?

How could Americans know and feel the full pain of war? The Civil War was long ago, and until 9/11 American soil had been inviolate from foreign action or invasion for nearly two centuries. Without having suffered wars and foreign occupation, how could Americans understand, let alone appreciate, the value of having neighbors like Canada and Mexico, with whom we are at peace and who share our dreams?

And some Americans don't know the pain of discrimination, because they have never experienced it. I grew up lucky. In the 1930s and 1940s, when the Home Owner's Loan Corporation was red-lining Black housing in Chicago, it considered Italians fit for "Blue" areas – not "Green", not the best, but still "Desirable". And in the university town of Ithaca, New York, where my father taught, I did not face much personal prejudice.

It was not until I went to Harvard that I discovered that some important stereotypes had come with the original colonists from England. The line "The Englishman Italianate is the Devil incarnate" is by John Lyly in 1578 (Hawkwood the mercenary in *Euphues*). Shakespeare asks "Am I politic? Am I subtle? Am I a Machiavel?" (*Merry Wives of Windsor* 1602, Act III, scene 1). I had so absorbed the idea that Machiavelli was an unprincipled and amoral manipulator that I was totally unprepared when my professor in a political theory class asked me if I thought Machiavelli was the first Protestant? I had to learn that Machiavelli was also a believer in virtue, who thought citizens could also distinguish truths from the lies of false prophets. Most people see the world mainly as they would like it to be rather than as it is – and accuse those who see its flaws as having evil intent. Machiavelli was one of the first to understand the world as it was without losing sight of what he wanted it to be.

As I was growing up in mid-century United States, there were enough successful Italian Americans in politics to make it unnecessary to cower to the Cabots and the Lodges. After secretly meeting Winston Churchill on a battleship off Newfoundland in 1941, Franklin Delano Roosevelt wrote his cousin Daisy that "Churchill is a tremendously vital person and in many ways is an English Mayor LaGuardia". Then he added "Don't say I said so", revealing that a shadow of prejudice probably still lingered. But Fiorello LaGuardia, a former Congressman and Mayor of New York City was not alone. Thomas D'Alessandro, father of our current Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi, was himself a Congressman and Mayor of Baltimore. There was no shortage of Italian American political role models, even before Geraldine Ferraro.

In my own career, the suggestion Jeane Kirkpatrick made that I be fired as the "wop down the hall" was offset by James Baker's decision to "not hold your Italianness against you" in nominating me to be an ambassador. And when I was sworn in as a U.S. Ambassador, perhaps the most touching sight for me was my formerly stateless mother tightly clutching and waving a tiny American flag.

Put simply, my experience is that our Italian American heritage today makes us distinctive, but that it is no longer degrading or handicapping. Some people still anglicize their name to avoid seeming foreign, but we still have enough national leaders named Panetta and Giuliani, Pelosi and

Pompeo, Cuomo and Garcetti to know that we are accepted as real Americans without needing to worry that we will be considered aliens or even anarchists if we do not hide behind an anglicized name.

Against that background, let me address two issues of current importance, issues that our Italian heritage gives us voice to address.

3. THE CHALLENGE OF IMMIGRATION POLICY

Our experience as Italian Americans has taught us that immigration is a win-win proposition, not a zero-sum game. Both Italy and the United States have benefitted. Our heritage also teaches that the greatness of the United States is closely tied to the fact that, despite some still glaring faults, our national utopia consists of a rule of law that accepts the rights of *all* individuals, in which all lives matter, and in which all should have equal opportunities regardless of gender, race, class, religion or nationality.

Even so, migration policy has become an emotional problem. For some years now, countless men and women have entered the United States who daily exert relentless energies to better themselves in ways impossible in their countries of origin. Their sheer numbers are again bringing growing controversy. I say “again” because today’s immigrants have brought the foreign born to about 13 per cent of those living in the United States. That is close to the 15 percent of 1910, at the peak of Italian and other European migration to America. In the 1950s, when I was in college, fewer than 10 million persons in the U.S. were foreign-born; Persons born in Italy, Germany, Canada and the UK, Poland and even Russia outnumbered those born in Mexico. Today, 44 million foreign-born persons live in the United States, of whom 12 million were born in Mexico, followed by India and China. I remember meeting with Gianni Agnelli in New York in the 1980s, and hearing him worry that U.S. ties to Italy would be weakened by the new arrivals, especially those from Asia. Clearly, to quote Yogi Berra, “The future ain’t what it used to be”.

And there is another problem. Migrants from Mexico and Central America are not crossing an ocean. Land borders obviously make it easier to go back and forth. They also make it easier to replenish and preserve their culture rather than integrate into ours. But to say that our civilization is at threat misses the point. *They* are now part of *us*. Lashing out and repeating the mass expulsions of Mexicans in the 1930s will uselessly compound the pain. We already send repatriation flights daily to Mexico and countries in Central America and the Caribbean – with effects that are strategically ineffective, locally destabilizing and regionally demoralizing.

What is needed is a return to the spirit of equality before the law that made America great. My friend, the University of California's Caesar Donato Sereseres, once commented wistfully that Native Americans had a lot of experience with what happens if you lose control of immigration. We need immigrants. But we do not need shadow communities that live in the dark, ghettoized, fearful, and at the margin of the law. That is not the American way. We need to control immigration. There is nothing wrong with walls. But walls need gates if they are not to imprison those they are meant to protect. So the real issue is, what are the rules for going in and out of the gates? Today there seem to be few enforceable rules. Uncertainties and visa delays are preventing many highly qualified persons – engineers, doctors, IT specialists – from coming to the United States.

As Italian Americans, our heritage makes clear we should not want to shut others out just because we are already here. To regain control in a way that is worthy of our civilization, we need to develop immigration laws that will shape an open system, with dignity and responsibility for all. The controls should define the qualifications and rights of guest-workers, distinguish between migrants and refugees, specify requirements for citizenship, and identify national security and health concerns. To make sure our rules are respected by other countries, their provisions should be approved multilaterally. And then those laws should be enforced, cooperatively and rigorously. As the old Roman saying goes, *Dura lex sed lex*. The law is hard, but it is the law.

As a footnote, let me say that immigration is today also a problem for Italy. Since the 1960s, many more people enter Italy than leave it. Something like seven per cent of persons living in Italy today are foreign born. The United States has announced it will accept 100,000 Ukrainian refugees. Last week, more than 100,000 Ukrainians refugees were already in Italy. Since Putin's aggression, Europe faces crises in both migration and defense.

Which brings me to a second issue we need to face, the Riddle of Sovereignty.

Sovereignty, the sovereign equality of states, has been the organizing principle of the international system since the 1648 Peace of Westphalia.

Sovereignty has long meant that individual states are to be inviolate from outside intervention and free to decide whether or not to participate in any particular activity. The problem is that our times *require* cooperation. I have just argued that is the case with migration, but it also applies to cyberspace, illegal drugs, weapons from small arms to drones and nukes, terrorism, disease, climate change – even most economic activity. No longer can any of these problems be controlled by any one state acting alone. Unfortunately, however, efforts to manage these issues stimulate nationalist recoils.

When sovereignty is linked to nationalism it can easily lead to war. Europe suffered through two world wars fought in the name of sovereignty and nationalism. As the first World War ended, my grandfather Einaudi wrote:

We must abolish the dogma of perfect sovereignty. The truth, reality, is the interdependence of free peoples, not their absolute independence ... A state isolated and sovereign that can survive on its own is a fiction, it cannot be reality. Reality is that states can be equal and independent among themselves only when they realize that their life and development will be impossible if they are not ready to help each other (Einaudi 1918).

Clearly, however, sovereignty cannot be reduced to an obsolete aspiration from a predigital age. Sovereignty is as vital to the protection of a country's rights as privacy is to individual rights. Yet in today's world, with so many problems escaping national boundaries and control, sovereignty's first line of defense should be understood – not as doing whatever we want, not as nonintervention – but as international cooperation. The best words I have found in English to express this way of working with others is mutual engagement. The words *engranaje* in Spanish or *ingranaggio* in Italian, a meshing of different gears, may express what I mean more clearly: gears do not break, but work together to make things turn better. The idea is to cooperate with others in ways that advance our interests without abandoning them. *The world needs laws and relationship-building, more than it needs walls or nation-building.*

My former Treasury and IDB colleague Ciro de Falco suggests developing such understandings may come more naturally to persons brought up in smaller countries that are exposed to neighbors with different languages and cultures. For example, the inhabitants of divided preunification Italy had to adjust to so many occupying powers over so many centuries, that they had to learn flexibility just to survive. This, he suggests, may teach humility, the ability to see the other side's position, and help develop social skills like listening, admitting mistakes, looking for allies, and giving credit to others.

Not too surprisingly, Ciro calls this the Italian “modo di fare”. Go to Palermo or Siracusa and you will see why Sicily was once the center of civilization. It has been said that “Norman Sicily stood forth in Europe – and indeed in the whole bigoted medieval world – as an example of tolerance and enlightenment, a lesson in the respect that every man should feel for those whose blood and beliefs happen to differ from his own” (John Julius Norwich).

A good friend of mine and Ciro's, the late Paolo Janni, an Italian diplomat who long lived in the United States, wrote a book in 2008 (Janni 2008)

in which he argued that the United States and Europe had drifted apart from common origins. Since the end of the Cold War, Europe was turning inward and fragmenting, the United States, also turning inward, was militarizing foreign relations and even to some extent its police. Even so, in a later book on President Obama (Janni 2010) Janni caught something else: the spirit of universalism. In the steps of Filangieri and Mazzei, we are neither Italians nor Americans, “In questo mondo c’è una sola razza – la razza umana”. In this world there is only one race, the human race, and we had better learn to respect all of its members, however different they may be.

I turn again to my grandfather, this time to his appeal for Italy to ratify the peace treaty ending World War II:

The Europe Italy hopes for, and for whose realization it must fight, is not a Europe closed against anyone, it is a Europe open to all, it is a Europe in which men and women are able to freely advance their different ideals and in which the majorities respect the minorities... And to create such a Europe, Italy must be ready to sacrifice part of its sovereignty.” (Einaudi 1947).

Today, 75 years later, in the midst of the desperate conflict in Ukraine, I would reformulate that to say that everyone, including the United States, must be ready, not so much to sacrifice sovereignty as to redefine it to include cooperation with other countries on issues whose management requires common action. In the name of sovereignty, the United States Senate has for the last quarter century refused to ratify international treaties, from the Rights of the Child to the Law of the Sea. The United States of America does not belong to the International Criminal Court. Beccaria would not agree. Jefferson, who in our Declaration of Independence called for “a decent respect to the opinions of mankind”, would not agree.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, as Italian Americans, we have a heritage of which we should be proud. We have much to be proud about, in Italy, in America, and in what we have produced together.

Looking to the future, I see two sharp, even dramatic alternatives. One is to say, we have come far – it is time to stop and enjoy what we have. The other is to say, we have indeed come far – and in coming far we learned we must build on our principles to carry us further, and by God, we will not stop.

If we allow ourselves and America to stop and drift in the glorification of the past, to wall ourselves in to defend where we think we are, we will

be giving up on the ideals that made America the world's magnet. Italian Americans will then become just one of many morally impoverished fragments of a world in retreat.

If, on the other hand, we continue to build on our immigrant dream of a society open to all and united in freedom, then Italian Americans will be an essential force in building the new civilization we seek, both as descendants of the *civis romanus* and as shapers of the new America and ultimately of the destiny of the universe, as Filangieri put it when commenting on our Constitution. This second choice builds on our culture, food, and religious traditions, and reaches beyond them to extend the path from Rome to America to becoming citizens of the world.

Whichever way it goes, whether we become fragments of a country in decline or part of a new civilization, the result will depend to a large measure on understanding our Italian American heritage. For that reason, I want to again thank our hosts, Ciro and Francesco, Father Dall'Agnese, and all who support the IAMDC, beginning with Robert Facchina. To live up to our heritage, we have to appreciate how we got here, and to do that, we have to write our own history. No one will do that for us.

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