



Italian Historical Society of America

Newsletter

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Tutto Italiano **Benvenuto a *Tutto Italiano***

From the [alarm clock](#) to the [Zamboni](#), Italian innovation has been absorbed into American society. It's not only products, but also in the arts, business, education, fashion, finance, food, law, science, transportation, and any other aspect of American life. How each became embedded in America, though, is part of the fragmented history of Italian immigrants becoming Italian Americans.

The culture of Italy in America takes a different path: directly through a diplomat and the third president of a still newly-forming United States. It was during his term as U.S. Minister to France (1784 to 1789), when [Thomas Jefferson visited Italy](#). For three weeks in 1787, Jefferson traveled through Lombardy, Piedmont, and Liguria, visiting 40 cities that included Genoa, Milan, and Turin. Although he was Minister to France, Jefferson traveled as a private citizen noting the architecture, customs, food, and wine of the towns he visited. When he returned to the States, he brought the influences of the Italian people and culture with him.

More than 20 years before his trip to Italy, Jefferson was a great admirer of Italian culture. From [Italian Influence in the Monticello Orchard](#): "Jefferson's first serious study of the Italian language probably began in 1764, when he purchased an Italian-English dictionary and three historical works in Italian ... As early as August 1767 he was using the word Monticello, which was both a place name and a noun meaning 'small mountain.' ... Whatever the direct inspiration, the indirect source of the name Monticello was undoubtedly Jefferson's early and intense study of the classical world and his deep identification with Roman culture."

In 1773, [Filippo Mazzei](#) – a native of Tuscany – travelled to Virginia, initially to establish a vineyard, and later established a deep bond with the men who were charting the course of a new nation. His philosophy was similar to theirs – supporting the desire for America's independence and self-rule – and through his European contacts, Mazzei was able to obtain funding and military support for his adopted country. Mazzei's friendship with Jefferson had a permanent affect on the foundation of America. His political writings included, "All men are by nature equally free and independent;" influencing Jefferson to include "all men are created equal" in the Declaration of Independence.

April 13th is the 280th anniversary of Thomas Jefferson's birth. Italian Americans have a rich, prolific history in America; both should be celebrated. To learn more, read about the featured author in the Italian American Press below.
(Article includes excerpts from previous issues of *Tutto Italiano*.)

[Thomas Jefferson](#)

[Thomas Jefferson and Italy](#)

Some towns Jefferson visited
[Limone Piemonte](#) [region of Liguria]

[Nervi](#) [region of Liguria]

[Voghera](#) [region of Lombardia]

[Cuneo](#) [region of Piemonte]

Italian American Press

The Italian American Press offers a great selection of books – culture, history, memoirs, art, family, food, the supernatural, the natural beauty of Italy, and more – for every interest. Help preserve Italian American heritage and history. Support authors of Italian heritage who write about Italian American and Italian culture and let them know you found their books on the Italian American Press.

Featured Author

Ralph G. Giordano has been “on a 40-year journey with Mr. Jefferson.” He notes that Thomas Jefferson had “a life-long admiration for all things Italian. Tracing his [Jefferson’s] cultural admiration for Italy is not a new phenomenon, placing him among the forerunner of assimilating Italian culture is.”

Ralph’s interest and research were the foundation for [*Italian Culture in America: How a Founding Father introduced Italian Art, Architecture, Food, Wine, and Liberty to the American People*](#).

[Read about his book on La Gazzetta Italiana.](#)

Italian American Heritage Project

One of the most influential issues damaging Italian Americans is the media’s representation of Italians and Italian Americans. Most notably, the connection of crime associated with having an Italian heritage. In the past year, Hollywood has been celebrating the 50-year anniversary of *The Godfather*. In [*The Hollywood Curriculum on Italian Americans: Evolution of an Icon of Ethnicity*](#), Carlos E. Cortés (Professor Emeritus, University of California, Riverside), writes:

“Movie Italian Americans have become, in fact, both an embodiment of American ethnicity and a synonym for screen criminality, particularly ethnic criminality ... the 1930s brought a new and, for Italian Americans, ominous twist in the Hollywood curriculum, a giant step toward becoming an undesirable screen icon. ... By the end of the 1930s Italian-American gangsters had become a staple of movie textbooks, a curricula tradition that has survived to the present. ... While movie textbooks featured greater Italian-American diversity, they also solidified violence, physical or verbal, as the prime Italian-American screen cultural characteristic, be it the lethal, sometimes sadistic violence ...”

Regarding *The Godfather*: “Coppola used Italian-American organized crime as a metaphor for the American quest for wealth and power, in which the mafia symbolizes both the successes and the excesses of American big business. The accuracy or authenticity of the Godfather films as fictional textbooks on the Italian-American experience may be debated, but their influence on the evolution of the Hollywood multiethnic curriculum remains incontestable. Evidence of the public effects of the Godfather films soon emerged, ranging from a boom in mafia jokes and Mafia Staff Car bumper stickers to the public institutionalization of the expression, ‘I’m going to make you an offer you can’t refuse.’ If anybody doubted that being Italian American was virtually synonymous with having criminal connections (not necessarily being a criminal one’s self), *The Godfather* put those reservations to rest. Italian Americans had evolved from screen figures to social icons. Moreover, by making lots of money, the Godfather films sent a further message to the rest of Hollywood: there’s gold in them there mafia movies. Hollywood responded with film after film involving the mafia or other Italian-American criminal agglomerations referred to more generically as the mob or organized crime ...”

Last March, the [Academy Museum of Motion Pictures](#) announced a new exhibit: “The Art of Moviemaking: *The Godfather*,” opening November 2022 and on exhibit through March 2024. The exhibit offers “an exciting glimpse into the process of making a masterpiece. Director Francis Ford Coppola’s interpretation of Mario Puzo’s popular novel provided an operatic and poignant reflection on the American dream, ...”

An [article dated November 11, 2022](#) declares it “a fantastic new exhibit that celebrates *The Godfather* ...” Another [article dated January 17, 2023](#), in an exclusive interview, the Assistant Curator states the exhibit gave the Museum “the chance to ‘surpass a more superficial celebration of the movie and really help people understand how technical processes used can produce real art.’”

The Academy Museum offers a variety of [The Godfather “gift shop”](#) items, and last November the [San Francisco Symphony](#) offered the opportunity to “Relive the chilling portrait of the Sicilian clan’s rise to power” as it performed a live score for the movie. As Professor Cortés wrote: “there’s gold in them there mafia movies.”

The [Academy Museum](#) offers “exceptional exhibitions and programs that illuminate the world of cinema. They are immersive and dynamic and tell the many stories of the movies—their art, technology, artists, history, and social impact—through a variety of diverse and engaging voices. The Academy Museum tells complete stories of moviemaking—celebratory, educational, and sometimes critical or uncomfortable.” Its Mission Statement is to advance “the understanding, celebration, and preservation of cinema through inclusive and accessible exhibitions, screenings, programs, initiatives, and collections.”

It’s interesting to note that the Academy Museum chose to highlight the “art” of making *The Godfather*, and avoids addressing the negative social impact the movie has had on Italian American culture and heritage. The exhibit will be on display until next March. Is it possible that if people of Italian heritage contacted the Academy and asked for “inclusion” in recognizing the film’s detrimental Italian American representation, the Academy would make an attempt to acknowledge this social issue? [Contact the Academy Museum](#).

[Cultural Civil War](#) (italic.org; March 6, 2023)

“Stop praising *The Godfather*. Acknowledge the harm that this one single film has done in distorting our history in America – our struggles and tragedies, our triumphs and successes. Those roots were noble, not criminal.”

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Keep your Italian heritage alive. An excellent source for learning about Italian American culture and heritage is a museum specifically established to focus on the Italian American experience. Many have virtual exhibits and tours available on their websites. [List of Italian American Museums](#).

Talk with your children (no matter what age), grandchildren, other family members, friends, and educators. Tell them about the significant contributions people of Italian heritage have made to America ... and the world. [List of more than 70 contributors on Thirty-One Days of Italians](#).

Learn about Columbus. It’s difficult to correct over 30 years of misinformation, and the rapid spread through digital sources is disheartening. In 2018, the Italian American Heritage Project was established to provide educational resources about Italian American history, heritage, and culture. The website also addresses the Columbus Controversy by providing facts about Columbus, how the controversy started, and why it continues. Read [What is the Truth About Columbus?](#) To understand how Columbus became an important part of American history, read [Christopher Columbus: When Did the Hero Become a Villain?](#) (Some links are no longer active.)

[Lesson plans developed from the letters Columbus wrote after his first voyage](#).

The groups opposing Columbus Day have an organized agenda to eliminate it from America. Although the statements of truth and facts posted on Italian American websites are filled with historical facts, they are not very effective in reaching and educating the intended audience. Columbus Day has lost much of its relevance in American history; but battles for his legacy in American history are being won. Even so, the war against Columbus and our Italian heritage continues. Indigenous People already have a designated day, and Native Americans have a day and a month to celebrate their culture.

Indigenous Peoples Day – August 9

Native American Month – November

Native American Heritage Day – Friday after Thanksgiving

Visit the [IAHP website](#) to read my articles, learn about the lesson plans, see the resources I've used, and support my work. Donate for a cause – preserving Italian heritage and Italian American history and culture through education. [All donations are tax-deductible.](#)

### **Italian American News**

[Visitors Flock to See Michelangelo's David Sculpture After School Uproar in Florida](#) (npr.org; March 29, 2023)

[See You In...U.S. Supreme Court](#) (onlineprimo.com; March 28, 2023, scroll down.  
*Note: The website may take a few minutes to load.*)

[We Must Expand Italian American Education in Schools](#) (lavocedinewyork.com; March 26, 2023)

[New Stamp to Honor NH Author Tomie dePaola](#) (news.yahoo.com; March 23, 2023)

[Walk of Fame: a Star for Giancarlo Giannini](#) (italoamericano.org; March 21, 2023)

[Joe Pepitone, Yankees All-Star 'Favorite of Generations,' Dies at 82](#) (nbcnews.com; March 14, 2023)

[Italian Americans Fight Discrimination Battle in Boston—'Huge Disadvantage'](#) (msn.com; March 10, 2023)

[Lori Lightfoot's Broken Columbus Promises Lead to Punishing Defeat](#) (orderisda.org; March 3, 2023)

[University of Toledo to Host Italian Bowl This July](#) (msn.com; February 22, 2023)

### **News about Italy**

[ChatGPT Banned by Regulator in Italy. ...](#) (msn.com; March 30, 2023)

[Italy Has a Gun Culture but No Mass Shootings—Here's Why](#) (rd.com; March 27, 2023)

[South Tyrol: Fairy Tale Castles Set in Natural Wonders on the Italian Border](#) (lavocedinewyork.com; March 20, 2023)

[What the World Can Learn from an Italian City's Approach to Mental Health](#) (slate.com; March 13, 2023)

[Italy's Dugout at the World Baseball Classic Has an Espresso Machine, and It's So Perfectly Italian](#) (msn.com; March 10, 2023)

[Italian Woman Who 'Got Back' Stolen WWII Birthday Cake Dies](#) (abcnews.go.com; March 9, 2023)

[Sculptor Lou Cella](http://franoi.com) (franoi.com; March 7, 2023)

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