

I. Goals of the Commission for Social Justice

Our goals of fighting bias, bigotry and discrimination against Italians and Italian Americans and promoting a positive image of Americans of Italian descent are accomplished through our Complaint Directory, our many programs including the Medal of Honor, the Holocaust Memorial Program, our video-documentary “Italian American Recipients of the Congressional Medal of Honor,” positive image materials, speaking engagements, and the publication of our CSJ newspaper *Justice*. We underscore the importance of retaining and supporting our present CSJ members as a high priority.

II Italian Language Program

Update to the Italian Language Program at St. Finbar’s Elementary School. Unfortunately the Diocese of Brooklyn chose to close St. Finbar’s this June. Most of the students transferred to nearby Our Lady of Guadalupe School. At a meeting with their principal, Ms. Diana Meringolo, she is enthusiastic about absorbing the entire Italian Language program into that school, as part of the curriculum, depending on a grant from IACE, for teacher’s salaries. If the grant received does not cover salaries for teachers of all grades, the program will continue for the lower grades only. Because OLG has twice the number of students as St. Finbar’s, they will be requiring additional books for the program. We will be working with the school to assist in obtaining the additional books.

III Complaint Directory Issues:

We have been contacted by members on various occasions, requesting CSJ intervention on an issue of bias and/or bigotry against Italian –Americans. We try to respond to every issue brought to our attention. It would be most helpful if you provide us with the TV or radio station, date and time of the program, and as much information as possible so that we can properly respond to the issue. Some issues are beyond our realm.

On several occasions, we have received an irate email asking why we haven’t handled a complaint. Upon investigation, it was found that the complaint was made to another party and was never related to us. We have also received email asking us to handle an issue that occurred several months ago. By the time we looked into the matter, it was no longer an issue. After much discussion concerning the handling of complaints we developed guidelines for this purpose.

- **Ken Pringle, Mayor of Belmar, NJ.** – I received many telephone calls and emails concerning Pringle’s derogatory remarks concerning the “Guido’s” and the “big haired girls” that visit his town on the Jersey Shore during the summer months. CSJ was contacted by NYC Councilman Tony Avella, various members and non-members concerning these insensitive remarks. After speaking with John Dabbene, I emailed Pringle offering him the opportunity to public apologize at the Garibaldi Meucci Museum, to Staten Island officials, and New York and New Jersey CSJ. However, I received no response from the Mayor. I was contacted by Tom Bergbauer, OSIA President of New Jersey, to attend a Town Hall Meeting in Balmar, NJ concerning the matter. However, because of very short notice, I was unable to attend. At the meeting, Brother Bergbauer reiterated the suggestion that the mayor meet with us at the Museum to publicly apologize, but he stated that he already apologized and the apology was accepted by NIAF. In essence – the matter was considered closed.
- **U.S. Open – June 15, 2008** - During NBC’s nationally aired coverage of the U.S. Open, featuring Tiger Woods and Rocco Mediate. Sportscaster Johnny Miller made derogatory remarks concerning Rocco Mediate by stating, “*Mediate looks like the guy who cleans Tiger’s swimming pool,*” and “*Guys with the name of Rocco don’t get on the trophy, do they?*” To quote the NY Times, according to Miller, “An Italian guy who looks like a pool cleaner, with his name on a trophy with Tiger’s, sounded wrong.” Not only was his verbal diatribe aired on national television

but was reproduced via a film clip on the internet, and printed in the New York Times and other newspapers. We wrote to Richard Ebersole, President -NBC Sports, concerning these derogatory remarks on national television, asking that Mr. Miller be removed from his sensitive position. Our National CSJ President, Anthony Baratta, conducted a national campaign to this endeavor. A very half- hearted apology was published by Mr. Miller, which is not acceptable to us. We have not given up on this matter.

- **Fordham University - “The Soprano’s – A Wake”** - A symposium was held at Fordham University, Lincoln Center Campus, “The Soprano’s – A Wake,” which was held on the weekend of May 24th. It consisted of a series of lectures, conducted by professors, adjuncts and lecturers from all over the world, who seemed to have found some redeeming value to this series. This symposium was supposed to be a sociological study comparing the *Soprano’s* family/characters to any other American family and their friends. We did write to the President of Fordham, concerning the use of this prestigious University for this symposium, and received a letter of apology – with the notation that the University did not advertise or promote the symposium and would not offer their facilities for anything like it in the future.
- **HBO – Boardwalk Empire** - It was brought to our attention that HBO is planning to air a new series “Boardwalk Empire,” based on Nelson Johnson’s book, *Boardwalk Empire: The Birth, High Times and Corruption of Atlantic City*, about the beginning of organized crime in 1920’s Atlantic City. It is our understanding that Terrence Winter, of *Soprano’s* fame, will be writing the series. We wrote to Michael Lombardo, President, HBO asking that this series not replicate another tiresome, stereotypical "Mafia" series. We further requested his cooperation and intervention in preventing this series from becoming another *Mafia-fest*. In a return email – he stated very briefly that this was not about Italian Americans.

IV. NYS CSJ Annual Fundraisers

NYS (CSJ) – B’nai B’rith Breakfast - Twenty-Seventh Breakfast of Solidarity – June 1, 2008

Our 27th annual breakfast held jointly with B’Nai B’Rith Metronorth Region, held on June 1, 2008 at the Woodlands. Lehman Laguardia Awards were presented to Howard Meier, Chairman Holocaust Memorial and Tolerance Center of Nassau County and Dr. Margaret Cuomo Meier, a medical professional, educator involved in the promotion of Italian Language Studies. Former Governor Mario Cuomo and his lovely wife, Mathilda Cuomo were in attendance as we honored their family for all their good works. There was an atmosphere of shared camaraderie and acknowledgment of our similar causes, to fight bias and bigotry. I thank Marge Moschella, Sal Moschella, Enrico Annichiarico, Richard Haemmerle, Eleanor Jobbagy and Maria Kobylarz, for a job well done.

V Seventh CSJ-B’nai B’rith Essay Contest

The **NYS and National CSJ/OSIA, and the MetroNorth Region of B’nai B’rith International** again sponsored writing contest entitled "2008 Enlighten America - Enlighten the World Youth Essay Award." New York State demographics indicate changes in the ethnic makeup of our population. Students were asked to address the following topic: **“How has diversity enhanced or broadened your experiences in your school and in your community?”**

Three prizes were awarded as follows: First Place- \$500. U.S. Savings Bond, Rafael Tangorra; Second - \$250 U.S. Savings Bond, Michael Hand; Third - \$100 -US Savings Bond, Jenna Maresco. A certificate of participation will be issued to every student submitting an essay. On June 26, 2008 we were invited to a meeting of the Herricks School Board to present Michael Hand with his award. In attendance were Stella Grillo, CSJ President, and Barbara

Glenbourtt and Doris Levinson, B’Nai B’rith Metronorth Division. We were invited to speak before the members and were able to tell them about the goals of both Organizations.

VI ITALIAN LANGUAGE ADVANCED PLACEMENT TEST IT

VII District CSJ’s

District I – Chairman Rick Annichiarico reports that the District has active and well attended meetings.

District II – Chairman, Lee Cerullo and the District II Liaisons had a very well attended meeting on June 26th at the Columbus Lodge. Three students were given awards for excellence in Italian Language studies. They plan another fund raiser in the fall – perhaps a trip to the historic sights in Philadelphia, Pa.

District III –District Chairperson, Josephine Truglio and District III liaisons met to revise and update the CSJ pamphlet.

District IV – Chairperson, Felicia Bonvino keeps us apprized of activities in District IV by sending copies of news articles of interest to us. She also researching elementary schools that have incorporated Italian Language programs as part of their curriculum.

District V – Sal Marasa, District V Chairman, advised that the Filippo Mazzei Lodge arranges to have positive image displays at various local libraries and public areas.

Districts VI – Joseph DiCarlo, Gabriela DiNunzia Lodge and Anna Maria Saia have volunteered to co-chair the District CSJ Liaisons. We wholeheartedly welcome them.

District VII – We are seeking a District Chairperson in this district. We have had some volunteers to participate as Liaisons and have written to them and have provided them with CSJ Liaison information. Carmine Federico has been working with our liaisons in District VII. We appreciate Brother Federico’s assistance.

District VIII –Lou Giambra, is working in his District by maintaining contact with the Lodges and keeping them apprised of CSJ activities.

VII Congressional Medal of Honor Video Documentary

We are continuing our efforts to promote and distribute this wonderful positive image video to lodges, state CSJ’s, military groups, and other interested parties around the country. The videos have been purchased all over the country with many OSIA groups, military groups, etc. We encourage the showing of the 6-minute promo tape and the sale of the video documentary, when displaying the Congressional Medal of Honor Program. The cost of the tape has been reduced to \$5.00 plus \$2.50 for postage and handling.

IX Video Tape Library

Our video-tape library has been categorized and shelved at the Garibaldi Meucci Museum. We have developed a system for the tapes to be loaned to lodges, organizations and individuals. We welcome donations of video-tapes and DVD’s appropriate to our collection. The complete listing can be downloaded from our web site, together with rental information, www.nyscsj-osia.org/ We encourage Lodges and other organizations to utilize the films in this collection. There is no charge to borrow the tapes.

X Positive Image Material

The CSJ is continually developing and distributing our positive image material to teachers, filial lodges and members. We have ordered additional Columbus bookmarks for distribution during the month of October at parades, various functions and feasts. We also have a supply of Italian National Anthem cards, in both Italian and English, that can be placed on tables at dinner/dances so that everyone can join in singing the Italian National Anthem. Our latest poster features Italian American – Sports Hall of Famers – which was prepared by Anthony Corsello and Sal Moschella.

XI Calendar of Events – New York State CSJ

Italian Night at Shea Stadium - Wednesday, August 20, 2008, game starts at 7:10 PM – tickets are \$32. per person. Join with us to show our strength and support. Contact Sylvia Summa ASAP for tickets – 718-384-7915.

Belmont, Day at the Races – Saturday, September 13, 2008, \$45.00 per person, Contact Anthony Corsello, Chairperson ASAP for reservations – 516-766-5518.

Teacher’s Conference, September 21, 2008 - 9:30 AM at Hofstra University - Informative conference held for Italian Language and Social Studies teachers. Teachers are supplied with a tube of positive image educational material to be utilized as teaching aids.

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II Italian Language Program

Update to the Italian Language Program at St. Finbar’s Elementary School. The program is doing well, however, the Diocese of Brooklyn will be closing the school in June 2008. Most of the students will be transferring to Our Lady of Guadalupe, in Brooklyn, NY. After several conversations with Carmela Ottaviano, it is almost certain that the Italian Language Program will continue at that school. They hope to have even more students involved with the program. As part of our positive image program, the CSJ plans to continue its efforts to promote the teaching of Italian Language at the elementary school level.

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- **Rev. Jeremiah A. Wright, Jr.** – We received many telephone calls and emails concerning Rev. Wright’s derogatory remarks concerning Italians and the response to these remarks was released by our National Office. NYS CSJ forwarded a copy of this release to Associated Press and several New York papers. A copy of this letter and a copy of a column written by Gregory Kane of the Baltimore Sun on April 12, 2008, are attached for your perusal.
- **Little Italy Game** was brought to our attention, by members of Police Lt. Joseph Petrosino Lodge located in Manhattan’s *Little Italy*, which was promoted by Playroom Entertainment. Postcards advertising this game have been widely distributed in *Little Italy*. This board game invites gamers to *become the head of a crime family in 1950’s Little Italy*. Your “game” glamorizes the criminal underworld and encourages young adults to “think like a criminal and become a crime boss. Letter was written to Playroom Entertainment suggesting that the game be recalled.
- **New York Daily News** – A two-page feature article, written by Mehrnoosh Torbatnejad, entitled *Cemetery has a mob of Mafiosi*” was printed. Not even the dead can rest in peace! A quote by Beth Santore of *Grave Addiction Web site*, expertly deduced that because many of the mobsters

- buried at St. John's Cemetery are Italian, they are also Roman Catholic, therefore buried in a Catholic Cemetery. She even went so far as to allude that "*there is competition amongst rivals in cemeteries.*" In our letter we asked what exactly was the point of this insensitive article or these *expert opinions*. Informative? To further denigrate the hundreds of Italian Americans buried at
- St. John's Cemetery? Many of our members have close relatives buried at St. John's Cemetery. The first sentence in this article stated that, "more than 20 infamous gangsters are buried there." How then did your reporter come to the conclusion that the Cemetery has a mob of Mafiosi? We asked for a retraction. The Daily News did reprint a portion of our letter on their Editorial Page.
 - **New York Daily News** - The comic strip, "Chuckie Bros" featured in the Thursday, April 10, 2008 edition. The "cartoon" shows a very elegant shop, with the letter "V" on the awning and a sign, "Vinny's Shoe Shoppe" *One Size Fits All*. The picture window features two *mobster-like characters*, wearing what is supposed to be "cement shoes." Again, the Daily News is permitting the tired scenario that associates ALL Italian Americans with crime and criminals. Is this supposed to be "funny." Comics and cartoons were once geared for children's entertainment, we asked how an adult explain this insensitive comic strip. Italian Americans, as an entire ethnic group, are constantly could explain this cartoon to a child. We asked for a retraction from Bronnian Comics or perhaps the Daily News should drop them from your "Comics Section."
 - **La Terranova** - members of the *Loggia Glen Cove* that this restaurant recently featured a new reality show, "You Got Whacked: *Gangsters and Pranksters*. The local newspaper, *Gold Coast Gazette*, featured a front-page article touting this show, which was co-hosted by Tony Darrow and Vinny Vella, two actors who are known for playing gangster roles in movies and on TV. The paper even compared these two actors to Allen Funt of "Candid Camera:" fame. Letter sent with the suggestion that they cancel these performances.
 - **Newsday - Sunday Travel Section** featured a wonderful article on "7 Wonders Close to Home," with the seated figure of *Abraham Lincoln and the Lincoln Memorial* in Washington, DC on the cover. The centerfold of the Travel Section continued the feature, citing that the sculptor, Daniel Chester French and architect, Henry Bacon collaborated to build the Memorial. We notified Newsday, that sculptor, Attilio Piccirilli and his five brothers actually carved the majestic statue, "*Seated Lincoln.*" They began their work in 1920 and completed this magnificent statue in 1922, shipping their completed work on railroad cars from New York to Washington, DC. The face, its expressive eyes, and other delicate features were carved by Attilio Piccirillo. The clay model of Lincoln they used was provided by Daniel Chester French, an American artist, selected by the U.S. government to create the design, but he could not execute the final masterpiece. The Piccirilli's should be credited for their beautiful craftsmanship on this National work of art, in a future publication.
 - **That's Amore – In this** series on MTV –Domenico Nesci – a young man from Milan comes to the United States to find a wife. He does so in his *Howard Hughes like mansion* that is lit up with red, white and green lights. He parades around in red, white and green shorts while be vies of young women vie for his attention by wrestling in a giant bowl of spaghetti and other inane events that border on pornographic. Our letter questions the message sent to our young Italian American men and women concerning respect for each other. What message are they receiving about our Italian culture.

IV. NYS CSJ Annual Fundraisers

NYS CSJ's 28th Anniversary Dinner-Dance – Sunday, Feb. 24, 2008

On Sunday, February 24, 2008, at our 28th Annual CSJ Dinner-Dance, the CSJ honored two committed individuals – Dr. Joseph Tursi, Professor Emeritus, Stony Brook University, Director of Foreign Language Education and recipient of many accolades and awards for his contributions to Language Education and Dr. Emelise Aleandri, a Cornaro Award recipient, for her contributions to the Italian American Theater. They are both positive role models for all of us. We thank all the officers, Lodge Presidents and members for their support of this very successful event. We especially thank Josephine Morici Cohen who continued to Chair this event, during the hospitalization of her husband, Murray Cohen, who passed away two weeks ago.

NYS (CSJ) – B’nai B’rith Breakfast - Twenty-Seventh Breakfast of Solidarity – June 1, 2008

We plan to celebrate our 27th NYS CSJ – B’nai B’rith Breakfast of Solidarity, during which Lehman-LaGuardia Awards, will be presented to Howard S. Maier, Chairman of the Holocaust Memorial and Tolerance Center of Nassau County and his wife, Dr. Margaret Cuomo. The breakfast will be held at the **Woodlands, 1 Southwoods Road, Woodbury, NY**. We look forward to another successful event.

V Seventh CSJ-B’nai B’rith Essay Contest

The NYS and National CSJ/OSIA, and the MetroNorth Region of B’nai B’rith International are currently circulating notices of our seventh jointly sponsored writing contest entitled "2008 Enlighten America - Enlighten the World Youth Essay Award." New York State demographics indicate changes in the ethnic makeup of our population. Students are asked to address the following topic: **“How has diversity enhanced or broadened your experiences in your school and in your community?”**

Three prizes offered are: First - \$500. U.S. Savings Bond; Second - \$250 U.S. Savings Bond; Third - \$100 -US Savings Bond. A certificate of participation will be issued to every student submitting an essay. **We welcome essay submissions from all high school students. Submission deadline: April 15, 2008. Winners will be declared by May 24, 2008.** As of this date, we have five entries to this contest.

VI District CSJ’s

District I – Chairman Rick Annichiarico reports that the District has active and well attended meetings.

District II – Chairman, Lee Cerullo and the District II Liaisons had a very well attended fund raiser - Day at the Opera that included a dinner in *Little Italy*. The funds they raise will be utilized to award two students in Nassau County, for Excellence in Italian Language studies.

District III –District Chairperson, Josephine Truglio and District III liaisons plan to meet in June.

District IV – Chairperson, Felicia Bonvino is working in her District by visiting various lodges and keeping them informed of CSJ activities. She keeps us apprized of activities in District IV by sending copies of news articles of interest to us. She also researching elementary schools that have incorporated Italian Language programs as part of their curriculum.

District V – Sal Marasa, District V Chairman, advised that the Filippo Mazzei Lodge arranges to have positive image displays at various local libraries and public areas.

Districts VI and VII – We are seeking a District Chairperson in these two districts. We have had some volunteers to participate as Liaisons and have written to them and have provided them with CSJ Liaison information. Carmine Federico has been working with our liaisons in District VII. We appreciate Brother Federico’s assistance.

District VIII –Lou Giambra, is working in his District by maintaining contact with the Lodges and keeping them apprized of CSJ activities.

VII College Liaisons

Sal Lalima arranged for the CSJ to participate in a program, presented by the Suffolk Center on the Holocaust, Diversity and Human Understanding, entitled "Heroes: Stories of Rescue from Genocide." The program included

a segment on Italian rescuers. *Frank Oliveri, of the Denaro Interfaith Center in Rochester*, a place that has been involved in honoring Italians who saved Jews from the Holocaust, spoke on Italian Legacy and Heritage, Heroism and Humanity During the Holocaust. The program was held at Suffolk County Community College on April 3, 2008.

VIII Congressional Medal of Honor Video Documentary

We are continuing our efforts to promote and distribute this wonderful positive image video to lodges, state CSJ's, military groups, and other interested parties around the country. The videos have been purchased all over the country with many OSIA groups, military groups, etc. We encourage the showing of the 6-minute promo tape and the sale of the video documentary, when displaying the Congressional Medal of Honor Program. The cost of the tape has been reduced to \$5.00 plus \$2.50 for postage and handling.

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X Positive Image Material

The CSJ is continually developing and distributing our positive image material to teachers, filial lodges and members. We still are receiving requests for our Women's Posters from teachers in anticipation of Women's History Month. We provide positive image material to teachers at no cost to them, to be used as teacher's aids. We encourage our Lodges to also distribute positive image material to libraries, local schools and community-based activities. Italian American – Sports Hall of Famers – **New poster prepared by Anthony Corsello and Sal Moschella. We hope to have it ready for the June Convention.**

XI Calendar of Events – New York State CSJ

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Another New York State Convention has come and gone and while I have always enjoyed our conventions, I believe this was one of the nicest. The ambiance at the Desmond Hotel made us feel as though we were in a perennial garden and the unassigned seating gave us all the opportunity to meet and speak with members from lodges throughout the state.

On a personal note, I thank all involved for naming me as one of the recipients of the very prestigious Dr. Vincent Sellaro Award. It certainly was my highlight of this wonderful convention. As a 30-year member of the Order, I found an extended family of brothers and sisters, and many good friends. My dedication to the Order over the years, was a truly a labor of love for a very worthy cause.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the officers, members and friends who contributed to the CSJ at the Convention. Your contributions are instrumental in assisting the CSJ to fight bias and bigotry against Italian-Americans and promote our positive image.

It was a pleasure to meet the many members that visited our CSJ Table. Our positive image material is available for distribution to schools, libraries, lodge buildings or wherever it can be utilized and appreciated. I particularly thank Carmel Lamont for the many hours she spent manning the table.

Our liaisons are instrumental in keeping the CSJ viable and our lodges informed on our various programs. We welcome Joseph DiCarlo, from the Gabriele D'Annunzio Lodge # 321 and Anna Maria Saia, from the Roma Intangible Lodge # 215, both in District 6, as liaisons – they are much needed in this District. We look forward to working with them.

We certainly welcome all the emails and telephone calls from members and their friends, when they become incensed over occurrences that are offensive to Italian Americans. The latest occurred on Sunday, June 15th, 2008, during NBC's nationally aired coverage of the U.S. Open, featuring Tiger Woods and Rocco Mediate. Sportscaster Johnny Miller made derogatory remarks concerning Rocco Mediate by stating, "*Mediate looks like the guy who cleans Tiger's swimming pool,*" and "*Guys with the name of Rocco don't get on the trophy, do they?*" To quote the NY Times, according to Miller, "An Italian guy who looks like a pool cleaner, with his name on a trophy with Tiger's, sounded wrong." Not only was his verbal diatribe aired on national television but was reproduced via a film clip on the internet, and printed in the New York Times and other newspapers. We wrote to Richard Ebersole, President -NBC Sports, concerning these derogatory remarks on national television, asking that Mr. Miller be removed from his sensitive position. Our National CSJ President, Anthony Baratta, conducted a national campaign to this endeavor. A very half-hearted apology was published by Mr. Miller, which is not acceptable to us. We have not given up on this matter.

We also heard from many irate members concerning a symposium held at Fordham University, Lincoln Center Campus, "The Soprano's – A Wake," which was held on the weekend of May 24th. It consisted of a series of lectures, conducted by professors, adjuncts and lecturers from all over the world, who seemed to have found some redeeming value to this series. This symposium was supposed to be a sociological study comparing the *Soprano's* family/characters to any other American family and their friends. We did write to the President of Fordham, concerning the use of this prestigious University for this symposium. We did receive a letter of apology – with the notation that the University did not advertise or promote the symposium and would not offer their facilities for anything like it in the future.

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Last year, we were instrumental in enabling an Italian Language program to be introduced at St. Finbar's Elementary School in Brooklyn, NY, as part of the curriculum for grades K through 8. Unfortunately the Diocese of Brooklyn chose to close St. Finbar's this June. Most of the students transferred to nearby Our Lady of Guadalupe School. At a meeting with their principal, Ms. Diana Meringolo, she is enthusiastic about absorbing the entire Italian Language program into that school, as part of the curriculum, depending on a grant from IACE, for teacher's

salaries. If the grant received does not cover salaries for teachers of all grades, the program will continue for the lower grades only. Because OLG has twice the number of students as St. Finbar's, they will be requiring additional books for the program. We will be working with the school to assist in obtaining the additional books.

Kudos to Josephine Konow, a member of the Columbia County Lodge # 659, who was instrumental in introducing an Italian Language Program, as part of the curriculum at the Academy of Christian Leadership in Columbia County. She has also set up Italian Language programs in three private schools. We were happy to provide her with our positive image material as teaching aids. Her enthusiasm is certainly exciting and very productive.

Our next exciting event is our "Day at the Races" at Belmont Park – Saturday, September 13, 2008. This is a District I, II, III Fund Raiser and promises to be a great afternoon. The cost is \$42. per person and includes a buffet lunch. Contact Tony Corsello, ASAP for reservations – 516-766-5518.

If you see something – say something! **When you notify us about an incident, please also provide us with the TV or radio station; date and time of the program; the name of the publication, date of issue; and as much information as possible so that we can properly respond to the matter. We try to address every issue.**

Remember – *If you are a member of OSIA you are a member of CSJ!*

The Baltimore Sun

Offensive foot in pastor's mouth
Gregory Kane

April 12, 2008

It took a while for the Order Sons of Italy in America to weigh in on the controversy surrounding the Rev. Jeremiah Wrong - er, uh, excuse me, I mean Jeremiah Wright - but I figured we'd be hearing from them.

Wright is the "spiritual adviser" to presidential candidate Sen. Barack Obama of Illinois. Wright, before he retired, was also the pastor of the Chicago church Obama has attended for 20 years. The clergyman emeritus is not exactly the bashful type. Excerpts from some of Wright's more - well, how should I put this? - fiery sermons were recently revealed, and it was Obama who took the heat.

Those excerpts first came to light several weeks ago, and this story seems to have better legs than a world-class marathon runner. There have been 226 newspaper or magazine stories about Obama and Wright this week alone, according to a Lexis-Nexis search.

The Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States were a case of "chickens coming home to roost," according to one Wright tidbit. After all, he railed, didn't we nuke the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki during World War II? In other sermons, Wright accused the U.S. government of spreading HIV and drugs in America's black communities.

Before I go any further, perhaps I should let my opinion about Wright be clear: He's a damned fool, one who should be grateful he lives in a country that doesn't ban damned fools from ascending to the pulpit and speaking their minds without fear of reprisal from their government. I can forgive Wright for not realizing that the Japanese government could have surrendered long before Aug. 6, 1945 - the day an atomic bomb devastated Hiroshima - and avoided that holocaust.

And considering how black folks feel about that syphilis "experiment" the U.S. government conducted in Tuskegee on black sharecroppers, I'm even willing to give him a pass on that HIV and drug thing, even if he didn't offer any proof.

But Wright's most offensive comments are the ones he wrote about Italian-Americans in the December 2007 edition of Trumpet magazine, where one of his daughters works as a publisher and another as an editor. The OSIA sent out a press release that focused on what the organization's members feel about Wright saying that "the Italians for the most part looked down their garlic noses at the Galileans."

Oh, there was more.

Wright accused an "apartheid Rome" of crucifying Jesus, and then called the execution "a public lynching, Italian style."

It was the use of the word lynching that especially rankles John DiBattista, who serves on the Maryland chapter of the Commission for Justice, the OSIA's anti-defamation arm.

"We were on the receiving end of that throughout American history," DiBattista said. The "we" he referred to are Italian-Americans. The "that" is, yes, lynching. There were Italian-Americans who were lynched. In fact, the victims of what's been called America's greatest mass lynching weren't black.

They were Italian-Americans.

It happened in New Orleans in 1891, According to Edward W. Knappman's Great American Trials, a lynch mob stormed a jail in the Big Easy and murdered 11 Italian-Americans who were accused of killing police Superintendent David Hennessy a year earlier. At least one of the defendants, according to the book, might have been innocent.

"Most of the accused were poor men whose arrests were based on circumstantial evidence or outright hysteria," Knappman writes. One of those "poor men" was a shoemaker named Pietro Monasterio. He lived in a shack near the spot from which Hennessy's killers fired their guns. That was enough to get him arrested - and lynched.

Perhaps Wright can be forgiven for not knowing that history. He lives in a country that doesn't just ignore anti-Italian bigotry. Hell, we embrace it. We celebrate it. Hollywood honchos have made a ton of money off ruthlessly stereotyping Italian-Americans as gangsters and mafiosos.

When Bernard McGuirk, the former producer of the Don Imus Show, called Supreme Court

Justice Samuel Alito a "meatball-sucking wop" during a satirical skit - he didn't get fired from the show.

But when McGuirk and Imus called members of Rutgers University women's basketball team "hos," they both got canned.

"It's been hard to communicate that [anti-Italian bigotry] to the media," DiBattista said. "We've had letters to the editors in different markets, and it's been hard to get that printed. Maybe it's because we're not an anointed minority."

But bigotry is bigotry, whether the target is an "anointed minority" or not. And bigotry is still bigotry when it comes from a man in the pulpit. With men of the cloth like Wright around, one thing is certain.

Expect God to make an official statement endorsing atheism any day now.

Sons of Italy News Bureau

We write on behalf of the 103 year old Order Sons of Italy in America (OSIA) and our 550,000 family members throughout the nation, and our anti-defamation arm, the Commission for Social Justice (CSJ), to strongly and unequivocally reject and condemn recently reported remarks made by the Rev. Jeremiah A. Wright Jr. According to *MSNBC* and other published and internet sources, Rev. Wright in 2007 stated: "[Jesus'] enemies had their opinion about Him . . . The Italians for the most part looked down their garlic noses at the Galileans." He then called Jesus' crucifixion "a public lynching Italian style" executed in "Apartheid Rome".

OSIA and the CSJ have sterling records of championing social justice and fair treatment for all people regardless of race, ethnicity, nationality or religion, and of combating, wherever and whenever necessary discrimination, defamation and stereotyping. We have worked closely, collaboratively and effectively for such causes with numerous and various social, religious and cultural groups throughout our long history. The civically responsible, philanthropic and patriotic works of the Sons of Italy have been publicly attested to by every US president since Woodrow Wilson.

Indeed, it is this unchallenged record of advocacy of social justice for all people that has delayed our response to Rev. Wright's unfortunate remarks, as we seek to lend reason and clarity to a deeply troubling historical reality. Rev. Wright's remarks cannot merely be attributed to "anger", but must be viewed against the backdrop of many years of what historian Richard Gambino called a "monstrous tradition in America" and an "injustice which remains hidden" directed at Italians.

While America of the late 19th century witnessed widespread racist, ethnic and anti-Catholic hatred, few immigrant groups suffered more than Italians: in 1891, in New Orleans, ten Italian prisoners found not guilty by a jury were executed by a mob in the *largest lynching in American history*. That same year, several Italians were lynched in West Virginia. In March 1894, several hundred Italians were driven out of Altoona, Pennsylvania, by an armed mob. In 1895, six Italian labor organizers were lynched in Colorado, six more in Hahnville, Louisiana, as were five Italian shopkeepers four years later in Tallulah, La. Fatal mob attacks against Italians were recorded in 1901, in Mississippi, 1906 in West Virginia, and 1910 in Tampa, Fl. In addition to the highly prejudicial and legally tainted Sacco and Vanzetti case of the 1920s, historian John Higham wrote that "No pogrom has ever stained American soil, nor did any single anti-Jewish incident in the 1920's match the violence of the [vigilante mob-led] anti-Italian riot " in West Frankfort, Illinois.

Words are important and have meaning, clear and subliminal. Shock jock Don Imus, whose very staple and basis for earning many millions of dollars, is the use of provocative, abrasive, demeaning and edge language, was fired and universally excoriated for the use of three extremely offensive and inappropriate words. A skilled communicator, Rev. Wright's deliberate choice of words having explicitly 20th century meaning ("lynching Italian style", "Apartheid", even "Italians"; there were Romans at the time, Italy didn't exist) to describe first century AD events speak to an intention far beyond the expression of mere "anger", or the citing of putative historical truths. We decry those intentions and sentiments as, we are confident, do all decent and fair-minded individuals. Rev. Wright, while perhaps retired, nevertheless owes all Italian Americans a sincere apology. We live in a profoundly complex, multifaceted, diverse society, which defies simplistic questions, answers and reasons. We must transcend personal injustices and seek a deeper understanding and appreciation that each of us, separately and as a group, often are and feel offended. No one has a monopoly on being discriminated against, defamed or stereotyped.

OSIA's and the CSJ's purpose here is not political. We desire no involvement in the current presidential campaign, nor do we wish to become embroiled in a political maelstrom. Still, one of the three candidates will, in all probability, become the next leader of the free world and the next president, thus representing all of the US's 300 million-plus citizens, 26 million of whom are of Italian heritage. We believe that Senators Clinton, McCain and Obama must unequivocally condemn the words and sentiments voiced by Rev. Wright, and clearly disavow his actions.

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The Supreme Council
Order Sons of Italy in America

The Commission for Social Justice Board of Directors

