

ALTRE



VOCI

(OTHER VOICES)

*The lesson of Roseto, Pennsylvania*

## US town was healthier with Italian values

For nearly three generations Roseto, a close-knit Italian American community in east-central Pennsylvania, was a very special place to live. With a diet that often included fatty meats, peppers fried in lard and much wine, the Rosetans boasted a remarkably low death rate from heart disease, less than half that of surrounding communities. These extraordinary findings prompted medical researchers Dr. John Bruhn and Dr. Stuart Wolf to conduct a 15-year study comparing medical histories on Rosetans and those of their Italian American neighbors in nearby Bangor and Nazareth, Pa.

The results were astonishing. Despite a greater prevalence of obesity in Roseto and despite similar dietary, smoking and exercise habits and similar ethnic and genetic background, the inhabitants of Roseto were relatively immune to heart disease at the beginning of research in 1963. They were also strikingly tenacious in adhering to Old World values and customs. Family relationships were very close and mutually supportive. This cohesive quality extended to neighbors and to the community as a whole. There was a well defined relationship between the sexes in Roseto. The elderly were cherished and respected and they retained their authority throughout life.

Roseto, Pa., was founded in 1882 by immigrants from the southern Italian town of Roseto Valfortore in the province of Foggia, in the region of Puglia, the heel of the "boot." The Italian atmosphere of Roseto is unmistakable - the grapevines and fig trees in the gardens, the obvious physical traits of the people, the names on the shops and front doors, the food stuffs for sale and many Italian street names (e.g., Dante, Colombo, Garibaldi, Falcone).

The American Roseto had a remarkable degree of cohesiveness, a legacy of the *campanilismo* (village spirit) which the settlers had shared in the Italian Roseto. By the 1960s the town had more than 2,000 people, 95 percent of whom

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were descended from the namesake village and spoke its dialect.

As a community, Roseto had not been isolated from mainstream America. Its very existence as a community depended upon close contacts with other well defined and long established ethnic groups, especially the English, Welsh and Germans who lived in surrounding communities and who owned the slate quarries that had employed many Rosetans. The town came into being largely as a result of the intolerance of these earlier immigrant groups.

But as succeeding generations of Rosetans abandoned the traditional values and relationships of family loyalty and clannishness, the death rate from heart attack climbed toward the American norm until in 1971 deaths from heart attacks occurred for the first time among men under 50. Deep changes have occurred in the lifestyle of Rosetans and of most Italian Americans in recent decades. Heart attacks and strokes are up. intermarriage has jumped to 70 percent from the 15 percent that existed at the time the study was begun. The family is no longer the center of Rosetan society.

It was the conclusion of the study that unconditional interpersonal support counteracts life stress and thus preserves life. "The lesson the Roseto experience offers Italian Americans is that the thwarting of their biological need for social cohesion, community and emotional security is doing them tremendous harm."

-- BILL CERRUTI  
Founder,  
Italian Cultural Society



The following ad ran in the September 6, 1993 issue of "Variety," the weekly newspaper for the entertainment industry. The ad was published by the Italic Studies Institute, an Italian American organization based in New York. The ad was prompted in part by the fact that the producers of the film "Lorenzo's Oil" were told not to hire an Italian American actor for the part of the courageous and determined Italian father because those actors have become tainted by Mafia typecasting. The part went to non-Italian actor Nick Nolte.

## TO ITALIAN AMERICANS IN THE MEDIA

*This is the pay-off of stereotyping*

**"Few, if any, other ethnic groups in this nation have suffered the unrelenting media defamation of Italian Americans. Ironically, much of it has been done by our brethren in the name of art and profit. That mainstream America has fully accepted the premise of cinematic defamation is evidenced every day in some form or other. Its effect on the attitudes of the American public**

**toward Italian surnames is manifested daily. This negative, larger than life Italic image has now been immortalized in reference works and in vocabulary throughout the globe. The Italic Studies Institute demands the end of the media stereotyping that has stained the heritage of 15 million Americans of Italian descent, the fifth largest ethnic group in the United States. We call on all Italian American actors, actresses, filmmakers, and producers to exercise responsibility in television, radio, film and video. We call on our media brethren to atone for past actions through balanced works based on reality."**

Italian Americans have a big "image problem." The problem is real and has been documented in study after study from the turn of the century to the present. A recent 1990 study showed that most Americans, almost 80%, associate Italian Americans with organized crime and that this image of Italian Americans is attributable to the negative portrayal of Italian Americans by all segments of the media. **Unfortunately for Italian Americans, the way they have been portrayed by the media has become ingrained in the national psyche and has contributed to a persistent and underlying prejudice against them.**

This cultural prejudice has affected the way Italian Americans have been treated by American society and institutions. It has contributed to numerous lynchings of Italian Americans during the earlier part of this century, to restrictive immigration laws in the 1920's that barred most Italian immigration, to the arrest, relocation and internment of tens of thousands of Italian Americans during World War II, and to problems of lowered self esteem and achievement among Italian American youth today who now have among the highest high school drop out rates in the nation.

While there are those who believe these images glorify Italian Americans, most Americans, when pressed, admit that these images undermine all Italian Americans and leave the impression the stereotypes are true and we are all associated with the stereotypes.

The ad by the Italic Studies Institute reminds us that we have a problem. **Protest is important because it makes us aware of the problem we face.** Italian American anti-defamation groups in Chicago and New Jersey have recently led protests against the television series "The Untouchables," which frequently uses slurs like "wop" and "dago" and have initiated a campaign to convince advertisers to remove their support from the series. In October, over 200 protestors from the Italian American One Voice Committee staged a protest rally against the series in front of WOR-TV 9 in Secaucus, New Jersey.

**Even more important than protest is the need for Italian American studies to be included in our nations schools to combat the effects of more than a century of prejudice and defamation against us.** Italian Americans do not merely suffer from an image problem, we suffer from a devastating lack of awareness about ourselves. This nation, including Italian Americans, is terribly misinformed about the Italian American experience. The association of Italian Americans with organized crime shows how devastating this lack of knowledge can be. Our children deserve better, they deserve the truth.

In school, Italian American children are exposed to books that either neglect them or when they do include them do so in overwhelmingly negative stereotypes and in condescending terms. Our children need to know their heritage. The way Italian Americans have been portrayed by the media does not provide young Italian Americans with any support or affirmation that their heritage may have any value for them. Rather, the way the media portrays Italian Americans stigmatizes them and distorts their heritage. **Italian American studies are necessary for our children to overcome the stigma of their own ancestry and for the nation to overcome its prejudice against Italian Americans.**

The challenges facing Italian Americans are real and can only be overcome by action. Italian Americans need to lobby their educational institutions so that they too will be included in the story of this nation and can overcome the disadvantages of their continued negative treatment by the media.

The Italic Studies Institute deserves our thanks for speaking out for us. The Institute produces a quarterly Magazine, "The Italic Way." Persons wishing to subscribe should send \$20 to The Italic Studies Institute, PO Box 818, Floral Park, NY 11001.

"There was, however, one Italian import whose vocabulary has had an influence on the [English] language out of all proportion to its significance in the Italian American community: the Mafia. Now treated as synonymous with organized crime (which it is not), the Mafia has added terms like *godfather*, *the family*, and *capo* to the language. **Hollywood's love affair with "gangster movies"** has ensured a wide dissemination of criminal slang: *hoodlum*, *racketeer*, *rough house*, *hatchet man*, *doing the dirty work*, *hot seat* (originally "the electric chair"), protection racket and loan shark. **The fact that these words -- in the minds of many -- now come with Italian accents, it is to do with the power of the media not the Mafia."**

*The Story of English* by Robert MacNeil, Robert Cran and Robert McCrum, 394 pages, Penguin Books, 1992



## INJUSTICE CANNOT BE QUANTIFIED

### *To Commemorate Italians Is No Betrayal Of Japanese*

Earlier this year, a few days before Ruth Asawa's powerful sculpture commemorating Japanese American internment was to be dedicated at the federal building, San Jose Mercury News editorial Board member Sharon Noguchi penned an opinion piece criticizing requests from Italian and German heritage groups for similar recognition of sanctions against Italian and German Americans during World War II.

Noguchi's column, which was riddled with historical inaccuracies, posited that "compared to the Japanese Americans, Europeans were mostly spared during the war.

"Look at the numbers, the scope and nature of World War II internment . . .," Noguchi argued. "To remember the European Americans to "an equal extent" [as was requested] would be to equate the experiences. "They were not equal."

No, of course, they were not , "equal." For anyone to argue as much would be absurd. But does the fact that the Japanese internment was not "equal" in scope and horror to the Jewish holocaust mean that the former is not deserving of commemoration? I think not.

**Injustice cannot be quantified. It is absolute. So is the violation of one's civil rights. All such violations are intolerable and must be condemned by history.**

There is a troubling tone of dismissal, even condescension, throughout Noguchi's piece to the experiences of Italian and Germans during the war. She is not alone. Many other writers have dismissed them as well. A current exhibit, for instance, at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art of Japanese American internment photos declares boldly, "No German or Italians received comparable treatment." This, of course, is a lie.

**The newly recognized plight of Italians and Germans during World War II muddies the waters of racial indignity. It points to a recurrent nativism in American history - one that transcends racial boundaries to include ethnic groups from all continents of the globe, including Europe.**

It forces us to look at history more closely and to disregard commonly held assumptions. It forces us to break down stereotypes.

It also helps us to heal old wounds - and to build new bridges.

According to historian Rose Scherini, the curator of *Una Storia Segreta*, which chronicles the plight of Italian Americans during World War II,

**Their lives were forever scarred by these experiences.** many Japanese Americans have attended the exhibit in a show of support for their Italian American counterparts. They have shared stories and explored their commonalities. And together they have shed tears.

It was on an evening in February 1942 that my great grandmother, Celestina Loero, then 70 years old, was accosted by agents of the Department of justice and forced to move from her home in Santa Cruz. Other members of my family, who made their livelihoods by fishing in the waters of Monterey Bay, had their boats confiscated and were not allowed to go to sea. A distant cousin was interned at Fort Missoula. Many more were subjected to curfews and travel restrictions.

**Their lives were forever scarred by these experiences, and their pride in their heritage forced into the closet. As a result, my life was scarred as well.**

It has been a bit too easy to sweep under the rug of history the experiences of Italian and German Americans during World War II. Their tragedy should not be forgotten.

*The above is reprinted from an article by Geoffrey Dunn in the Metro Section of the San Jose Mercury News on July 7, 1994.*

## COSE ITALIANE

**THE ITALIAN AMERICAN RADIO SHOW** - has moved from Saturdays and is now broadcast every Sunday from noon to 1:00 pm at 1430 AM on the dial. The weekly radio program, sponsored by the Society, is now in its 12th year and is hosted by Society Board member Bob Masullo. The Program features the best of contemporary and traditional music from Italy and Italian America as well as news, interviews and commentary.

**THE MEMORIAL FUND** - Mille Grazie to those who have made recent donations to the Children's Fund in remembrance of Esther Dugoni. When you wish to honor a departed friend or loved one or to commemorate a special occasion, such as an anniversary, a Memorial Gift to the Italian Cultural Society becomes a living memorial --- a thoughtful gift.

Your gift to the Italian Cultural Society is used to support the work of the society in advancing our Italian heritage and people. You may specify a particular program that you want your Memorial gift to be used for it. [Programs for Children, the Lending Library, the Italian Language Fund, Community outreach...]. Families of those honored will be promptly notified by an appropriate letter.

**THE PIEMONTE REALE BENEVOLENT SOCIETY** - Dance to the Italian sounds of the Espresso Five at the Piemonte Reale's annual Sausage and Pasta Dinner on Saturday, October 29th at St. Mary's Hall. No host bar at 6:00 pm and dinner at 7:30. Tickets are \$18.00 and must be purchased by October 22. Call Brian Martucci at 383-2637 or Don Francesconi at 456-8103 for tickets.

**THE ITALIAN AMERICAN HERITAGE FOUNDATION OF SAN JOSE** - is having its 18th annual Italian Family Festival at Santa Clara County Fairgrounds on Saturday, October 1 from 11 am to Midnight and Sunday, October 2 nd from 10:00 am to 7:00 pm. Admission is \$3:00

**THE NORTH BAY ITALIAN CULTURAL FOUNDATION** - invites everyone to the 5th Annual FESTA ITALIANA on Sunday, September 11th from 12:30 to 6:30 pm at the Luther Burbank Center in Santa Rosa. Call Sal Peritore at (707)527-7277 or Sharie Sbrazza at (707)542-0943 for information.

**BELLA FESTA ITALIANA** - will be held from noon to dusk on Saturday and Sunday, September 10 & 11 at the Charles Krug Winery in the Napa Valley. There will be Italian style entertainment, dancing, food and Bocce.

**THE ITALIAN AMERICAN ONE VOICE COMMITTEE** - Will rally the Italian community in New Jersey for an ITALIAN AMERICAN UNITY DAY at Seton Hall University on Sunday, September 25. Call (201) 429-2818. The One Voice Committee has been effective at uniting Italian groups to combat media defamation and stereotyping of Italian Americans. Their efforts do not receive the recognition they deserve.



# Italian American Studies

## *Telling Our Story*

**One of the stunning cultural successes of the past two decades has been the growth of Jewish, African American, Hispanic American, American Indian, and Asian American Studies programs at the grade school and university levels.** These programs are now well established and compete with other academic programs for status, funding and influence. Italian Americans have been slow to develop and push for similar programs. As a result, the Italian American experience is not well known by Americans or even by Italian Americans. Italian Americans have entered the mainstream of American life and their story is now part of the American saga, but their experience and history is not included in the educational experience of Americans.

**Italian Americans are beginning to realize the importance of being included in the school curriculum along with the other ethnic groups that are.** And there are many reasons why they should be. For one thing, Italian Americans are one of the largest ancestry groups in the nation, the fifth largest according to the 1990 census. The Italian immigration to the American continents was the largest migration in history of a people from one continent to another. Most of that migration occurred in this century. In its 70 year history, 12 million people went through Ellis Island and almost one-third of them were Italian.

**The settlement of the United States by Italians during the latter part of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century changed the history of the United States.** Although the United States is often described as a nation of immigrants, the peoples who came to America during the great wave of immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe around the turn of the century are missing from the school curriculum. Previous ancestry groups from Europe, Africa and Asia are included as are later ancestry groups from the more recent third world immigration. If any group symbolizes the impact of this wave of peoples on the course of American history, it is the Italians, the largest group in that wave and the last large European group to come to America.

**For much of California history, Italians were the largest of the immigrant groups to settle in the state.** They came to California early in the states settlement and established successful economic and cultural communities in virtually every California town and city. The Italians played a significant role in the development of the nation and especially in the development of California where many of the states basic industries, such as the wine, fishing, agricultural, canning and banking industries, were developed by the Italian people.

Another good reason for including the contributions and experience of Italian Americans in the school curriculum is to overcome the effects of the humiliating and degrading media images of Italian Americans. Recent studies indicate that the self esteem and academic achievement of Italian American school children suffers as a result of these negative images. This places Italian American kids at a disadvantage.

**Italian Americans have learned from experience that if their experience is not specifically required to be included in the grade school and university curriculum then it is usually excluded altogether from the educational experience provided by our schools.** At the same time, other ethnic group experiences are included in our childrens studies. To ignore the distinctive cultural and historical role played by Italian Americans despite the enormous contributions they have made while requiring the study of other ethnic group experiences leaves a misleading impression in students minds of who the primary groups are that have immigrated to this land and what role they have played in the creation of California and in the creation of the present day United States.

**Establishing Italian American educational and language programs in the nations schools is at the top of the Italian American Agenda. There are a number of initiatives across the nation that should inspire Italian Americans to continue to work toward that goal.**

**John Carroll University in Cleveland** recently established a Professorship in Italian American Studies to develop a full program of undergraduate courses about the Italian American experience..

**Lehman College in New York** recently created an endowed Chair in Italian and Italian American studies. The new program will highlight the achievements of Italians and Italian Americans in all fields.

**DePaul University in Illinois** offered a summer program about Italian American values and history that included the effects of American culture on Italian American immigrants, the evolution of the Italian community and contemporary Italian American ethnicity.

**The State University of New York** at Stony Brook on Long Island recently established an Italian American Studies Program with an initial offering of four undergraduate courses.

**The City University of New York** has both an Academic Italian American Studies Program and a university wide Italian American institute to serve the distinct educational needs of Italian American students on its campuses.

**California State University at Long Beach** has established the George L. Graziadio Chair of Italian Language Studies funded by a \$500,000 donation from the Italian American community in Southern California. A \$150,000 gift by George Graziadio as well as the fund raising efforts of Frank DeSantis, both members of the California Italian American Task Force, were instrumental in establishing the Italian major.

**Louisiana State University** recently established a professorship in Italian Studies with a \$100,000 endowment raised by donations from members of the Federation of Italian Organizations of the Southeast.

**Still, very few universities offer courses about the Italian American experience.** Nor is our experience required to be included in the grade school curriculum or instructional materials.. On the other hand, many universities offer programs and degrees in the study of other ancestry groups. Italian Americans have made a late start in pressing our educational institutions to include our experience in the educational experience offered to American students, but these programs are vital to establishing that we were here and that we were and are a part of the history and life of the nation. They are also vital to the future of the Italian people in the United States. For without them, our memory about the people who came here from Italy will be lost. And Italian Americans will find it increasingly difficult to maintain their heritage and identity as well as build family and community without the cultural support offered by such programs. Unfortunately, Italian American institutions are too weak and underfunded to maintain Italian America even though they are better motivated to do so.

**Most Italian Americans would agree that it is important for our story to be included in the school curriculum.** Because Italian Americans are unified about the need for Italian American studies they can speak with a unified voice and organize effectively in support of this simple goal on the Italian American Agenda. And that goal is for our educational institutions to meet our educational needs. For now, they do not. **For us and for the nation, Italian American studies are an idea whose time has come.**



# ALTRE VOICI

O T H E R V O I C E S

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Newsletter of the Italian Cultural Society

## *Il Bel Paese : Italy Re-discovered*

*by Patrizia Cinquini Cerruti*

Everyone I meet is either planning a trip to Italy, just returning or at least dreaming of going to Italy. Of course, my work for the Italian Cultural Society and the fact that I teach classes like: "Planning Your Italian Vacation," and "Italian for Travelers," and write and consult about Italian travel, put me in contact with many travelers heading to the *Bel Paese*. But my observation is not like the doctor who says, "Everyone I meet is sick." The numbers speak clearly that this is a real phenomenon. In the year 2000 the number of Americans visiting Italy DOUBLED!

Almost every popular travel magazine features at least one Italian city in every issue. I have been stunned to see the familiar faces of friends from Lucca, Firenze and Venezia staring back at me from the pages of *Gourmet* and *Bon Appétit Magazine*. Italian foods, culture and art are visible in every medium. Italian music, film and language are making a strong presence world wide, whereas *La Cucina e La Moda Italiana* (Italian Cooking and Fashion) have always remained world favorites. There are hundreds of Italian language and cooking classes being offered in Italy, and the better ones are often fully booked months in advance. The same holds true for Italian hotels and also plane flights to Italy. Ten years ago, one could be certain to find a room in a favorite Italian *albergo*, and an open seat on flights to Italy during the "off-season." Today many hotels in Italy's favorite cities and many flights to Italy are booked year round. In 1999, Alitalia, the Italian national airlines, saw an increase of 10.4% in the passenger sector and 2000 balance sheets show even greater gains in passengers.

Italy has long been a favorite destination. Pilgrims, kings, writers, students, artist, and lovers have been lured for ages by Italy's many charms. My friend Pierluigi, in the United states only 7 months teases: "*Siamo molto di moda.*" To which I respond, "*Ha sì, andiamo a ruba.*" (We are very much in fashion." "Oh yes, 'we're going like hot cakes'.") Italy and things Italian have indeed become very popular.

Italy is a traveler's paradise. Experts estimate that more than 60% of the world's art treasures are housed in Italy. Italy is a living, breathing museum. When asked what it is like to be the Minister of Cultural Heritage and Activities in Italy, Minister Giovanna Melandri answers, "It is rather like being the minister of petroleum in Saudi Arabia." The wealth of art and culture in Italy is truly miraculous. But what truly stuns travelers, is that all these incredible treasures are found in a country which is brimming with breathtaking natural beauty, an ideal climate and warm gracious people who have been welcoming travelers for millenniums.

As befits a gracious host, Italy has responded well to the recent increase in visitors. New, faster, modern trains and several new lines have been added to facilitate transport. Some cities have used innovative techniques for transporting the extra people. Naples has started a single passenger taxi service which is provided by motor-scooters. Malpensa and Fiumicino Airports, along with some of the smaller airports, have had major remodeling and expansion. Italians have long understand the awesome responsibly of being the care takers for so much of the world's patrimony of art, archeology and architecture. Restoration and preservation is at an all time high, and the museums and churches are becoming increasingly user friendly. In the summer of 2000 over 80 museums remained open until late evening giving visitors greater opportunities to visit them. This summer Pisa will re-open the famous "*Torre Pendente*" (Leaning Tower) after more than a decade of closure. Italy's art and archeological treasures are more accessible than ever.

At the risk of sounding "*montata*" (stuck-up) Italy also houses another treasure...Italians. *La dolce vita, il dolce far niente*- at least the ideals and in many parts - the reality of a slower, sweeter life still exist in Italy. The human touch is still a large part of the love affair travelers have with Italy. American writer and archeologist, and incisive observer Ann Cornelisen said it best, 'Italy is the only place where one wakes up feeling truly ALIVE!' I see this played out again and again. Many Americans returning from Italy describe the sense of joy and happiness they feel in Italy. Italian Americans talk about the awesome experience of "going home" to a country they have never been to. They describe seeing face after face of faces like those of aunts, uncles, grandparents, and parents. Perhaps most striking-- these faces look like the one in the mirror. Many travelers to Italy are indeed Italian Americans making the trip back to rediscover who they are by coming face to face with their cultural heritage.

When I go to Italy I am both returning home and going away. Italian by birth and heritage, I now live in America. I have made the trans-Atlantic trip home over 50 times. One might think that the boot held few surprises for me. But nothing could be further from the truth. Italy is a country so rich that one lifetime is not enough to know her. And all those who have loved her long to be back in her embrace.



*Italian American kids in Rapallo-Italian Riviera.*



# ALTRE VOCI

O T H E R V O I C E S

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## NEWSLETTER OF THE ITALIAN CULTURAL SOCIETY

### THE ITALIAN SLAVE CHILDREN OF NEW YORK

Dressed in rags, his dirty hair in tangles, the little boy tinkled a melody on a brass triangle; the cap at his feet, catching coins tossed by passers-by. Only six years old, Francesco already was a veteran of the tough streets of 19th century New York City. He was one of thousands of Italian street children, playing musical instruments and begging for pennies in America during the winter of 1873.

By 1870, the migration of Italians to America had been on the rise for decades. Italian pioneers, drawn by the Gold Rush, had settled in northern California in large numbers beginning in the 1850's and the establishment of Little Italy's in America's major cities was well underway across the nation. Between 1880 and 1920 more than 4 million Italians voluntarily settled in America.

While black slavery in America had been abolished in the 1860's after the Civil War, a new system of involuntary servitude among Italian children took root in America. During the 1870's, between 7,000 and 8,000 children were kid-napped from Italy and kept as slaves in America's biggest cities.

Most were from small towns in Italy, snatched from their beds or given up by their parents to Italian agents who assured them that their children would have a better life in America. In reality, once in the United States, the children were sold into bondage at private auctions for \$100 to \$300 for boys and \$100 to \$500 for girls. Enslaved by their masters, they were given rudimentary lessons on the triangle, violin or harp and sent out daily as street musicians.

This travesty gripped the headlines of the New York Times in 1873 when a reporter, who spoke Italian, discovered three boys around a garbage can in an alley. As he approached the nervous boys and spoke to them in Italian, he learned the boys, aged 6, 8 and 12 had been kidnapped and put aboard a steamer bound for America. Once in America, the pirated children were installed in dreary quarters under the rule of padroni (bosses) in the poorest neighborhoods of Brooklyn and Manhattan and sent into the streets and ordered to bring home a quota of fifty to eighty cents or be beaten.

The slave trafficking in Italian children reached a peak in the 1870's. In May, 1873 An Italian newspaper in Genoa reported that three children were stolen from Milan, printed their names and descriptions and noted they were likely in New York. Driven by grief, some parents made the journey to The United States to search for their children. A mother from Basilicata crossed the Atlantic with her two young children to search for her four other children who had been kid-napped. Her fate is unknown.

Media stories in Italy and the United States drew attention to the plight of the young Italian street musicians. But it took the combined efforts of Italian American organizations, the federal government and finally the U.S. Congress to end it. In June, 1873 the Italian American Societies of New York joined forces to protect the street children. In December, 1873, the Italian Parliament passed legislation making the selling or employing of abducted children a felony.

In April, 1874, The Consul General of Italy in the U.S. called upon the New York City Police to apprehend any Italian children found begging or playing musical instruments in the streets. This afforded the children some protection from their padroni and facilitated their return to their families in Italy. The New York Children's Aid Society even set up Italian schools in the worst neighborhoods to help keep the children off the street.

Finally, In June 1874, The U.S. Congress passed an "Act To Protect Persons Of Foreign Birth Against Forcible Constraints or Involuntary Servitude," a federal law known as the "Padrone Act" that carried fines, prison sentences and even deportation to enforce it. In 1876, New York State passed a law forbidding children under 16 in public entertainment. These laws diminished the slave trade from Italy and by the late 1880's the Italian street musicians had all but disappeared from the sidewalks of New York City. To this day, their fate is not well known.

This article was written by David McCormick and is reprinted from the Winter 2012 issue of Italian America Magazine, a publication of the Order Sons Of Italy In America. See their website at [www.osia.org](http://www.osia.org) for more information.



"Wandering Minstrels," painted in 1883 depicts the plight of street musician slaves.

The New-York Times JUNE 17, 1873.

#### CHILDREN AS SLAVES.

The Little Ones Kidnapped in Italy and Sold in New-York—Horrible Treatment by Their Masters.

It has been learned that at the present time there are between 7,000 and 8,000 children kid-napped from Italy held in this state of slavery in the large cities of the United States, New-York being the great central entrepot. The children are brought here and sold daily by private auction, prices varying from \$100 to \$500 for boys, and from \$100 to \$500 for girls. Where girls are exceptionally pretty, the prices are considerably higher. It is said that two little girls, who are frequently to be seen playing in Wall-street, were sold to their present owner for the sum of \$1,500.

The New York Times article that helped expose the trafficking of Italian children