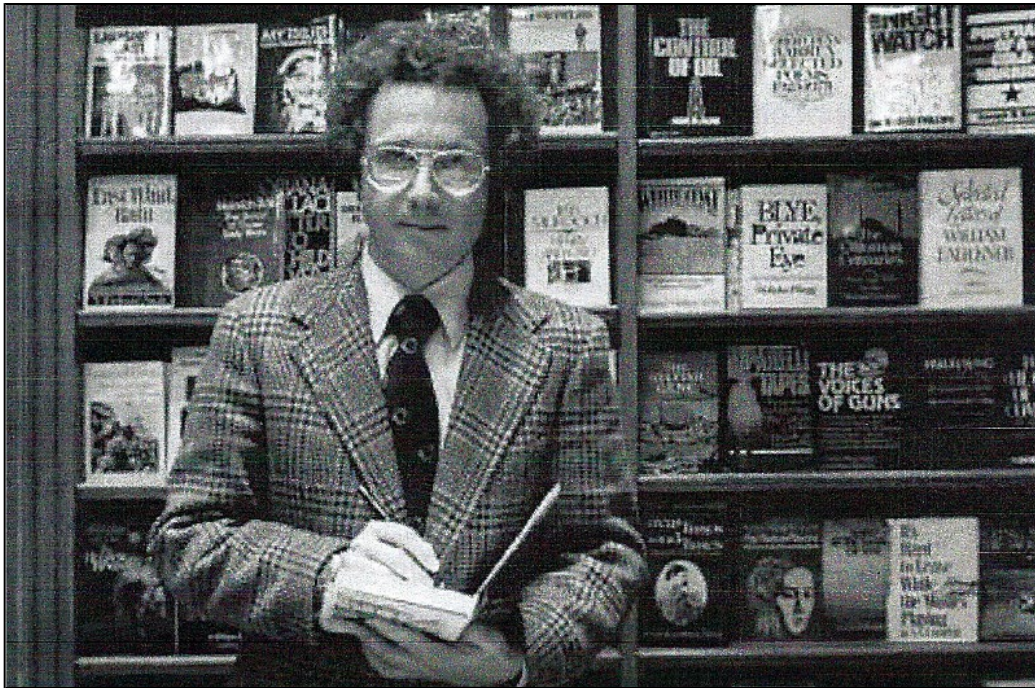


Richard Gambino - Italian American Champion Fought Discrimination Against Italian Americans



Richard Gambino was a leading critic of those who mocked Italian Americans with ethnic stereotypes in popular culture. He was a scholar who founded and directed the first academic Italian American Studies program in the United States at Queens College in New York in 1968.

Growing up in Brooklyn during the 1940s and 50s, he faced overt discrimination because of his heritage. His father, Dominic, was an immigrant from Palermo. Richard earned master's and doctorate degrees in philosophy. He was a professor, as well as scholar and author.

His 1973 book, *"Blood Of My Blood, The Dilemma of the Italian Americans,"* hit the top of the New York Times best seller list in 1973. The well received book was an examination of Italians as an ethnic group during their first, second and third generations.

"Blood Of My Blood," Gambino examines their immigrant origins, the central role of the family as an institution, and the persistence of their ethnic identity, to understand Italian Americans and their value systems. Who they are and how they got that way.

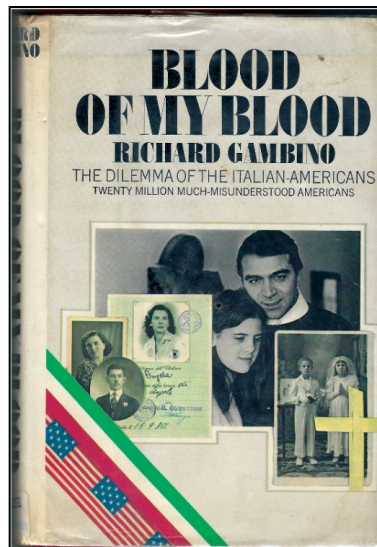
In his book, Gambino examines what it means to be Italian American. He explores their rich cultural and psychological heritage in shaping their identity, which animates their lives and withstands the alienating pressures of modern America.

Gambino dispels the myths about Italian Americans and the melting pot. He singles them out as one of the most

misunderstood ethnic groups and the prevailing ignorance about their ethnic customs, values and characteristics; let alone their history and contributions.

He especially recommends the need for an educated awareness among Italian Americans, especially younger Italian Americans, to know themselves and their group identity to fully participate in a divided American society,

He takes note of the enduring bias against Italian Americans. Throughout his life he stayed alert to incidents of prejudice and malice against them, and there are many. They confirm what one American journalist has called ***“The most tolerated intolerance’ in the United States: anti-Italian prejudice.”***



In his later book, ***Vendetta***, published in 1977, he wrote about what he called, ***“the largest lynching in American history.”*** The mass murder of 11 innocent Italian Americans in New Orleans in 1891 by a rampaging mob of over 1,000. The incident led to the first national Columbus Day Presidential Proclamation in the United States. In the following decades, scores of Italian Americans were lynched in the United states becoming the second most lynched ethnic group in America.

According to Gambino, the incident left a lingering negative image of Italians as criminals and the use of the word mafia came into vogue. The lynchings were approved, not condemned, by the media and political leaders. The book was made into a movie starring Christopher Walken in 1999. It ends with the deportation of Italians to Italy as they are replaced by others on the docks as they sail away.

In the book, ***“Vendetta,”*** Dr. Gambino took note of the enduring bias against Italian Americans reflected in the Lynchings. Teddy Roosevelt commented ***“it was rather a good thing.”*** He quotes President Richard Nixon in 1973 telling one of his aides on a White House tape: ***“They’re not like us. Difference is they smell different, they look different, act different.”***

Gambino’s book, ***Blood of my Blood***, was influential in the renewal of Italian American ethnic identity among a generation of Italian Americans ashamed to be Italian. It was written during a time during the 1970s following the Civil Rights Act when our country turned in the direction of group identity as the means to success and acceptance.

The 1970s witnessed the rise of the un-meltable ethnics in American society, primarily southern and eastern Europeans, the last large European immigrant groups. Both major political parties wooed them for their votes.

Richard Gambino passed away in January 2024. His good work made a difference for generations of Italian Americans and his legacy carries on among those whose lives he changed. Today, we can accept who we are and can be proud to be different, not ashamed of it.

