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ALTRE VOCI

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ITALIAN-AMERICANS AND THE BIRTH OF AMERICA

As America celebrates its 250th birthday, it is an ideal time to remember the Italian Americans who helped build the nation and whose influence reached

onto government, science, business, medicine, sports, entertainment and every aspect of American life...

Many Italians played pivotal roles in the birth of our nation.

FILIPPO MAZZEI

"All men are by nature equally free and independent."



One Italian who helped found the nation was Filippo Mazzei from whom Thomas Jefferson, the author of the Declaration of Independence, derived "all men are created equal" from a 1774 essay penned by his friend Mazzei in the Virginia Gazette.

The essay contained the phrase, *"Tutti gli uomini sono per natura egualmente liberi"*

e independenti" (All men are by nature equally free and independent.")

Writing for the Gazette under the pseudonym "**Furioso**," Mazzei helped convince Virginians that independence from England was possible and Europe would be sympathetic to the American cause.

His 1774 pamphlet entitled "*Principle of the American Revolution by a citizen of Virginia*" contained the famous phrase used by Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence.

"All men are by nature equally free and independent. This equality is necessary in order to create a free government. All men must be equal to each other in natural rights."

When the war came Mazzei accepted dangerous assignments for the American cause. From 1779 to 1783, he traveled throughout Italy and France, securing loans, purchasing military supplies and rallying diplomatic support for the revolution. Captured by the British along with his family, he eventually escaped and continued to secure support for the struggling colonies.

Born near Florence, Italy, Mazzei moved to America in 1773 at the invitation of Benjamin Franklin, to establish agricultural experiments, particularly vineyards. He had been encouraged by Benjamin Franklin, who he had met in London, to bring Mediterranean agriculture to Virginia.

Upon his arrival in Virginia, he was introduced to Thomas Jefferson and George Washington.

Mazzei, the immigrant from Tuscany, arrived with an enormous number of vines, shoots and other clippings from his native Tuscany. Jefferson welcomed Mazzei and persuaded him to purchase a fourteen-hundred-acre farm next to his own estate, Monticello.



Mazzei named his farm "Colle" and started work on his great agricultural experiment, planting some of the first European grapevines in Virginia and taught Jefferson how to plant a vineyard.

The two men developed both an agricultural partnership and an intellectual one. The vineyard became a meeting place for ideas.

Mazzei prospered as a farmer and became involved in colonial politics. He had a flair for writing. Jefferson encouraged him to write his thoughts in Italian so that he could translate them into English.

In 1774, they collaborated on the political pamphlet. Mazzei wrote in Italian and Jefferson translated into English. Their discussions reflected enlightenment principles - that governments exist to protect natural rights and derive their authority from the consent of those who are governed. Two years later Jefferson would draft the Declaration of Independence and include the immortal phrase.

Before the revolution could be won on the battlefield it first had to be won as an idea. The extraordinary friendship and common belief that liberty and equality were natural rights reflected the passion the two men shared for revolutionary ideas.

Jefferson was fluent in Italian, self-taught while a student at Harvard, and an Italophile

of Italian culture, music, architecture and art. Jefferson recruited 16 Musicians from Italy to form the first Marine Corps band and drew inspiration for his home, Monticello, and the State Capitol in Richmond from the books of the classical Italian architect Andrea Palladio.

After independence, Mazzei translated the Constitution into Italian and maintained lifelong correspondence with Jefferson, Adams, Madison and Monroe while helping explain the American experiment to Europe.

Mazzei did more than witness the birth of a nation. He helped give it vocabulary.

It took two centuries for Mazzei to gain recognition for his influence on Jefferson. In 1980, a 40-cent commemorative stamp was issued by the U.S. Postal Service. **A congressional resolution in 1993 acknowledged him as the inspiration for the iconic phrase in the Declaration of Independence.**

In the Public Broadcasting series “The American Revolution” by Ken Burns, Mazzei, the man behind the revolutionary idea, and other Italian Americans are overlooked.



PHOTOS: (ABOVE L) Jefferson's Monticello, (ABOVE R) Venetian Villa Rotunda designed by Andrea Palladio

CAESAR RODNEY

The Ride That Saved Independence



On July 2, 1776, Caesar Rodney rode 80 miles from Dover, Delaware to Philadelphia in a race against time. Arriving as the vote for independence was already underway, he cast the tie-breaking ballot that secured Delaware's support for separation from Great Britain, paving the way for the adoption of the Declaration of Independence.

Rodney's monument, pictured above, stood in downtown Wilmington, Delaware from 1923 until its removal amid the civil unrest in June 2020. The uprooted Caesar Rodney monument was taken out of storage and installed in Washington, D.C.'s Freedom Plaza in April 2026 as part of the nation's America250 summer celebration.

On the evening of July 1, 1776, thunder rolled across Delaware as a lone horseman urged his mount toward Philadelphia. The journey covered nearly 80 miles over muddy roads, but delay was not an option. The Continental Congress was debating whether the colonies should sever ties with Great Britain and Delaware's vote hung in the balance. The 80-mile journey was a three-day trip, but Rodney condensed it into hours.

The rider was Caesar Rodney, a Delaware statesman whose family history stretched across the Atlantic to northern Italy. Rodney belonged to landed gentry. He had risen to Associate Justice of Delaware's highest court.

By 1774 he represented Delaware in the Continental Congress with two other Delaware delegates. One of the delegates favored independence and one opposed it leaving Delaware evenly divided.

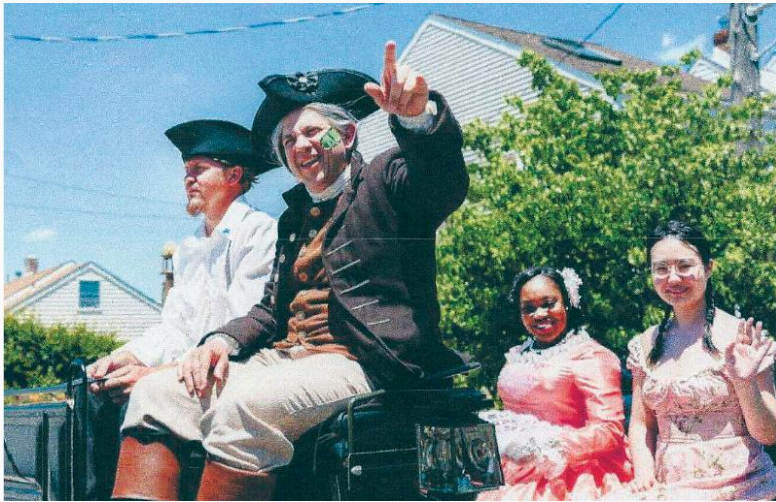
Rodney was in Dover, Delaware when word reached him of the impasse jeopardizing the revolution and that the vote could not wait. The Continental Congress was evenly divided. There was only one solution, he had to reach Philadelphia immediately. And so, he rode. He set out on a grueling overnight ride through darkness and storm. By the morning of July 2, 1776, he arrived in Philadelphia reportedly still "in his boots and spurs" just as the voting began.

Rodney cast his vote breaking Delawares deadlock and allowing the colony to join the movement to independence. Two days later the wording of the Declaration of Independence was approved and on August 2, Rodney signed one of the most important documents in American history.

In 1776, Caesar Rodney simultaneously served as a member of the continental Congress, the speaker of the Delaware legislature and a brigadier general in the war effort. After returning to Delaware, he served as president of the State, while helping to direct its militia during some of the darkest years of the revolution.

His ancestry traces to the noble Adelmare family of Treviso, Italy, giving him Italian roots and according to historians, he became the first Italian American to serve as Governor of an American State. His true legacy transcends his ancestry.

PHOTO BELOW: Ciro Poppiti Reenacts the Ride of Caesar Rodney



Caesar Rodney Rides Again

Nearly 250 years later, Americans still reenact Rodney's ride from Dover to Philadelphia, honoring a man who understood that history sometimes offers only one chance to act.

Caesar Rodney is considered Delaware's greatest patriot. As the United States approaches the 250th anniversary of the founding, 250RIDE.org will bring Rodney's remarkable journey to life with an intensive 80-mile, two-day reenactment of his historic ride by horse-drawn carriage from Dover to Philadelphia.

Portraying Rodney is **Ciro Poppiti**, founder of the 250Ride and the Delaware Italian American Foundation. According to Poppiti, "America's birthday is a wonderful opportunity to remember the many contributions of Italians, including those during the revolution. "

The journey will begin on Friday, June 12, with a prayer at Historic Christ church in Dover. From There the ride will travel north through Delaware culminating that evening at Thousand-Acre Farm in Middletown for the 250 Ride gala. On Saturday, June 13, the reenactment continues through Historic Old New Castle, joining the Separation Day Parade before concluding at Independence Hall in Philadelphia.

Visit 250Ride.org to learn more about the reenactment commemorating Rodney's overnight ride.



WILLIAM PACA

The Signature That Could Have Cost A Life



The quill paused for only a moment. William Paca looked at the document before him and understood its consequence. The words spoke of liberty and independence, but the British Crown would view them differently. To King George III, this was treason. **Paca dipped the pen into ink and signed his name. If the American revolution**

failed, that signature could become his death warrant.

Today, visitors admire the faded signatures on the declaration of Independence, but in 1776 those names represented a wager with the highest possible stakes. The fifty-six signers placed their fortunes, their families and their lives behind the proposition that thirteen colonies should become a nation.

Among them was William Paca. His family had once been Pacci, reflecting Italian roots traced to southern Italy. His willingness to act when conviction demanded courage earned him a place in history.

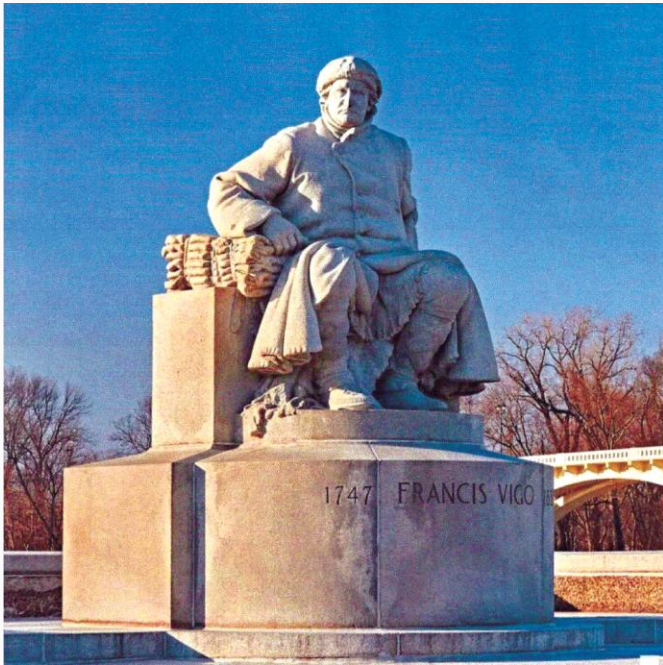
Paca served in Maryland's Committee of Correspondence and later in the continental Congress, joining those who believed reconciliation with Britain had become impossible. The colonies needed more than eloquent speeches; they required men prepared to accept the consequences of their beliefs.

After independence, Paca continued building the nation he had helped create serving as Governor of Maryland. And later appointed a federal Judge by George Washington.

History often remembers the Declaration of Independence as America's birth certificate. It was also, for its signers, an act of profound personal sacrifice. Had events unfolded differently, William Paca might today be remembered as a traitor. Instead, because the cause succeeded, his signature became a promise that the principles expressed on that parchment were worth risking everything to defend.

FRANCESCO VIGO

Helped Finance The Revolution



Born Giuseppe Maria Francesco Vigo in Modena, Italy, he later joined the Spanish army and became a successful merchant in the frontier settlements of North America making his fortune in the fur trade in the Louisiana Territory.

After meeting George Rogers Clark in Kaskaskia in July 1778, he decided to help Clark capture Fort Vincennes. Vigo advanced him money for supplies to keep his men from deserting, and in December of that year he allowed himself to be captured by the British, putting his life in danger while spying for Clark.

While imprisoned, he discovered that the British did not expect a winter attack. When he was released because of his affiliation with Spain, he shared that intel with Clark, who mounted a surprise assault in February 1779 and took control of the fort, ultimately securing the Northwest Territory for the young nation, Vigo went on to establish Jefferson Academy, now known as Vincennes University, in Jasper, Indiana.

While never reimbursed for his large investment in the success of the Revolution, he has been recognized for his contribution through monuments, schools, parks, counties and historical remembrance.

Nota Bene:

It should be noted that while two individuals of Italian descent – William Paca and Caesar Rodney - signed the Declaration of Independence other Italians served as officers in the Continental Army: Lt. James Bracco, Col. Richard Tagliaferro, Col. Cosimo De Medici, Capt. Ferdinand Finazzi and Capt. Benjamin Tagliaferro, who was the deputy commander of the 2nd Virginia regiment and an assistant to George Washington.

Three Italian regiments – the Royal Italian Regiment, the 3rd Piemonte and the 13th Due Perche - fought with the Americans at Yorktown.

AMERICA: A NICE ITALIAN NAME



Celebrating the 250th anniversary of the American revolution is a time to acknowledge the role Italian explorers of the Renaissance played in the discovery of the American continent and naming it America.

CRISTOFORO COLUMBO

The Great Navigator



PHOTO ABOVE: *The Columbus Monument in Genoa, Italy.*

It all started with the voyage of Columbus across the Atlantic on an impossible mission into the unknown to discover the American continent, a continent unknown to the rest of the world.

Historians consider Columbus voyage one of the most significant events in recorded history and Columbus one of the most important historical figures of the last one thousand years. With reviews like that he is not replaceable.

“Columbus Voyage was the most significant event to happen to our species.”

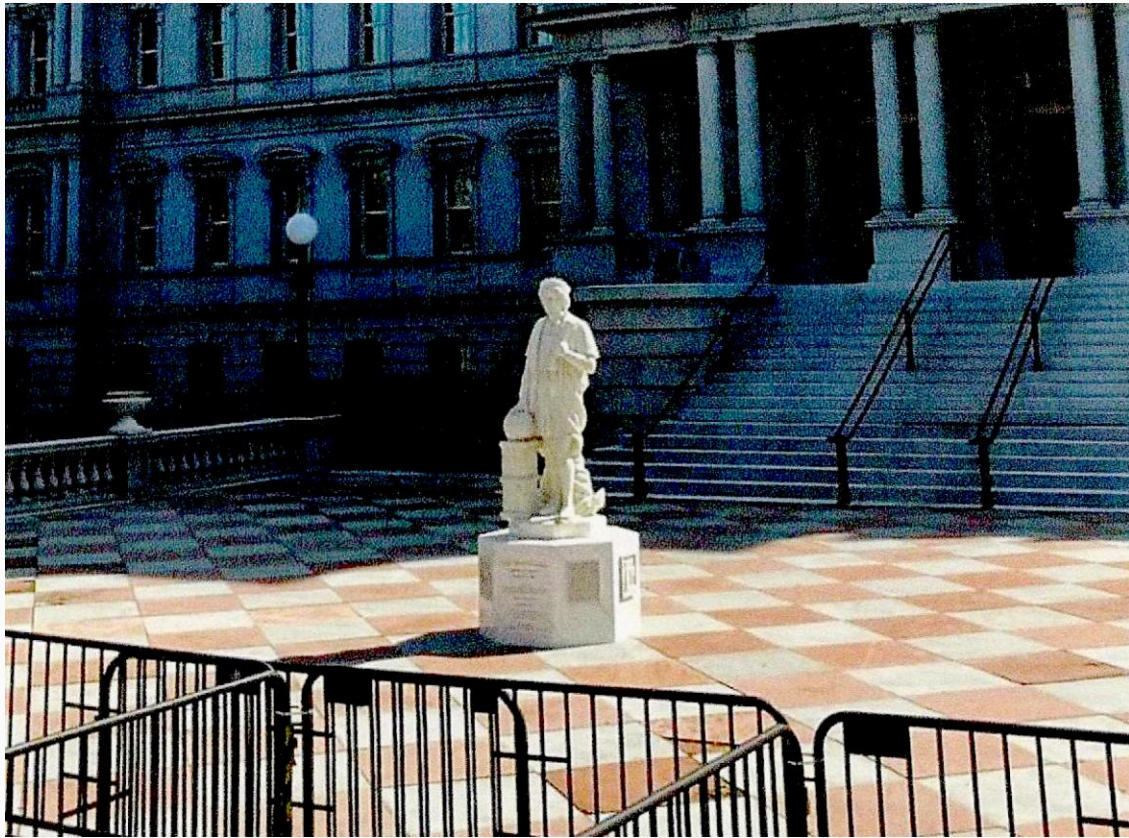
- Neil deGrasse Tyson

Columbus made his voyage in 1492 to find a trade route to Asia with three trading ships, the Nina, the Pinta and the Santa Maria. He set sail to trade, not to conquer. The Ottoman Turks had conquered Constantinople, the seat of the Western Roman Byzantium empire in 1453 and were invading Europe and taking control of the Mediterranean. This isolated Europe from Asia and the trading routes across the Mediterranean.

Portugal led the way to Asia around the Cape of South Africa. But blocked other Europeans nations from the route. Columbus convinced the Spanish Crown to back his idea of reaching Asia by sailing west into uncharted waters. The Spanish Crown had just expelled the Muslims from Spain in 1492 after hundreds of years of occupation.

The rest is the stuff of history. Columbus was considered the greatest navigator of his time, the trade routes he established across the Atlantic and back are still used today.

BELOW: Columbus Statue on White House Grounds



His legacy is one felt worldwide today.

Columbus made four voyages across the Atlantic and opened the Americas to Europeans and the widespread transfer of people, plants and animals that affected every society on the planet.

Foods from the Americas such as potatoes, tomatoes and corn became staples of Europeans while wheat from Europe became a main food source for people in the Americas. Coffee from Africa and sugar cane from Asia became major food crops for Latin American countries. Europeans brought livestock unknown in the Americas like cows, pigs, sheep and horses. The introduction of the horse allowed native American tribes to shift from a nomadic to a hunting lifestyle.

While Columbus was from Genoa, Italy, he sailed for Spain, but his voyage was financed by Italian merchants. He is recognized for his discovery that changed the course of world history.

In Italian American, the Columbus Day holiday is a national symbol of pride, unity and identity. Columbus Day is the only national Holiday observed in the United States each year in October. And one celebrated by Italian Americans who are referred to as the Children of Columbus.

Water Flows Again at the Christopher Columbus Memorial Fountain



ABOVE: Columbus Fountain Monument in front of Union Station in Washington D.C.

In preparation for the 250th anniversary of America, water is again flowing at the Christopher Columbus Memorial Fountain in Columbus Circle in Washington D.C.

The 15-foot Monument is located in front of Union Station and was erected in 1912 to commemorate Columbus' 1492 voyage to the Americas. The fountain

had had not flowed since 2007.

The importance of Columbus to the early United States is evidenced by the fact that the Washington D.C., the nation's capital, is in the District of Columbia.

AMERIGO VESPUCCI

A New World



PHOTO ABOVE: The Italian naval Ship Amerigo Vespucci – “The Most Beautiful Ship In The World”

The man who gave his name to America was another Italian explorer of the day, Amerigo Vespucci from Florence who explored the coast of South America for Portugal.

Amerigo Vespucci's voyages defined the New World. Born in Florence, Italy, his voyages demonstrated that the New World, first discovered by Columbus in 1492, was not Asia's eastern outskirts but an entirely separate landmass unknown to the people of the Old World.

It came to be known as America, a name derived from Americus, the Latin version of Amerigo. Vespucci had made several voyages that explored the east coast of South America between 1499 and 1502. The expeditions became widely known in Europe after Vespucci wrote about them in 1502, realizing it was a continent and dubbing it the New World. In 1507, German cartographer, Martin Waldseemuller, produced a world map on which he named the new continent America after the feminine Latin version of Vespucci's first name.

Vespucci named one part of South America during his voyages in South America, Venezuela (Little Venice), where the natives lived on water.

GIOVANNI CABOTO (John Cabot)
England's Claim



Another Italian explorer, Giovanni Caboto (John Cabot) who was also born in Genoa and raised in Venice claimed North America for England in 1497. He was also financed by Italian merchants and his own money. Upon landing he planted both the British and Venetian flags. He was a citizen of Venice. Like Columbus, he thought he had landed near the coast of Asia.

He was the second European to land in the Americas. His first voyage was successful not only because he reached the new land and returned but also because he discovered the massive cod fishery, we now call the Grand banks.

Cabots second voyage in 1498 included five ships and followed the North American coast to Chesapeake Bay locking in England's claim to the continent.

Both Columbus and Caboto were born in Genoa just a year apart

PHOTO BELOW: A replica of Giovanni Caboto's ship 'The Matthew'



GIOVANNI da VERRAZZANO

New York Harbor



PHOTO ABOVE: The Verrazzano Bridge

The Verrazzano Bridge links the New York Boroughs of Brooklyn and Staten Island. **Giovanni da Verrazzano from Florence, Italy sailed for France and laid claim to parts of North America for France in 1523.**

Verrazano had set sail with the support of Florentine Bankers and the French king in search of a passage to the Pacific Ocean and the Far East.

His ship, the Delfina, was designed in Genoa, the birthplace of Columbus, as the first high-capacity type of European ship large enough for oceanic trade and exploration. On his voyage, Verrazzano explored the coastline of the eastern seaboard of the United States and Canada.

He was the first European to enter New York harbor. He named the area Santa Margherita, also the name of a famous seaside town on the Italian Riviera near Florence and Genoa.

Verrazzano wrote a report based on his travels to the New World, used later by explorers including Henry Hudson (Hudson's Bay). It is believed that Verrazzano was the first to explore Hudson's Bay.

Verrazzano's 1524 arrival in New York Harbor took place 85 years before Hudson's 1609 expedition. Hudson's route was almost identical to that of Giovanni Caboto's 1497 voyage from England to Newfoundland. Hudson used Verrazzano's maps to chart his route to New York.

During Verrazzano's third voyage in 1528, after he had explored Florida and the Bahamas, Verrazzano anchored out to sea and rowed ashore. He was killed by native Caribs. Columbus also had done battle with the Caribs to protect his men and the friendly native tribes. The Caribs practiced cannibalism and the Caribbean Sea is named after them.

ALESSANDRO MALASPINA

Maps The Pacific Coast



PHOTO ABOVE: Alessandro Malaspina, early explorer of the Pacific Northwest coast

A later Italian explorer, Alessandro Malaspina, commanded his first two-year expedition around the world in 1774. A few years later in 1789 he embarked on a four-year expedition to the Pacific Northwest, the Philippines, Australia and New Zealand, said to be one of the greatest scientific expeditions of the day.

Born in Tuscany, Italy and raised in Palermo, he sailed under the Spanish flag as did Columbus. During his around-the-world expedition he explored the Pacific Coast from the horn of South America to Alaska seeking a northwest passage to the Atlantic, unsuccessfully. During his voyage, Malaspina documented the native tribes, plants and coastal areas of the Pacific Northwest while also surveying the Spanish outposts in the Americas.

Although not well known for his explorations, today a Glacier in Alaska is known as the Malaspina Glacier.

PHOTO BELOW: The Malaspina Glacier



THE LEGACY OF THE ITALIAN EXPLORERS IN THE AGE OF DISCOVERY



The Italian Renaissance explorers, Cristoforo Columbus, Giovanni Caboto, Amerigo Vespucci, and Giovanni Verrazzano were among the maritime navigators from the Italian peninsula who set off across uncharted waters into the unknown.

We can appreciate these men of the sea, their accomplishments and the technological genius of the Renaissance which made their voyages possible.

Columbus was one of the many Italian based navigators, map makers and seamen that used the latest technology of their time in the service of the emerging modern nations of Europe. These navigational skills opened the world to commerce.

Even today, The Renaissance explorers, Verrazzano, Columbus, Caboto, and Vespucci, with a sextant in hand, could guide any ship to their desired location. They were the great navigators and architects of the Age of Discovery

Columbus, Vespucci, and Caboto were contemporaries and acquainted with each other. Columbus and Vespucci worked together and Caboto worked with Columbus's brothers. They were friends and rivals in the race for America.

Columbus of Genoa sailed for Spain, Caboto of Venice sailed for England, Amerigo Vespucci of Florence sailed for Portugal, Verrazzano of Florence sailed for France. Each of the claims of these nations in the New World were established by Italian navigators.

One might ask why they didn't sail for Italy. These men were spawned by the great maritime city states of Italy - Genoa, Florence, Venice. Italy was not yet a unified country during the Renaissance as were the other European Nations.

Italy did not unify as a country until 1861 after a revolutionary war ending the occupations by other more powerful European nations.

**ITALY AND AMERICA CELEBRATE
NATIONAL HOLIDAYS**



PHOTO ABOVE: The Frecce Tricolore fly over Rome

The 250th celebration of the birth of America coincides with Italy's national Republic Day. Both countries are honoring national historical milestones: The U.S. is turning 250 and Italy is celebrating 80 years since the birth of the Italian Republic in June 1946.

Each year on June 2, Italy celebrates La Festa della Repubblica, the national holiday that commemorates the birth of modern democratic Italy. For Italians, the day carries much the same emotion and symbolic importance that July 4 holds in the United States.

The holiday traces its origin to June 2, 1946, when Italians were called to the polls following World War II for a historic referendum to determine what form of government would guide the country after the fall of fascism and the devastation of war.

After 85 years of monarchy under the House of Savoy. Italians voted to establish a Republic. More than 12.7 million votes were cast in favor of the Republic while just over 10.7 million supported retaining the monarchy.

King Umberto II left Italy shortly afterward in an effort to avoid political unrest between monarchists and republicans. The exile of the Savoy family was written into the Italian Constitution.

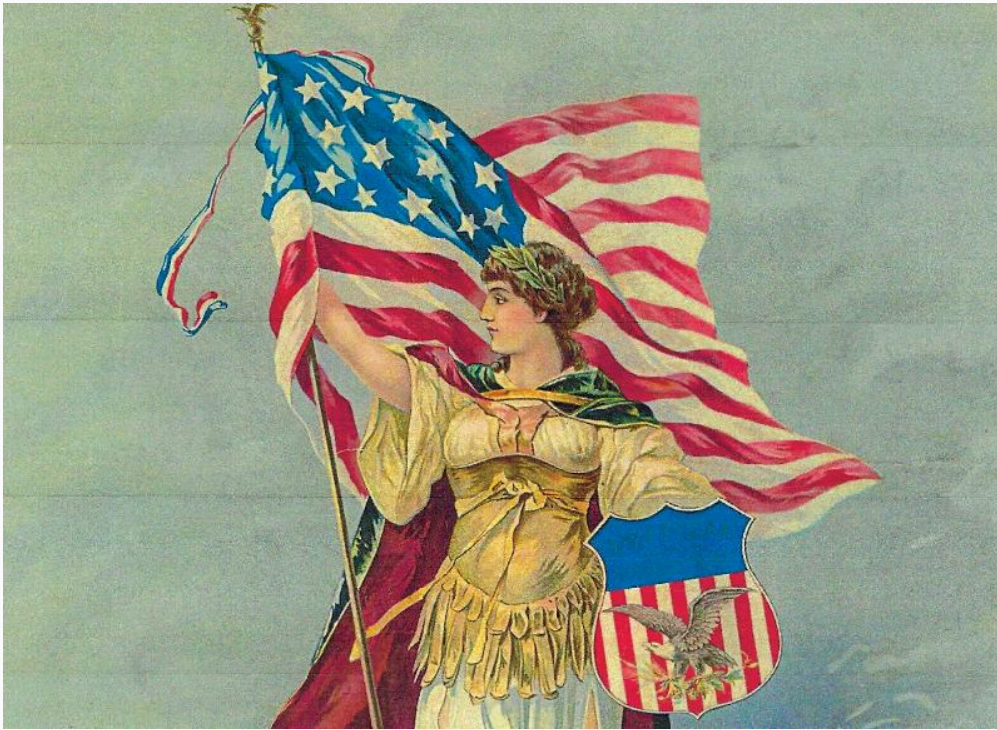
Today, Republic Day remains one of the countries' most important civic celebrations. Throughout Italy, public buildings and city streets are decorated with Italian flags. The center of the celebrations remains in the capital city of Rome just as in the United States they are centered in Washington, D.C.

One of the most anticipated moments of the celebration comes overhead as Italy's famed aerobatic demonstration team, the Frecce Tricolori, streak across the Roman sky trailing green, white and red smoke in the colors of the Italian flag.

For Italians around the world, La Festa della Repubblica is more than a national holiday. It is a reminder of a defining moment when the country chose a new national identity.



**MISS COLUMBIA:
THE FEMALE SYMBOL OF AMERICA**



Columbia is a word known across the United States. It has been used to name cities, rivers, universities and spacecraft.

The Italian origins of the name are traced to Columbus. The female image of the early United States “Miss Columbia” has been used as a symbol to represent America since its inception and longer than Uncle Sam.

Known as “Miss Columbia” her name has been used even before there was a United States of America. By the 1730s it was established practice to refer to the American colonies as Columbia. By the time of the revolution, Columbia was an alternative name for America. The name quickly came to reflect American identity. The name was even proposed as the name for the new nation. Either way, Columbia or America, the name is Italian.

In 1791, the area destined to become the seat of the United States government, the territory of Columbia, was organized as the District of Columbia. The song “Hail Columbia” was used as the national Anthem for more than a century, until 1931 when the Star-Spangled Banner was adopted.

The image of Miss Columbia still resonates in America. Hollywood film studio, Columbia Pictures, has used her symbol for 100 years. In recent years the command module of the Apollo spacecraft, the first manned mission to land on the moon was named Columbia. Before "lady Liberty", there was "Miss Columbia," the female personification of America.

The Founding Fathers referred to the symbols of Italy and the Roman Empire for the new nation, adopting the symbol of the Roman eagle as the national bird. The use of the term Senate to describe the upper house of Congress, and the naming of Capitol Hill and the Capitol building were chosen to evoke the Roman symbols of power.

On Columbus Day we can recognize the importance our forefathers placed in the historical contribution of Italy, from the Age of Discovery and the age of the Roman Empire.

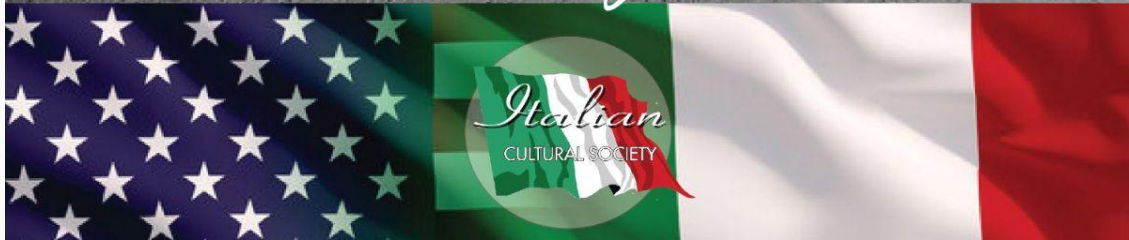


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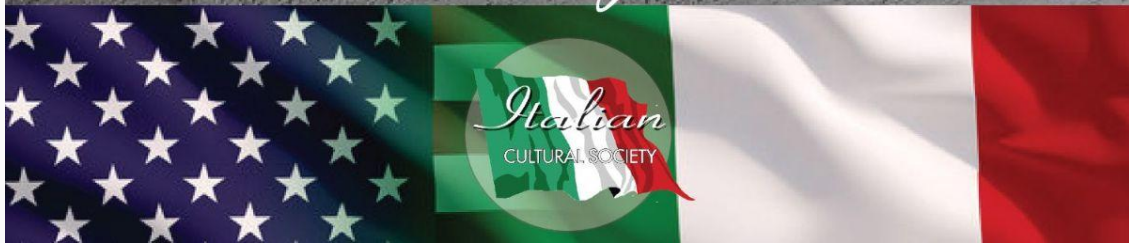


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