

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 2nd 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.