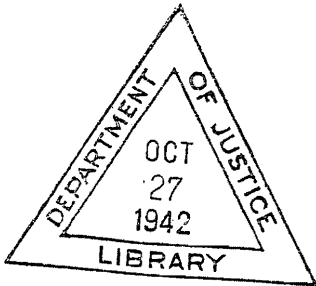


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AMERICANS OF ITALIAN ORIGIN

An Address by

THE HONORABLE FRANCIS BIDDLE

Attorney General of the United States

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On his way across the Atlantic Ocean--to India as he supposed-- Columbus looked first for Japan, that fabulous island he had read about in the book of Marco Polo. In 1492, finding Japan was not as easy as it was in 1942 for General Jimmy Doolittle and his squadron of bombers. Columbus had but little information. Yet he was doing better than he knew. He was on his way to something infinitely better than finding Japan. After his time, other men informed the world that he had discovered America.

On this day the people of a hemisphere look back through the march of those four and a half centuries to honor the questing mind and courageous spirit of Christopher Columbus that led men across the western ocean. But we in America do more than repeat the praises of a hero; for it is also our way of acknowledging, within ourselves, the great gift of the land. In the land, our heritage begins. The freedom we are now helping to defend in far places of the world has root in its very soil. Between us and this good earth of ours the bond is more than material; there has been a give and take of something dearer to us than goes into the working of mines or the growing of crops.

This is so, I think, in all countries where men are now fighting to defend their liberty. Sooner than give up this precious privilege, they would go down fighting; yet they cannot count that freedom won until the very ground is free beneath their feet.

No people knows as well the meaning of a liberated land, none feels the longing as terribly, as the nation which has had it and lost it. There are, among you, many men and women who loved what once was Italy. There are those who call that older Italy their own. Within them burns the pride

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of a people, who time and again, arose to resist the arms of the invader of their soil, armies of Spain, of France, of Austria. Through generations these defenders fought and lost. Yes, they failed and were crushed; but the unrelenting love for a land that was theirs would not quiet, would not let them put down their weapons and resign themselves, as Dante once expressed it, "to savor the salt of the bread of others, and know how hard a road the going up and down another's stairs." They fought until they could lose no more, and then the dream was theirs. Late in the last century Italy had won her independence. The land was free.

Free and united; but now that dream is gone, and in the halls of Rome a jackal cowers. But the seed of liberty is too deep in Italian ground, the growth is too sturdy to be uprooted. There are too many reminders. There are great names, far in a glorious past, that come back to stir the memory of the present.

To you of that other, braver Italy, to the six million Americans born of her people, and to those other millions who may hear our voices across the sea, there is need but to recall those names, and the dream cannot die: Dante himself, breaker of the spell of antiquity; Galileo, wanderer among the stars who heard the command of reaction to keep silent, and would not; Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Tasso, Ariosto--all the great men who searched and found new paths to the liberation of man's spirit.

Let us glance back less than a hundred years ago. There on a bank of the Tiber Garibaldi, hopelessly outnumbered by the French, his shirt bespattered with the blood of his own legionnaires, turned to those in his council who would have played appeaser, crying, "He who still has faith in Italy, let him follow me!"--and carried on the fight, guerrilla fashion,

from the hills. Today through conquered Europe the guerrillas still shoot the invaders. We need but to remember Mazzini, exiled to poverty and a London garret, waging from there his lonely battle for the liberation of his country; and Cavour, boldly shaming the Moderates in the revolution of 1848, sounding the keynote of his life-struggle when he broke into their hemming and hawing to say to them; "Why go on begging for little or nothing? I propose that we demand a constitution!" Out of such spirits Italy the nation was shaped. Like our own nation, that Italy had the memory of names which marked her as a "land of the free."

Italians have given us again and again this theme of freedom of the land, of the shaking off of oppression. In her paintings, in her literature, in all the great expression of her being, renascence--risorgimento--runs like a bright thread binding her gift of genius to the world. While our own American Revolutionists were rising to the consciousness of their destiny, Alfieri was crying out to his people in Rome:

The seeds of liberty may be suppressed  
By spilling human blood, but not extinguished.  
And oftentimes from blood they shoot again  
With fresh luxuriance.

When America was building a nation after her newly won independence, Leopardi gave voice to the bitter wistfulness of Italy, saying:

Unhappy he who dies in war not for his dear  
country, fighting for wife and children, but  
for some alien cause, so that dying he cannot  
say--"My country, the life thou gavest me, I  
now restore!"

Such a heritage does not die with the burning of books. Destroy the record, exile the teacher, persecute the adherent; you cannot divert the destiny of a people. A people that has produced and paid its homage to

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men like Carducci, Verdi, Marconi, Puccini, Caruso, Toscanini--a people with that blood in its veins will not turn forever from such a past, and bow down before the little men of Europe.

Not forever and not, as history goes, for long. Today there are sullen, silent watchers lining the streets of Naples and of Rome, and stepping aside on country roads to make way for another foreign army, as it marches through and pauses to give them arrogant commands. Yet another invader!--for that is what this brutish, swastika-wearing horde masked as friend and ally has become to Italy. The mask is thin. It deceives no one--not even the man who calls himself Il Duce. Today the nation that was Italy is prostrate. Her people know they have been betrayed, and they see the shadows of a new enslavement lengthening over the land, more terrible than any that their forefathers knew.

Within a few days, twenty years will have passed since Mussolini marched on Rome. To the people of Italy they have been years of revelation, tragic and ever more tragic. The plague of Fascism overran Italy in a moment of internal strife, confusion, and post-war economic weakness from which the nation was gradually but surely emerging. It overran Italy, concealing its underlying purpose by talk of "work, order and discipline." Many fell for those labels and failed to see the criminal contrabbando of war and tyranny that they covered.

Soon these people of Italy began to see the product of their labor, their earnings, and the youth of their country wasted in useless wars. They witnessed the saber-rattling antics of this prancing dictator; they listened to the bombast of his speeches, while taxes piled up, and the country was drained to satisfy the ambition of a single man.

Through the thin shell of a new industrial order, the fraud of fascism began to show. The people of Italy did not like it. They were disturbed. They were unwilling to trade their nation's birthright for that particular pottage. Their peace and their freedom were too high a price to pay for a few apartment houses, a new batch of railroad timetables. They saw their country being maneuvered, ever closer as the years passed, to the vortex of an aggressor's war. Where was the strength, the dignity of the great nation that had been promised by Mussolini, the fascist? A proud people still; but here was their leader, cringing, waiting for crumbs from the table of the Fuehrer.

Today the people of Italy are sick of fascism, sick of Mussolini, and particularly sick of Adolf Hitler. In their hearts is an echo of the sad, prophetic lines that Byron loved, warning Italy not to let.....

.....the stranger's sword  
Be thy sad weapon of defence, and so,  
Victor or vanquished, thou the slave of friend or foe.

We are in an age when unarmed civilian populations can no longer hope to match, with sheer courage, the machine guns of an army of conquest. Goaded, tortured, they rear their heads and try. The humiliation becomes more than proud and bitter patriots can bear. A gold-bedecked gangster of the Gestapo is shot in Paris. A glorified assassin is given a dose of his own medicine in Czechoslovakia. But there follows only heartbreak as compatriots, hostages in Nazi hands, are killed a hundred for one in reprisal. This is the answer of criminals, and the Nazis have made it theirs. The crime is systematic, machine-like. For a time it puts off the reckoning.

But no matter how deadly the machines men fashion, there remains an area of the spirit which they cannot reach. In a world which has tasted

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of freedom there is a communication that eludes the censor, radiates from the concentration camp, and hovers in the very air above the firing squad. In nations and men who have known freedom there is a quality of the will that goes on heedless of bullets. It persists, it must assert itself; and if need be, in the end it will make the machine its own to command.

Here in America we are building that machine. Here in America some 600,000 Italians, technically alien enemies, are joining millions of Americans of Italian parentage, in the building of it. They are working side by side with other millions who have in them the blood of the French, the Norwegians, the Belgians, the Dutch, the Poles, the Greeks, and the other conquered peoples of Europe. To amass the full might of this new machine in all its vast proportions is taking time. To bring its weight to bear upon the enemy will take more time--yes, and more sacrifices by our people, more of the lives of our men. But not these nor any other cost of victory will stop us now.

Fascism stands in mortal fear of revolt. That is why, in Italy today, an unarmed civilian population is staring into the barrels of machine guns--Nazi guns, brought into their country by special invitation of Benito Mussolini. That is why storm troopers patrol the streets and the Gestapo lurks in the byways. The "strong man" of Italy has hidden himself behind a curtain of German steel.

But the revolt against Italian fascism, nevertheless, cannot be kept down. It has already started. Here in the United States, in American buildings and American factories, Italians--thousands upon thousands of them--are already in revolt against the government of Mussolini. By their labors they are fighting this man who has betrayed and declared war upon them. By their own hands they are hastening his defeat.

To America, and to the United Nations, this resistance to fascism means more guns for our soldiers, more ships for our sailors, more tanks, planes, and bombs. It is important to America--yes, even more important than the accounts that come to us of unrest on enemy soil. Our production of war materials must not lag. The need is huge and we must keep abreast of it. Every extra man-hour of labor for our factories, on our railroads and farms, is vital now. Any American who fails to recognize this fact injures the cause of the United Nations, in our common, all-out war effort.

In that body of loyal workers, there are those who have given more than their labor. Into the war against the Axis they have sent their own sons. These Americans of Italian ancestry will help Italy again to become a free nation. In each division of the United States Army, nearly five hundred soldiers, on the average, are the sons of Italian immigrants to America. Many more are of older Italian origin. I do not need to tell you that these men are abundantly represented in the list of heroes who have been decorated for bravery since December 7, 1941.

One of these men, Lieutenant Willibald C. Bianchi, charged an enemy machine gun nest on Bataan Peninsula. He was wounded, but he silenced the Jap pillbox with hand grenades. Then he climbed on top of a tank and manned an anti-aircraft gun. Again he was wounded. But he went on fighting until he was hit a third time and disabled. He was awarded the Congressional medal of honor upon the recommendation of General Douglas MacArthur. I could tell you of many others--Salvatore Battaglia, now carried as "missing in action in the Central Pacific", awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for his part in a torpedo attack in the battle of Midway; and Sergeant George Braga, who made a dash across no-man's-land on Bataan Peninsula, running a gauntlet

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of machine-gun fire to give vital information to Americans holding another position. It is a long list, and an inspiring one. It does not surprise me that this is so. Perhaps, it surprises Mussolini.

Surely the fathers and mothers of these boys are making the same sacrifice, surely their feeling about it can be no different, from that of other fathers and mothers who are citizens of this country. They, too, would like to be citizens of America. Had it not been for the barrier of the literacy test, almost without exception they would have become so long ago.

It is for this reason that I have recommended enactment of a bill which is now under consideration in Congress. By the terms of the bill, an alien, who is otherwise eligible, will be granted citizenship without taking the literacy test, provided he is fifty years of age or older, and provided that he came to this country before July 1, 1924, and has lived here continuously since. This measure would, I think, remove the greatest single difficulty that has stood in the way of citizenship for a large number of the older generation of Italians, who, in all other respects, have made this country their own. Some 200,000 Italians would be affected by this new law.

I know the problems of the people of Italian origin who are living in this country. I know their heritage and background, their hopes and ambitions. For a long time I have known what their loyalties are. When war broke, ten months ago, and they were declared "alien enemies", I knew time would tell the story of these loyalties better than any words of mine, any assurances or predictions that I could make. Nevertheless, I said then, and I have repeatedly said since, that there was no doubt in my mind that with a very few exceptions, these 600,000 Italian "alien enemies" were not enemies at all.

Experience has borne me out. We now have the results of ten months of an unprecedented exercise of wartime vigilance. We have watched these

Italians, these so-called "alien enemies", we have investigated, we have acted on the slightest impulse of doubt. We have taken no chances. And what do we find? We find that out of the total of 600,000 persons, there has been cause to intern only 228, or fewer than one-twentieth of one per cent!

The test of time, of actual performance, was essential. We wanted proof. We were right in requiring it. But now the proof has been given; and the stigma of "alien enemy" would be unfortunate from now on, not only in name; if continued against the Italian population of this country, it would be unfortunate in deed.

I have an announcement to make to you tonight, that comes as a result of the splendid showing the Italians of America have made in meeting this test. It also comes as the fulfilment of my own hopes, the consummation of a project that has been very close to my heart. I now announce to you that beginning October 19, a week from today, Italian aliens will no longer be classed as alien enemies. From that time on the exoneration which they have so well earned will be granted them. With the approval of the President I have today issued the following order:--

Section 30.2 of the Regulations Controlling Travel and other Conduct of Enemy Nationalities is amended by adding thereto paragraph (f), so that it will read: Classes of persons not required to comply with these regulations:

(f) Any alien of Italian nationality.

Of course this does not mean that dangerous or disloyal persons are no longer subject to apprehension or internment. We still will take no chances. It does mean that the regulations applying, up to now, to alien enemies, no longer apply to Italian aliens. Those persons, though they are still aliens, are not, from this time forth, subject to the restrictions imposed by

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existing regulations on alien enemies. They will be free to participate in the war effort without the handicaps that have hampered them up to now. They will be free to travel and go about their lives as any other person.

I wish to emphasize that in thus removing the label of alien enemy from Italians, we do not forget that there are other loyal persons now classed as alien enemies. Their situation is now being carefully and sympathetically studied by the Department of Justice.

To those who are affected by this change, I say tonight: "You have met the test. Your loyalty to the democracy which has given you this chance, you have proved, and proved well. Make the most of it. See to it that all Italians remain loyal. We have trusted you; you must prove worthy of that trust, so that it may never be said hereafter that there are disloyal groups among American Italians. If you love your freedom, give all that is in you for the nation which is now fighting to preserve it."

Finally, to those citizens of Italy across the sea in whom the love of freedom has not died, I offer a brief message from America on this Columbus Day. The words are not mine; they are Italy's--the words of Giuseppe Mazzini in an address to the young men of his country, delivered at Milan in memory of the martyrs of Cosenza, July 25, 1848. I quote:

Beyond the Alps, beyond the sea, are other peoples now fighting or preparing to fight the holy fight of independence, of nationality, of liberty; other peoples striving by different routes to reach the same goal--improvement, association, and the foundation of an authority which shall put an end to moral anarchy, an authority which mankind may love and obey without remorse or shame. Unite with them; they will unite with you.