



# **ITALIAN AMERICAN CRIME FIGHTERS: A BRIEF SURVEY**

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## **Table of Contents**

<b>Executive Summary.....</b>	<b>P. 3</b>
<b>Part I:</b>	
<b>A Century of Law Enforcement.....</b>	<b>P. 6</b>
<b>Part II:</b>	
<b>Fighting Organized Crime.....</b>	<b>P. 13</b>
<b>Appendix I:</b>	
<i>The Detective in the Derby: Joseph Petrosino</i> <b>By Ercole Gaudioso.....</b>	<b>P. 21</b>
<b>Appendix II:</b>	
<b>Sources.....</b>	<b>P. 28</b>
<b>Appendix III:</b>	
<b>Future Research....</b>	<b>P. 29</b>

# ITALIAN AMERICAN CRIME FIGHTERS: A BRIEF SURVEY

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This report was inspired by three recent events in the U.S. entertainment industry:

- The popularity of the HBO television mafia soap opera, *The Sopranos*
- The PBS public television documentary and Website, *The Medicis: Godfathers of the Renaissance*
- Steven Spielberg's children's gangster film *Shark Tale*

These and countless other films and television shows for decades, all portray characters of Italian heritage as criminals.

The result of such stereotyping is the belief strongly imbedded in the public's mind that Italian Americans are criminally inclined. In a poll of American adults, conducted by the Princeton-based Response Analysis, Inc. several years ago, 74% said they believed most Italian Americans have some association with organized crime. This perception is at odds with the facts:

- **The U. S. Department of Justice estimates that 5,000 people of all races and ethnic backgrounds are in organized crime today.** Even if all 5,000 were Italian American, that would constitute .0025 or **one-quarter of one percent** of today's 16 million Italian Americans, the nation's fifth largest ethnic group.\*

*\*In the U.S. Census of 2000, 16 million people identified themselves as Italian American. However, OSIA estimates that about 10% of the people in the United States have at least one ancestor of Italian heritage.*

- **Since 1950, only 5% of the felons on the FBI's *Most Wanted List* have been Italian American.** In the 55 years since its founding, the names of 477 criminals have been placed on this list.

Of those 477, only 24 have been of Italian descent. No Italian Americans are on the current list.

The fact is that far from choosing a life of crime, Italian Americans have made law enforcement a career since the arrival of the early immigrants from Italy more than a century ago.

Today, **four of every 10 New York City police officers are of Italian descent**, according to the Columbia Association of the New York Police Department, which estimates that 14,400 Italian Americans (40%) are among the approximately 36,000 members of the NYPD.

**In 2003, 10 Italian American police officers were killed in the line of duty.** They served in California, Georgia, Louisiana, Maryland, New York, Pennsylvania and South Carolina, according to the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial.

Famous Italian American crime fighters include:

- **Charles Joseph Bonaparte**, who founded the FBI.
- **James V. Capone, aka "Two-Gun Hart,"** who was a U.S. marshal and presidential bodyguard.
- **Judge John J. Sirica**, who presided over the Watergate trials that resulted in Richard Nixon's resignation as president.
- **Geraldine Ferraro**, who, as an assistant district attorney in New York, helped establish the Special Victims Bureau.
- **Frank Serpico**, a New York Police Department undercover officer, who revealed widespread corruption in his department.
- **Nancy Jardini**, who heads the IRS criminal investigations division which tracks and attempts to arrest drug traffickers and tax-evaders.

As this report reveals, Italian Americans have enforced the law as police officers, detectives, criminal prosecutors, district attorneys, U.S. attorneys general and judges at federal, state and local levels.

Italian Americans also have played a significant role in arresting and prosecuting members of organized crime, risking their own lives as undercover agents who infiltrated these violent crime networks.

Regrettably, the impressive record of these real-life Italian American crime fighters has been overshadowed by the likes of such fictional Italian Americans as Don Corleone and Tony Soprano.

This report is a carefully researched exploration of the role Italian Americans have long played in enforcing the law in the United States. It is organized in chronological order, from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to today.

It was compiled by Dona De Sanctis, Ph.D., OSIA Deputy Executive Director and Krissy Ellison, Research Assistant, and released by OSIA's anti-defamation arm, the Sons of Italy's Commission for Social Justice (CSJ).



Joseph Sciamè  
OSIA National President



Albert De Napoli, Esq.  
CSJ National President

*August 2005*

## **PART I: A CENTURY OF LAW ENFORCEMENT**

*Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Italian Americans have enforced U.S. laws as police officers, detectives, criminal prosecutors, district attorneys, U.S. attorneys general and judges at federal, state and local levels.*

### **CHARLES JOSEPH BONAPARTE (1851-1921)**

The founder of the FBI, Charles J. Bonaparte was also the first U.S. attorney general of Italian heritage. As attorney general in 1908, he signed the order establishing a permanent investigative force in the U. S. Justice Department that was officially named the Federal Bureau of Investigation in 1935.

As a member of the Federal Board of Indian Commissioners, he investigated corrupt government policies toward Native Americans. Bonaparte also assisted President Theodore Roosevelt in his trust-busting campaigns, including cases against Standard Oil and the American Tobacco Company.

### **CHARLIE ANGELO SIRINGO (1855-1912)**

Cowboy, Pinkerton detective and chronicler of the Wild West, Charlie Siringo pursued Billy the Kid, Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid. He reportedly went undercover in Cassidy's Hole-in-the-Wall gang. Siringo also wrote *A Texas Cowboy*, the first authentic autobiography in cowboy history (1885).

Siringo's *A Cowboy Detective* is about his years with the Pinkerton Detective Agency. In 1915, his book *Two Evils: Pinkertonism and Anarchism* revealed the agency's unsavory tactics.

### **CHARLES S. CAVOLO (1891-1958)**

Lieutenant Charles S. Cavolo was born in Italy in 1891 and arrived in America in 1895. Although, he grew up on the same Cleveland streets with many future criminals, Cavolo chose law enforcement and joined the Cleveland police force in 1917. There he served in the Cleveland Police Department's "Black Hand Squad,"

investigating several murders of notable Cleveland citizens and arresting these gangs that preyed on recent immigrants.

Cavolo made numerous bootlegging arrests during Prohibition including the arrest of Cleveland bootleggers and murderers Dominic Benigno and Charles Coletti, the culprits in the famed Sly-Fanner murders. These two were members of the Mayfield Road Mob that robbed and brutally murdered Wilfred Sly and George Fanner, two payroll clerks of the W. W. Sly Manufacturing Company.

During his career, Cavolo arrested some of the most elusive criminals: kidnapers who had been at large for years, murderers who had wrongfully received parole, and members of the most prominent gangs in the city. Well-liked and respected by many, Cavolo had solved 85 murder cases by the time he retired in 1946.

### **MICHAEL FIASCHETTI (1882-1960)**

In the early 1900s, Detective Michael Fiaschetti worked very closely with Lt. Joseph Petrosino in the New York City Police Department's Italian Squad. It was formed to hunt down members of the Mano Nera (Black Hand), who were preying on New York City's Italian immigrants. Among these criminals were kidnapers and lottery racketeers.

In 1928, Fiaschetti published his autobiography, *The Man They Couldn't Escape*, which chronicles his experiences fighting crime with the Italian Squad. The book describes the valuable skills Fiaschetti learned from Petrosino and how he used them when he took over as commander of the Squad after Sicilian mobsters murdered Petrosino.

### **JAMES VINCENZO CAPONE a.k.a. "Richard Hart" (1892-1952)**

Al Capone's oldest brother, James Vincenzo Capone was a respected lawman, U.S. marshal and presidential bodyguard. He was so ashamed of his brother that he changed his name to Richard Hart.

At age 16, James Capone left his native Brooklyn, New York to join the circus. He then enlisted in the U.S. Army in World War I and after the war moved west where he became a Prohibition enforcement officer. Ironically, while Al Capone was bootlegging in Chicago, his brother was destroying illegal stills and arresting horse thieves in Nebraska.

James Capone was so good a marksman that he was known as "Two-Gun Hart" because he always carried a pair of pearl-handled pistols. He later served as a bodyguard for President Calvin Coolidge. After Prohibition ended, he became the marshal of Homer, NE, concealing his Italian heritage until 1949, only a few years before his death in 1952.

### **JOHN J. SIRICA (1904-1992)**

As chief federal judge for the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, John Sirica presided over the Watergate trials for five years.

Judge Sirica enforced the subpoena that required President Richard M. Nixon to turn over the infamous White House tapes—an action that led to Nixon's resignation in 1974.

### **JOSEPH NAPOLI (1915-2004)**

After World War II, the Allies worked to eliminate the influence of Nazis and remove them from public life in Germany. The man in charge of U.S. "denazification" efforts was Joseph Napoli. After serving North Africa and Europe in World War II, Napoli worked in Germany as an intelligence officer, investigator and chief of denazification.

For the Allied Control Council, he was responsible for implementing a series of programs: identifying war criminals and Nazi groups and outlining judicial procedures and guidelines for handling them. Denazification also included removing the physical symbols of the Nazi regime which had previously permeated German and Austrian society.

From 1949 to 1955, Napoli was the chief of budget and field services for the Southern Command of NATO in Naples, Italy. He returned to the United States in 1956 and held several positions within the Department of Defense, finishing his career as a Justice Department investigator of illegal Nazi immigration in 1975.

### **MARIO BIAGGI (b. 1917)**

Before his election to the U.S. Congress, Mario Biaggi served for twenty-three years as a New York City police officer. His career included ten separate injuries



as a result of his bravery in the line of duty. When he retired from the force in 1965, he was the most decorated officer in the history of the NYPD. He introduced a bill in Congress in the late 1990s which established funding for the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial.

### **GERALDINE FERRARO (b. 1935)**

Although history will remember her as the first woman vice presidential candidate on a national party ticket (1984), Geraldine Ferraro also had a distinguished career as an assistant district attorney in Queens County, N.Y.

Ferraro began her work as assistant district attorney in 1974. Four years later, she helped establish the Special Victims Bureau, prosecuting sex crimes, child abuse, domestic violence and violent crimes against senior citizens.

### **FRANK SERPICO (b. 1936)**

After joining the New York City Police Department in 1960, Frank Serpico witnessed widespread bribery and kick-backs among his fellow officers. His complaints were ignored until he became "the whistle-blowing cop" and testified before the Knapp Commission in 1971. Shortly afterwards, he was shot in the face during an undercover drug bust, yet his fellow officers did not come to his aid.

Serpico retired from the force in 1972 and went abroad, returning to New York in the 1980s. His life became the subject of a best-seller by Peter Maas and was turned into the hit movie *Serpico* starring Al Pacino in 1973.

### **ANTHONY PALMISANO (1942-1969)**

Anthony Palmisano was born and raised in Newark, New Jersey where he joined the FBI as a field office clerk. He became a special agent in 1967 and was transferred to Washington, D.C. Two years later, he was shot and killed by an escaped federal prisoner who later received life in prison for the murder. Agent Palmisano was 27 years old.

## **WILLIAM JACONETTI (b. 1943)**

Sergeant William Jaconetti started his 38-year career with the Chicago Police Department in 1968, and walked the beat in the Wicker Park area of the city for 37 of those years. During his career, Jaconetti earned 150 awards for life-saving and heroism including the city's prestigious Lambert Tree/Carter Harrison Award, Chicago's Medal of Honor awarded to a law enforcement officer or fireman who has risked his life in the line of duty.

An example of his courage occurred on February 16, 1979, when Jaconetti responded to a call about a robbery at a jewelry store. When he arrived, he found a fellow officer trapped under a large shelf who told him the robbers had taken several hostages. Entering the store, Jaconetti shot and killed one armed robber. When the remaining two thugs threatened to kill the hostages, Jaconetti forced them into a standoff at which point they surrendered, allowing everyone to leave unharmed. Later he discovered two bullet holes in his jacket, but no wounds.

In 1993, Jaconetti, along with other foot patrol officers, helped implement and expand the Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy (CAPS). It employs cooperation between police, community, social services, and other agencies to decrease crime in the city. In 2000, the residents of Wicker Park paid tribute to Jaconetti by making him the first living officer to have his name placed on the street signs of the neighborhood's major intersection. After retiring in 2005, Jaconetti plans to teach ethics to cadets because it is the most important aspect of law enforcement today.

## **RUDOLPH GIULIANI (b. 1944)**

Former New York mayor Rudy Giuliani came to politics from a legal career as a prosecutor, putting behind bars drug traffickers, members of organized crime, white collar criminals and corrupt politicians.

For 25 years, he worked as a prosecutor at the U.S. Department of Justice. In 1981 he became associate attorney general, the third-ranking official in the department. In 1983, he became the head of the U.S. Attorney's Office in New York's southern district.

There Giuliani earned a national reputation for prosecuting Mafia chieftains as well as Wall Street investment bankers. In 1989, he lost his first bid for New York mayor to David Dinkins, whom he later defeated in 1993. Giuliani served for two

terms (1994-2002) as a law-and-order mayor whose policies cleaned up the city and reduced crime.

### **CATHERINE ABATE (b. 1947)**

A leading authority on prisons, Catherine Abate began her career in 1973 as a criminal attorney for the Legal Aid Society in New York City. In 1982, she was chosen to be the acting chairwoman for then-New York Governor Mario Cuomo's Task Force on Criminal Justice.

After two years she became the chairwoman for the New York State Platform on Criminal Justice. She then served as the New York State Commissioner of Corrections from 1992 to 1994, supervising 51 correctional institutions with over 20,000 inmates.

For her work as Commissioner for the NYC Departments of Corrections and Probation, Abate was awarded the 1993 Law Enforcement Woman of the Year Award.

In 1994 Abate was elected a New York State senator and served for four years. There she introduced and helped pass several important bills to protect communities and help crime victims.

An expert on domestic violence, prison overcrowding and community empowerment, she currently serves on committees at the Women's Prison Association, the National Campaign for Effective Crime Policy, the Institute Against Violence and the U.S. Committee on International Criminal Justice and Law Enforcement Reform.

### **GREGORY SPINELLI (1949-1973)**

Originally from Johnstown, Pennsylvania, FBI Special Agent Gregory Spinelli was shot and killed in a gun battle with a suspected robber in Charlotte, North Carolina. The robber, Arthur Mankins, was later apprehended and sentenced to life in prison for Spinelli's murder. Agent Spinelli was 24 years old.

***FBI agents Palmisano and Spinelli are among the 34 FBI agents who have died in the line of duty since the founding of the FBI.***

## **MICHAEL CARONA (b. 1955)**

His presidential appointment as the only sheriff on the Emergency Response Senior Advisory Committee for the Department of Homeland Security, caps a long career in law enforcement for Michael Carona.

A grandson of Sicilian immigrants, he began in 1976 as a deputy with the Orange County Marshal's Department in California. In 1988, as Marshal, he became the youngest department head in Orange County. After eleven years as Marshal, Carona was selected as Sheriff of Orange County.

Since then three governors of California have appointed Carona to various councils and committees dealing with criminal justice. In 2002 he helped implement Cal-Photo, a tool designed to help law enforcement agencies identify and apprehend criminals and improve officer safety through the use of the state's DMV and criminal photo database. He also has co-authored the book, *Save My Son*, which describes new programs for rehabilitating substance-abuse offenders.

## **NANCY JARDINI (b. 1965)**

The IRS's "top cop," Nancy Jardini is chief of the IRS criminal investigation division, the agency that investigates and helps prosecute drug traffickers, tax-evaders and money launderers.

Jardini is the first woman to head this agency and one of only four women in key IRS positions. Jardini oversees a staff of about 4,500 employees including nearly 3,000 special agents. She was appointed in 2004.

A 15-year veteran of law enforcement posts, she has been a public defender, federal prosecutor and an IRS lawyer. Married and the mother of two toddlers, she holds a law degree from Villanova University and was born and raised in Pittsburgh, PA.

## **PART II: FIGHTING ORGANIZED CRIME**

*Many Italian American law officers have risked their lives doing undercover work to bring down those members of organized crime who share their heritage. Their familiarity with the language, customs and mannerisms of these felons has helped thin considerably the ranks of Italian Americans in organized crime in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.*

### **FRANCIS P. DIMAIO (1864-1958?)**

Detective Francis Dimaio began his work with the Pinkerton Detective Agency in 1888. Between 1890 and 1891, he posed as a counterfeiter in the New Orleans Parish Prison to investigate the murder of New Orleans Police Chief David Hennessy. Dimaio uncovered information about the possible perpetrators of the crime and a plot to intimidate or bribe witnesses.

During his investigation, 11 Sicilians, including a 15 year-old boy, were tried and found not guilty of the crime. Despite the verdict, they were dragged from the prison where they were in protective custody and murdered by a mob of thousands of New Orleans citizens. This is the biggest mob lynching in U.S. history.

Dimaio spent the next two years chasing Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid throughout North and South America.

In 1908 he became the superintendent of the Pittsburgh office of the Pinkerton Agency where he worked with the U.S. Postal Inspection Service to end a “Mano Nera” (Black Hand) extortion scheme operating through the mail. Dimaio also supervised a group of detectives that worked against Mafia kidnappings in the Midwest. He lived into his nineties, dying in or around 1958.

### **JOSEPH PETROSINO (1860-1909)**

Joseph Petrosino was the first Italian American detective and the first New York City police officer to die in the line of duty while abroad. One of the earliest southern Italian immigrants, Petrosino came to the U.S. with his family in 1873 at age 13. Ten years later, he joined the New York City police force and in 1885 became its first Italian American detective.

In 1905, Petrosino was promoted to lieutenant and placed in charge of the Italian Squad. This elite corps of Italian American undercover police officers helped deport 500 criminals, who were preying on the Italian immigrants in New York's Little Italy. He also founded the New York Bomb Squad in the same year.

On March 12, 1909, Petrosino was assassinated in Palermo where he had gone to collect evidence that would have allowed the U.S. to send back to Italy immigrants with criminal records. *[See “The Detective in the Derby,” an article on the life of Petrosino by Ercole Gaudio in Appendix I, page 21.]*

### **AMEDEO POLIGNANI (1882-1932)**

Amedeo Polignani was the youngest charter member of Petrosino's New York Police Department Bomb Squad in 1905. He frequently went undercover to expose anarchists and gangsters.

In 1915, Polignani succeeded in infiltrating a gang of anarchist bombers after a number of other officers had died in similar attempts. These anarchists were plotting to bomb St. Patrick's Cathedral and to kill some of New York's most powerful entrepreneurs of the time. Polignani thwarted their attempt and arrested the two masterminds behind it. Both were convicted and sentenced to six to twelve years in jail.

### **CHARLES SIRAGUSA (1914-1982)**

During his 10-year surveillance of Charles “Lucky” Luciano, Charles Siragusa helped convict him for compulsory prostitution in 1944 then followed him to Italy when he was pardoned and deported after the ninth year of his 50-year prison term. As a U.S. narcotics agent from 1939 to 1963, Charles Siragusa tracked shipments of heroin and other illegal drugs from Italy to the U.S., managing the U.S. Bureau of Narcotics office in Rome, Italy from 1948 to 1960.

When Siragusa returned to the U.S., he became the chief investigator of Organized Crime in Interstate Commerce for the U.S. Senate. While working for the U.S. Narcotics Commission in the early 1960s, Siragusa discovered and publicized drug trafficking between the U.S. and Cuba.

In 1963, Siragusa became the executive director of the Illinois Crime Investigating Commission that had the authority to subpoena records and witnesses, compel testimony, and require cooperation from state or local government agencies to assist in the conduct of its investigations. While there, his positioning of an

undercover agent in the suspected burglary gang helped solve the \$4.3 million Purolator theft in 1974.

### **RALPH SALERNO (1925-2003)**

During his 20 years of police work with the NYPD Ralph Salerno earned a reputation for knowing more about organized crime than any other law enforcement officer.

After retiring as supervisor of the NYPD's Central Investigation Bureau in 1966, Salerno published the book *The Crime Confederation: La Cosa Nostra and Other Allied Operations* (1969). He continued his involvement with criminal justice and the fight against organized crime as the chief racket investigator for the New York City District Attorney's Office from 1973 to 1974.

From that point until his death, Salerno served as a consultant for various law enforcement groups and legislative bodies. He testified before Congress on ten separate occasions, including as an expert witness in the investigation of President John F. Kennedy's assassination. Salerno also worked with the President's Commissions on Crime and Violence and the National Council on Crime and Delinquency.

### **DAVID TOMA (b. 1933)**

David Toma worked for many years as a New Jersey police officer using disguises and other unconventional tactics to infiltrate drug gangs and arrest criminals. Throughout his career, he had an extremely high conviction rate of 98% out of thousands of arrests, many of them made without using his gun.

During the 1950s, Toma left law enforcement to become a motivational speaker. He disagreed with the conventional idea that marijuana was harmless and traveled to high schools for many years, warning young people about the dangers of drugs and alcohol. He spoke from personal experience; both from the effects of these addictions he had seen in his work as a police officer and from his own struggles with alcohol.

In the 1970s, *Toma*, a television show based on his life aired. It later became the popular TV series, *Baretta*. In 1981, Toma published a book entitled, *Toma Tells It Straight-With Love* that encouraged Americans to "wake up" to the drug and alcohol abuse epidemic that is crippling the nation.

## **JOSEPH PISTONE (b. 1939)**

Upon completing his training as an FBI agent in 1969, Joseph Pistone was assigned to work on hijacking cases in New York City and Florida. He helped bring down a criminal conspiracy that had stolen millions of dollars worth of vehicles along the east coast from New York to Florida. Pistone went undercover, infiltrating their ring. His work resulted in the arrest of 30 thieves.

After returning to New York in 1976, he continued his undercover work with vehicle hijackings and began to use the undercover identity of “Donnie Brasco.” He became so close to the Bonanno crime network, he was proposed for official membership.

Pistone gathered valuable intelligence that put the Bonanno syndicate out of commission. His testimony before Congress eventually led to more than 200 indictments and over 100 convictions.

Pistone retired from the FBI in 1986. He currently lectures and trains agents internationally and works as a consultant for the FBI. He has written several books and co-owns a production company. He also assisted with *Falcone*, a television series about his experiences, and the movie, *Donnie Brasco*, starring Johnny Depp in the title role.

## **FRANK J. PANESSA (b. 1941)**

During the 30 years he worked for the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), Frank J. Panessa used his Italian-American heritage for important undercover and international work in law enforcement and crime prevention.

He spent a year undercover and helped the DEA arrest over thirty Sicilian heroin traffickers. Panessa discovered the crucial connection between the operations in Philadelphia and New York in the “Pizza Connection” case.

The DEA had been investigating heroin traffickers in New York who were using their family-owned pizzerias to traffic heroin imported from Sicily. They distributed it throughout New York and to Philadelphia, but before Panessa went undercover no one had been able to determine the exact connection between the pizzeria owners and the drug traffickers.



In 1985, Panessa testified before the President's Commission on Organized Crime on this heroin network. He has continued to testify as an expert witness throughout the U.S. on narcotic trafficking and efforts to enforce laws to eradicate it.

His expertise took him abroad. Between 1988 and 1991, Panessa served as the chief United States advisor to Italian police agencies on narcotic enforcement in Rome, Italy. During that time, he also coordinated international enforcement, intelligence and training operations throughout the Mediterranean basin. Currently, Panessa works in Maryland as a private investigator and consultant on law enforcement and security.

### **ERCOLE GAUDIOSO (b. 1941)**

In his 34-year long career with the New York City Police Department, Ercole Gaudio successfully trailed and arrested a number of prominent figures in organized crime. In 1995, he helped bring successful loan sharking indictments against the acting head of the Gambino crime network, Greg DePalma and his son.

Just before the indictments, he discovered that DePalma was meeting with John Gotti Jr., a piece of evidence that allowed investigators to tap all of Gotti's phones. A total of 40 wire taps and 13 bugs were used to secure indictments. The investigators arrested 40 people in connection with Gotti and DePalma.

Born and raised in the Bronx, Gaudio joined the NYPD in 1966 and began patrolling the 44<sup>th</sup> Precinct. From 1971 to 1981 he worked for the Organized Crime Control Bureau's Narcotics Division. In 1981 he was promoted to sergeant and retired from the force in 1986. After leaving the force, Gaudio worked for the New York State Organized Crime Task Force until his official retirement in 2000. *[See his article on Joseph Petrosino on page 21.]*

### **CARMINE RUSSO (b. 1947)**

As a veteran FBI agent of 27 years, Carmine Russo has helped convict members of the Bonanno, Gambino and Gotti crime syndicates. Born in Messina, Sicily, Russo came to Brooklyn with his father at age nine in 1956. After serving in the U.S. Navy and as an investigator for the New York City Police Department, Russo became an FBI agent in 1978.

On his first major FBI assignment in 1979, he investigated the murder of Carmine Galante, boss of the Bonanno crime network. Through this investigation, he

eventually discovered important links between the Bonanno syndicate and heroin trafficking New York City.

After five years, Russo's investigation developed into the "Pizza Connection" case in which his team was largely responsible for over 20 arrests and convictions of criminals funneling drugs into the U.S. through pizza parlors.

Russo was later assigned to investigate the Gambino crime family and successfully brought John Gotti to trial three times. He now works out of the FBI's New York field office.

### **DIANE GIACALONE (b. 1949)**

As assistant U.S. district attorney, Diane Giacalone made history in 1987 when she became the lead prosecutor in the government's case against John Gotti. Early in the trial she scored a victory when she had Gotti's bail revoked, but Gotti eventually was acquitted after a six-month trial.

Ten years later, Gotti's henchman Sammy "the Bull" Gravano revealed in his autobiography that he had fixed the jury.

### **LOUIS FREEH (b. 1950)**

In 1993, Louis Freeh became the second Italian American to head the FBI, following in the footsteps of its founder, Charles Bonaparte. (Freeh's mother's name was Bernice Chinchiola.)

A career FBI agent, he joined in 1975 and did undercover work on the New York waterfront that led to the prosecution of about 125 criminals in organized crime. Later he was a lead prosecutor in the "Pizza Connection" case, which successfully convicted 18 drug dealers and other felons who were funneling drugs into the U.S. through pizza parlors. Freeh served as FBI director from 1993 to 2001.

### **DONNA CONGENI FITZSIMMONS (b. 1951)**

Donna Congeni is best known for her conviction of Cleveland crime boss Angelo Lonardo and five of his gang members. For her work in this case, President Ronald Reagan appointed her deputy counsel to the Commission on Organized Crime in Washington, D.C. (1984-1985.)

Congeni began her legal career in 1977 as the assistant prosecutor for Cuyahoga County in Cleveland, Ohio where she specialized in organized crime cases and counseled women on protecting themselves from stalkers. After serving there for three years, she became the first woman appointed as a special attorney on the U.S. Department of Justice Organized Crime Strike Force in Cleveland. Congeni currently serves as a judge of the Rocky River Municipal Court and specializes in domestic violence and stalking cases.

### **DENNIS VACCO (b. 1952)**

Dennis Vacco's long legal career began when he served as the assistant district attorney in Erie County, NY (1982-1988). He was also appointed chief of the Grand Jury Bureau in 1982. In 1988, Vacco became the youngest person to ever serve as United States Attorney of the Western District, appointed by President Ronald Reagan.

During his term as U.S. Attorney, Vacco worked on environmental and white-collar crimes. He convicted many drug traffickers using the 1970 Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) statutes. In June 1998, investigators working in conjunction with Vacco's office arrested John Gotti Jr. and indicted him on several charges. Authorities seized Gotti's list of other "made" men in rival crime families and \$358,000 in cash.

### **ANTHONY VENDITTI (1952-1986)**

NYPD detective Anthony Venditti was only 34 years old when he was murdered in 1986 by gangsters as a result of his investigations into illegal gambling in New York City.

He joined the NYPD in 1974 and served as police guard for witnesses testifying against Paul Castellano, the head of the Genovese crime network. In 1985 he joined the Organized Crime Control Bureau's Joint Organized Crime Task Force. Through his work with this force, Venditti began investigating the gambling dens in Queens that the Genovese family controlled.

On the night of January 21, 1986, three members of the Genovese family shot and killed Venditti outside a diner where he and his partner had stopped to eat. Although the men were arrested, conflicting accounts from eye witnesses, missing pieces of evidence and coercion by the mobsters prevented juries in four separate trials from convicting the three men of Venditti's murder.

## **REMO FRANCESCHINI (b. 1954?)**

Through his investigation into New York City's organized crime network, Franceschini was able to map out the exact structure of the crime syndicate. From 1975 to 1991, Remo Franceschini served the New York City Police Department. Throughout his career, Franceschini served both as the Queens District Attorney's Squad Commander and as an NYPD Intelligence officer.

In his book, *A Matter of Honor* (1993), Franceschini writes of his experiences tracking mob bosses. He has written for several newspapers including *The New York Times* as a recognized expert on organized crime. Franceschini accurately predicted that Thomas Gambino would succeed John Gotti as head of Gotti's crime network.

## **NINO PERROTTA (b. 1967)**

Shortly after the Secret Service selected him as a special agent in 1995, Nino Perrotta, his team, the senior NY state investigator and the assistant district attorney arrested a total of 48 members of the Gambino Family including John A. Gotti, Jr. After discovering a telecommunications fraud scheme involving prepaid calling cards, Perrotta and the others had enough evidence to bring charges against Gotti and his crew. The arrest also led to the seizure of homes, money, and all other proceeds of their criminal activities.

The Secret Service then sent him to Rome where he worked with the Italian Finance Police Force (Guardia di Finanza) on a prime bank lending scheme. Later, he was sent to Bucharest, Romania to work on numerous computer fraud cases, which gave the Secret Service the opportunity to justify opening an office in Bucharest.

After Romania, Perrotta opened a Secret Service office in Sofia, Bulgaria where he set up the first "international" Electronic Crimes Task Force. He modeled this task force after the original at the Secret Service New York field office.



# APPENDIX I:

## JOSEPH PETROSINO: The Detective in the Derby

By Ercole Joseph Gaudio

Of all the Italian American crime fighters, Joseph Petrosino merits particular attention because he was the first Italian American detective sergeant on the New York City police force and the only New York City police officer ever killed while on assignment abroad.

### COMING TO AMERICA

Before 1880, the population of Italian immigrants in the United States counted 25,000, according to the U.S. Census of 1870. The area that would become New York City's biggest Little Italy with 500,000 first and second generation Italians was then populated by an almost negligible number of Italians, nearly all from the north-central area of Italy. Many were educated men or skilled craftsmen who had left Italy for political rather than economic reasons because they were disappointed with the politics that followed Italy's long-awaited unification in 1870.

Prospero Petrosino was among that group of early Italian immigrants, having left his town of Padula in the province of Salerno with his wife and six children in 1873. A tailor by trade, he settled in Manhattan where he opened a shop on the city's lower east side.

One of his sons, 13-year old Giuseppe, adapted quickly to America. With another thirteen year old, he established a newspaper and shoeshine stand outside the police headquarters at 300 Mulberry Street, working by day and taking English classes at night.

By age sixteen Giuseppe – Joe by this time – had learned the ways of the street as he observed the parade of felons who marched in and out of 300 Mulberry. At seventeen and now an American citizen, he worked in a stockbroker's office on Broome Street. A year later he took a job with the city as a "white winger," or street cleaner. At that time, the city's sanitation duties were within the Police Department's structure.

In 1880, waves of Italians, ninety percent of them from small towns and villages in the south, began arriving in New York City. They suffered from centuries of economic abuse, a high rate of illiteracy and heavy taxes. Ignored by the Church, these peasant families in their isolated communities bonded and survived by developing an intense distrust of all outsiders.

As word filtered back to Italy about America and its opportunities, the bravest of these peasants, the risk-takers, crammed into steamers headed for *La Merica*. With them they brought the fears and superstitions that would make them perfect victims for members of *la mala vita* or Italian underworld of fugitives, counterfeiters and murderers, many of whom had also sailed to America.

### JOINING THE FORCE

As a "white winger," Joe Petrosino had become a confidant and "trusted agent" of his boss, Captain Alexander Williams, who appreciated Petrosino's value. Fluent in almost every

dialect in Little Italy and himself an immigrant, Petrosino understood *la mala vita* and knew why its victims would not seek protection from the police, whom they considered both outsiders and government agents.

But he was only five feet, two inches tall, well below the five feet, seven-and-one-half inch requirement for the Police Department. Squat and with a round face marked by the small pox he'd suffered as a child, at first glance he was hardly an authority figure. But as an Italian politician, Luigi Barzini, who met him noted, "... in that butcher's face there was the impress of a stubborn will and of courage, something that made one think of a mastiff."

Thanks to political maneuvers by Captain Williams, on October 19, 1883, at age 23, Joe Petrosino became New York's shortest cop. During his first assignment, a foot post on East 13<sup>th</sup> Street, a black man was attacked by three men. The brand new cop rescued the man and left his three attackers beaten and sprawled on the sidewalk.

Stories of Petrosino's skill and eagerness at fisticuffs splattered the newspapers of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and helped propel his career. In 1890 he was made a detective, replacing his uniform with a business suit and, to help his height, double-soled shoes and a tall derby. In newspapers he became "the detective in the derby."

### **FIGHTING LA MANO NERA**

In those days police brutality was less an issue than it is now and, when it came to bad guys, the art of the night stick was appreciated, particularly by one New York City Police Commissioner who advocated walking softly and carrying a big stick.

On July 20, 1895, Commissioner Theodore Roosevelt, known by his cops as "Silk Socks," promoted Petrosino to Detective Sergeant. It was the first time an Italian had achieved that rank. Assigned to Homicide, Petrosino was given Italian-related investigations. One of the first "undercover" cops, he filled his closet with disguises. By turns he was a beggar, a gangster, a bartender or a Hasidic Jew.

As Italian crime and victimization in the big cities became known around the country, so did the detective in the derby. A relationship developed between Petrosino and Roosevelt, both dedicated crime fighters. The men saw each other frequently and, while the Italian press was largely unkind to Petrosino, he was a sweetheart of the American press and never lost an opportunity to praise Roosevelt or talk with reporters.

Journalists were not the only ones to notice Petrosino. Soon he began receiving death threats, estimated at thousands through the years, signed with a crudely drawn black hand or fist, sometimes gripping a knife or a gun. This was meaningful communication for a people familiar with stories of Sicily's *Mafia*, Napoli's *Camorra* and Calabria's *Ndrangheta*.

They crossed themselves at the mere mention of *La Mano Nera*, (the Black Hand) and paid up if they received a demand for money signed with the infamous drawing of a black hand. The consequences for ignoring these demands included murder, maiming, assault and bombing. The newspapers began referring to a "Black Hand Society" and the people of Little Italy became convinced that the Black Hand was as organized and powerful as the *Mafia* back in Sicily

The most notorious of the Black Handers was Ignazio Lupo, nicknamed “Lupo the Wolf,” whom they believed was able to cast a curse with his *mal’occhio* or evil eye. He and his brother-in-law, Joe Morello, ran a stable up in Harlem’s Little Italy, known as the “Murder Stable” because it was the burial site for more than 60 bodies. People began crossing themselves at the mention of their names, too.

But Petrosino found no evidence of Black Hand leadership, hierarchy or structure. He noted that the Black Hand letters were written in a mixture of dialects and the menacing hand drawn in variously crude designs--all indications that pointed to a lack of organization. Arrests for Black Hand shake-downs revealed that the thugs were not connected to one another. Some were not even Italian.

## **PROTECTING THE POOR**

Extortion was only one of the crimes these thugs inflicted on their fellow immigrants. Other scams took advantage of the immigrants’ naiveté and inexperience. Take, for example, the case of Antonio Sperduto, who was found wandering the streets of Manhattan’s Little Italy on December 22, 1898 and brought to Petrosino. Sperduto told the detective that he’d left his wife and four children in Sicily six months earlier. In America, he dug subway tunnels and lived on bread and milk to save money. When the job ended and he’d given the hiring agent and his foreman their “cuts,” he had a savings of \$102.00, just enough to bring his family to America.

At the steamship office where he had gone to set up their passage, a stranger approached him. “He was well dressed and he seemed glad to see me,” Sperduto said. Then Petrosino told him the rest of the story. “He addressed you by your name and said he had known you as a boy in Sicily so he invited you for a drink to celebrate. You went with him and woke up in a dark alley with your wallet gone.” Petrosino caught the thief and locked him up.

The next year, in a connected investigation, he arrested 112 conspirators of another scam called the “Insurance Gang.” Pretending to be insurance salesmen, the gang members would persuade Italian immigrants to take out life insurance on credit. The insured would have a policy without spending a penny because the friendly agent advanced them the money for the premium. For security, the agent made himself the beneficiary, a detail that he told the immigrant would be simple to change after the debt was paid. People who bought the insurance seldom survived the year.

## **INVESTIGATING CRIME SCENES**

Petrosino was a creative and relentless sleuth. A good example of his techniques involved the case of an unidentified dismembered body of a man, found stuffed in a barrel on New York’s east side. Petrosino had the crime scene photographed and examined, traced the barrel to a German confectioner and connected the sawdust to a bar and Sicilian hangout. The two businesses shared a common alley and detectives established that the man in the barrel had been killed in the bar and stuffed in one of the confectioner’s barrels.

Subsequent investigation brought in the Secret Service and the investigation of a counterfeit ring with connections in New Orleans, Pittsburgh and Palermo. Eight Sicilians were

arrested, among them the feared Joe Morello and Ignazio Lupo and a certain Tommaso “The Ox” Petto, who was charged with killing the man in the barrel and Vito Cascio Ferro, a “man of respect” in the Sicilian *Mafia*. Petto and Ferro would later play major roles in Petrosino’s life.

With cash bundled in a handkerchief and delivered to court, all the defendants made bail before Petrosino returned from a trip to Buffalo where he had dug up evidence connecting all his defendants with the counterfeit ring that would return them to the Tombs, New York’s infamous prison.

The next day six of the eight were re-arrested. Ferro escaped to Italy and Petto had vanished. Morello and Lupo stood trial for the manufacture and sale of counterfeit money and were convicted. Morello would later become one of New York’s first *Mafia* bosses.

## **FIGHTING EXTORTION**

In 1903, gangsters hit on a less bloody method of extortion. Victims were put on a schedule with fixed due dates on which they had to hand over cash for “protection.” The amount was based on their ability to pay. One victim told Petrosino:

“They came to see me the other evening. There were three of them, with ugly faces, but elegantly dressed and very polite. They knew I’d received knife letters in the past and so they offered me their protection. ‘Just have faith in us,’ they said with their hands on their hearts, ‘and from now on nobody will touch a hair of your head or your family’s.’”

Petrosino couldn’t know that the new, “benevolent” method of protection had been instituted by Vito Cascio Ferro, the “man of respect,” who carried a photo of Petrosino in his wallet, vowing, “I swear that I will kill this man with my own hands.”

Ferro’s philosophy about extortion was to skim the cream off the milk “without breaking the bottle,” by throwing people into bankruptcy with ridiculous demands for money. “Offer them protection instead, help them to make their businesses prosperous and not only will they be happy, but they’ll kiss your hands out of gratitude,” he told his gang.

## **THE ITALIAN SQUAD**

In New York, Petrosino had long lobbied for the establishment of a squad of cops who spoke Italian and would concentrate on the Black Handers. Finally in January 1905, Police Commissioner William McAdoo announced the formation of a squad of five Sicilian-speaking men to police Little Italy’s half of a million residents.

On January 20<sup>th</sup>, the Italian Squad was officially founded with Petrosino at its head. Under him were Peter Dondero, George Silva, John Lagomarsini, Ugo Cassidi (who liked to be called Hugh Cassidy or Butch Cassidy), and Maurice Bonoil, who was French and Irish, but was raised in Little Italy and spoke Sicilian as well as the others.

The squad began gathering intelligence of criminal activity in the city and the state that led to arrests and indictments. Petrosino encouraged his squad to use his method. “If the courts



send these criminals back into the streets, we'll make life so tough for them that they'll have to clear out whatever way they can.”

On January 1, 1906, a year after the Italian Squad was formed, Theodore Bingham, a personal friend of Teddy Roosevelt, became Police Commissioner. Within four months the Italian Squad became known as the Italian Legion with twenty-five men plus a detachment of ten in Brooklyn commanded by Sergeant Antonio Vachris (Vacarezza).

In November of that year, Petrosino was promoted to lieutenant, the first Italian to achieve that rank. The following year, he married Adelina Saulino, 37, a childless widow. The groom was too busy for a honeymoon. The newlyweds set up home in Petrosino's apartment where Adelina found herself alone much of the time. She learned to live with the anonymous threats and never showed herself at a window, especially at night.

Petrosino and the squad had been grinding out large numbers of deportment orders. Much of their intelligence focused on the Neapolitan *Camorra*, a somewhat differently organized version of the Sicilian *Mafia*. One story needs telling.

On April 17, 1907, armed with a deportment order, the Italian Squad visited an apartment in Italian Harlem where they found Enrico Alfano, the *Camorra's capo dei capi* (boss of bosses) and a fugitive from murder charges in Italy. Petrosino kicked down the door, knocked Alfano down and dragged him down the stairs to the local precinct. Eventually he was deported to Italy where he was tried and convicted for murder. The New York branch of the *Camorra*, weak and depleted, was absorbed by the Sicilian *Mafia*.

## **THE SECRET MISSION TO PALERMO**

On November 30, 1908 Adelina Petrosino gave birth to Adelina Bianca Giuseppina. Every day, as soon as he got off duty, Petrosino rushed home to a family life that he cherished and enjoyed. Then, on February 9, 1909, he left for Palermo.

The trip was Police Commissioner Bingham's idea. The plan was to gather information from Italian law enforcement, letting them believe that Petrosino's purpose was general in nature. Then, without telling the Italian authorities, Petrosino would find informants and devise a means to funnel information from Italy to the U.S. and back. This would allow American law enforcement to profile individuals and groups on both sides of the Atlantic likely to engage in criminal activity.

The operation was secret to all but a few. Petrosino's absence from the job was announced as health related. He headed for Genoa aboard the liner *Duca di Genova*, traveling under an alias and carrying a notebook with two lists of names: one of known criminals connected to America and the other potential informants he would approach in Sicily.

On another ship, also headed for Italy was the escaped “man-in-the-barrel” murderer, Tommaso Petto, on his way to Sicily to meet with Petrosino's sworn enemy, Vito Cascio Ferro.

## **EXPOSED!**

When Petrosino reached Italy, he discovered that a local newspaper had reprinted a story from the *New York Herald*. The article, dated Feb. 20<sup>th</sup>, revealed that Petrosino was in Sicily to gather information about “Italian criminals residing in the United States.” Police Commissioner Bingham had entrusted a reporter with the story with the promise not to run it until the operation ended.

Petrosino arrived in Palermo from Naples on a mail boat the morning of February 28, 1909. He took a room at the Hotel de France under a fictitious name and opened a bank account in his own name with 2,000 lire to pay informants. In the evening, he dined at the Café Oreto, near his hotel, sitting at a corner table with his back to the wall.

For a week, he avoided contact with the Italian police, but on March 6, he met with Baldassare Ceola, Palermo’s chief of police. The two men took an instant dislike to each other. Petrosino implied that Italian passports had been issued deliberately and illegally to known criminals, who were showing up in the United States. Ceola protested that the men had been rehabilitated, but failed to explain why the rehabilitation seemed to take largely with criminals seeking passage to America.

Knowing that Petrosino had been visiting the most dangerous areas of Palermo at night, Ceola offered him a bodyguard. Petrosino refused. Ceola then asked where Petrosino was staying. Petrosino refused to tell him.

## **THE MURDER IN THE PIAZZA**

March 12 was a rainy Friday, but the weather didn’t stop Petrosino from traveling to towns around Palermo to make contact with informants. The mission reduced his 2,000 lire account to about 800 lire. By seven-thirty the rain had stopped. Petrosino left his hotel, walked across the plaza to the Café Oreto and sat at his regular table in the corner.

He ordered pasta with tomato sauce, fish, fried potatoes, cheese with peppers, fruit, and half of a liter of wine. During his meal two men entered the restaurant, walked to his table and remained standing during a brief conversation with Petrosino. Without finishing his meal, Petrosino left money on the table and, at eight-forty-five, left the café, headed toward the dark and deserted Garibaldi Garden in Piazza Marina.

Three shots rang out. Then a fourth. A sailor, Alberto Cardella, who had been waiting at a nearby street car stop, ran to the scene. Others at the stop vanished. Cardella had seen Petrosino fall to the ground as two men ran from the shadows and disappeared.

Three bullets had hit Petrosino in the right shoulder, right cheek and the throat. Later a bullet was found in the fabric of his jacket. The bullets were fired at close range, the shooter or shooters facing him. Near Petrosino’s body was his derby and a revolver.

Suddenly and mysteriously, the street lights went out, plunging the square into darkness. A passerby got candles and a delayed investigation began with the arrival of a medical officer

from Cardella's ship, the *Calabria*, police officials and a magistrate on the staff of the public prosecutor.

The revolver on the ground, from which one bullet had been fired, was not Petrosino's. His was in his hotel room. Apparently, he trusted whomever he left the restaurant to meet that night, probably the two men who had interrupted his meal.

In Petrosino's pockets, among letters of introduction and his notebook, was a picture postcard addressed to his wife. It read, "A kiss for you and my little girl, who has spent three weeks far from her daddy."

Witnesses were questioned, but no one had seen anything. Suspects were gathered, questioned and released. Years later, one of them, Vito Cascio Ferro, would claim that he shot Lieutenant Giuseppe Petrosino. Whether he pulled the trigger or not, it is believed he ordered the hit.

## A CITY MOURNS

In New York, outrage at Petrosino's murder filled the papers and the press generated a campaign against Italians. "Let's throw them out" screamed articles and editorials. Reporters and editors who had called Joe Petrosino "the loyal defender of New York," "the Number One enemy of the Black Hand" and "the heroic Lieutenant Petrosino," failed to recall that he, too, was Italian.

The ship carrying Petrosino's body arrived in New York on April 9. A funeral service was held three days later in the Saint Patrick's Old Cathedral, where he and Adelina had been married. The day was declared a holiday, flags flew at half staff, the Police Band played *Verdi's Requiem*. The hearse was followed by the widow, family and friends, a thousand patrolmen, two thousand school children, sixty Italian associations and a crowd of 250,000. The march lasted five and a half hours and ended at Calvary Cemetery in Queens.

Today, in lower Manhattan, on the corner of Lafayette and Kenmare Streets sits a monument to Lieutenant Giuseppe Petrosino in a park that bears his name. It is small, littered and ignored.

***Ercole Gaudio is a retired New York City police officer. See details of his career in this report on page 17. This article is a condensation of a detailed study of Joseph Petrosino's life and career by Gaudio. His complete article can be downloaded from the OSIA Website at [www.osia.org](http://www.osia.org) under STUDIES IN CULTURE, "Italian American contributions."***



## APPENDIX II

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## APPENDIX III

### FUTURE RESEARCH

*OSIA is currently researching the careers of other Italian American crime fighters, including those listed below, for inclusion in future updates of this report.*

Louis Balestrieri	NYPD Detective	Operation "Wasteland"
Lee Flosi	FBI	Organized Crime
Vincent Inserra	FBI	Sam Giancana
Joe Mazilli	NYPD	Organized Crime Control Bureau
Nunzio Orlando	MA State Police	New England Family
Pasquale Russolillo	MA State Police	New England Family
Frank Spero	FBI	Gambino Family
Matty Tricorico	FBI	Gambino Family

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