



Dr. Salvatore LaGumina

Dr. Salvatore LaGumina is Professor Emeritus of History and Director of the Center for Italian American Studies, Nassau Community College. He is also author/editor of seventeen books and several dozen articles. These include: The Italian Americans: An Encyclopedia; From Steerage to Suburb, Long Island Italians; and Wop, A Documentary

History of Anti-Italian Discrimination.

In his latest book, "The Humble and the Heroic: Wartime Italian Americans," Professor Salvatore J. LaGumina turns his analytic gaze to "The Greatest Generation" and examines the impact of World War II on the assimilation of Italian immigrants into American Society. He asks two basic questions: Was an extra measure of loyalty and patriotism required of Italian immigrants because the country of their birth was a declared enemy of their adopted country; and, does their WW II experience offer meaningful insights as to how we should treat other immigrant groups in future conflicts?

While the answer to both questions is in the affirmative, the long, arduous, road traveled by the ethnic group has not received the attention it deserves. Their quest for acceptance amidst a path paved with sacrifice, bitter poverty, discrimination, and, for many, the devastating indignity of being designated as "enemy aliens," is worthy of scholarly study.

By the 1940's, the approximately six million first- and second-generation Italian Americans in the United States constituted our nation's largest ethnic

group. Despite the U.S. Government's designation of 600,000 as "enemy agents", many sought to prove their allegiance to their adopted country by joining the military and in some cases fighting their own kin on Italian soil.

Interestingly: LaGumina points out how in Tom Brokaw's comprehensive coverage of the Greatest Generation, "no Italian American is given major treatment that revolves around ethnicity." Unfortunately many mainstream history texts have neglected the Italian- American experience. "The Humble and Heroic" seeks to rectify that oversight.

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