

A photograph of a tall, jagged rock formation in the ocean under a blue sky. The rock is dark and textured, with some white patches. The water is a deep blue with ripples. The sky is a clear, bright blue with a few wispy clouds.

an Almost-Lost World
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Michael Ceraolo

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For a New Holiday For a New Holiday

Let us disestablish the current holiday
celebrated on the second Monday in October
Let us not honor ignorance,
an ignorance
so profound it took his full complement of voyages
before he realized he was someplace new
to the European worldview,
if indeed he even realized it then
Let us not honor the lack of an actual sighting of this land;
close counts in horseshoes and hand grenades,
but
exploration,
encounter,
and
the grounds for creating a holiday
should be held to a much higher standard
Let us honor another of his countrymen,
one who actually saw this land (and knew it),
from
Cape Fear up the coast all the way to Narragansett Bay
(though
he mistakenly thought one of the many sounds on the coast
was actually the Pacific Ocean),
and
as far as is known didn't exterminate any natives;
on all counts
an incalculable improvement over his predecessor
If
we are to celebrate the European sighting of this land,
let us honor Giovanni da Verrazano,
and
make March 1st,
date of his first sighting of this land,
the new holiday

Or,
if we want to celebrate
a day putting forward a different vision,
two possibilities:

December 12th,
Sinatra Day,
celebrating the birthday of the man
who sang the song and acted in the short film
The House I Live In,
a celebration
of a multicultural vision of America
still yet to be achieved,
and for which
he was mercilessly Red-baited by nativists
(a form of honor in itself)

Or
November 16th,
Groppi Day,
celebrating the birthdate of Father James Groppi ,
a man who worked tirelessly toward
the as-yet-unachieved dream of ending segregation,
and
worked for economic justice,
being convicted
by the Wisconsin state legislature of "Contempt of the Legislature"
(another badge of honor)
for organizing a sit-in demonstration,
a bill of attainder later invalidated by the Supreme Court

Or someone else,
almost anyone,
who would be more worthy of being honored
than the genocidal Genoan

una storia segreta “una storia segreta”

Secret story,
or
secret history,
buried in arcane archives,
buried
in the memories of generations ended or ending
(and not talked about with their descendants)
"Italy is my mother and the United States my father"
and
Father
or Uncle (Sam)
thought there was a problem,
the problem of aliens of 'enemy' origin,
and
thought he knew best how to deal with it
And
here were some of the solutions to the perceived problem:

ID cards,
which included fingerprints,
which had to be carried at all times,
which was definitely not a re-registration of aliens
who had been required to register two years earlier
before the country was at war,
officially
(because
the government said it wasn't re-registration);

forced relocation from prohibited zones:
arbitrarily declared areas that extended
a certain distance inland from the coast,
which
dry-docked many fishermen on the West Coast;
it was slightly different on the East Coast,
with searches and special passwords (probably not Swordfish)
taking the place of total exclusion

And
the creation of the exclusion areas
led to ludicrousness like people not being allowed
to cross the street because one side of the street
was in the banned zone and the other side wasn't
(one man
was not allowed to farm his land because,
although he wasn't forced to relocate,
his farm land was inside the restricted area
and his farm house was outside said special zone;

curfew,
from 8:00 PM to 6:00 AM,
which,
again,
prohibited them from many of the jobs they usually worked;

confiscation of what was called 'contraband',
which
included cameras,
flashlights,
radios with shortwave capability,
etc.

And these and other condition applied
even when the 'aliens' were parents of citizens,
even when they were the spouses of citizens,
even when they were the parents or spouses of soldiers,
even when they had been here
20,
30,
40 years,
'guilty' only of not possessing the proper papers
(for a wide variety of reasons, none of them sinister)
"Don't those imbeciles in Washington
understand that to have American-born children
is to become an American for the rest of your life?"

And last but not least among solutions
was the bast bureaucracy of internment:
twenty-six of the then-forty-eight state had at least one permanent
internment facility

Thirty such sites were run by the Immigration and Naturalization Service,
fifteen such sites were run by the Provost Marshal General's Office
And that doesn't count the temporary detention facilities
located in most major cities

People put away behind chain-link fences with barbed wire,
watched by gun-toting guards in tall towers,
taken from their families,
taken from their communities,
all

for the 'crime' of their ancestry

And
even being a naturalized citizen offered no protection
against the decision of kangaroo courts
(apologies in advance to the Aussie animals);
at least two American citizens,
Pasquale DeCicco and Mario Valdastri,
were interned for no good reason

Redress was unaddressed until the next millennium,
when an apology of sorts was offered,
saying
what was known even as this was happening:

"persons are at times interned
where there is considerable doubt
as to whether they are guilty
of conduct endangering the nation"

A Flood of Hate

When a city has a mayor named Shakspeare
it is only a matter of time before tragedy ensues
(the comedy of politics is a given)

The tragedy
would be the sin of bigotry, and its aftermath,
and

this being real life and not a play
(and decidedly not well-written),
the committers of the sin wouldn't suffer,
the victims of the bigotry would

And
the Southern-fried Shakspeare didn't come near
the eloquence of his English counterpart

The police chief of New Orleans had been murdered,
and,

despite a moral and political climate that
produced an almost infinite army of suspects,
somehow,

Italian immigrants were fixated upon

Mayor Shakspeare:

"Arrest every Italian you come across"

"we find them

the most idle, vicious and worthless people among us"

Nineteen men of Italian descent were arrested,
and were to be put on trial in two groups

The first group of nine was tried:

six were acquitted,

the jury was unable to reach a verdict on the other three,
yet all nine were put back in prison

A mass meeting was called fro March 14, 1891

"Come prepared for action"

and

"several thousands of the first,
best and even the most law-abiding
of the citizens of this city"
answered the call
deciding

"We must teach these people a lesson
that they will not forget for all time"

The army of injustice marched to the prison,
where they battered down the locked gates,
where a hundred 'elite troops' selected in advance of the gathering
searched the prison for the nineteen
(The warden had performed a 'kindness',
letting the nineteen out of their cells though not out of the prison,
forcing them to play hide-and-seek for their lives
Eleven were caught,
and

shot untold numbers of times
Two who weren't quite dead yet
were passed outside to the mob,
where they were strung up and shot some more
Bloodlust satisfied by

"a movement conceived by gentlemen,
and carried out by gentlemen",
the search for the remaining eight wouldn't take place
One of the aforementioned 'gentlemen'
announced the names of each of the dead,
to the great cheers of the crowd

Then
the nine victims still inside the prison
were placed in a viewing room,
and

thousands filed by in five hours
to acclaim their handiwork
When word of the event got out
half of the nation's newspapers,
most organizations and institutions,

and

at least one future President
(the alleged progressive Theodore Roosevelt)
voiced their collective approval

Of course,
no one was ever tried for the crime,
and
the eight Italian-Americans not lynched
were quietly let go without being tried (or tried again)
The city of New Orleans quickly moved to remove
Italian-Americans from handling any of the busy port's business;
some opposed the move

Mayor Shakspeare again:
"You have not yet learned the lesson taught your race
by the people of New Orleans"
But they had:
the income of Italian-Americans didn't catch up to other whites
for over 60 years

A tolling for the dead,
guilty of the twin 'crimes'
of not assimilating American bigotry
and daring to challenge Anglo economic supremacy:

Joseph Macheca (acquitted)

Anthony Marchesi (acquitted)

Anthony Bagnetto (acquitted)

Pietro Monasterio (hung jury)

Anthony Scaffidi (hung jury)

Emmanuele Polizzi (hung jury)

James Caruso (not tried)

Rocco Geraci (not tried)

Frank Romero (not tried)

Loretto Comitz (not tried)

Charles Traina (not tried)

Riposi In Pace

The Man Who Couldn't Fly

Years after Haymarket,
years before Guantanamo,
there was Antonio Salsedo,
who emigrated here in 1902,
who worked as a typesetter for an anarchist paper
(Cronaca Sovversiva),
who was arrested in March 1920,
who was held as a private prisoner of the Department of 'Justice',
who was specifically not turned over to the Labor Department
that handled deportations,
who was tortured,
who confessed to crimes he may or may not have committed,
who implicated others in these real or imaginary crimes,
who suffered for this confession,
who on May 3, 1920 at 4:20 AM defenestrated himself from
the fourteenth floor of the building where he was
"under surveillance"

A Justice Department official:

"Salsedo was lawlessly a prisoner,
. . . held incommunicado in a secret prison
controlled by detectives of the Department of Justice,
that this person was fourteen stories above the street,
. . . that his body struck the pavement with an impact
that turned it to a pulp"

That would seem to have given his widow an ironclad lawsuit
But no one ever went broke underestimating
the ability of the American judicial system
to excuse official mendacity
Case lost in lower court,
and
a Three Stooge review affirmed the atrocity,
though
perhaps that should only be Two Stooges,
giving
credit to the man who dissented:

"If a man is confined against his will for two months
. . .continuously and grievously injured
. . .continuously threatened with death,
can it be said as a matter of law
that the wrongdoer should not have foreseen
that the infliction of such wrongs
. . .might naturally and probably lead to loss of mind
and that self destruction might follow?"

Se vogliamo che tutto rimanga come e,
bisogna che tuttoe cambi
(the more things change the more they stay the same)

Two Adolescent Activists

Camella Teoli

Though the frontier had officially been declared closed
in 1890, the industrial frontier
was still wide open twenty years later: unofficial sheriffs
of the mill would illegally recruit members of their own ethnicity
to work in the mills for wages of a few dollars a week,
supplying the necessary papers if, as was usually the case,
the child was under the state of Massachusetts'
minimum employment age of fourteen,
and Camella Teoli was one of those so conscripted;
her formal education ended at the sixth grade
And she would have remained one of the anonymous millions
with similar ignored stories, but for two things:
she had been scalped by one of the mill's machines,
spending seven months in the hospital
(at the company's oh-so-generous expense),
and she testified before Congress in March 1912,
two months into the strike in Lawrence
that rang in the new year;
the shock of her and others' matter-of-fact testimony
about the the conditions they daily labored under
helped to end the strike on March 12, 1912
on terms satisfactory to the strikers:
wage increases and no retaliation
(at least for the short term)
Then, she would return to the immigrant's anonymity,
not mentioning her heroic past even to her family
They would become aware of it only after her death:
her radicalism would be resurrected
with the re-discovery of her Congressional testimony,
and she would even receive that most American of honors,
that of having a street named after her

Consiglia Rocco

Becoming one of the wounded in the war against workers
and testifying about the experience before Congress
weren't the only ways a teenager could help win a strike
With half of the more than 25,000 striking workers
being women, there were other duties to be fulfilled
so that solidarity could be maintained
Consiglia and her mother
turned their weekly bread baking
into planning and strategy sessions;
she would also watch the children of the strikers
so their mothers could picket
(and be subjected to such abuses as being hosed
in January in Massachusetts,
in an attempt to get them to disperse)
She also helped provide food to the strikers,
and all the unsung necessary work
helped the strike to be won
And then she slipped back in anonymity,
where she, unlike Camella, remains:
her resurrection not yet as public as Camella's,
though she is equally deserving of such

An Accidental Martyr

No physical description of her survives,
other than the usual dark hair and dark eyes

Not even her name is known for certain,
though LoPizzo is the generally accepted spelling;
she was also cited in various news reports
as LoPezzi, LaPiazza, LaPizza, Lopez,
and probably a dozen other variations,
reflecting the newspapers' unconcern at the time
with getting ethnic names correct
(after all, 'they' weren't one of us)

She may or may not have been know as LaMonica

She may have been the same Anna LoPizzo,
age thirty, who arrived at Ellis Island
from Naples on July 28, 1909

One thing known for certain is her date of death:
January 29, 1912;
another fact for certain is her cause of death:
fatal gunshot wound,
though most, if not all
other details of the shooting were disputed at the time,
and, barring discovery of an unknown filming of the incident,
are now lost to the myth-mists of history

She was on strike from the American Woolen Company
in Lawrence, Massachusetts on the above date,
though she was not assigned to picket duty at this time

Sometime around five o'clock in the evening
she decided to visit some friends,
stopped on the way to watch what was happening
between a crowd of her fellow strikers
and the police and state militia,
and was shot to death by someone unknown,
an accidental martyr for the strike

She deserves more commemoration
than just a small headstone in the cemetery

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read., Post as Soapbath, Burn Minimum, Art is not Meant to be Touched, Drawing, Give What You Can, Down in the Dirt v084, Come Fly With Me, Clearing the Debris, Sectioned & Sequestered, Six Six Six, Skeletal Remains, Out of the Web, Don't Tread on Me, Lines of Intensity, Entering the Ice Age, When the World Settles, Into the White, Along the Surface, Life... from Nothing, the Line to Power, Fear the Forsaken, Down in It, Falling Into Place, Wake Up and Smell the Flowers, Unknown, Looking Beyond, Forever Bound, See the World Burn, Exploding on the Scene, America the Lost, Moving the Earth, Catch Fire in the Treetops, Wisdom in Broken Hands, Autumn Again, Up in Smoke, Symbols Manifest, No Return, Grounded, Perfectly Imperfect, Wrapping It Up.

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