

The Week of Remembrance. Never Let the Past Horrors Happen Again

Marcello De Marco (January 24, 2011)



With the patronage of the Italian Consulate and Primo Levi Center, the recurrence of the Day of Remembrance has been expanded to become the Week of Remembrance. A series of events in honor of the Italian victims of the Holocaust

Some things should never be forgotten. While this statement holds true for many happy historical events, such as the day Columbus touched land, or the adoption of the Declaration of Independence, it is much more important and has a much deeper meaning when we are remembering tragedies: in that case remembering is functional to never let the past horrors happen again.

This is why every year the [Consulate General of Italy in New York](#) [2] places particular emphasis on Remembrance Day, January 27, the date on which, in 1945, the Soviet army entered Auschwitz and



discovered what can be defined as one of the most perfect examples of pure evil at work in the history of mankind.

Italy has always been extremely sensitive about the horrors of WWII, for instance it was one of the first countries to observe Remembrance Day, established by the parliament with a law dated July 20, 2000. Furthermore, the relationship between the Italian and Jewish community in New York has historically been very positive and constructive. Rabbi Arthur Schneier himself confirmed this during a [recent interview with i-Italy](#) [3], remembering the contributions of Mayor La Guardia, one of the first to denounce the Nazi persecutions, and more recently Rudy Giuliani and the Cuomos. It is no surprise, then, that the Consulate of Italy in New York put great emphasis on the recurrence, so much that they decided to expand the Remembrance Day into a Remembrance Week full of appointments.

In cooperation with the [Primo Levi Center](#) [4], the Italian Cultural Institute, the [Casa Italiana Zerilli-Marimò](#) [5] at NYU, the [Italian Academy at Columbia University](#) [6], and the [John D. Calandra Institute](#) [7] at CUNY, the [Scuola d'Italia "G. Marconi"](#) [8], and the Consulate organized a series of events meant to contribute to the preservation of the memory of the Holocaust.

The opening of Remembrance Week took place at the Scuola d'Italia G. Marconi. It was the discussion "New York and Naples: Harbors of Dialogue" between the cardinal of Naples [Crescenzo Sepe](#) [9], who visited New York last week, and Rabbi Arthur Schneier. The event was divided in two parts. The first was a recital performed by actors Robert Zuckerman and Antoinette La Vecchia along with students of the Scuola. It consisted in readings of excerpts from the book "Il Libro della Shoah in Italia" (The Book of Shoah in Italy). These memoirs gave the public an idea of how Jews in Italy lived through those terrible year. Tales of rejections from schools and closures and destructions of Jewish businesses were alternated to tales of more general xenophobia, like that experienced through the innocent eyes of a child who wrote: "my mum used to tell me that black people smell. When I was at school I tried to smell my black schoolmates but I could find no difference with the white ones".

After the recital Sepe and Schneier tried to find answers to the great questions regarding the Holocaust through a profound discussion on the themes of xenophobia and segregation, and the new approach to those themes of the Catholic Church after Nostra Aetate, the Declaration on the Relation of the Church with Non-Christian Religions promulgated in 1965 by Pope Paul VI, which is intended to pave the way to a new harmony and cooperation between faiths.

Probably the most touching of these events will be an outdoor reading of the names of the Italian victims of the Shoah at the Consulate, on Thursday. As every year, every New Yorker is invited to what is an extremely touching tradition of the Italian-American Jewish community. A mixed crowd of Jewish and Italian students, common people and notable personalities will perform the reading of the names of the over 8,000 Italian victims of the tragedy.

Also on Thursday there will be a discussion about a special issue of the magazine Zapruder called "Brava Gente" (Good People) regarding memory and colonialism, at NYU Casa Italiana Zerilli-Marimò. Prof. Ruth Ben Ghiat will moderate a panel featuring Prof. Teresa Fiore and Claudio Fogu in conversation with Elena Petricola and Andrea Tappi, co-curators of Brava Gente.

The next event will take place on Friday, January 28, at the John Calandra Institute for Italian American Studies at CUNY. It is the discussion "A Difficult Identity? Literary Representations of the Shoah from Liana Millu to Helena Janeczek". During this event, Stefania Lucamante, Ph.D. Professor of Italian and Comparative Literature at The Catholic University of America, will shed some light on the role and experiences of women during the Holocaust.

It will then be the turn of "Anti-fascism and Resistance among Italian Jews" at the Primo Levi Center on Sunday, January 30. This appointment features an afternoon of screenings and interviews aimed at reconstructing the participation of Italian Jews in anti-Fascist movements and the resistance. A panel of scholars and public intellectuals will shed light on the early opposition to Mussolini's Regime and the exodus to France of many political dissenters.



The Week will end with the symposium “Racially Inferior: Roma, Sinti and other Holocaust victims” at the Italian Academy at Columbia University on Tuesday, February 1. This event is dedicated to the other communities judged “Racially Inferior” in those dark years, such as the Roma and Sinti (known as Gypsies) that shared the same tragic fate of the Jews.

Along with the Consulate, one of the main supporters of these manifestations is the Primo Levi Center. Named after the famous chemist and writer, this foundation is dedicated to studying the history and culture of Italian Jewry, sharing beyond linguistic borders its current ferments and future perspectives.

EVENTS OF THE WEEK OF REMEMBRANCE

Friday, January 21 | 9.30 am – Scuola d’Italia “G. Marconi”, 406 East 67th Street : New York and Naples: Harbors of Dialogue”, a dialogue on tolerance between Naples Cardinal Crescenzo Sepe e Rabbi Arthur Schneier

Thursday, January 27 | 9 am to 4 pm –Italian Consulate (690 Park Avenue) - Outdoor reading of the names of the Italian victims of the Shoah

Thursday, January 27 | pm – Casa Italiana Zerilli Marimò at New York University, 24 West 12 St: presentation of a special issue of the magazine Zapruder on memory and colonialism.

Friday, January 28 | 12 pm - The John Calandra Institute for Italian American Studies at CUNY, 25 West 43rd Street: A Difficult Identity? Literary Representations of the Shoah from Liana Millu to Helena Janeczek

Sunday, January 30 | pm - Primo Levi Center, 15 West 16th Street: “The Jews of Italy between Antifascism and Resistance” , a conference on the contribution of the Italian Jewish to the Liberation of Italy

Tuesday, February 1 | pm - The Italian Academy at Columbia University, 1161 Amsterdam Avenue Symposium: “Racially Inferior: Roma, Sinti and other Holocaust victims”.

For further information, see <http://www.primolevicenter.org/Home.html> [4]

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Links

[1] <http://newsite.iitaly.org/files/new-york-giorno-della-memoria>

[2] http://www.consnewyork.esteri.it/Consolato_NewYork

[3] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O1PER8WgrjI&feature=player_embedded

[4] <http://www.primolevicenter.org/Home.html>

[5] <http://www.casaitaliananyu.org/>

[6] <http://www.italianacademy.columbia.edu/>

[7] <http://qcpages.qc.cuny.edu/calandra/>

[8] <http://www.lascuoladitalia.org/>

[9] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crescenzo_Sepe