

# IT 131: Italian American Culture & Civilization

The Pennsylvania State University – Spring 2023

**Meeting Times:**     **Section 001: Tuesday and Thursday 10:35A-11:50A in Nursing Sciences 322**  
                              **Section 002: Tuesday and Thursday 12:05P-1:20P in Willard Building 373**  
                              **Section 003: Tuesday and Thursday 3:05P-4:20P in Willard Building 073**

**Welcome to Italian 131!** In this course I invite you to examine the Italian American community through historical, sociological, literary and cinematic investigations. Our discussions will provide an overview of Italian emigration to America in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and the conditions within the United States as a destination. I ask you to interrogate the immigrant experience through the lens of race and ethnicity tracing the trajectories of quotidian life through and against the concept of ‘otherness’ for three generational periods of the Italian American experience: The migrant, post-migrant, and later generations. My hope is that you change the way that you read novels, view films and receive information from all sources so that you are able to analyze and thoughtfully add to the continuing discussion of what it means to be Italian American in a contemporary American context.

**Michael Edwards, PhD ([mje13@psu.edu](mailto:mje13@psu.edu))**

Office Hours: by appointment via Zoom, weekdays, 24-hour notice required

## **Communication:**

- The primary form of course communication will be through Penn State e-mail. **You are responsible for checking your university e-mail account (...@psu.edu) for any class correspondence.**
- Please contact me directly through webmail at [mje13@psu.edu](mailto:mje13@psu.edu).
- I generally aim to respond to student emails within 24 hours, excluding weekends or holidays.

## **Required Course Texts & Films**

Mangione, Jerre, & Ben Morreale. La Storia: Five Centuries of Italian-American Experience. (Harper Collins, 1993).

Pietro di Donato, Christ in Concrete. (New American Library, 1993)

Film – The Golden Door (Crialesi, 2006) [streaming online for \$5.99]

Film – The Godfather (Coppola, 1972) [streaming online for \$2.99]

Film – Marty (Mann, 1955) [streaming online for free or \$3.99]

Film – Big Night (Tucci, 1996) [streaming online for \$2.99]

*Students are responsible for streaming the above films. The Sopranos episode will be screened in class.*

## **Course Components (Grade Breakdown)**

**5% Intellectual Engagement** – A commitment toward intellectual growth is a fundamental element of earning a university credential and is essential for success in this class. Our course goals go beyond the mere memorization of dates or facts, since the development of analytical and evaluative skills are of value in academic, professional, and civic spheres alike. Thus, a portion of the course grade is based on your intellectual engagement with the course materials and our learning community. Intellectually engaged students will:

- regularly attend and participate in our class sessions
- prepare all readings (or other materials) before class, monitor their comprehension, and discuss challenging material with the instructor during office hours if needed.
- complete any assigned homework or in-class activities
- give full attention during lessons, arrive to class on time, and attend class for the entire session.
- respectfully collaborate with colleagues and contribute to class discussion

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<sup>1</sup> My sincere appreciation goes to Dr. Johanna Rossi Wagner: much of the language, policies, and general structure of the course comes from syllabi for previous iterations of IT131.

**Note:** The use of electronic devices for anything not related to the course activity is prohibited. Interfering with the learning of others will result in a request to leave the class session. After an initial written warning, a deduction will be made from the final grade for each occurrence of behavior that disrupts any aspect of our community's learning.

**35% Quizzes** - Five quizzes will be given via Canvas throughout the semester based on the reading materials. The lowest grade will be dropped. Quizzes will be open for seven days for you to complete. Note: Because you will have access to the quiz for a week and you are able to drop your lowest score, make-up quizzes or access beyond the due date will not be granted but for extreme situations.

**30% Oral History Project (15% Oral History, 15% Critical Introduction to Oral History)** – Students will participate in committees tasked with setting guidelines for the creation of a digital oral history collection. The specifications for the archive will be determined democratically by the students. The end goal is for each student to conduct, record and transcribe an oral history interview with an Italian American.

**5% In-class Oral History Mini-Analysis** – On the final day of class, students will write an impromptu analysis of an oral history.

**25% Critical Analysis Essay** – You will write a critical analysis of one of the works discussed in class (The Golden Door, Christ in Concrete, Marty, Sacco & Vanzetti images/poems, Riis photos, ecc.) or another work with permission of instructor. Committees are encouraged to read and evaluate peers' papers. **All essays due Friday, March 31th by 11:59P.**

**Grading Scale (SIP Grading Scale; there will be no rounding of percentages at the end of the semester.)**

**A 100 – 95**

**A- 94.9 – 90**

Student demonstrates an exemplary understanding of the material and concepts studied. Exemplary understanding is shown through depth of argument and analysis.

**B+ 89.9 – 87.7**

**B 87.6 – 83.3**

**B- 83.2 – 80**

Student demonstrates a thorough understanding of the material and concepts studied. A thorough understanding is shown through careful argument and clear analysis.

**C+ 79.9 – 75**

**C 74.9 – 70**

Student demonstrates a variable depth of understanding of the material and concepts studied. Argument and analysis are of a variable standard.

**D 69.9 – 60**

Student demonstrates a minimally acceptable depth of understanding of the material and concepts studied. Analysis and argument are weak.

**F below 60**

Student does not demonstrate an acceptable understanding of the material and concepts studied. There is little evidence of any depth of knowledge or analysis.

## Additional Course Information

### Class Attendance

(Faculty Senate Policy 42-27, abridged; [complete text](#).) **Regular class attendance is one of the most important ways that students learn and understand course materials.** It is a critical element of student success. Accordingly, it is the policy of the University that class attendance is expected and that students should follow the attendance policy of the instructor, as outlined in the syllabus. **A student should attend every scheduled class and should be held responsible for all work covered in the courses taken.**

Class attendance is expected regardless of the format of the course and this expectation applies equally to students in face-to-face, online, and hybrid courses. Attendance in online courses goes beyond course login and is based on documentable participation in class activities, such as interacting with the instructor, interacting with enrolled students, completing assignments with specific due dates, and/or participate in online discussions on a regular basis. It is the student's responsibility to complete work early, or make alternate arrangements with the

course instructor, if due dates or required work will be missed because of a University-approved absence as described in this policy.

Instructors should provide, within reason, the opportunity to make up work for students who miss class for regularly scheduled, University-approved curricular and extracurricular activities (such as Martin Luther King Day of Service, field trips, debate trips, choir trips, and athletic contests). In addition, instructors should provide, within reason, the opportunity to make up work for students who miss class for post-graduate, career-related interviews when there is no opportunity for students to re-schedule these opportunities (such as employment and graduate school final interviews.) In both cases, **students should inform instructors in advance and discuss the implications of any absence.** Missing class, even for a legitimate purpose, may mean that there is work that cannot be made up, hurting the student's grade in the class. Likewise, students should be prepared to provide documentation for participation in University-approved activities, as well as for career-related interviews, when requested by the instructor. Instructors also should provide, within reason, the opportunity to make up work for students who miss classes for other legitimate but unavoidable reasons. Legitimate, unavoidable reasons are those such as illness, injury, military service, family emergency, or religious observance. Again, it should be recognized that not all work can be "made-up" and that absences can affect student performance in a class. [...] Instructors can determine when irregular attendance negatively affects a student's scholastic achievement, and thus grade, in the course, even to the point of failure. If class absence constitutes a danger to the student's scholastic attainment, the instructor should make this fact known to the student. The student may appeal this decision to the head of the department in which the course is offered.

If an evaluative event will be missed due to an unavoidable absence, the student should contact the instructor as soon as the unavoidable absence is known to discuss ways to make up the work. **An instructor might not consider an unavoidable absence legitimate if the student does not contact the instructor before the evaluative event.** Students will be held responsible for using only legitimate, unavoidable reasons for requesting a make-up in the event of a missed class or evaluative event. (Conflicts with non-final examinations are covered the Policy 44-35.) **Requests for missing class or an evaluative event due to reasons that are based on false claims may be considered violations of the policy on Academic Integrity (Policy 49-20).**

If a student becomes ill and needs to be away from class for an extended period of time, the student should contact the instructor so that a plan can be made to catch up with missed work.

In the event that the instructor of this class is unable to teach in person, due to illness or need to quarantine, classes will be met by a temporary instructor, delivered remotely and synchronously (via Zoom), or addressed through asynchronous assignments and activities. If classes are remote and synchronous, students can bring their own devices to the classroom during the scheduled class time to connect to class from that location.

### **Late Work**

Late work is not accepted in this course. (In the *rare* cases where the instructor deems it appropriate to accept a late assignment, a *minimum* penalty of 10% will be assessed for each day past the assignment deadline.) **Late online Quizzes will NOT be accepted and will receive a grade of 0. Any missed in-class assessments will receive a grade of 0 and no make-ups will be given** except for:

- Participation in an officially documented, university related activity (official documentation must be presented to instructor as soon as the activity is known to the student and **no less than 14 days in advance**)
- A grave personal illness or emergency, with instructor notified in advance of the assessment.

### **Academic Integrity**

Academic integrity is the pursuit of scholarly activity in an open, honest and responsible manner. Academic integrity is a basic guiding principle for all academic activity at The Pennsylvania State University, and all members of the University community are expected to act in accordance with this principle. Consistent with this expectation, the University's Code of Conduct states that all students should act with personal integrity, respect other students' dignity, rights and property, and help create and maintain an environment in which all can succeed through the

fruits of their efforts. Academic integrity includes a commitment by all members of the University community not to engage in or tolerate acts of falsification, misrepresentation or deception. Such acts of dishonesty violate the ethical principles of the University community and compromise the worth of work completed by others.

**Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated in this course.** Dishonesty includes (but is not limited to) plagiarizing, fabricating information, facilitating acts of academic dishonesty by others, having unauthorized possession of examinations, submitting work of another person or work previously used without informing the instructor, or tampering with the academic work of other students. **Any idea which is not a student's own, whether paraphrased or quoted verbatim must give credit to the source from which it originated.** Should you have any questions as to what is acceptable, please speak to the instructor. **Suspected violations of academic integrity will be reported to the appropriate university authorities.**

## Academic Adjustments

Penn State welcomes students with disabilities into the University's educational programs. Every Penn State campus has an office for students with disabilities. Student Disability Resources (SDR) website provides [contact information for every Penn State campus](#). For further information, please visit the [Student Disability Resources website](#).

In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, you must contact the appropriate disability services office at the campus where you are officially enrolled, participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation: [See documentation guidelines](#). If the documentation supports your request for reasonable accommodations, your campus disability services office will provide you with an accommodation letter. Please share this letter with your instructors and discuss the accommodations with them as early as possible. You must follow this process for every semester that you request accommodations.

## Educational Equity and Reporting Bias

Penn State takes great pride to foster a diverse and inclusive environment for students, faculty, and staff. Acts of intolerance, discrimination, or harassment due to age, ancestry, color, disability, gender, gender identity, national origin, race, religious belief, sexual orientation, or veteran status are not tolerated and can be reported through Educational Equity via the [Report Bias webpage](#).

## Counseling and Psychological Services

Many students at Penn State face personal challenges or have psychological needs that may interfere with their academic progress, social development, or emotional wellbeing. The university offers a variety of confidential services to help you through difficult times, including individual and group counseling, crisis intervention, consultations, online chats, and mental health screenings. These services are provided by staff who welcome all students and embrace a philosophy respectful of clients' cultural and religious backgrounds, and sensitive to differences in race, ability, gender identity and sexual orientation.

[Counseling and Psychological Services at University Park \(CAPS\)](#): 814-863-0395

[Counseling and Psychological Services at Commonwealth Campuses](#)

Penn State Crisis Line (24 hours/7 days/week): 877-229-6400

Crisis Text Line (24 hours/7 days/week): Text LIONS to 741741

**Note on course content:** It is likely we will read about and discuss sensitive topics in this course. Literary and artistic works can often present us with beauty, and knowledge of history and exposure to diverse ideas can be illuminating. But the experience of widening our perspective can also be difficult and uncomfortable. It is possible that exposure to unfamiliar materials could potentially trigger a traumatic response. Please prepare yourselves for reading assignments/film screenings and class meetings accordingly (which might include skimming the preparation beforehand, or checking-in with the instructor). In order to fully meet the goals of this course, I do not typically provide content warnings for individual texts/assignments. Such warnings often condition our readings of texts,

and I am not qualified to determine what content might be triggering. That said, I will do my best to proceed with common sense and advise students of particularly sensitive content. In all course interactions, it is expected that everyone (including myself) maintains an environment of respect, especially in discussions on potentially delicate topics. If you have any questions or concerns about this policy, please send an email request to meet with me during the first week of the semester.

### Tentative Course Calendar

<b>WEEK 1: The Land They Left</b>		
<b>Date</b>	<b>In Class</b>	<b>Preparation</b>
T Jan 10	Introductions to course	---
R Jan 12	Early Explorers	<i>La Storia</i> : Chapters 1-2
<b>WEEK 2: The Southern Question</b>		
T Jan 17	Risorgimento	<i>La Storia</i> : Chapter 3 <b>Fiction</b> : Ventura (C)
R Jan 19	The Southern Exodus	<i>La Storia</i> : Chapters 4-5
<b>WEEK 3: Early Immigrants</b>		
T Jan 24	Leaving Home	<i>La Storia</i> : Chapters 6 (to p.78) & 7 <b>Oral History</b> : Gallati
R Jan 26	Discussion of <i>The Golden Door</i>	<i>La Storia</i> : Chapter 8 <b>Film</b> : <i>The Golden Door</i> (C) <b>Poem</b> : "Lazarus" (C)
<b>**Quiz #1 (<i>La Storia</i> 1-8, Ventura, <i>Golden Door</i>) available on Canvas 1/26 – 2/2**</b>		
<b>WEEK 4: Little Italy &amp; Prejudice</b>		
T Jan 31	"The Other Half"; Enclaves and Beyond	<i>La Storia</i> : Chapter 9 & 11 <b>Oral History</b> : Balestreire & Dozzi <b>Photos</b> : <i>How the Other Half Lives</i> , Riis.
R Feb 2	New Orleans	<i>La Storia</i> : Chapter 13
<b>WEEK 5: America Consumes, Immigrant Novel</b>		
T Feb 7	Discussion of <i>Christ in Concrete</i>	<b>Fiction</b> : <i>Christ in Concrete</i>
R Feb 9	Discussion of <i>Christ in Concrete</i>	Review <i>Christ in Concrete</i>
<b>**Quiz #2 (<i>La Storia</i> 9, 11, &amp; 13; <i>Christ in Concrete</i>) available on Canvas 2/9 – 2/16**</b>		
<b>WEEK 6: Labor and Politics</b>		
T Feb 14	Oral History Committee Discussion Italians and the Unions	<u>Committee must be ready to propose project guidelines</u> <i>La Storia</i> : Chapters 16 & 17
R Feb 16	Sacco & Vanzetti	<b>Painting</b> : Guthrie and Shahn (C) <b>Poetry</b> : Millay, Corso (C) <b>Internet Search</b> : Find artistic pieces inspired by Sacco and Vanzetti
<b>WEEK 7: End of Restriction and WWII</b>		
T Feb 21	Whitening of Italian America	<i>La Storia</i> : Chapter 19
R Feb 23	Discussion of <i>Marty</i>	<b>Film</b> : <i>Marty</i> (C)
<b>WEEK 8: Ethnic Consciousness and 2<sup>nd</sup> Wave</b>		
T Feb 28	1960s Revival	<b>Fiction</b> : Excerpts from Puzo & Barolini (C) <b>Oral History</b> : Castelli
R Mar 2	Organized Crime and The "Invented Tradition"	<i>La Storia</i> : Chapters 15 & 20
<b>**Quiz #3 (<i>La Storia</i> 15-17/19-20, Puzo, Barolini, Millay, Shahn, Guthrie, Corso, <i>Marty</i>) available 3/2-3/16**</b>		
<b>Spring Break!</b>		

<b>WEEK 9: "I believe in America"</b>		
T Mar 14	Discussion of <i>The Godfather</i>	<b>Film:</b> <i>The Godfather</i> (C)
R Mar 16	Discussion of <i>The Godfather</i>	<b>Essay:</b> "The Crooked Ladder," Gladwell (C)
<b>WEEK 10: Italian American Stereotypes</b>		
T Mar 21	Screening of <i>Sopranos</i> , "College"	---
R Mar 23	Discussion of <i>Sopranos</i>	<b>Essay:</b> "The Sopranos and the American Dream," Yacowar
<b>WEEK 11: Is Italian Cuisine Italian American?</b>		
<b>Date</b>	<b>In-Class</b>	<b>Preparation</b>
T Mar 28	Discussion of <i>Big Night</i>	<b>Film:</b> <i>Big Night</i>
R Mar 30	Discussion of <i>Big Night</i> In-class Oral History Discussion / Essay Peer Workshop	TBA
<b>**Essay Due via Canvas Friday 3/31 by 11:59pm**</b>		
<b>WEEK 12: Race, Ethnicity, Gender</b>		
T Apr 4	Multiple ethnicities	<b>Non-fiction:</b> <i>The Skin Between Us</i> , Ragusa ©
R Apr 6	Italian American 2 <sup>nd</sup> , 3 <sup>rd</sup> generations and beyond	<i>La Storia</i> : Chapters 27 & Epilogue
<b>**Quiz #4 (Godfather, Yacowar, Gladwell, Ragusa, Big Night, Sopranos) 4/6-4/13**</b>		
<b>WEEK 13: Poetics of Ethnicity</b>		
T Apr 11	Defining It Am Poetry Old Voices	<b>Essay:</b> "What is Italian American Poetry?," Gioia (C) <b>Poetry:</b> Ciardi, Ferlinghetti
R Apr 13	New Voices	<b>Poetry:</b> Covino, Addonizio, Pelizzon
<b>WEEK 14: Our Own Histories</b>		
T Apr 18	Reality Television and Ethnic Stereotype Possible In-Class Oral History Workshop	<b>Essay:</b> Troyani
R Apr 20	Twilight of Ethnicity?	TBA
<b>WEEK 15: New Directions</b>		
T Apr 25	Contemporary Comparisons; Concluding Discussion	---
R Apr 27	In-Class Oral History Mini-Analysis	---
<b>**Quiz #5 (La Storia 27 &amp; Epilogue, Gioia, Week 13 poetry, Troyani) available 4/21-5/1**</b>		

Readings or assignments in the "Preparation" column are to be complete before the class meeting.

The instructor may change this provisional schedule as needed. Appropriate notice will be given if changes are made.