

SENATE RESOLUTION

8650

By Senator Fortunato

1 WHEREAS, In 1890, the Police Chief for the city of New Orleans
2 was murdered and reportedly whispered to witnesses a racial slur
3 against Italians as the culprits, leading to the mass arrest of
4 people of Italian descent; and

5 WHEREAS, 19 of the Americans of Italian descent arrested were
6 eventually indicted, nine of whom were put on trial, six being
7 acquitted and three declared mistrials, all were placed back in
8 prison on other manufactured charges; and

9 WHEREAS, After the acquittals, many New Orleans residents were
10 outraged by the verdicts, a mob gathered outside the parish prison,
11 numbering in the thousands as anti-Italian sentiment was stirred by
12 assertions of prominent figures in the city that the trials were
13 corrupted by the mafia; and

14 WHEREAS, On March 14, 1891, a day after the trial, 11 Americans
15 of Italian descent were lynched over their alleged involvement in the
16 death of the city's police chief. Their bodies were indignantly
17 mutilated and displayed for the public to see; and

18 WHEREAS, Historical accounts implicated New Orleans' political
19 leadership as being complicit in these crimes, and reports in the
20 national news characterized the lynchings as an act of just vengeance
21 rather than racially motivated violence; and

22 WHEREAS, These crimes were committed during a period of American
23 history marked by a rising tide of anti-Italian sentiment, stoked by

1 economic fears and physical differences of their darker Mediterranean
2 skin color; and

3 WHEREAS, Although the United States government paid \$25,000 in
4 reparations to the families a year following the lynching, no one has
5 ever been brought to justice; and

6 WHEREAS, The Sons and Daughters of Italy worked to gain formal
7 recognition of this atrocity, urging the city of New Orleans to take
8 responsibility; and

9 WHEREAS, The mayor of New Orleans issued a formal Proclamation of
10 Apology in April 2019, after remaining silent for 130 years for the
11 city's complicity in one of the largest lynchings in American
12 history; and

13 WHEREAS, The United States congress declared the first Italian-
14 American heritage and culture month in October 1989, coinciding with
15 the celebration of Columbus day, authorizing and requesting the
16 President of the United States to issue a proclamation calling upon
17 the people of our great nation to observe the month with appropriate
18 ceremonies and activities;

19 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, That the Washington State Senate
20 recognize the numerous contributions of Americans of Italian descent
21 to the cultural and economic landscape of Washington and the entire
22 country and join in celebration of Italian Heritage month in October;
23 and

24 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Washington State Senate recommit
25 itself to shining a light on forgotten injustices and applaud the
26 city of New Orleans for righting this historical wrong perpetrated on
27 this group of immigrants who silently endured decades of
28 discrimination and oppression.

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