

**OLLI Lecture**  
**7/16/13**  
**“The Risorgimento”**

**Chinese paper currency**

My topic today is the “Risorgimento;” that means resurgence in Italian. It’s a term that refers to a specific period in Italian history; the mid-nineteenth century. You might well ask what happened between the glorious Renaissance and the Victorian era? The answer is “not much” except for Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) who was instrumental in bringing down the medieval universe. Then there was also:

- Michelangelo Caravaggio (1571-1610), the great Baroque artist.
- Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741) whose musical compositions are heard every day on WETA.
- Domenico Scarlotti (1685-1757) who rivals Vivaldi on the play charts.
- And Giovanni Tiepolo (1696-1770) whose artistry dominates palace ceilings throughout southern Europe.

*Risorgimento* is as elusive a term as “Renaissance.” What was resurging in Italy in the mid nineteenth century that hadn’t been vital before? One thing was the global economy. In the first half of the second millennium AD, Italy had prospered from its commanding position as the Mediterranean hub of a great trading network that connected Europe to East Asia via the Arab world. The intrusion of the Ottoman Turks into the midst of this well-established commercial highway diminished the role and wealth of the Italian city-states. So did the activities of one of its sons, Christopher Columbus, a Genoese navigator. Then there was the Portuguese sailor, Vasco da Gama (1469-1524), who in 1498 managed to find his way into the Indian Ocean, thereby bypassing Turkish control of the ancient Euro-Asian trading routes. None of this boded well for merchant capitalists of Renaissance Italy.

As I mentioned last time, the increasingly powerful French monarchy sent armies into Italy in 1494. Not long thereafter the increasingly powerful Spanish monarchy did the same. In between these two

emerging super powers were the Italian states ruled by the papacy. So untenable had that position become that in 1527 troops under the control of the Charles V (1500-1556) of Spain sacked Rome and imprisoned Pope Clement VI I (p. 1523-1534), a Medici, in the Castel Sant-Angelo near the Vatican.

Papal power, once so formidable, had now become a handball in the game of national politics. When in 1648 representatives of the European powers gathered at Westphalia, Germany, to conclude 30 years of fighting between Catholics and Protestants the papacy wasn't even invited to attend. Thus, the modern state system emerged.

What about the Italians? They were increasingly becoming a sideshow. Spaniards and their relatives dominated the South; the French and the Hapsburgs controlled much of the north. Even the august and beautiful Venetian Republic slipped into obscurity and, of course, the Papal States (caught in the middle of all of this) were marginalized. The Turkish tide receded in the seventeenth century and the truly Great Powers played out their competition on the waters of the Atlantic and the shores of the Americas.

Then came a Corsican named Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821), who always spoke French with a slight Italian accent. Partly because of the French monarchy's costly support of American independence from Great Britain, King Louis XVI was overthrown in 1789 and less than 10 years later Bonaparte seized power in that great state. One of Napoleon's first acts was to invade Italy as he sought to drive the Hapsburgs (the Austrians) out of the region which they had dominated since the beginning of the eighteenth century. Of course, there was no Italy. The Hapsburg diplomat, Klemens von Metternich (1773-1859) referred to Italy as "merely a geographic expression." Bonaparte succeeded briefly and established several Italian jurisdictions, but his ultimate defeat returned Austrian power to the North; the Spanish Bourbons to the South; and the Pope in between.

Many Italians didn't like this state of affairs at all and in the early nineteenth century there were many uprisings against it; but the Austrian Hapsburgs proved especially adept at putting them down. Some of you, I'm sure, have watched the beautiful television show from Vienna on New Year's Day, featuring Strauss waltzes and always concluding with the "Radetzky March," a musical celebration of Austrian Field Marshall Radetzky's great triumph over Italian insurgents at Custoza in 1848. To this day it is accompanied by much hand-clapping and foot stomping by the Viennese audience.

To explain the *Risorgimento* I need to introduce you to a cast of characters as one might read a handbill at an Italian opera. There's Prince Eugene of Savoy (1663-1736). The Germans called him "Prinz Eugen" and named a battle cruiser after him. He was the Duke of Marlborough's sidekick in the War of Spanish Succession (1701-1713) and in the peace conference that followed its conclusion the Prince was rewarded with jurisdiction over a small state that bordered between France and its Italian neighbors. In time it became Piedmont/Sardinia with its capital at Turin (where they now manufacture Fiats).

Further east was what had once been the Republic of Genoa, a maritime power that Napoleon had conquered early in his career. It was there during the French occupation that Giuseppe Mazzini (1805-1872) was born. He was a passionate believer in the idea of a united Italy, formed as a republic, and governed under a constitution. He was a teacher, a journalist, and a revolutionary who led his first armed revolt against the Austrian Hapsburgs in 1831. Mazzini was a brilliant writer, the founder of a movement called "Young Italy," but not a particularly good revolutionary. He spent much of his life in exile in Switzerland, France, and England.

A far more formidable Italian nationalist was Giuseppe Garibaldi (1807-1882) whose revolutionary career cannot be summarized in the time allotted to us. Let me try, however. He was born in Nice, which was then and is now part of France. Garibaldi joined up with Mazzini's "Young Italy" movement and participated in his abortive

uprising against the Austrians in 1831. When it failed, he sailed to Latin America and took part in revolutionary movements in Brazil and Uruguay that also failed. Then came the Revolutions of 1848 in Europe and Garibaldi commanded a ship to join those who were taking to the streets to drive out the Austrians of northern Italy.

They (Mazzini, Garibaldi, and others) briefly succeeded and even managed to force Pope Leo IX to flee the Vatican and in his place established a Roman Republic. In their moment of victory, however, French troops arrived to “restore order” and thanks to their bayonets Mazzini and Garibaldi were forced to escape the city. In the process, Garibaldi lost his beloved wife.

As you may recall, revolutions swept across Europe in 1848, forcing monarchs into exile, driving out ministers (Metternich among them), but when the turmoil subsided nothing much had changed. The Hohenzollerns still ran Prussia; the Hapsburgs were back in power in Vienna; and that dynasty still controlled most of northern Italy. The one big change is that France was once again ruled by a Bonaparte. This time by the nephew of the first Napoleon who came to style himself Emperor Napoleon III (1808-1873).

He had great plans for France. While he ruled modern day Paris was transformed into its current beauty; French rule was extended into Indo-China and Africa; work on the Suez Canal was begun; and the French joined their ancient rivals, the English, in attacking Russia during the Crimean War (1854-1856). Joining them in the Crimea War was a small contingent of Italian troops from the little kingdom of Piedmont/Sardinia. Their presence on the Russian battlefield was a curiosity to the Allies, but not to the Prime Minister of Piedmont, Camillo di Cavour (1810-1861) who had sent those Italian soldiers to the Black Sea to win a place at the conference table that would conclude the war. His intention was to force the Austrians to withdraw from northern Italy and replace them with the sovereignty of the king he served, Victor Immanuel II (1820-1878)

At first, Cavour was unsuccessful in making his case, but at the peace conference's conclusion Napoleon III agreed to meet him in secret to discuss what might be done about the Austrian position in northern Italy. They met at the baths at Plombières in France and struck a bargain. France would join Piedmont in an attempt to drive the Austrians out of Lombardy and in return would acquire Piedmontese territory in Nice and Savoy. The result was a war that initially pitted the Piedmontese army against the Austrians, but in April, 1859, the French poured across the Alps and inflicted huge losses on the Austrians that summer at Magenta and Solferino. But then French intelligence detected Prussian army movements toward the French border, so in July 1859 Napoleon negotiated a peace treaty with the Austrians that left them in control of Venice and obliged the Austrians to relinquish sovereignty over Lombardy to the Piedmont monarchy.

This is where Garibaldi returns to the scene. Unhappy with Cavour's discreet diplomacy, he and about 1,000 of his followers captured a ship at Genoa and sailed to Sicily where in a matter of weeks they overthrew the control of the island from the Bourbon government of Naples. Then to Cavour's astonishment, Garibaldi crossed the Messina Straights and invaded the Kingdom of Naples itself, promptly overthrowing that unpopular regime and replacing it with a republic. Garibaldi was now master of southern Italy and directed his attention to the Papal States, which since 1859 separated the Piedmontese-controlled north from his insurrectionary south. In between was not only the Pope himself but a French military garrison which had arrived in 1849 to rescue the Pope from Mazzini and Garibaldi's Roman Republic of 1849.

Civil war loomed between north and south at about the same time that it engulfed the United States. Cavour as Piedmont's prime minister intervened with his king's permission. The Piedmontese army invaded the Papal States and marched south to meet Garibaldi's forces. The two sides met at Teano (north of Naples) on October 26, 1860. Garibaldi doffed his hat, shook Victor Emmanuel's hand, and

proclaimed him to be Victor Emmanuel II, King of Italy. In a scene not unlike those of Italian opera, the nation state of Italy was born.