

ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION No. 159

STATE OF NEW JERSEY 222nd LEGISLATURE

INTRODUCED OCTOBER 19, 2026

Sponsored by:

Assemblywoman DAWN FANTASIA

District 24 (Morris, Sussex and Warren)

Assemblyman CHRISTOPHER P. DEPHILLIPS

District 40 (Bergen, Essex and Passaic)

Co-Sponsored by:

Assemblymen Sauickie, DiMaio, Barlas, Inganamort, Auth, McGuckin,

Assemblywoman Flynn, Assemblymen Kanitra and Azzariti Jr.

SYNOPSIS

Acknowledges historical lynchings of Sicilians in New Orleans and recognizes Italian-American Heritage Month.

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT

As introduced.



(Sponsorship Updated As Of: 10/19/2026)

1 **AN ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION** acknowledging the historical
2 lynchings of Sicilians in New Orleans and recognizing Italian-
3 American Heritage Month.
4
5 **WHEREAS**, Considered the largest mass lynching in the American
6 South, 11 Italians were lynched in New Orleans on March 14, 1891,
7 taking place just one day after nine of the men were acquitted in a
8 trial for the murder of the New Orleans police chief David
9 Hennessey; and
10 **WHEREAS**, These men were working-class immigrants employed as
11 dockworkers, cobblers, fruit vendors, and tinsmiths, and were
12 ordinary immigrants who arrived in the United States to build a
13 better life for themselves and their families; and
14 **WHEREAS**, Salacious newspaper accounts vilified the acquitted men as
15 monsters worthy of mob violence, echoing the mainstream belief
16 that Italians were savages; and
17 **WHEREAS**, It was during this hostile climate that “mafia” was
18 introduced into American English, a term that remains negatively
19 associated with Italians and Italian-Americans to this day; and
20 **WHEREAS**, The Italian Consul in New Orleans, Pasquale Corte,
21 understood the blood of innocents tainted American culture and
22 contacted both the Louisiana governor and the New Orleans mayor
23 asking for law enforcement to prevent mob violence against the
24 Italian men, however both requests were declined; and
25 **WHEREAS**, Upon Mr. Corte’s urging, Italy demanded the United
26 States to arrest and prosecute the mob leaders and provide
27 compensation to the victims’ families; and
28 **WHEREAS**, The administration of President Benjamin Harrison
29 initially refused Italy’s demands, citing the actions as a domestic
30 matter that did not pertain to Italy; and
31 **WHEREAS**, However, as a man noted for his personal integrity and
32 decency, President Harrison was troubled by the incident, knew that
33 the lynching was morally wrong and understood that Italians faced
34 bigotry, institutionalized discrimination, and mob violence; and
35 **WHEREAS**, President Harrison wanted to leave a legacy of
36 rehabilitating United States foreign policy, especially after the
37 Mexican-American War and the Civil War had tarnished American
38 prestige in the world, and to rectify the situation in an effort to
39 show the world a different side of America; and
40 **WHEREAS**, President Harrison agreed to pay \$25,000 to the families of
41 the murdered men, valued at approximately \$900,000 today, and
42 used his presidential office to acknowledge the contributions of
43 Italians and Italian-Americans to the United States; and
44 **WHEREAS**, President Harrison’s acknowledgment of Italians and
45 Italian-Americans marked the first time an American president
46 would officially affirm the rightful place of Italians in the fabric of
47 American life; and

1 **WHEREAS**, After the Civil War, Italy announced its gift of a statue of
2 Christopher Columbus to the United States, which would be
3 delivered to New York City; and

4 **WHEREAS**, President Harrison’s intention for a one-time celebration of
5 Columbus Day evolved into recognition of a national holiday after
6 popular acclamation for an annual observance; and

7 **WHEREAS**, In 2019, New Orleans Mayor LaToya Cantrell issued an
8 official Proclamation of Apology to the Italian-American
9 community, stating that, “what happened to those 11 Italians, it was
10 wrong, and the city owes them and their descendants a formal
11 apology...At this late date, we cannot give justice. But we can be
12 intentional and deliberate about what we do going forward”; and

13 **WHEREAS**, Following its unanimous passage by both houses of the
14 Legislature, Governor Jon Corzine signed AJR-97 in 2009, a
15 bipartisan joint resolution designating October of each year as
16 Italian-American Heritage Month; and

17 **WHEREAS**, The history of America and the State of New Jersey have
18 been significantly influenced by the rich heritage of Italy, which
19 includes the classical civilization of Rome, the fine arts of the
20 Renaissance, the scientific and artistic genius of Leonardo da Vinci,
21 the literary works of Dante and Petrarch, the operas of Verdi and
22 Puccini, and many other contributions that have enriched
23 civilization; and

24 **WHEREAS**, Over 5.4 million Italians emigrated to the United States
25 between the years 1820 and 1991; and

26 **WHEREAS**, Approximately 1.5 million New Jerseyans, or about 18
27 percent of the State population, are of Italian descent; and

28 **WHEREAS**, It is appropriate to encourage American history classes in
29 this State to highlight the contributions of Italian-Americans
30 throughout American history; and

31 **WHEREAS**, It is altogether fitting and proper to acknowledge and
32 condemn the historical lynchings of Italian-Americans and to
33 recognize the significant accomplishments and contributions of the
34 Italian-American community; now, therefore,

35
36 **BE IT RESOLVED** *by the General Assembly of the State of New*
37 *Jersey:*

38
39 1. This House acknowledges and condemns the historical
40 lynchings of Italian-Americans.

41
42 2. This House recognizes October of every year as Italian-
43 American Heritage Month to honor the significant accomplishments
44 and contributions of Italian-Americans and to encourage American
45 history classes throughout the State to discuss and examine the
46 contributions of Italian-Americans to the history of this country.

1 3. Copies of this resolution, as filed with the Secretary of State,
2 shall be transmitted by the Clerk of the General Assembly to the
3 Governor of this State, the Mayor of New Orleans, and the Mayor
4 of New York City.

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6
7 STATEMENT
8

9 This House acknowledges the historical lynchings of Sicilians in
10 New Orleans and recognizes Italian-American Heritage Month in
11 New Jersey.

12 Considered the largest mass lynching in the American South, 11
13 Italians were lynched in New Orleans on March 14, 1891, taking
14 place just one day after nine of the men were acquitted in a trial for
15 the murder of the New Orleans police chief David Hennessy. These
16 men were working-class immigrants employed as dockworkers,
17 cobblers, fruit vendors, and tinsmiths, and were ordinary
18 immigrants who arrived in the United States to build a better life for
19 themselves and their families. Salacious newspaper accounts
20 vilified the acquitted men as monsters worthy of mob violence,
21 echoing the mainstream belief that Italians were savages. It was
22 during this hostile climate that “mafia” was introduced into
23 American English, a term that remains associated with Italians and
24 Italian-Americans to this day.

25 The Italian Consul in New Orleans, Pasquale Corte, understood
26 the blood of innocents tainted American culture and contacted both
27 the Louisiana governor and the New Orleans mayor asking for law
28 enforcement to prevent mob violence against the Italian men,
29 however both requests were declined. Upon Mr. Corte’s urging,
30 Italy demanded the United States to arrest and prosecute the mob
31 leaders and provide compensation to the victims’ families. The
32 administration of President Benjamin Harrison initially refused
33 Italy’s demands, citing the actions as a domestic matter that did not
34 pertain to Italy. However, as a man noted for his personal integrity
35 and decency, President Harrison was troubled by the incident, knew
36 that the lynching was morally wrong and understood that Italians
37 faced bigotry, institutionalized discrimination, and mob violence.
38 He wanted to leave a legacy of rehabilitating United States foreign
39 policy, especially after the Mexican-American War and the Civil
40 War had tarnished American prestige in the world, and to rectify the
41 situation in an effort to show the world a different side of America.

42 President Harrison agreed to pay \$25,000 to the families of the
43 murdered men, valued at approximately \$900,000 today, and used
44 his presidential office to acknowledge the contributions of Italians
45 and Italian-Americans to the United States. His acknowledgment of
46 Italians and Italian-Americans marked the first time an American
47 president would officially affirm the rightful place of Italians in the
48 fabric of American life. Italy, after the Civil War, announced its

1 gift of a statue of Christopher Columbus to the United States, which
2 would be delivered to New York. President Harrison's intention for
3 a one-time celebration of Columbus Day evolved into recognition
4 of a national holiday after popular acclamation for an annual
5 observance.

6 In 2019, New Orleans Mayor LaToya Cantrell issued an official
7 Proclamation of Apology to the Italian-American community,
8 stating: "What happened to those 11 Italians, it was wrong, and the
9 city owes them and their descendants a formal apology...At this late
10 date, we cannot give justice. But we can be intentional and
11 deliberate about what we do going forward."

12 Over 5.4 million Italians emigrated to the United States between
13 the years 1820 and 1991. The history of America and the State of
14 New Jersey have been significantly influenced by the rich heritage
15 of Italy. Approximately 1.5 million New Jerseyans, or about 18
16 percent of the State population, are of Italian descent. It is
17 appropriate to encourage American history classes in this State to
18 highlight the contributions of Italian-Americans throughout
19 American history. It is fitting and proper to acknowledge and
20 condemn the historical lynchings of Italian-Americans and to
21 recognize the significant accomplishments and contributions of the
22 Italian-American community.