

# US of A

## The Bicentennial and Our Ethnic Origins

By Joseph Antinoro-Polizzi

One phrase that has been used again and again during our Bicentennial year is "ethnic origins." The term means, of course, the various racial, continental, national and cultural backgrounds of those people we call Americans.

As a matter of fact, observers of the American scene have been anticipating for some years that there would be a resurgence of ethnic identifications in some form in the later decades of the twentieth century. Some expected that it would be expressed in generational terms ("the grandson would wish to remember what the grandfather or father had wished to forget.") Others envisioned it as an additional manifestation of the "simmering" (or ultimate "evaporation") of the "melting pot." Still others conceived of it in terms of an impending political power struggle. Undoubtedly, many events and developments in the 'fifties and 'sixties — an era of especially accelerated social and cultural change and, perhaps, of momentous national maturation — have provided incentives ranging from gentle encouragements to impelling forces for the eventual crystallization, refinement, and direction of movements of "ethnic pride." The "Black is beautiful" movement suggested the subsequent matters. "Polish is

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beautiful," "German is beautiful," etc.

Whatever may be thought of these predictions of ethnic revival, the Bicentennial year certainly seems to have paid very particular attention to things ethnic.

The coincidence of recent historical forces and the celebration of our nation's 200th birthday has been fortunate. It has given life and substance, and often generous support to ethnic-historical scholarship: the publication of special monographs, the preparation of exhibits on local and national levels, and the establishment of permanent museums, institutes and academies focussing on ethnicity. The well-documented accounts that have begun to emerge from heretofore neglected, ignored and overshadowed sources of American ethnic history, and from the wide and deep exploration of specific ethnic and cultural experiences, have demonstrated one thing: America was indeed conceived, built, and defended, and continues today to be sustained, by the efforts

of many people who still retain much of their ethnic identity: white Europeans, black Africans, Amerindians, Orientals.

Certainly America was not the creation solely of a limited, selected few leading men of a single heritage (or as one scholar has put it "of one British-ethnic village"). Indeed, according to one ethnic specialist, Professor Elio Casparetti, the American Revolution itself was the first international effort of great magnitude to secure the benefits of liberty and freedom!

For countless persons, especially those of the "second generation" who have had the most vivid feelings of alienation and the most vivid experiences of social resistance and hostility, the new documentation will help to diminish what they felt was a discrepancy or dislocation between their ethnic heritage and the "usual" image of American life. No longer need they endure the anguish and agony of an unwarranted and unmerited position of what sociologists used to call "marginality."

The Bicentennial will not be remembered solely for making ethnicity something "fashionable." Although, admittedly, that alone would constitute an enormous advance on the American view of ethnicity since the Centennial Year a century ago. It will also be remembered and cherished for having provided the larger occasion for making more evident the positive equivalence of "being ethnic" and "being American."

Moreover, if the ideas and materials now being produced are projected imaginatively before the public eye and incorporated generously into the educational structure — from the elementary level through the university level — future generations of Americans will be enriched and edified.

The social historian, Max Lerner, once wrote that "America has polarized fields of meaning" or more simply, that America is best understood as being at the same moment "both 'this' and 'that.'" Happily, therefore, the ethnic renaissance has added the long-awaited corrective emphasis to an otherwise lopsided conception of American meaning and experience.

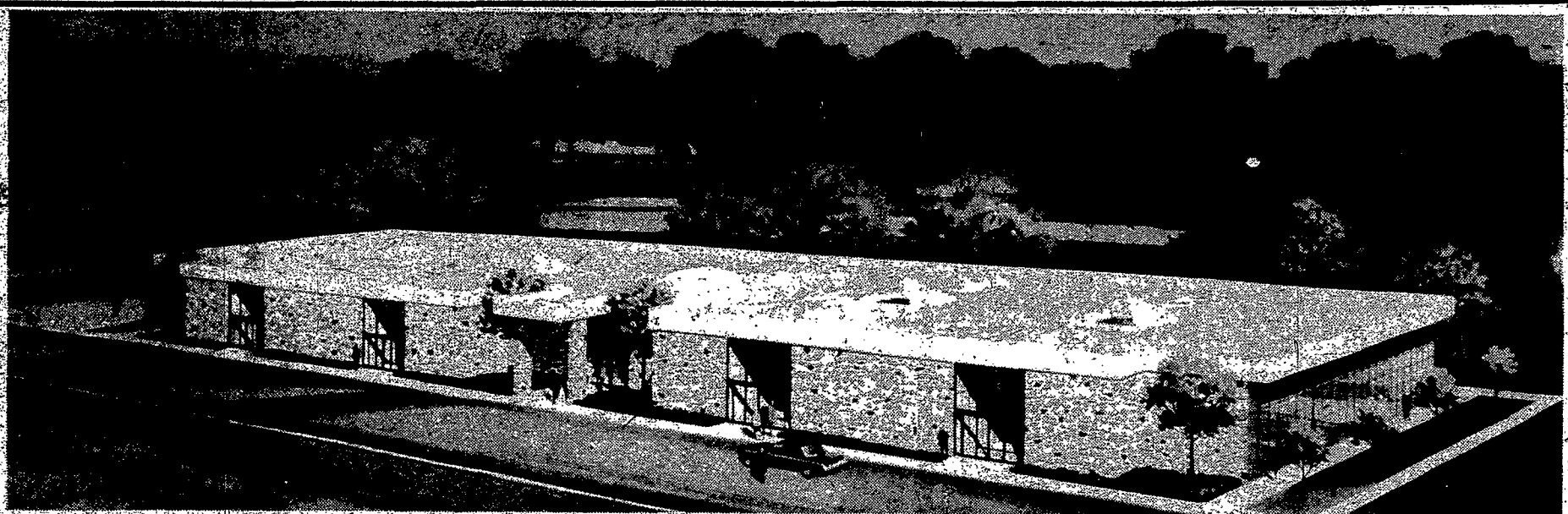
As we near the close of this Bicentennial year, we can be reasonably confident that America will be able to enter into her third century as the still viable Great Experiment, with each constituent

cultural heritage more fully recognized as having contributed substantially to the quality of American consciousness and American civilization.

Among other things, it will be learned that the ethnic groups that make up the United States have contributed far more to our civilization than beer, scotch and cognac; than Swiss cheese, chow mein, soul-food and pizza. The motto of our third century may well turn out to be "Faith in America and Pride in Ethnic Heritage." Or perhaps some of us might prefer Dennis Weaver's beautiful proposal — "Let's think of America and her many groups as a special 'Rainbow.'"

### ADVENT SERVICES

**Seneca Falls.** — A Eucharistic Day in preparation for the season of Advent will be held at St. Patrick's Roman Catholic Church here, Nov. 28, from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. Opening services at 2 p.m. will consist of Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament and recitation of the Rosary. The Blessed Sacrament will remain exposed for private adoration throughout the afternoon. Closing services commencing at 4:30 p.m. will consist of Advent readings, homily, and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.



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