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## **Sicilians and others**

by Jerre Mangione

*To the Editors:*

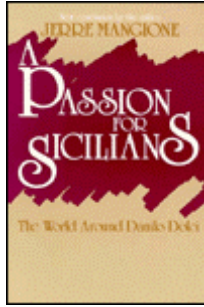
Mr. Barzini's article "The Sicilians" (NYR, October 9) struck me as excessively shallow and misleading. It gave me the impression that the writer is more concerned with being clever than with being accurate. Particularly offensive is the portrait he presents of Danilo Dolci, which is so distorted as to smack of slander. It is certainly a gross misrepresentation to say of Dolci that he is "not a social reformer" but "an unconscious and extremely able manipulator of publicity." To make such a statement is to deny the impressive and solid work that Danilo Dolci and his collaborators have gradually accomplished in Western Sicily during the past fifteen years.

Part of that work consists of Dolci's aggressive crusade against the Sicilian Mafia. Although Mr. Barzini discusses the Mafia at some length, he pays no attention to Dolci's anti-Mafia activities, which culminated in his arrest, on charges of "criminal libel," for exposing the close connections between a prominent Christian Democrat senator and a number of well-known mafiosi. It is difficult to understand how Mr. Barzini could have ignored the long and unjust trial that ensued (1965-67) since nearly half of *The Man Who Plays Alone* (the book that Mr. Barzini was purportedly reviewing) is devoted to the subject.

By saying nothing of the trial, in which Dolci and his associate Franco Alasia were found guilty, the reviewer, consciously or unconsciously, was playing the game of the Christian Democrats who used every possible technique to keep the public in the dark about its proceedings, even to the extent of holding its sessions at odd and unexpected hours, so as to discourage newspaper coverage. It seems to me that Mr. Barzini also plays the game of the political establishment when he tries to diminish Dolci's significance by describing him as "a mad non Catholic saint of today." That statement is so patently false as to make me question the validity of all the other judgments expressed in the article.

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P.S. Dolci and Alasia appealed the verdict of the court, which imposed a suspended jail sentence, and heavy fines. A new trial is expected shortly.



**A Passion for Sicilians: The World around Danilo Dolci**

[Jerre Mangione](#) Foreword by [Alfred McClung Lee](#)

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*Jerre Mangione*

### **Jerre Mangione, From Mount Allegro to La Storia**

Jerre Mangione, an emeritus professor of English whose portrayal of the Italian-American experience won the abundant praise and prizes of the literary world both here and abroad, died on August 16 at the age of 89.

As a high school newspaper editor-in-chief in his hometown of Rochester, New York, Jerre Mangione had declared himself in his 1927 yearbook with the caption “As though I wrote to live, and lived to write.” He was to do just that for over six decades to come, publishing eleven carefully crafted novels, biographies and memoirs as well as establishing the writing program and the Italian Studies Center at Penn.

He landed his first writing job, with Time Magazine, on graduating from Syracuse in 1931. His next was with the McBride publishing house journal Travel. Then came the Federal Writers Project, where he was National Coordinating Editor from 1937 until 1939 when Congress ended the project. Later, he was to receive the 1973 Athenaeum of Philadelphia Literary Award for his definitive history of that project, *The Dream and the Deal*, published in 1972 and nominated for the National Book Award in history.

But it was his first book, the 1943 *Mount Allegro*, that established Jerre Mangione’s place in American letters. His best-selling family memoir of Italian immigrant life in Rochester was followed by his first novel, *The Ship and the Flame*. He was to publish nine more books and numerous articles after joining Penn in 1961 as chairman of the freshman composition program, which he built into a major hands-on writing program. A winner of Fulbright, Guggenheim, Rockefeller and other awards, he was promoted to full professor in 1968. Among his most prominent works of the later period were *A Passion for Sicilians: The World Around Danilo Dolci*, and a slim, droll volume called *Life Sentences for Everybody*, in which he gave intricate fictitious

biographies consisting of one sentence each--prompting the poet John Ciardi to label him the inventor of a new genre.

In 1971, Professor Mangione was named Commendatore (Commander of the Order Star of Italian Solidarity) by the Italian government for his writings and lectures "devoted to making Italy better known and respected." In 1974, he was elected a Fellow of the Society of American Historians. He received the Person of the Year Award in 1978 from the Italian-Americans of Delaware County for his portrayal of the Italian-American experience in his many books. The American Humanist Association elected him to the editorial board of *The Humanist* in 1979. Professor Mangione received the President's Award from the American Institute for Italian Culture that same year.

The University of Pennsylvania conferred an honorary degree on him in 1980, noting that he is "an American in Italy and a *paesano* in America, he has bridged the gulf between countries and cultures in the best-seller *Mount Allegro* and the autobiographical *An Ethnic at Large*." He also received an honorary degree from SUNY at Brockport for "recording the uniquely varied experiences of a lifetime in novels, autobiography and social history."

As he became an emeritus professor in 1978, Professor Mangione devoted himself to the creation of the Italian Studies Center, where he served as acting director from its inception in December 1978 until July 1980, and was coordinator of cultural programs for some time afterward. In the spring of 1980 he also became a visiting professor at Queens College, teaching a writers' workshop and a course in American ethnic literature. Then in 1981 he began work on an NEH-funded study of the Italian-American experience for the years 1880-1980. It evolved into his last and longest book, written in collaboration with Ben Morreale and published in 1992--*La Storia: Five Centuries of the Italian American Experience*; or as Professor Mangione was to describe it, "from Columbus to Cuomo."

He was the first American writer to receive the *Premio Nazionale Empedocle*, in the Sicilian port city of Porto Empedocle, his father's birthplace. It is described as the most important prize for literature given by the government of Sicily. In 1984 he was cited for the new Italian edition of *Mount Allegro*; and later that year he was awarded the Chapel Legion of Honor Medallion of the Chapel of Four Chaplains in Philadelphia in recognition of "loving service rendered...to persons regardless of their race or religious faith."

He was awarded a Pennsylvania Governor's Award for Excellence in 1989, coinciding with the sixth American edition *Mount Allegro*, the book that by that time had given a new name to the area where he grew up: his old neighborhood was named Mount Allegro in 1986 in honor of the book, with a historic marker in Rochester's Upper Falls Overlook Park to designate the site as part of the original 60-acre neighborhood. The University of Rochester established the Mangione Archive of his papers and manuscripts in their library, which opened with an exhibition from October 28, 1990, through March 15, 1991.

The Leonardo Da Vinci Award of the Italian Heritage and Culture Month Committee was presented in New York in October 1989 to Professor Mangione for his "outstanding contribution to the world of letters, through his own fiction and non-fiction writing, his teaching and his efforts to establish and develop the Italian Studies Center. He authored books of fiction and non-fiction, among them are *Life Sentences for Everybody* (1966); *A Passion for Sicilians: The World Around Danilo Dolci* (1968); *Reunion in Sicily*; and *An Ethnic at Large: A Memoirs of America in the Thirties and Forties* (1978).

One of his most recent awards, The International Arts Award from the Columbus Countdown 1992 Foundation, summed up his career in its citation, “Jerre Mangione has had a lasting impact on our society in a distinctive way: he was one of the first to make ethnicity respectable as a social and historical reality as well as a literary trend, but,--most important--he brought ethnic realities into the mainstream with elegance and sensitivity....”

He is survived by his wife of 41 years, the artist Patricia Mangione, a brother and two sisters.

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