SENATE RESOLUTION

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By Senator Fortunato

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

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

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

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

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

WHEREAS, These crimes were committed during a period of American history marked by a rising tide of anti-Italian sentiment, stoked by economic fears and physical differences of their darker Mediterranean skin color; and

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

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

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

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

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

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