



## **Italian Americans by the Numbers - Education: Who will educate our children?**

Tom Verso (September 12, 2009)



6th generation children of Italian descent: Who will teach them about great-great-great grandparents and their roots in “The Two Sicilies”?

### **Series Preface**

This blog series, “Italian Americans by the Numbers”, presents demographic data about Italian Americans based on the US Census Departments “2005-2007 American Community Survey (ACS). The ACS collects and produces population and housing information every year instead of every ten



years. The 2005-2007 ACS three-year estimates are based on data collected between January 2005 and December 2007.”

For a more detailed introduction to the ACS, please see the first article in this series “Italian Americans by the Numbers - Comparative ethnic population totals and percentages” link in this article.

If there are any questions, comments or requests, please place them in the comments section below and/or write to me directly at [Tomverso@yahoo.com](mailto:Tomverso@yahoo.com). (If you place a note in the comments section, please send a copy to my e-mail address. The auto response system of the comment section may not notify me.)

Summary of Series Reports to date:

1. “Comparative ethnic population totals and percentages”
2. “Where we live”
3. “Age, Gender & Generations”
- 4 “Households, Marital Status, “Mammoni” and “What does it mean to be Italian American?”

To view these reports, click on links in this report.

There are three types of information contained in these reports:

1. Descriptive Measures (quantities and percentages) of the American population in general.
2. Descriptive Measures (quantities and percentages) of Americans who identified themselves as of Italian descent.
3. Comparative Measures (percentages) of Americans generally and Americans of Italian descent.

“Comparative percentages” provide us with a measure of similarities and differences between the American population in general and Italian American population, thereby helping us understand who we are.

“Comparative Absolute Values”

Further, I attempt to quantify and make more objective the relative similarities and differences between the two populations. The technique I use is called “Absolute Value”. The absolute value of a number is the number without plus or minus signs. Thus, for example, the absolute value of a +3 is 3 and the absolute value of a -3 is also 3.

Removing the plus and minus signs makes it possible to compute average differences for many measures. For a more detailed explanation of how I understand the mathematical concept of absolute value and how it is used in these reports, please see the Discussion Section at the end of this report.

Emphasis: my understanding of absolute value and its application is based on decades old recall of freshman college algebra, Needless to say: anyone who thinks my math erroneous or my logic fallacious, PLEASE advise via my above e-mail address! Thank you.

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American Community Survey Education statistics are presented here in two tables:

- I. “School Enrollment”
- II. “Educational Attainment”.

In outline form the tables look like the following.

Each Table is divided into ‘Categories’ (Outline Capital letters A, B, etc.) and each category is divided into ‘Measures’ (Outline Numbers 1, 2, etc.).



The 'average absolute value' of the 'measures' allows for comparisons of Americans in general with Italian Americans in each 'category'.

Table I - School Enrollment



## Comments about Table I

### 1. Comparative Percentages Measures Column F

Column F is a measure of the similarities/differences between the American population in general and the Italian American population on a percentage basis for each measure: rows 6-10; 12-13; 17-18. Thus, for example, col. F row 6 tell us that there are 1.0 % more Italian Americans enrolled in Nursery or preschool than Americans in general ( $6.2 - 7.2 = -1.0$ ).

Note: A minus sign indicates that the Italian American percentage is larger than the American population in general. And vice versa.

### 2. Comparative percentage Category - Average Absolute Value



Column G is the absolute value of Col. F percentages (i.e. minus signs removed). Row 11 col. G is the average absolute value of all the category measures (rows 6-10). This tells us that for the Category "Population 3 years and over enrolled in school" (col. A row 5) there is 0.9% difference between the American population as a whole and the Italian American population.

Note: The minus signs have been removed so Average Absolute Value will always be positive. The Average Absolute Value only tells us the difference between the two populations. It does not tell us which population is larger or smaller.

The same for the other two Categories:

'Male 3 years and over enrolled in school' (col A row 12)

- measures in rows 13-14; Average Absolute Value row 15 col. F

'Female 3 years and over enrolled in school' (col A row 16)

- measures in rows 17-18; Average Absolute Value row 19 col. F.

### 3.Summary Comments

Clearly there is not much difference between the American population as a whole and the Italian American population in the three categories of School Enrollment (Average Absolute Values: 0.9, 2.1, 1.5). This is to say, Italian Americans enrolled in school at about the same rate as Americans in general.

Table II - Educational Attainment



#### Comments about Table II

This table is organized slightly different than Table I. In this table there is only one Category “Population 25 years and over” (col A row 22). There are five measures under that category (rows 23-27).

However, rows 29-31 aggregate “High School graduate or higher” and then subdivide that into Male and Female. Rows 33-35 aggregate “Bachelor’s degree or higher” and subdivides into Male and Female.



Accordingly, I have computed Average Absolute Values for all three subsections of the category "Population 25 years or older" (Rows 28, 32, 36).

## Discussion Section

### 1. Education

There are many conclusions about the Italian American population that can be inferred from survey data such as reported in the above Tables. For the most part there is no significant difference between the American population as a whole and the Italian American population. Which raises the question:

"What does it mean to be an Italian American?"

However, Italian Americans do seem to differentiate themselves in two categories: "High School graduate or higher" (Table II row 29 col F) and "Bachelor's degree or higher" (Table II row 33 col F).

We graduate high school at a rate of 6.4% more than the population as a whole. And, we graduate college at a rate 5.1% more than the population as a whole. However, I'm not certain that differences in the area of 5-6% are significant. Conclusions about that would take more research and statistical analysis.

### Future of Italian American Culture

To my mind, the one data point most significant for the future of Italian American culture is the relatively low percentage of Italian Americans who are getting graduate degrees 11.8% (Table II row 27 col. D).

This means that Italian Americans will not have a significant presence in professions requiring graduate degrees such as medicine, law, and most importantly teaching and humanities/social science research. If one subtracts doctors, lawyers, MBA's, PhDs in Math/Science, and other professions requiring graduate degrees from that 11.8%, then we must conclude that there are very few Italian American teachers and humanities/social science professors.

Most states require a Master degree to teach K-12. Colleges, universities, research funders and publishers require PhDs. Accordingly, unless there are significant increases in the numbers of Italian American graduate students in humanities/social science education and research, Italian Americans will have little influence on curriculum, research agendas and publishing. All to the detriment of Italian Americana!

As described in detail in a previous blog articles, Italian American history and culture is completely absent from the New York State high school curriculum, a typical community college and university. Please see:

<http://www.i-italy.org/bloggers/10420/fighting-better-fight> [2]

<http://www.i-italy.org/bloggers/8870/educate-italian-american-children-or-not> [3]

Without professional Italian American educators and researchers, there is no reason to expect that to change. Any discussion about the future of Italian American culture has to consider the relatively few Italian Americans in graduate school and the complete absence of an Italian American curriculum throughout the American education system.

Who will teach our children their history in America, and their cultural roots in "The Two Sicilies"?

Without teachers and historians, there is no history. Without history, there is no culture!

### 2. Absolute Value (general discussion)

I've suggested that the absolute values of percent differences between two populations is a method of comparing the similarities and differences between the Italian American population the Total



American population.

What follows is my understanding of my very old and dusty 'college algebra' textbook. I present it not to instruct; rather, to make clear my thinking.

Two values shown in the graph below are +3 and -3. Both represent distance from zero (0). The plus sign (+) indicates direction (i.e. to the right of zero). The minus sign (-) indicates direction (i.e. to the left of zero). The plus and minus signs indicate direction but not distance.

However, regardless of direction to the left or right, both distances are equal. Both are three units from zero. For example, think of two people standing on a street corner and the street corner is point zero (0). If one person travels 3 miles west (think to the right of zero) from a street corner and the other persons travel 3 miles east (think to the left of zero) from the corner, then both would have traveled the same distance, i.e. 3 miles, albeit in different directions.

To compute the average distance travel by both people, one has no choice but to use absolute values. To compute the average, add the two numbers and divide by 2. If one adds +3 and -3 the sum is zero. Zero divided by 2 equals zero. Obviously, the average distance traveled in this example is not zero.

Using absolute value:  $3+3=6$ ,  $6/2=3$ . The average distance traveled by the two people is 3 miles. Which is obviously true.



Similarly, in the census tables above, when comparing the % of population numbers of the 'total American population' and the 'Italian American population', I subtract the Italian American population % from the Total American population %. Accordingly, if the 'Italian American %' is larger than the 'Total American' then the difference will be a negative %. Using the absolute values of the differences, gives a measure of the difference between the two populations in the measured category.

Again, anyone who thinks my math erroneous or my logic fallacious, PLEASE advise through e-mail [Tomverso@yahoo.com](mailto:Tomverso@yahoo.com). The comments section's notification process my not notify me. E-mail assures that I will get your response. Thank you

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