

THE WHITE LINE

A One Act Play

By John Christgau

CAST

(in order of appearance)

FIRST FISHERMAN IN THE AUDIENCE

ANGELO, an Italian "enemy alien" and owner of a fishing boat

SECOND FISHERMAN IN THE AUDIENCE

BANDINI, the sheriff, an Italian American citizen

GENO, Angelo's 16-year-old son

MAMA, Angelo's wife

SCENE

Santa Cruz, California, February 1942. A slide projection of a typical small-town street, with houses on either side, is made against a white backdrop. A superimposed white line runs down the street and spills onto CS.

FIRST FISHERMAN IN AUDIENCE: (*Standing from aisle seat, left side of audience*) Hey, Angelo! Angelo! You hear what they're doin'? They're taken all our boats.

(*Angelo enters hurriedly from SL. He wears a black fisherman's cap and an open vest. He stands downstage L and shouts to First Fisherman*)

ANGELO: I saw 'em go by. With all their trucks. It's the U.S. Army.

FIRST: Angelo, we all gotta go down to the wharf.

SECOND FISHERMAN IN AUDIENCE: (*Standing from aisle seat, right side of audience*) He's right, Angelo. The whole bunch of us here. We can gang up on 'em. We'll tell 'em, "Don't take our boats!"

SECOND: (*Joins First*) Don't take our boats!"

FIRST AND SECOND: (*Chanting together*) Don't take our boats! Don't take our boats!

SHERIFF BANDINI: (*Enters SR. Wearing garrison hat*) What's all this racket?

ANGELO: (*Steps quickly back from white line*) Hey, Bandini. How you doin' up this late?

BANDINI: A good sheriff never sleeps, Angelo. And it's almost midnight. You and your friends, you got to stop all this racket.

FIRST: They're taken our boats!

ANGELO: Bandini, they're down there right now at the wharf! The United States Army!

BANDINI: It's the Coast Guard, Angelo. And they'll pay every one of you a fair price for your boats.

ANGELO: What they gonna pay me for my beautiful boat, Bandini? Two, three hundred dollars? Well, no thanks. I don't wanna sell it. And they gotta stop maken all the rules against Italians. They took our radios. They took our cameras. Then they told me, "Angelo, you the enemy. You and all the other lousy Wops that never bothered to

take your citizenship. So they made me move from the house where I live. They said Geno and Mama, they could stay because they got the citizenship. But me, I'm an enemy alien. So they said, "Angelo, you gotta move." I said, "Where'm I supposed to go?" They said, "Angelo, you see that white line down the street for traffic?" I said, "Sure, I see it." "Well," they told me, "you gotta be on the other side of the white line."

FIRST: We can't get to our boats, Bandini. So how we gonna make a livn'.

SECOND: They got me sweepin' floors, Bandini, and cleanin' toilets, just to make ends meet.

BANDINI: (*To Second*) So what difference does it make if they take your boat. With the white line where it is, you can't fish anyway. How you gonna fish when you can't even get to the wharf?

ANGELO: You wait, Bandini. The country's gotta have fish. When everybody's hungry enough, they'll let us fish again. Meantime, they gotta stop maken all the rules against Italians.

BANDINI: Italians aren't the only ones, Angelo. Germans, Japanese--they can't go across the white line either. They got a line up and down the whole coast. From Washington to Mexico. Goes right through Santa Cruz. Enemy aliens can't go across. They don't want any of 'em given signals to submarines.

ANGELO: Well, they oughta move the line a little bit. So we can get to our boats.

BANDINI: If I could move the line, Angelo, I would. Meantime, *(points)* you have to stay over on that side. And in case you forgot, there's a curfew for enemy aliens. You're not supposed to be out anywhere this time of night. Go home, Angelo. *(To the audience)* Go home, all of you. You all need to get on home.

ANGELO: Go home? I guess you forgot, Bandini. After they said I had to move, the only place I could find was a little bedroom at Benny Patrizzi's place. Ever since they took Patrizzi away, his wife, she give me a room in her place. But I got no place of my own no more. Now they gonna come and take my boat.

FIRST and SECOND: (*Chanting*) Don't take our boats. Don't take our boats. Don't take our boats! Don't take our boats!

BANDINI: (*Stepping downstage center*) All right, all right! Quiet down! Quiet down, now!

ANGELO: Hey, Bandini! How come they won't even let us go out at night?

BANDINI: It's wartime, Angelo. Don't you read the news. They already had a Japanese submarine trying to blow up oil tanks in Santa Barbara.

ANGELO: So, whaddaya think, Bandini? Because I didn't take the citizenship, I'm gonna blow up the oil tanks? I'm gonna signal the submarines?

FIRST: Hey, Bandini. You better keep an eye on Angelo. He could be a spy!

SECOND: (*To First*) Angelo? He don't look like a spy.

FIRST: *(To Second)* Angelo's sneaky. That's why Bandini's gotta be careful.

BANDINI: Sure, make a joke of it. All of you.

ANGELO: We're not tryin' to make jokes, Bandini. How come they treat us like we're all spies?

BANDINI: You brought it on yourself, Angelo. You could have been a citizen, if you'd have stuck with it. But you and Benny Patrizzi and your friends here. You always have to be making trouble.

ANGELO: --Maken trouble?

BANDINI: That's right. You go to your Sons of Italy meetings and talk about Italy like you still lived there. You make trouble for everybody else.

ANGELO: We make trouble, because we love Italy?

BANDINI: You should forget Italy, Angelo. Italy's in the past.

ANGELO: Not to Angelo. Not to Angelo.

FIRST: Not to me either, Bandini!

ANGELO: I'm not gonna ever forget Italy. They had the church bells over there ringin' all the time. I remember, they had hot bread, bakin' in ovens. You could smell it everywhere.

BANDINI: Angelo, you are living in America now!

ANGELO: Hey, Bandini! You ever notice how the United States of America smells? Like gasoline. Everywhere you go.

BANDINI: You trying to blame America for your troubles?

ANGELO: So, what is it? My fault I can't go down to the wharf. How could it be my fault, Bandini? For twenty years I got my big, beautiful boat. I come, I go, I bring in the fish. Everybody happy. Now we got this war. We got President Roosevelt. We got Hitler. We got Mussolini. But what those fellas gotta do with me? They never heard of me. (*Pauses*) O.K., Bandini! You go to Mussolini. You

ask him, "Hey, Mussolini, how's your friend Angelo?" You know what he's gonna answer? He's gonna answer, "--Angelo? Angelo who?"

BANDINI: Everybody's heard of you, Angelo.

FIRST: He's right, Angelo. Everybody knows who you are. So you gotta go down to the wharf with us and stop 'em from taken our boats.

FIRST AND SECOND: (*They began chanting again*) Don't take our boats. Don't take our boats!

ANGELO: O.K. O.K. (*Waits until actors in audience are quiet. Then approaches white line*) You gotta let us go down there quick, Bandini.

BANDINI: None of you are goin' anywhere, except to bed maybe.

FIRST: We all come across the white line, Bandini, how you gonna stop us?

BANDINI: I don't care how many of you there are. (*Steps*

to middle of street, in front of the white line.

Plants his feet) You come across, I'll arrest you.

SECOND: You gonna arrest all of us?

BANDINI: Maybe I can't stop all of you. But you go down to the wharf, they got guards there with guns, keepin' away all the enemy aliens. They see you all comin', they'll shoot you first, ask who you are later.

ANGELO: O.K., O.K., I'm gonna send my boy Geno down there.

BANDINI: --Geno?

ANGELO: Sure, Geno's got the citizenship. They can't stop him. Hey, Geno! *(There is no answer)* Geno? *(There is still no answer)* Gi-no! Geeeeee-noooo! You hear me?

GENO: *(Enters from SR)* I hear you, Papa. *(Stops across street from Angelo)* You don't have to shout.

ANGELO: Well, how come I'm standin' right over here and you won't answer?

GENO: I was in the house, helping Mama get supper ready.

ANGELO: Forget supper. You gotta run to the wharf. They taken my boat.

GENO: Who's taking your boat?

ANGELO: They taken all our fishin' boats.

GENO: Papa, who is taking all the boats?

ANGELO: The United States Army! They're down there right now. At the wharf. Didn't you see the Army trucks come right down the street here?

GENO: I didn't see anything. I've been inside, doing my schoolwork.

ANGELO: Well, I sure as hell saw 'em. They said they need our boats to help chase away the submarines. Geno, you gotta run to the wharf.

GENO: What am I supposed to tell them?

ANGELO: (*Approaches white line*) Tell 'em they can't take our boats.

GENO. Papa! Don't come across the white line.

ANGELO: (*Stops in center of street, just short of the white line*) Geno, are you gonna go or not?

GENO: Papa, it won't do any good for me to go.

ANGELO: Here, you gotta have the boat key!

GENO: What am I gonna do with the key?

ANGELO: You gotta start up the boat. Take it out of the wharf.

GENO: Take it where?

ANGELO: Any place they won't find it.

GENO: You've never even let me drive the boat.

ANGELO: Well, now you gotta do it.

GENO: What if they won't let me go out on the wharf?

ANGELO: How come you gotta stand there arguin' all night like you always do when I give the directions?

GENO: Papa, I don't even know what you want me to do.

ANGELO: So I gotta go across the white line myself?

(Takes another step toward white line)

FIRST: You gotta go, Angelo. Geno's just a schoolboy.

ANGELO: All right, all right. What if it's just me comes across, Bandini?

FIRST: Let Angelo go across, Bandini!

SECOND: Angelo's got the big, beautiful boat. He's always stood up for the rest of us. They gotta listen to Angelo!

FIRST and SECOND: *(Rhythmic chant, three steady beats)* An-juh-low! An-juh-low! An-juh-low!

ANGELO: You see, Bandini. I gotta go. (*Steps toward line, looks left and right, as if crossing a railroad track*)

GENO: Papa, don't come across!

BANDINI: I'm warning you, Angelo. You come across you'll get yourself put on a train like Benny Patrizzi and sent to a camp in Montana. You think it's bad here, because you can't go across the white line. Wait 'til you get to the camp for Italians in Montana. Bella Vista, they call it. Beautiful view. There's a good joke, Angelo! There's nothing there to see. Half the year it's ice, the other half nothing but horse flies.

MAMA: (*From offstage R*) Geno? Geno? Come get Papa's supper.

GENO: (*Shouting to offstage R*) I'm out here, Mama. With Sheriff Bandini.

MAMA: (*Enters SR*) Sheriff Bandini? I got Papa's supper ready for him.

ANGELO: They're down there at the wharf, Mama. Taken our boats. The United States Army! I'm gonna go down there. I'm gonna make 'em stop.

BANDINI: Mama Angelo. You gotta tell him not to go.

MAMA: Angelo, I got Geno gonna bring you your supper. Don't you come across the white line.

BANDINI: I'm comin' across just this once.

MAMA: Don't you do it, Angelo!

BANDINI: You better listen to her, Angelo!

ANGELO: So I stay on this side, Bandini, I'm O.K.?

BANDINI: That's right.

ANGELO: This side, I'm good ol' Angelo. I don't give nobody trouble. But I step across over here-- *(steps just across the white line, and stands firmly)*

BANDINI: *(Stepping forward suddenly)* --Angelo!

ANGELO: --I'm not O.K standin' here? I'm what, Bandini? Maybe a spy off a submarine? Maybe gonna blow up some oil tanks? So now you gotta handcuff me like they did Benny Patrizzi. Send me to the camp in Montana with the ice and the horse flies.

BANDINI: If you stand here on the wrong side, Angelo, like a stubborn mule, I'm warning you, that's exactly what will happen to you. You gotta pay attention to where the white line runs.

ANGELO: Where it runs, Bandini? I'll tell you where it runs. (*Steps back across the white line with one foot, so that he straddles the line*) It runs right through the middle of me. It's got me split right in two, Bandini. This side (*indicates his right side, then points to his house*) used to live with Mama and my boy Geno, gonna be president some day. But this other side (*indicates left side*) has to live over here, ashamed to be Italian.

MAMA: Angelo, what's that got to do with your boat?

ANGELO: (*Steps all the way back across the white line*)

Mama, they gonna take my boat! So what am I supposed to do for work? Sweep floors? Clean toilets? Go off to one of those factories maken war planes? They got a white line for Italians all around those factories. We can't even get close. No, Mama, I gotta have my boat.

MAMA: What do I care about your boat, Angelo? Every time you go out for the fish, I don't sleep. I worry, what if there's a big storm? Or, what if there's no fish?

ANGELO: There's always fish, Mama.

MAMA: Let them have your boat, Angelo. Let the government lie awake worrying about the storms. Let the government worry about no fish.

BANDINI: She's right, Angelo. You know she's right.

MAMA: Bandini, how much they gonna give us for Angelo's boat?

BANDINI: It'll be a fair price!

MAMA: At least it'll be something. To tide us over. Now

you stay where you are, Angelo. I got your supper ready. Geno's gonna bring it across. You eat, Angelo, you be happy. (*Exits, SR*)

FIRST: Don't listen to her, Angelo. You gotta go down there, stand up for us!

ANGELO: (*To First*) But they got the whole Army against us.

BANDINI: I told you, Angelo, it's the Coast Guard.

ANGELO: (*Still to First*) How'm I supposed to whip the whole United States Army.

FIRST: Angelo, you gotta try! They gonna listen to you.

FIRST and SECOND: (*Rhythmic chant again*) An-juh-low! An-juh-loh! An-juh-low!

ANGELO: (*Moves forward, hold up hands to quiet them*)

Whadaya think? I'm King Kong? Can't ever be beat?

FIRST: Angelo, you gotta make the fight.

ANGELO: All my life, all my life, you tell me, "Angelo, Angelo! You gotta make the fight." Well, maybe I'm given up.

SECOND: You can't give up. They taken our boats. You gotta make the fight.

ANGELO: Maybe that's just what they want. Make us fight. Then we all look like spies. No, no, I got no more fight left. It all run outta me. È passate. It's over. You folks, you folks all go home.

FIRST: You're not gonna do nothin'?

ANGELO: I'm not gonna go across. (*Turns to Bandini*) I'm givin' up, Bandini. You go down to the wharf, you tell 'em, they can have our boats. Hell, they gonna take 'em anyway!

BANDINI: All right. Now you're making more sense, Angelo. So get moving.

(Bandini begins to push Angelo off SL)

GENO: Wait, Papa. Wait! Mama's got supper for you.

ANGELO: (*Stops*) I'm not hungry.

BANDINI: So go home, Angelo!

ANGELO: Go home? I got no home to go to.

BANDINI: You know what I mean. Go home to your room at Benny Patrizzi's place. (*Again pushes Angelo SL*) Go home and go to bed.

ANGELO: Wait a minute! (*Stops again*) Wait a minute. I gotta give Geno his directions.

GENO: I know what to do, Papa.

ANGELO: You gotta keep the porch light on at night. So they know somebody's home. They see the house dark, they'll think we all got sent to Montana. They'll steal everything we got.

GENO: I leave the porch light on every night, Papa.

ANGELO: O.K. You gotta keep the windows locked.

GENO: They're all locked!

ANGELO: You done all your school reading for the night?

GENO: I finished everything.

ANGELO: You finished it? How you finish it already?

GENO: Papa, I read fast.

ANGELO: Maybe, maybe that's what I shoulda learned. To read the English faster. Maybe if I could read the English faster, they won't send me to Montana, with the ice and horse flies.

GENO: You read fast enough, Papa.

ANGELO: Maybe like Bandini here says, it's all my fault. What's happening to us. Maken all Italians move. Taken our boats.

GENO: It's not your fault!

ANGELO: Maybe I shoulda studied more for the citizenship.

GENO: It's not your fault, Papa!

ANGELO: Geno, you study hard. Do all your homework.

GENO: I will, Papa. *(Exits SR)*

BANDINI: O.K. Bedtime, Angelo. Get moving.

(Bandini exits SL, marching Angelo ahead of him.)

FIRST: Hey, Angelo!

SECOND: Angelo?

FIRST: What are we supposed to do about our boats?

END

Events in "The White Line" are inspired by episodes described in *The Unknown Internment: An Oral History of the Relocation of Italian-Americans during World War II*, by

Steve Fox, and *Una Storia Segreta: Italian American Evacuation and Internment during World War II*, edited by Larry DiStasi, which includes the essay "Mala Notte: The Relocation Story in Santa Cruz," by Geoffrey Dunn.