

Florence Fights Hate Crimes

Hello, and welcome once again to As It Is, the daily magazine show from VOA Learning English.

I'm Christopher Cruise.

Today, we report on an effort by eight United States senators to reform the country's immigration policies.

And we go back 76 years ago to a deadly, fiery crash that ended the dream of a new kind of air transportation.

But first, we report on what artists did when African migrants in the Italian city of Florence were attacked.

Florence Fights Hate Crimes Against Immigrants

Florence is world famous for its art and beauty. Less well-known is that many immigrants live there. Recently, some immigrants from Africa were attacked.

Now, a group of artists is publicizing how immigrants to Florence have affected its culture -- past and present. VOA correspondent Henry Ridgwell recently visited the city.

Avi Arditti has his report.

Florence is known for its beautiful architecture and works of art. The city has been at the center of Western art for many years. It was the birthplace of the Renaissance -- the great expansion of Western art that began in the 14th century.

Now, a group of Florentine artists is thinking about what it means to be Florentine in the 21st century. They are re-creating Renaissance paintings using photographs of the city's immigrants.

Mark Abouzeid is an American-Lebanese photographer who lives in Florence. He helped organize the show called "The New New World." He says the exhibit gained speed after a gunman shot and killed two Senegalese immigrants in December of 2011.

"We decided instead of being angry and saying everything that's wrong, why don't we for once just show everything that's right, from the Renaissance when we reached out to culture to create something so beautiful the world has never forgotten, to today when -- thanks to the immigrant community -- we have a cultural renaissance taking place again."

Elhadji Sall is from Senegal, but now lives in Florence. He sat patiently as hair stylists, costume designers and lighting engineers prepared him for the photo shoot.

Sal explains that in Sengal he had worked for the public water utility. He says he had everything -- a job, a wife, two children, a home. While on

vacation, he met another Senegalese who lived in Florence and insisted he visit, and he says he found the most beautiful city he has ever seen.

“The New New World” exhibit can be seen at Florence’s Palazzo Vecchio. The organizers plan to bring the show to other parts of Italy.

I’m Avi Arditti.

Senators Try to Change America’s Immigration Rules

A group of eight United States senators has proposed a bill aimed at reforming the rules for foreigners wishing to immigrate to the country. The group has members in each of the two main political parties.

The bill would give citizenship to the more than 11 million immigrants now said to be living in the country illegally. But it would be years before they are permitted to become American citizens. The measure would also give money to pay for increased security along the border with Mexico. And it would change the visa system to make it easier for people to come to the United States legally.

Kelly Jean Kelly has our report.

Senator Marco Rubio of Florida says the bill would greatly improve the country’s immigration system.

"First and foremost it is about modernizing our legal immigration system. It's about helping to attract the world's best and brightest talent and to keep the world's best and brightest talent."

He and the other members of the group believe that both the Senate and House of Representatives can pass the measure. Other attempts at immigration reform have failed.

The bill would require illegal immigrants to pay a fine and any taxes they owe. They would also be required to learn English. And they would have to wait 13 years before they could become citizens.

Senator Charles Schumer of New York says the country's current immigration policies are hurting the economy.

"We turn away people from entering the country who could create thousands of jobs, and let people cross our borders who take away jobs."

But other lawmakers strongly oppose the bill. They are worried about the effect it would have on national security and the economy.

Congressman Lou Barletta of Pennsylvania belongs to the Republican Party.

"We have our immigration laws for two reasons: one, to protect our national security, and two, to protect American jobs. The proposal of the Senate "Gang of Eight" violates both of those principles, will make our borders less

secure and jobs harder to find at a time when 22 million Americans can't find work.”

I'm Kelly Jean Kelly.

A Terrible Day, An Eyewitness to Horror

Finally on the program, we go back 76 years, to May 6th, 1937.

On that day, the Hindenburg -- Germany's huge dirigible, or airship -- exploded as it attempted to land near Lakehurst, New Jersey. The Hindenburg was the best of Germany's fleet of lighter-than-air craft. The airship had just flown across the Atlantic Ocean. It was floating toward its landing position when disaster struck.

Suddenly, there was an explosion, and the 245-meter-long dirigible caught fire and fell to the ground.

Reporter Herbert Morrison was doing a radio broadcast of the landing when the Hindenburg exploded. His emotional description was heard on radio stations throughout the country that night.

“It's practically standing still now. They've dropped ropes out of the nose of the ship. The back motors of the ship are just holding it, just enough to keep it from...it burst into flames! (inaudible) It's crashing, and it's crashing, it's crashing terrible. Oh my, get out of the way please. It's burning, bursting into flames, and its falling on the mooring path, and all the folks in between (inaudible). But this is terrible. This is one of the worst catastrophes in the world. (inaudible). Oh four, five hundred feet into the sky. It's a terrific crash

ladies and gentlemen, the smoke and its flames now. And the frame is crashing to the ground, not quite to the mooring mast. Oh the humanity and all the...”

The Hindenburg had 36 passengers and 61 crew members. Thirty-five people on the ship died, and one member of the ground crew was killed. But, surprisingly, a majority of the passengers survived.

The radio broadcast and the widely-seen film of the crash led to the end of the dream to use lighter-than-air dirigibles for long-distance transportation.

That’s As It Is for today.

Thanks to Avi Arditti and Kelly Jean Kelly for their reports.

And many thanks to you for sharing part of your day with us.

We would like to hear what you want to hear about. So let us know --send an email to LearningEnglish@voanews.com

I’m Christopher Cruise, and that’s “As It Is” from VOA Learning English from The Voice of America.