

Italian-American League Absolves Blacks of Attack

By FRED FERRETTI

The Italian-American Civil Rights League told its 32 chapters in the metropolitan area yesterday that "the black community should not be held responsible" for the critical shooting of Joseph A. Colombo Sr., the league's founder.

Colombo was shot three times Monday shortly before the league's second annual Unity Day rally began in Columbus Circle. His assailant, who was shot to death on the scene, has been identified as Jerome A. Johnson, a 24-year-old Negro from New Brunswick, N. J.

The league's president, Natale Marcone, echoed yesterday an assertion made by describing the assault as "the work of one nut, one fanatic."

As the league attempted to cool what it fears could become severe racial friction between Italian-Americans and blacks, instances of which were visible at Monday's rally, the family of the stricken man kept a vigil at his bedside.

Colombo's wife, Lucille, and three of his four sons—Anthony, 26 years old, Joseph, 24, and Vincent 20—who went to Roosevelt Hospital after the shooting and remained there through the night, stayed in a second-floor hospital lounge down a corridor from the in-

tensive-care unit where the stricken man lay.

Mrs. Colombo and Anthony visited Colombo's room shortly after the hospital announced yesterday afternoon that Colombo had received eight units of blood, that his blood pressure had risen, that there was some movement on the left side of his body and that the next two days would be "critical."

'All That Matters'

The family generally declined to speak to reporters. Vincent Colombo said: "We don't care what anybody says. As long as my father gets better, that's all that matters."

He kept repeating to Mrs. Colombo, "He's going to be all right, Ma."

The hospital corridor is guarded by a patrolman, and there are many captains from the Civil Rights League around the hospital.

Visitors came from time to time to console Mrs. Colombo. Among those who stayed for much of the night and into yesterday were Rabbi Meir Kahane, president of the Jewish Defense League; Anthony Imperiale, former Newark Councilman, and Barry H. Gottfrid of Mayor Lindsay's Urban Action Task Force.

Reports came in that the various chapters of the Civil Rights League were being called by league officials urging them to tell members that "it wasn't a black-against-white thing," as one member put it.

Anthony Colombo had said earlier: "This was not a racist thing. It was a nut." He refused to comment further.

The league office at 635 Madison Avenue, was late in opening yesterday morning because of shooting and bombing threats made by phone on Monday. A spokesman for the league said the offices had also been "flooded with calls asking what can they do."

"We're telling everybody to keep the chapters open," the spokesman said. "No retaliation against blacks. We're telling them it's the work of a nut." He added that the league's public service efforts were continuing apace.

Its Camp Unity I in Rosendale, N. Y., will open on Saturday, he said, and will handle 200 to 300 children each week sent "all expenses paid" by the various chapters. He said also that "our clothing drive for poor Puerto Ricans is going ahead."

Mr. Marcone said later: "We'll continue to grow. Our future plans are go. Our theme on Unity Day was to work for the betterment of all. We'll continue to work."

He stressed the need to disassociate the shooting from the black community as a whole because "this would only lead to divisiveness."

Major Mafia Shootings Last Reported in 1957

It has been 14 years since major Mafia leaders were the targets of assassination attempts here.

As Frank Costello was walking across the lobby of his Central Park West apartment house on May 2, 1957, a voice said, "This is for you, Frank," and a shot rang out. The bullet only creased Costello's skull, however, and he was not hurt seriously.

Joseph Valachi, the Mafia informant, later told authorities that the attempted assassination had been ordered by Vito Genovese as part of a drive to supplant Costello as the primary force in the Mafia in New York. Valachi identified Vincente Gigante, who was tried and acquitted of the shooting, as the man who shot Costello.

The last Mafia leader to be shot and killed was Albert Anastasia. On Oct. 25, 1957, two men walked into the barbershop of the Park Sheraton Hotel and fired several bullets into Anastasia, who was relaxing on a barber's chair under a pile of hot towels. No one was ever tried for the killing. Valachi said Genovese had ordered it as part of his power drive.