

The Unification of Italy and American Independence

Luca Delbello (September 27, 2011)



Among the several events organized by the Italian Cultural Institute of New York to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the Unification of Italy, an international conference was held to discuss the constitution, differences between political and sociological visions and historical heroes.

[The Italian Cultural Institute of New York](#) [2] has prepared a series of events in order to celebrate the 150th Anniversary of the Unification of Italy. An International Conference on “The Unification of Italy and American Independence” was held on September 20th, in collaboration with the [Guido Carli LUISS University](#) [3].

Several prestigious guests, including professors from the [University of Connecticut](#) [4], [New York](#)



[University](#) [5] and [Columbia University](#) [6], were present to give some interesting historical and sociological lectures.

The Ambassador of Italy to the United States, Giulio Terzi di Sant'Agata, a regular guest at the Institute, opened the panel with some welcome remarks that expressed gratitude to Riccardo Viale, director of the Italian Cultural Institute, for the idea of having a conference on such a relevant subject.

"Reflecting on our Constitution in the year when we celebrate the 150th Anniversary of the Unification of Italy will help us first and foremost to link the 1948 Constitution to the idea of patriotism" he stated. He was delighted to be part of a conference with so many esteemed friends and colleagues.

So he went on to introduce Richard Gardner, former Ambassador of the United States to Italy, who gave an interesting and heartfelt speech about his personal and professional relationship with his country of adoption, Italy. He provided the audience with "two different snapshots" by explaining his own experience as an Ambassador and George Perkins Marsh's involvement in Italian politics.

"Luigi Barzini, years ago, once wrote: in the heart of every man, wherever he is born, whatever his education and taste, there is one small corner of his heart that is Italian" he stated, and added that that remark was certainly true in his case.

He lectured about "gli anni di piombo", the 70's and the start of the 80's, when terrorism and riots tormented and afflicted Italy. He talked about his personal point of view on those happenings and reminded the audience of the terrible murder of Aldo Moro. He was sincere enough to admit that the United States had their fair share of problems too, at that time, and he wasn't coming to represent the United States with a "clean slate".

Professor John A. Davis was the first to speak after Gardner's discussion and he stressed the importance of a rather unknown but interesting connection between Italian thinkers of the Risorgimento and leaders of the United States, followed by Professor Stephen Holmes who gave a sharp lecture about the concept of constitution and the differences in his perception between Italians and Americans.

Another well-known name in the academic field was Sergio Fabbrini, Director of the Luiss School of Government, who talked about changes in Italian politics in the nineties and the urgency of a debate focusing on dualism in a country always struggling between domestic problems and European issues.

Another guest of the Institute was Professor Filippo Sabetti, author of many essays about Italian politics, who shared with the audience some optimistic words about the state of Italian democracy. According to Sabetti, it would be as strong as ever, despite of all the trouble Italy has been facing in these days, because its foundations are solid, being it a Regionalist State.

Even Judge Guido Calabresi, very proud of his Italian roots, was present. He is Professor of Law at [Yale University](#) [7] and his speech focused on the Constitution of the United States and how American people relate to it. "The fact that it is a sacred document may mean that, despite its flaws, it will come back and say: no you must change the political system so that we can work within it!" he added.

Giulio Napolitano, Professor at [Roma Tre](#) [8], lectured about the Italian Constitution and explained the differences with the previous Statuto Albertino of 1848 and acknowledged the progress made since the post-war time. "We must recognize and we cannot forget what happened in Italy in the last 60 years under the rule of the Constitution, peace and democracy were enhanced and defended, the greatest economic development in the Italian history was achieved, individual liberties and social rights were recognized and expanded at levels unknown in the past", he stated; while Giannicola Sinisi, with the [Italian Embassy in Washington](#) [9], reminded the audience about the importance of the great Italian thinkers and their role in building up the concept of nation, such as Filangieri and Mazzei.



The conference ended with some final remarks by Professor David Kertzer, from [Brown](#) [10], who spoke about Italian Unification and the problems deriving from creating a national identity.

Some words, during the panel discussion, were also spent to criticize and analyze the state of Italian political and social situation nowadays, some of them were encouraging, some others were less optimistic, but one thing stands still, and that is the hope for a quick and radical change.

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