

On Guidos, Gramsci, and Irony Deficiency

Laura E. Ruberto (January 14, 2010)



Why Italian Americans need to take action, a Pasquinian response to some recent debates.



In response to recent posts on i-Italy, Facebook, the H-ItAm listserv, and elsewhere regarding [Jersey Shore](#) [2] and the Calandra Institute's upcoming [colloquium on Guido culture](#) [3], I have been asked by the i-Italy editors to chime in.

This topic brings to the surface broader concerns and the need of influential community leaders to help make a change. I'm talking about the need for more old-fashioned organic intellectuals—the kind that would make Antonio Gramsci feel all warm and fuzzy inside.

I've come up with a short list of some issues concerning Italian Americans I think could be changed for the better with the help of proper intellectual guidance and earnest debate:

-We need more paesani on the highest court in the land. Regardless of their politics, the fact that there are only two [Italian American Supreme Court Justices](#) [4] suggests Italian Americans en masse are not being taken seriously.

- MTV, HBO, or any other media outlet should not be allowed to create shows that depict Italian Americans, past or present. I don't care so much about depictions of Italians as mafiosi or guidettes (after all, here in California no one knows what the difference is anyway); I'm just plain annoyed when they get some cultural detail wrong. I mean, what if there's a wedding scene and they forget the [cookies](#) [5]? Che vergogna!

- We should be hostile to cultural or political references that connect [contemporary immigration](#) [6] to Italy (think of the [recent events in Calabria](#) [7]) with Italy's history of emigration. Italians have nothing in common with the immigrants who live and work in Italy today; [such comparisons](#) [8] are ludicrous! And why, why should we believe [Dennis Hopper](#) [9] anyway?

- In fact, we should discourage education generally, and seriously reconsider censorship. It might be time to bring back "[red squads](#) [10]"—but rather than focus on communists (way too retro) they could infiltrate any institution that is trying to promote critical thought, dialogue, or debate.

Ma dai! Who would get behind such nonsense?

But let's return to my man, Gramsci. Now, [Gramsci](#) [11]—yes, I am in all earnestness, citing that rabble-rousing radical—figured most folks were already set in their ways and thus realized that unless some people started looking at the world a little differently, no cultural transformation (an [alternative national popular culture](#) [12], if you will), could possibly happen:

No mass action is possible, if the masses in question are not convinced of the ends they wish to attain and the methods to be applied.
(Gramsci, "[The Southern Question](#) [13])"

And how better to get to that common ground than to hear from informed and well-trained scholars as well as listen to people's real-life experiences and points of view?

It seems to me that getting people talking and thinking critically about themselves, the media, and the development of culture generally is certainly something that would make Gramsci raise his glass.

And this is the kind of action I'm interested in talkin' about.

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