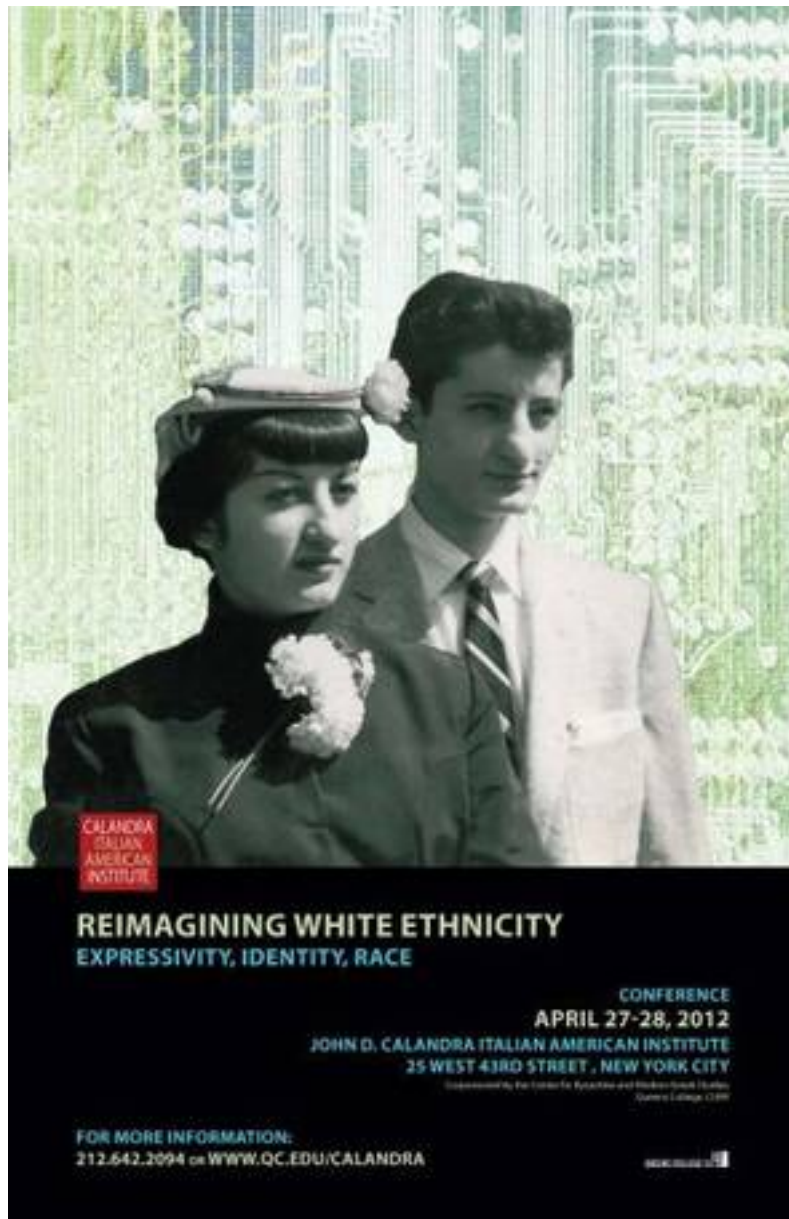




Reimagining White Ethnicity: a Conversation with Joseph Sciorra

Diana Del Monte (April 26, 2012)



The John D. Calandra Institute's Annual Conference promises to be a memorable one in 2012. "Reimagining White Ethnicity: Expressivity, Identity, Race" brings together scholars studying different ethnic groups in contemporary America to redefine the idea of Ethnicity. i-Italy interviewed Dr Joseph Sciorra to know more about the Conference.



[Calandra Institute](#) [2]'s Annual Conference promises to be a memorable one in 2012. From April 26 to April 28, the Institute will host a series of panels approaching the topic of white ethnicity in America today.

“[Reimagining White Ethnicity: Expressivity, Identity, Race](#) [3]” seeks to reclaim white ethnicity as a complex and historically situated site that invites reflections on those heterogeneous and hybridic identities that often challenge hegemonic narratives and histories.

It locates European-American ethnicities in relation to recent scholarship on whiteness, transnationalism, and diaspora. The conference positions collectives such as Greek America, Irish America, Italian America, Polish America, and others as historically distinct yet interrelated cultural fields, whose complexities have not been sufficiently recognized by scholarship.

Conference participants investigate historical trends and recent developments in the cultural expression of these ethnicities, including revitalization of heritage, institution-building, transnational exchanges, hybridities, and progressive cultural politics that emerge in the wake of globalization and multiculturalism.

i-Italy has interviewed Dr [Joseph Sciorra](#) [4], Associate Director for Academic and Cultural Programs at Calandra Institute, to learn more about the conference and the important topics it draws the academic attention upon.

Where did the idea for the conference come from?

Until now, Calandra Institute has been organizing its annual conference on the topic of Italianness. In the past it was about Italian immigrants and their [descendants returning to Italy](#) [5], about the notion of [land, landscape and geography](#) [6], and last year the conference was about [film, food and fashion](#) [7] from everywhere: Italy, United States and Canada.

This year is different, because we have expanded beyond the Italian realm. I was inspired by reading a book by Yiorgos Anagnostou called [Contours of White Ethnicity: Popular Ethnography and the Making of Usable Pasts in Greek America](#) [8]. He is a Professor at Ohio State University and he will be one of the two keynote speakers.

I am involved in Italian-American studies, and it was interesting to see similar topics and similar things discussed from a Greek-American perspective.

It seemed that there were enough differences but enough similarities to broad in scope beyond Italians. In addition, the idea that some academic circles have that European immigrants melted in some general whiteness is a little simplistic. That emerges in part with older studies on immigration from 1970, but as well as in recent studies on whiteness. The idea is to have a large conversation about the differences and similarities among white communities.

Identity, multiculturalism, ethnicity, race. These words are part of the program of the conference. Could you help us understand their real meaning in this context?

It's a key term for a self and group representation. In the context of that, the conference explores issues of Identity. There's no single definition, the conference will leave it to the participants to discuss, argue, debate about what that means. I think that identity is going to have a different sense for every scholar, anthropologist, sociologist.

Any of those words is problematic, but I think the word Ethnicity is the most complicated. For many contemporary scholars, ethnicity doesn't mean Italian-American or Polish-American, it means more “people of color.” It has come to me from some scholars, not from all, and this conference is an



opportunity to also raise a sort of contemporary subject for academia. This conference will provide a forum for the these kinds of conversations.

What can you say about the relationship between the topic of the conference, white ethnicity, and the city where this conference will be held, New York City?

I wouldn't say ethnicity, but ethnicities, because ethnicities are plural and this is exactly what the conference is about. There is no single white ethnicity, there is no single form of white ethnic expression. There are multiple ones. The appearances or existences or performances of white ethnicity in New York City takes many forms.

The right topic, in the right place, in the right moment...

It is not necessarily a hot topic, I don't think it is more important today than it was yesterday or it will be in the future. As the program shows, it is a topic that has gotten some shift in Academia in the present.

The idea, for example, that because the contemporary Italian-Americans are the third, fourth, fifth or sixth generations they don't have the sense of Italianess is a false one.

Sense of ethnic identity is not necessarily based on proximity to an immigrant population. You can express yourself as an Italian-American and not speak Italian and not eat spaghetti and not dance tarantella. That's one of the elements of the conference.

In your opinion, what is the main feature of this conference?

I'm very excited that the conference is engaging with scholars who deal with other communities than the Italian-American. This conference in part of an ongoing contemporary scholarly conversation that we are part of. And we will be able to engage in multiple panels with colleagues studying different communities.

Conference Program:

[\(click here to see Conference \[9\]Live-Stream \[9\]\) \[9\]](#)

Thursday, April 26, 2012

6-8 pm

Welcome and Reception

Fred Gardaphé

Queens College, CUNY

Joseph Sciorra

John D. Calandra Italian American Institute

Christos P. Ioannides

Center for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies

Katharine Cobb



Queens College, CUNY

Lucia Pasqualini

Consulate General of Italy in New York

Friday, April 27, 2012

9:30-10:45 am

Conference Room

Representing Italian Americans

Chair: Dennis Barone, Saint Joseph College

Images of Italian Americans in African-American Literature during

Jim Crow

Samuele F. S. Pardini, Elon University

Colum McCann's *Let the Great World Spin* and the Erasure of Italian-

American Experience

Nancy Caronia, University of Rhode Island

Homespun History, *Youngstown Style*: Ethnic Representation in Do-It-Yourself Narratives

Anthony D. Mitzel, Università di Bologna

La Galleria

Missed Opportunities: The 1970s Resurgence of White Ethnic Identity and the Left

Chair: Gaia Giuliani, Università di Bologna

The Threat of a Good Example: Twentieth-Century Solidarity Identities in Working-Class White Communities

James Tracy, San Francisco Community Land Trust

White Lightning: Organizing the White Working Class in the Bronx, 1971-1975

Gil Fagiani, Italian American Writers Association

Beyond Whiteness

Lynn Lewis, *Picture the Homeless*

11 am-12:15 pm

Conference Room

Keynote: *Ethnic Acts*: On "European Ethnicity" Cultural Politics

Yiorgos Anagnostou, Ohio State University



1:30-2:45 pm

Conference Room

Negotiating Scandinavian Identities

Chair: Samuele F.S. Pardini, Elon University

Lox and Lax: How Marcus Samuelsson Merges Ethnicities

for Consumption

Jonathan Bean, The New School

Latex, Hijabs, and the Refiguration of the Swedish Folk Costume

Anna Blomster, University of California, Los Angeles

Heritage Envy: Selecting the "Danish Days" Maid in Solvang, California

Hanne Pico Larsen, Columbia University

La Galleria

Family, Food, and Cultural Capital

Chair: Robert Oppedisano, Editor

Traditional Greek-American Child-Rearing

Marilyn Ann Verna, St. Francis College

Italian Foodways as a Marker of Ethnicity: Italians Are What They Eat

Patrizia La Trecchia, University of South Florida

Italian-American Cultural Capital

Paola Melone, John D. Calandra Italian American Institute

3-4:15 pm

Conference Room

The Greeks of New York City: Contemporary Trends and Historical Contexts

Chair: Christos P. Ioannides, Center for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, Queens College, CUNY

Greek Americans of Queens: Ethnic Identity in the Second Generation of Post-1965 Immigrants

Nicholas Alexiou, Queens College, CUNY

Greek Immigrants and Greek Americans in New York City Observed through the National Census

Anna Karpathakis, Kingsborough Community College, CUNY

Films about Greek Americans in New York: A Case Study of the Greek-American Image in American Cinema



Dan Georgakas, Center for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, Queens College, CUNY

La Galleria

Clef Notes on Music

Chair: Gil Fagiani, Italian American Writers Association

The Wanderers: Italian-American Doo Wop, Sense of Place, and Racial Crossovers in Postwar New York City

Simone Cinotto, Università degli Studi di Scienze Gastronomiche

Living the Dance in Tarpon Springs

Panayotis League, Hellenic College

Polishness in Terms of Authenticity, Social Conservatism, and Whiteness in Buffalo, New York

Marta Marciniak, University at Buffalo, SUNY

4:30-5:45 pm

Conference Room

White Privilege

Chair: David Michalski, University of California, Davis

Beyond Racism, Beyond Whiteness: A Critical Investigation of White Privileged Discourse

Kathryn Peterson, New York University

The Dialectic of White Privilege: Resisting Habits of Privilege with Merleau-Ponty

Kristin Anne Rodier, University of Alberta

Antiracism as Rhetoric: Arizona's House Bill 2281 and Saving Ethnic Studies through a "Dis-Knowing" Critical Pedagogy

Julia Istomina, Ohio State University

Saturday, April 28, 2012

9:30-10:45 am

Conference Room

Historicizing Italian Americans and Race

Chair: Cristina Lombardi-Diop, Loyola University Chicago

"Fatti di sangue": Italian Americans, Race, and Justice in the Late

Nineteenth Century

Bénédicte Deschamps, Université Paris Diderot



A Race Destined to Expire: Prominenti, Native Americans, and the Boundaries of Civilization and Race

Peter G. Vellon, Queens College, CUNY

The Social Construction and Contestation of Whiteness in York

County, Pennsylvania

Justin D. Garcia, Millersville University

La Galleria

The Body and Sexuality

Chair: Donna M. Chirico, York College, CUNY

The Sports Race: Alexi, Cioffari, and Body Versus Brain

Dennis Barone, Saint Joseph College

"I Must Maintain This Rigid Posture or All is Lost": The Trials and Tribulations of R. Crumb's Whiteman

Joseph Cosco, Old Dominion University

Public Sexuality and Whiteness in Gentrifying Neighborhoods: A Comparative Case Study in Williamsburg and Park Slope, Brooklyn

Laura Braslow, Graduate Center, CUNY and Lidia K. C. Manzo, John D. Calandra Italian American Institute

11 am-12:15 pm

Conference Room

Keynote: White Ethnicity and the Discourse of Authenticity

in Modern Paganisms

Sabina Magliocco, California State University, Northridge

1:30-2:45 pm

Conference Room

Questioning Race and Whiteness

Chair: Peter G. Vellon, Queens College, CUNY

How Ethnicity Trumps Race in the Struggle for Self-Identity

Donna M. Chirico, York College, CUNY

Italian Americans and Whiteness through the Lens of Americanization: Toward a Critique of Racial Reason

James S. Pasto, Boston University

From Oppressed to Oppressor without Even Trying



James S. Pula, Purdue University North Central

La Galleria

Imagining Greek Americans

Chair: Dan Georgakas, Center for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, Queens College, CUNY

Changing Images of Greek Immigrants within American Mainstream Society: A Historical Overview Based on Documentary Sources and Case Studies

Constantine G. Hatzidimitriou, New York City Department

of Education

The Book Culture of Greek Americans

Maria Kaliambou, Yale University

Schadenfreude, Anxiety, and Representation in the Era of the Greek Debt Crisis in a Greek Diasporic Community

Leo Vournelis, Southern Illinois University

3-4:15 pm

Conference Room

Continuities and Discontinuities in Italy's Racial Identity

Chair: Patrizia La Trecchia, University of South Florida

An Anthropological Perspective on Italian Ethnicity from the Colonial Age to Post-Colonialism

Moira Luraschi, Università degli Studi dell'Insubria, Varese

The Construction of Italianness: Masculinity and Race in Liberal and Early Fascist Italy

Gaia Giuliani, Università di Bologna

Spotless Italy: Hygiene, Advertisement, and the Ubiquity of Whiteness

Cristina Lombardi-Diop, Loyola University Chicago

La Galleria

Comparative Approaches

Chair: Bénédicte Deschamps, Université Paris Diderot

White on Arrival?: A Comparison of the Racial Status of Italian

Immigrants on the East and West Coasts

Stefano Luconi, Università degli Studi di Padova

"What if I'm Too Spicy-Italian for Them?": Italian Canadians and



Whiteness Studies

Krysta Pandolfi, York University

Foreign Shades of White: The Transnational Experience of Greek and

Italian Communities in Australia and the United States

Andonis Piperoglou, La Trobe University

4:30-5:45 pm

Conference Room

Heritage Festivals and Roots Journeys

Chair: Sabina Magliocco, California State University, Northridge

Czech Heritage Festivals in the Midwest: Symbolizing Ethnicity in Rural Spaces

Karen Kapusta-Pofahl and Elizabeth Nech, Washburn University

The Lost Apostrophe: Race and the Irish-American Roots Journey

Sinead Moynihan, University of Exeter

Reconsidering White Ethnic Revivals: Italian Americans and Italian Immigration in the 1950s and 1960s

Danielle Battisti, Colby College

La Galleria

Deconstructing and Reconfiguring Italian Americans

Chair: Joseph Cosco, Old Dominion University

Race and Taste in the Olive Garden: On the Tuscanization of

American Culture

David Michalski, University of California, Davis

"Calling Myself Olive": Italian Americans as Mediterranean Americans

Jim Cocola, Worcester Polytechnic Institute

Beyond the Ghetto: Deconstructing White Italian-American Ethnicity

Dora Labate, Rutgers University

Source URL: <http://iitaly.org/magazine/focus/life-people/article/reimagining-white-ethnicity-conversation-joseph-sciorra>

Links



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- [2] <http://calandra.i-italy.org>
- [3] <http://www.livestream.com/italicsconference2>
- [4] <http://calandra.i-italy.org/joseph-sciorra-phd-0>
- [5] <http://www.i-italy.org/8776/land-our-return-diasporic-encounters-italy>
- [6] <http://www.i-italy.org/13974/terre-promesse-italian-topography-calandra-institute>
- [7] <http://www.i-italy.org/17189/food-fashion-and-film-explored-calandra-institute>
- [8] <http://www.ohioswallow.com/book/contours+of+white+ethnicity>
- [9] <http://www.livestream.com/italicsconference>