

Guidos!

George De Stefano (August 06, 2008)



The mayor of a New Jersey shore town inflamed ethnic and borough passions when he complained about "guidos" from Staten Island. But how do you feel about them, and the media stereotype?



“Guido” is a pejorative slang term for a young, lower class or working class, Italian-American... male from the urban Northeastern United States ... most often New York and the surrounding area...The Guido stereotype is often portrayed as humorously and incorrigibly uncultured, with a thuggish and overtly macho attitude and an unyielding pride in his Italian ancestry.

Clothing associated with the stereotype includes gold chains, working class clothing such as plain T-shirts, muscle shirts or "guinea t's" (derived from the term "guinea," an ethnic slur for Italians), leather jackets, sweat or tracksuits, scally caps, unbuttoned dress shirts, and dress suits.

-- Wikipedia

Ken Pringle, the mayor of Belmar, New Jersey, ruffled guido feathers (loaded with “product” and spiked) when, in July, he complained about their presence in his seaside resort town.

“We think of Guidos as a kind of rare bird: They flock to our shore towns during the warm months, and are as welcome as, oh, Canada geese,” he said in a column he writes for a local newsletter.

“The call of the Guido,” he added, “is bellowing, and frequently slurred, invariably starting with the sound, ‘Yo,’ followed all too often by some creative variation on an expletive beginning with the letter ‘F.’”



Guidos, as the Wikipedia entry notes, hail from various parts of New York and “the surrounding area.” Pringle’s ire was aimed at those who come in droves from Staten Island during the summer months to purportedly wreak havoc in Belmar.

No sooner had Pringle’s comments been published than local media were reporting the reactions – mostly indignant, some mildly annoyed, and a few in agreement with the mayor -- from Staten Island. (Or, as I like to call it, the Borough That Time Forgot.)

One Vinnie Guadanino told the New York Times, “I’m a guido – I have no problem with that word – and I used to go to the Jersey Shore.” Guido-ism, he added, runs in the family. “My daughter goes to Belmar – she’s a guidette.”

In the weekly New York Press, another self-described guido, 37 year-old Sebastian Mauro, waxed indignant (and possibly also his chest hair) in response to Pringle. “The next thing he’s going to say is that every guido is in the Mafia. What? I’m supposed to have a ‘goumada’?”

As Guadanino’s and Mauro’s comments make clear, there are Italian Americans who are “guido-identified,” that is, self-proclaimed members of the tribe. But as Mauro observes, some associate the type with an offensive stereotype, that of the Mafia gangster. Wikipedia states that “guido” often is used “as a term for an Italian criminal in the Mafia in areas where Guido culture is common, much like the term ‘goombah.’ In fact, ‘goombah’ and ‘Guido’ have often been interchangeable.”

“Guido,” then, can be both an ethnic epithet and a badge of ethnic pride. And, like other loaded expressions such as “queer” and “nigga,” it’s who is speaking that determines whether it’s a slur or



a statement of identity.

(Some years ago I explained the meaning of “guido” to an Italian visiting New York. He was horrified to learn what this name, so common in Italy, signified in America. “No!” he cried. “You mean it is like ‘cafone’?”)

To further complicate things, some Italian Americans not only don’t identify with the term but are contemptuous of those who do. For them, “guidos” are to Italian Americans what “niggers” are to black people, to borrow the distinction comedian Chris Rock made in a notorious routine from his show “Bring the Pain.”

“Guidos and guidettes are an absolute embarrassment to Italian Americans,” according to a posting at the website of New York magazine. “These mindless conformists are arrogant, ignorant, and belligerent...Kudos to the Mayor of Belmar for telling the truth. The guidos and guidettes are nothing more than a pollutant to the Jersey Shore.”

Another poster, calling himself Mickeyitaliano, put distance between himself and guidos while also decrying the implicit bigotry in the way some use the term:

“I am Italian and I am completely 180 degrees different from these bozo, cruisy suzies in their freakin 'dadillacs'. But, that is beside the fact... I give two fucks for political correctness; have a sense of humor, right? But, single out a whole nationality...Fongul.”



Guidos, whatever your view of them, constitute a substantial Italian American subculture. In fact, the type is so well-established by now that other urban “ethnic” males who affect the sartorial and lifestyle trappings can be called – and call themselves – guidos. There are Jewish guidos, Latino guidos, Greek guidos, Arab guidos. Up here in the Northeast, it’s Guidoworld.

Moreover, it’s not only in the United States. As Wikipedia informs us, guidos also are found in parts of Canada, where they’re called “ginos.”

The guido phenomenon is all over the Internet. On You Tube, three uber-guidos called Bobby, Tony, and Nunzio are starring in a comedy series called “Douchebag Beach.” Here’s the promo for the series, which currently comprises 11 “webisodes”:

It's summer, and three 20-something douchebags from Northern New Jersey have packed up their Axe Body Spray, collared striped shirts and house music CDs for their annual trip to the Jersey Shore. But this year Bobby, Tony and Nunzio aren't looking for a piece of a*s, they're searching for something much bigger: True Love... They're three douchebags looking for love in South Jersey -- what could possibly go wrong?

The creators of “Douchebag Beach” obviously know their guidos. Their dispatches are often very funny and very on-target. One segment, “DJ Twink,” hilariously skewers the unacknowledged homoeroticism that often underlies guido male bonding. My first impression was that “The Three Douchebags” were a young Italian American version of The Three Stooges, only more knowing and satirical.



But then I checked and found out that none of the performers actually is Italian American. “Bobby” is Greg Siff, “Tony” is Jason Zumwalt, and “Nunzio” is Bryan Feckart.

Does that affect my reaction to “Douchebag Beach?” I guess it does. As my parenthetical sarcastic comments about guido grooming and the borough of Staten Island indicate, I’m one of those Italian Americans who tends to regard these guys as something of an embarrassment. Yet the “it depends on who’s speaking” rule applies here. That the three “douchebags” aren’t Italian Americans doesn’t make the series less amusing. But it does give it the whiff of minstrelsy. And maybe worse?

So what do you think about guidos, the real thing and the media-mediated images? Slap on a little Axe, “fix” your hair, and tell me what you think. Comments from guidos, guidettes, non-guido Italian Americans, etc., are all welcome, yo.

Meet the “guidos” of Douchebag Beach (<http://www.youtube.com/user/DouchebagBeach?ob=1> [2])



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Links

[1] <http://ftp.iitaly.org/files/3708guido-guidette1217890953jpg>

[2] <http://www.youtube.com/user/DouchebagBeach?ob=1>