

Fighting the “Better Fight”

Tom Verso (August 20, 2009)



In a recent i-Italy article, “Fighting the Good Fight”, Italophile lamenting about AP Italian continues. But, for Philo-Italian Americana, the “Better Fight” would be over the non-existence of Italian American history and culture in our public schools, colleges and universities.

In a recent i-Italy article “Fighting the Good Fight”, the lamenting about AP Italian continues in an interview with Arthur Piccolo, who is promoting “The Alberti Project, to make the Italian language the equal of both French and German within the United States.” Mr. Piccolo, of course, is not alone in his “good fight”. The article reports:



“In a generous effort to save the AP in Italian, in the past year several Italian and Italian/American Organizations mobilized. The Italian Embassy in Washington and the Consulate General of Italy in New York were among those in the forefront of this struggle, together with the American Association of Teachers of Italian (AATI) and the Italian Language Foundation, to raise necessary funds.”

WOW! This is some serious ‘fire power’ being brought to bear in this AP “fight”. Getting students 4 or 5 college language credits has become an international issue.

I must admit, as an Italian American, I am jealous. These Italophiles really know how to wage a fight. Would that my people had such organizations and combat mentality for promoting the study of our history and culture, which is far more neglected than Italian Language education.

Consider: there would be no AP issue if the Italian language wasn’t taught in high schools. While students have ample opportunity to study the language and culture of Italy, they have absolutely no (as in ‘zero’) opportunity to study the history and culture of the Italian American people. For details on the complete absence of Italian American studies in the New York State public education curriculum and the community college serving the Rochester NY metro area, please see the article “To Educate Our Children – Or Not??” linked to this one.

Beyond public school, consider the higher education opportunities for Italian Americans in the Rochester metropolitan area. In this metro area, there are, according to the US Census Dept., 185,000 Americans of Italian descent (18% of the population) of which 60,000 fall into the school age 5-24 years old category (i.e. elementary thru graduate school ages). In the metro area, there are two universities, two state colleges, three private colleges and the above mentioned community college. They all offer Italian language courses. None (as in ‘zero’) of these higher education schools offers a single (as in zero, ‘not one’) dedicated course in Italian American history, literature or culture. Nor do their catalogue descriptions of general survey courses such as American Literature, American History, etc. mention a single (as in ‘zero’, not one) Italian American writer, artist, politician, etc.

Consider, for example, the University of Rochester. The U of R list in its on-line catalogue 273 English Literature courses, 363 history courses. As stated, not one of these 636 courses is dedicated too or even mentions an Italian American. At the same time, the University offers 46 Italian language courses. While the U of R has the largest course offerings in the metro area, the same pattern can be found in the catalogs of all the other colleges – i.e. plenty of Italian language education and no (none, zero) Italian American education.

The Italiophiles fight for AP Italian is no doubt a “Good Fight”. But a “Better Fight” for Italian Americans would be one for educating our children in the history and culture of their people. Sadly, to my mind, there are no combatants. We have no “Alberti Projects”, we have no international Italian organizations, no Embassies or Consulate Generals to argue our cause, and no Associations of Teachers fighting our fight. Ironically, even nominally Italian American Organizations fight for AP Italian, but do nothing about promoting (let alone demanding) Italian American curriculums in public schools, colleges and universities.

Interesting... NO?



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