

Dialogue and Debate: Not Denigration and Dismissal

Fred Gardaphe (January 08, 2010)



Open Letter to Mr. Arthur Piccolo and all those who believe in boycotting intellectual investigations

Dear Mr. Piccolo,

I want to thank you for drawing attention through your recent blog to the Calandra Institute's upcoming colloquium that was designed to investigate what is known "Guido" has been in existence for 30 years. Too often the Italian American community does not pay attention to the good work done at and through the Calandra Institute.



In that blog, "['Guido' The New Way to Mock Italian Americans](#) [2]" you say there are "so called 'intellectuals'...trapped by their own Bull Shit" I assume you are referring to me [editor note: for the statements published in the [Time Magazine](#) [3],] and so I address this as my personal response to your claims.

I have never been referred to as a "Guido" nor do I portray the behavior that might warrant such a characterization. First of all you claim that what I say makes me "dumb" and "a traitor for a few pieces of silver" thrown my way. Such accusations are unfounded; I ask you here for a personal apology and a public withdrawal of those accusations. The work I do and have been doing for a good thirty years has never been funded by any insidious source that has enticed me to "betray" or even worse as you put it "piss on" my community.

On the contrary, my work has been motivated by my need to understand that community, and my responses to the exploration of that information has been the more than seven books I have written on the subject of the Italian American community. I have dedicated my professional life to this exploration, and your characterization of me is crude and could be construed as libelous. I have not garnished monetary wealth from this work and simply have a respected reputation that you have publicly attempted to defame. Your public apology would be greatly appreciated.

I don't believe that Donald Tricarico, as you say, "glorifies guido". Tricarico is a sociologist who has spent time trying to understand aspects of the larger Italian American community that often gets manipulated by the media. Guido culture is not something the media created; in fact, Italian American culture, for better or worse, has created Guido culture, and that I believe is something that must be investigated and understood before we can move further in any discussion. Dr. Tricarico, as any good social scientist describes Guido culture for those who are interested. He doesn't "Love it" or Hate it.

I can understand your anger and your fear at the recent dominance of this culture's representation in the media. Once again, a small segment of the Italian American population is getting the attention that the major part of Italian American culture has never respectfully received. This has been one of the greatest problems that our community has faced, and one that we hope to address through intellectual investigation and through the promotion of alternative artistic and media works. This has been the foundation of what has been produced by the Calandra Institute since its inception and one of the reasons I was drawn to my current affiliation.

I find the Calandra Institute's wording of this upcoming participation in the upcoming colloquium to be accurate and appropriate. Guido culture is something that is "non-traditional" and represents the way a number of Americans of Italian descent have chosen to identify themselves as being Italian American. No one ever said they represent the whole of the culture, and actually, within Dr. Tricarico's work, you will find the information you need to more cogently critique what you see as a negative representation of Italian American culture.

Whatever it is one feels about Guido culture, all Italian Americans share some responsibility for having created it. Whether those inside Guido culture have created their identities out of arrogant animosity toward what some consider to be traditional representations of Italian American culture--both within and without the Italian community--or through some interpretation based on attentive admiration of publicly presented versions of Italian American culture, what needs to be examined is just what is and what isn't Italian or American about Guido culture, and what is or isn't of our own creation. That is what I feel is the work at hand.



I have many students who feel that Guido culture does not represent them, the same way that most Italian Americans feel that gangster culture does not reflect them. I also have students who feel comfortable within versions of Guido culture. This is simply a reality that such a colloquium will enable us to examine.

I have never once publicly applauded the MTV television program that has brought attention back to this culture, and I do not accept your interpretation of a recent misquoting of my response to one reporter as enthusiastic support of it. In fact, I simply said that it is just more of what MTV has been throwing out for years without much protest from other communities. The reporter mistook my interpretation of “guappo” for “guido” and that’s where some of the confusion might lie.

I do believe strongly in there being an irony deficiency within some members of the Italian American community that does not allow them to connect to the more artistic mis-representations of Italian America that appear in the arts. I never said irony deficiency was a right or wrong thing, those are your words. I simply identified it and have been working to document it and explain it, much the same way Dr. Tricarico has worked to document and interpret Guido culture.

That Guidos take pride in themselves is no reason to encourage “young Italian boys and girls” to join them. Such reasoning would lead to the suggestion that the First Amendment is at the root of all this representative evil.

I think this colloquium is a great opportunity for all Americans to better understand all sides of this issue. By calling for a boycott, or even worse a cancellation, of this colloquium you are not only denying the right of free speech, but also the necessity of intellectual investigation of all aspects of the community. It is imperative that we debate intelligently and respectfully all issues, whatever we may think of them. I find this quite sad and little more than a reminder that the generation gaps inside Italian America will continue to grow and remain unbridged.

Professor Tricarico does not need any “proof” of his credibility; but we all need to consider his research as we attempt to fashion powerful ways of addressing Italian American identities today and for the future. I hope you, as well as others who might consider not attending, will consider joining us for what promises to be a significantly informative, and thus beneficial discussion for all.

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