

## A Ph.D. in Basket Weaving

Joey Skee (October 19, 2011)



Italian-American anti-intellectualism rears its ugly little head again.



It has come to my attention that I stand in the crosshairs of one Richard Annotico, a fulminating yet paltry blogger. ([See link \[2\]](#) and text below.) The depth of viciousness, ignorance, bigotry, and pettiness is appalling but it comes as no surprise to those of us who have witnessed such Italian-American anti-intellectualism from others, such as [Arthur Piccolo \[3\]](#). I'm proud to join the ranks of distinguished scholars of Italian American Studies like [Fred Gardaphé \[4\]](#), Anthony Tamburri, and Donald Tricarico who have been attacked on-line with similar diatribes. To paraphrase Franklin Roosevelt, "I welcome the hatred."

Annotico's blog post was prompted by a digitally-distributed "open response" from John Mancini, executive director of [The Italic Institute of America \[5\]](#). This letter was originally a private one mailed directly to me on September 26, 2011 ([see attached \[6\]](#)) to which I replied the following week (see attached [Page 1 \[7\]](#) and [Page 2 \[8\]](#)). I'm surprised that Mancini decided to take what he initiated as a private conversation to the digital arena. No matter. While I disagreed with Mancini's premise, I was pleased to read that he took the time and care to make his case intelligently and respectfully. The same cannot be said for Annotico's vituperations.

The casual reader will note Annotico's horrid prose and typos (e.g., "it's Italian American Review," "admoired"), the hyperbolic writing style that has come to characterize Italian-American anti-intellectualism (e.g., "despotism," "relations with ANY OTHER ETHNIC Groups"), and the fetid stench of anti-Semitism.

Annotico—who claims to know me for "over the decade" although we have never met— accuses me of being many things, and I quote:

1. "Turncoat" vs his Italian Ancestry
2. Self Loathing of his Italian Ancestry
3. being a Cypto -Italian
4. a former website designer
5. a rap music aficionado
6. a PHD in Basket Weaving
7. disparage his Italian Ancestry
8. Defending Spike Lee
9. Misreporting the "[Bensonhurst Incident \[9\]](#)"
10. [Promoting Italian Folklore \[10\]](#)
11. A "Basket-weaving" pseudo-intellect

These charges are hysterically funny even as they underscore a tragic level of narrow-mindedness and maliciousness, and are evidence for dismissing his pronouncement outright.

However, what is most disturbing about Annotico's virulent tirade is his flawed notion of Ethnic Studies, Italian American Studies, and scholarship in general:

the PURPOSE of ETHNIC Studies is to PROMOTE PRIDE and the POSITIVE ASPECTS of the ETHNICITY to counter all the NEGATIVITY in the Society/Media.

Ethnic Studies is NOT intended to present a "Balanced" view, BUT to COUNTER the DISTORTED Negative STEREOTYPES rampant in the SOCIETY.

This is not an attack of me but a community of scholars.

We are currently experiencing a proliferation of stimulating research on Italian-American history and culture, as well as the larger Italian diaspora. For the past decade we at the John D. Calandra Italian American Institute have provided a forum for scholars, authors, visual artists, and filmmakers to present their work in [a rich and diverse array of programming \[11\]](#), including an annual conference, ongoing exhibitions, and monthly lectures, readings, and screenings. All free and open to the public. In addition, the Calandra Institute has re-launched the [scholarly journal Italian American Review \[12\]](#) and published several books on various topics such as education, language, and film.

Annotico and his ilk maintain that the uncritical, flag-waving triumphalism that emerged out of the 1970s white ethnic movement is "the PURPOSE of ETHNIC Studies." This is not the basis for rigorous and sustained scholarship.

The question becomes how do we reply to this rampant anti-intellectualism as a community? Do we simply ignore such repugnant pronouncements or do we respond collectively, and if so, through which channels?

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Fri 9/30/2011

Calandra's Sciorra's Anti -Italian Prejudice - This Time re : "And They Came to Chicago"

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Joe Sciorra, of the Calandra Institute, and Editor of it's Italian American Review, is Not only an example of one who has risen far above his skills and talent. (with nepotism, despotism, favoritism rather than MERIT), he has once again, and still over the decade I have known him, been a "Turncoat" vs his Italian Ancestry.

I don't know if this results from a Self Loathing of his Italian Ancestry, or a the use of a Technique used by those who would rather be associated with the "Power Group" and uses every opportunity to show them he is Not one of "those other Lowers", or being a Crypto -Italian, or if it is his Sheer Ignorance, Sciorra (blogs under the name of "Joey Skee"), is a former website designer, and a rap music aficionado. who earned his Ph.D in Folk Lore (sorta like a PhD in Basket Weaving ) <http://www.italianrap.com/me.html>.

"Joey Skee" has never lost an opportunity to disparage his Italian Ancestry, whether it be by Defending Spike Lee ( a consistent Italian detractor- and also a movie employer of Skee's sister), Misreporting the "Bensonhurst Incident" as an "Italian Racist Riot" rather than a "Turf War" (since there was at least one black in the Italian group), and Promoting Johnny MeatBalls DeCarlo, who is a Chest beating "Guido", (a Mafia, and a "Jersey Shore" admirer, and a Calandra Blogger), along with promoting Italian Folklore as a way of inferring how backward and primitive Italians are. These are only few examples of a litany of Anti -Italian transgressions.

"Skee" and other Calandra Executives, AMAZINGLY seem Unaware that the PURPOSE of ETHNIC Studies is to PROMOTE PRIDE and the POSITIVE ASPECTS of the ETHNICITY to counter all the NEGATIVITY in the Society/Media.

Ethnic Studies is NOT intended to present a "Balanced" view, BUT to COUNTER the DISTORTED Negative STEREOTYPES rampant in the SOCIETY. In fact in Jewish American Studies, even FACTS that are TRUE and POSITIVE,, but that "might" be bad for the Jewish Community, by showing it's power or wealth are "buried" because such revelations "might" incite Anti-Semitism.

In regard to Prof. Naison,I was unable, after great research, to uncover ANY credentials for Prof. Naison to critique ANY Italian American History. It is also MOST interesting that while Naison is disturbed by the absence of an analysis of Italian/ Black relations, he expresses NO concern about ANY analysis of Italian relations with ANY OTHER ETHNIC Groups, such as Irish, and Polish among others. that Italians were in STRONG competitor with. And If Not, Why Not.???? Is Mr Naison's Afro Ethnicity Studies causing MYOPIA?????

Is it mere Coincidence that Prof Naison's remarks were merely "echoes" of what "Joey Skee", has been saying for at least 10 years???

Is THAT why "Skee" chose Naison to review the Italic Institute Video, or even the lower motive of "dissing" a competitor? Then again, Prof. Naison's Jewish Guilt about his Parent's Racism toward Blacks (as noted in his own memoir "White Boy") might be causing him to become hysterical/ overcompensatory, rather than scholarly?

Having "Sciorra" a "Basket Weaving" pseudo-intellect as Editor, and "Johnny Meatballs" a "Wannabe Mafia/Guido" as a Blogger, and choosing other dubious contributors really undermines Calandra's credibility. It is a Travesty to the Italian American community that such a resource is being Squandered.

I have always admoired the Italic Institute, and it's long time scholarly and zealous defense of the Italian American, on niggardly resources, and always look forward to their far more informative and readable "The Italic Way" and their "Officers Log".

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An Open Response to the Editor of the Italian American Review

26 September 2011

Joseph Sciorra, Ph.D., Editor, Italian American Review

The John D. Calandra Italian American Institute

Queens College, 23 West 43rd Street, Suite 1700

New York, NY 10036

Dear Dr. Sciorra:



Regarding Volume 1, Number 2, Mr. Naison's review of our video, *And They Came to Chicago*. Just for the record, this production was a joint venture by the Italic Institute and Modio Media, originally conceived by our president Bill Dal Cerro. It was shown on PBS in Chicagoland to a very warm reception. As with most, if not all, ethnic productions on PBS the tone was essentially positive. After all, local PBS stations around the country use such broadcasts to raise operating money from the target communities.

So, it struck us as odd that Mr. Naison would expect any ethnic group to present a contrary side of itself on public television. He spends two-thirds of his review asking that our community admit to surviving on government hand-outs, that we come clean on our relations with African Americans, and that we not 'sanitize' our history. Worse, he suggests we conform to Spike Lee's bigoted film versions of the Italian American experience.

When I googled Mark Naison, I found that he teaches African-American History at Fordham University in New York. Now the question is why was a New Yorker, who teaches African American history, asked to review a video about Chicago Italian Americans in an Italian American journal? Could it have something to do with your own focus on Italic racism? I'm reminded of your panel discussion at Queens College a few years ago, *Are Italians White?*, which was planned around that very theme. I objected to it then, you will recall. Are taxpayers sustaining such endeavors?

If the racial taunt weren't enough, Prof. Naison's annoyance at the video's message that Italian Americans succeeded by dint of their sweat and sacrifice smacks of anti-Italic prejudice. Notwithstanding the flood tide of New Deal programs and unionism, which lifted many ethnic boats in the 1930s, who would deny that Italian Americans found more success in entrepreneurial pursuits such as restaurants, pizzerias, delis, green groceries, construction, barber shops, shoe repair and even trash hauling? And of course, Italic saving rates, low divorce rates, home ownership, parental sacrifice and economy are well known. Regrettably, Italian Americans never approached the level of success in tapping into government programs that Prof. Naison's landsmen or African Americans achieved.

Finally, I am disturbed that your associate editors, Anthony Tamburri and Fred Gardaphe (a native Chicagoan and participant in our video), acquiesced in allowing such a prejudiced review to go to press. It was a disservice to the honor and the sacrifices of our community.

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#### **Links**

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- [6] <http://www.i-italy.org/files/Mancini%20letter%20to%20Sciorra09.26.11.pdf>
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[8] <http://www.i-italy.org/files/Sciorra%20reply%20to%20Mancini10.03.11b.pdf>

[9] [http://topics.nytimes.com/topics/reference/timestopics/people/h/yusuf\\_k\\_hawkins/index.html%20](http://topics.nytimes.com/topics/reference/timestopics/people/h/yusuf_k_hawkins/index.html%20)

[10] <http://www.fordhampress.com/detail.html?id=9780823232666>

[11] <http://qcpages.qc.cuny.edu/calandra/academic/index.html>

[12] <http://qcpages.qc.cuny.edu/calandra/italrev/index.html>