

## My Version of "History"

Aileen Riotto Sirey (April 06, 2013)



What follows is one woman's response to the attacks against the John D. Calandra Italian American Institute and Dean Anthony Julian Tamburri. It does NOT address the validity of the complaint that Italian Americans are still under represented in the CUNY system.



The recent attacks by a certain Mr. Piccolo give an interesting and different view of our history. Please accept these remarks as my impressions gathered over my 32 years of active tenure in the Italian American community while I readily admit that my full attention has not focused on Calandra.

Sometime in the late '70s I sat proudly near Joe Scelsa in Judge Motley's courtroom and was 100% supportive when the Judge declared Italian Americans a "protected minority" due to discrimination in the City University system. GREAT....and along came the Italian American Institute to Foster Higher Education, later named the John. D. Calandra Italian American Institute. I had hoped many changes would be encouraged by the Institute through study and education. I was satisfied that we had an advocate for Italian Americans in the CUNY system!

Our two growing organizations, [NOIAW](#) [2] (started in 1980) and Calandra, had, a long and fruitful working relation. Joe and I worked together to cosponsor many program events, and Calandra supported many important studies; most memorable for me — my [Ethnotherapy](#) [3] study and the study of the high dropout rate of Italian American High School students.

I side-stepped the continuing litigious activity toward the University system. Advocacy as I understood it is not necessarily best served by lawsuits, nor are they the best way to settle issues. Under my leadership (8 years as President and 24 as Chairwoman of NOIAW) our organization avoided demonstrations and protests and certainly lawsuits by accentuating the positive role of Italian Americans and putting forth and reaffirming the best examples of our tradition. I kept in mind what Justice Scalia said at a NIAF seminar, and although I don't always agree with Scalia, he said, "We have to stop being cry babies." But the lawsuits went on, it seemed in sync with Joe's promotions.

I believe it was after Emilese Aleandri's award, costing CUNY \$1.2, or 1.3 million, that the City University had to pay regarding Joe Scelsa's "bullying" that CUNY decided he needed to be replaced. (I think that was the story.) Now I'm not sure what went on there, but I do know that no women of stature really achieved any status at Calandra under Joe's tenure. The struggle to get Joe Scelsa's position back by the legal crowd in our community would have resulted in damnation for St. Francis, had he been appointed Dean of Calandra. Anthony Tamburri is a guy with a different vision of how to accomplish the same goal...a real academic who has done a fantastic job of remaking Calandra into a fine educational institute we should be proud of with the highest level of programs — in film, lectures, seminars and conferences along with the debates and controversies that are healthy for our community.

SO NOW, WE ARE SUING EACH OTHER.

I'm really not very clear about Fosco's and Milione's law suits. Are they a way to diminish Tamburri? I'm very fond of Maria Fosco and I understand she maintains her grade level and salary. Yes? Don't know what happened but were I the new Dean and given her "close" relationship with Scelsa and given Scelsa's expressed public desire to get his old job back, I would have considered requesting her transfer. And what's Milione's beef? A title change? While others may feel differently, I personally couldn't imagine working in an environment where I wasn't wanted; I'd take my skills and go elsewhere!

SO HERE ARE MY THOUGHTS ABOUT AN AMIABLE AND CONSTRUCTIVE SOLUTION:

First Mr. Piccolo: Please, please stop the personal attacks on members of our community. Be aware that they do more to diminish your credibility than that of anyone you are attacking. There are always differences of opinion and they can be aired with less hysteria and hyperbole.

Lastly, I can only hope that your command of the Italian language is better than your command of English... which I could accept. So why not get a proofreader to help you with clarity if you really want our attention?

And for our community — Does this look like a good solution?



1) That the Italian American Legal Defense group continue its work, raising money and suing the City University as deemed necessary

2) That we all support the very positive efforts of Dean Tamburri and the Calandra Institute with pride.

REMEMBER that Pogo was Italian (his name does end in a vowel) and he said, "WE HAVE MET THE ENEMY AND HE IS US."

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#### **Links**

[1] <http://www.iitaly.org/files/sirey3501365285005jpg>

[2] <http://www.noiaaw.org/>

[3] <http://www.amazon.com/Ethnotherapy-An-exploration-Italian-American-identity/dp/B0006YRF6M>