

Naples: Not a Commonplace

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Talking to Mayor Luigi de Magistris on the eve of his diplomatic voyage to New York, where he hopes to paint a true picture of Naples during five days of conferences and meetings.

“Naples: Not a Commonplace”
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●● Your trip coincides with invitations from two major universities. The first came from the John D. Calandra Italian American Institute of the City University of New York, the largest research institute for Italian American studies. Dean Anthony Tamburri invited you to speak at the institute on a special day dedicated to the history of emigration and immigration in Naples and New York. How does this topic, in your opinion, link the two cities?



Naples and New York are inclusive cities. Many Neapolitans left for those lands in the first half of the 1900s. Just as today a lot of immigrants, especially citizens of the southern hemisphere, are moving to our city. The reason? They're seeking opportunity. The result? Human enrichment, which can only be achieved by being inclusive of and commingling with other races, while also maintaining each one's identity. Both cities attempt to practice a globalization of hearts and minds in a world that still appears to be extremely self-centered. Both cities are fascinatingly complex and paradoxical. Both are made unique by their diversity.

The second invitation you received was from New York University's prestigious Casa Italiana. There will be a meeting open to the public, part of a series entitled "Eppur si muove," dedicated to Italians living in and out of Italy who are trying to change things. There you will talk about two watershed moments in your life: your work as a magistrate and battle with the mafia, which you have recounted in a book; and your work now as mayor of Naples. Could you tell us about these two turning points in your professional and political life? What have they meant for you?

I've spent the last twenty-two years of my life, from the age of 25 to 47, working for our country's institutions, first as magistrate in Calabria and Campania, and now as mayor. I was always first in line in the fight against mafia corruption and the squandering of public funds. Both experiences taught me that the cancer of the mafia is also present in our country's institutions. Anti-statism and illegality are often dressed up as "legality," and that's why it has become increasingly difficult to tell them apart. Often, they've turned into institutions. Obviously my time as magistrate has been very useful in my work as a local administrator. As a public prosecutor, I saw the issue from a pathological point of view—as something to be sanctioned, the way a doctor treats a disease. Now I'm working to plant the seeds for a culture of justice, partly through a widespread educational network in the schools. Children and young adults are the megaphone for good practices. My life's been spent surrounded by people, since it's fundamental to immerse oneself in the social dynamics, to be among the people, to get to know them, to listen to them without prejudice. Obviously, combating corruption must pass through a preventative stage of public administration procedures, when you must be extremely careful, bearing in mind that behind every human phenomenon there's a person, and that even the mafia, as Antonio Falcone said, is a phenomenon that has a beginning and an end.

You're going to be the main speaker at numerous events, many of which are aimed at attracting tourists to the city and promoting the city's partnership in production companies. We all know Naples' image abroad has deteriorated in recent decades. Many people think of Naples as the home of the Camorra. It's a fate that has a lot of parallels with the Italian-American experience: Italian immigrants, many of whom are from the South, are often identified by the media with the mafia and spaghetti. What will you tell New Yorkers who want to know the real Naples, its attractions, its art and culture?

That image should be challenged because it simply doesn't correspond to the truth today. When I became mayor, I immediately had to face one of the most difficult wounds to heal, one that, in terms of its image, cost my city dearly. The objective of Naples—inundated with trash, a crime perpetrated for years—was to nurture economies neck-deep in shady business. That picture provided the ballast to re-launch the city. We worked tirelessly to create a morally upright circle that since July 2011 has restored our credibility in the eyes of professionals in the area. The result is that today Naples is experiencing a major cultural renaissance.

Naples is the city in Italy that, as opposed to the rest of the country, has a growing rate of tourism. Naples is Wedding in Naples, a destination wedding service dedicated to help foreigners to come and get married in our city, whether it be civil or religious. Naples is NapoliMovieTour, a mobile app that guides you to the most famous and hidden places in the city. Naples is its historic center, which has been declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Naples is Giovani&Cultura, helping young people organize initiatives and exhibitions. Naples is a stroll along Via Caracciolo, the seaside promenade I sought to restore to residents by blocking it off to cars. Naples is also chaotically sonorous and full of life, and frequently relies on its own code of self-regulation. I tell everybody, "Don't take my word for it. Come and visit. The veil will be lifted and you'll fall in love."

You recently met New York Mayor Bill de Blasio on his visit to Naples. What was your impression? Do



you think you two could collaborate on many projects to strengthen the cultural and financial bonds between the two cities?

Mayor de Blasio made a favorable impression on me. I appreciated his strong ties to Italy, Campania and Naples. We had an interesting exchange and we both decided to reinforce the relationship between two cities, not with formal protocols but by opening up channels between the two cities so as to foster a mutual understanding based around creativity, innovative business enterprises, and cultural tourism.

What are you hoping to get out of this trip?

To let people know what's happening in Naples, to restore it to its natural place: as the capital of the Mediterranean, as a strategic city in the geopolitical balance of power. I hope to encounter the thriving and honest intelligence of New York's entrepreneurs, including so many Neapolitans, and send them a message: Destination Naples!

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