



On the Road to Naples I Discovered Why Italian American Politicians are their Own Worst Enemies

Jerry Krase (January 15, 2016)



Italian American politicians adhere to a corollary given by the 6th century BCE Chinese general Sun Tzu who wrote the Art of War. It was uttered by Michael Corleone in *The Godfather Part II* (1974): "My father taught me many things here — he taught me in this room. He taught me — keep your friends close but your enemies closer." My mother-in-law Rose Jordan-Nicoletti's version of this Italian American proverb was "Don't apologize! Your friends don't need it and your enemies won't believe it."



Both Mayor Bill DeBlasio and Governor Andrew Cuomo have deep family roots near Naples. Last week I went to the Università degli Studi suor Orsola Benincasa in Naples to talk about, among other things, "Citizenship and Governance." Many would not believe it but Napoli is one of the best places in the world to learn about both topics. Walking around the city I could see how it works despite citizenship and governance. People say that Naples is chaotic and they are correct, but the chaos makes sense to its citizens and as a result their city simply "happens."

Any attempt to control Neapolitans like traffic signals, anti-litter regulations, and even bicycle lanes have little effect on local life. Neapolitans don't expect much from their government and their government returns the favor. In contrast, in the Big Apple and the Empire State, New Yorkers hold their elected officials, especially Bill and Andy, to a much higher standard and blame them for every real and/or imagined slight. In turn they blame each other, and their continuing feud, on the verge of vendetta, serves neither of them, or the rest of us very well. One might ask, "Why are Italian American Politicians their Own Worst Enemies?" The answer can be found in a corollary of the advice given by the 6th century BCE Chinese general Sun Tzu who wrote the Art of War. This Machiavellian-sounding sentiment was pilfered by Mario Puzo and Francis Ford Coppola and uttered by Al Pacino (Michael Corleone) in [The Godfather Part II](#) [2] (1974): "My father taught me many things here — he taught me in this room. He taught me — keep your friends close but your enemies closer." My mother-in-law Rose Jordan-Nicoletti's version of this universal, but especially Italian American, proverb was "Don't apologize! Your friends don't need it and your enemies won't believe it." The parallel, yet competing, political careers of New York State Governor Andrew Cuomo and New York City Mayor Bill De Blasio clearly have been guided by these complementary aphorisms.

Andy and Bill have become their own worst enemies because they are so much alike, and this makes them even more dangerous to each other. When one itches, the other one scratches and vice versa. As a result of their mutual quest for prominence they compete for just about everything. During the past six months the intense competition has evidently been for bad press and it is difficult to declare a victor. As with all bad news the basic headlines tell the whole sad story.

For The New York Times [Nikita Stewart](#) [3] announced "For Some New York Latinos, Enthusiasm for de Blasio Gives Way to Frustration." In The Daily News [Albor Ruiz](#) [4] wrote of the "Rising Fury at Mayor de Blasio over Luxury Developments." In the New York Post [Danielle Furfaro](#) [5] implied that de Blasio was peddling influence; "Campaign contributions behind move to cap Uber, New Yorkers say." De Blasio's progressive reformer campaign image opened him to charges of hypocrisy once he took office.

"Mayor de Blasio's Hired Guns: Private Consultants Help Shape City Hall" was the not so shocking discovery of [Thomas Kaplan](#) [6]. To nobody else's surprise Bill's 2013 campaign advisers were still "at his side as a kind of privately funded brain trust, offering strategic advice and helping to shape the message that comes from City Hall." And even less startling, as with every other political consultant I have ever known "Their involvement also poses conflict-of-interest concerns, as some of the consultants' firms have clients that do business with the city." The featured Comment, by ["J"](#) [7] of New York, NY, said it all: "Based on his dismal performance as mayor, he is definitely not getting his money's worth out of these consultants. "

Andy has been no slouch either in the bad news column, racking up an impressive record second only to Bill, and Andy's fellow Governor Chris Christie. [Alexander Burns](#) [8] told his readers that even his "Fellow Democrats" don't like "His Style," (), while Burns' fellow Times writers William K.



Rashbaum and Suzanne Craig were more substantive with “Corruption Inquiry Appears to Expand to a Signature Cuomo Program.”

The investigation by U.S. Attorney Preet Bharara, was into the “Buffalo Billion” development bidding process. He has also caught the unwanted attention of the non-mainstream press as evidenced by [Julian Guerrero's](#) [9] unflattering characterization “Andrew Cuomo's Circle of Corruption” in *The Socialist Worker*.

This embarrassment of riches has led the rivals to point fingers at each other. In the *Daily News* [Erin Durkin](#) [10] blurted “De Blasio blasts Cuomo, accusing governor of thwarting his goals out of 'revenge.’” [Alexander Burns and Thomas Kaplan](#) [11] added “New York Democrats Join Mayor de Blasio in a Chorus of Dissent Against Governor Cuomo.” Two months later, [Capital New York](#) [12] reported “Cuomo-de Blasio war expands to new fronts.” Simultaneously, veteran New York political war correspondent [Fred U. Dicker](#) [13] warned de Blasio that “Cuomo (was) personally recruiting candidates to de-throne” him. The latest embarrassment for both were reports in several New York City dailies that while on a joint visit to Puerto Rico they didn't even look at each other.

Like feuding next-door neighbors, they have put plagues on their own houses. In the *Daily News* “About New York” reporter [Jim Dwyer](#) [14] penned “Mayor De Blasio and Governor Cuomo Point Fingers, but There's Enough Blame for Both.” The *New York Post's* [Natalie Musumeci](#) [15] reported “Mayor de Blasio's approval ratings have plummeted to a new low, with relatively few voters approving of his performance.” Half said he didn't deserve another term. *Capital New York's* [Josefa Velasquez](#) [16] said Governor Cuomo's popularity glass was only half-full as his approval rating dropped twenty percent over the past six years. From the [Fred Dicker](#) [17]'s sharpened quill comes “Mayor de Blasio is so reviled across the state that Senate Republicans are planning to use criticism against Hizzoner to boost their candidates in next year's campaigns — and they'll use critiques leveled by Gov. Cuomo to help demonize him.”

The closeness between Andy and Bill virtually makes them brothers, and in Italian families intense male rivalries are normal. My Sicilian-American mother's four half-Sicilian sons constantly fought with each other over nothing. At my wife's all-Italian family gatherings, I fondly remember my father-in-law Anthony Charles (Nick) Nicoletti and his brother-in-law Anthony Jordan Jr. taking center stage. Whatever comment one made the other quickly contradicted, leading to a verbal battle during which spectators were called upon to support “their” oratorical gladiator. As with the war between Andy and Bill, no one was ever declared a “winner.”

If truth be told, Andrew Cuomo and Bill de Blasio won election because their opponents (Rick Lazio, Carl Paladino, Joe Lhota) were less appealing. Their campaigns also produced record low turnouts. Lucky for their egos however, once in office, our two rival emperor's got to wear new clothes. What their closest advisers won't tell them however, the press seems only too happy to.



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- [4] <http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/rising-fury-mayor-de-blasio-luxury-developments-article-1.2368058>
- [5] <http://nypost.com/2015/11/02/campaign-contributions-behind-de-blasio-move-to-cap-uber-new-yorkers-say/>
- [6] <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/05/nyregion/mayor-de-blasios-hired-guns-private-consultants-help-shape-city-hall.html>
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