Italo-Trumpism in NYC

Jerry Krase (December 15, 2016)

Why did so many Italian Americans vote for Trump and how might they be rewarded for their fealty to him?

The day after the Presidential election I was in England to deliver the keynote address at the University of Central Lancashire [2]'s "Fieldwork Photography Symposium." I had already voted for Hillary Clinton [3] on the Working Families Party [4] line by absentee ballot [5] from Brooklyn. My opening remarks were "Yesterday there was a battle in the U.S.A. between the Anti-Christ and the Whore of Babylon, and the Anti-Christ won." Given that many in the audience had mistakenly voted for Brexit [6] and were now suffering the consequences of populism, I knew they'd understand the metaphor. This raises two questions: "Why?" and "How" might Italian Americans be rewarded for their fealty to the Trumpster?"

Part One: Why?

Many of the most wrong-headed political commentators are now bending over backwards to explain how they weren't really as wrong about the election as they actually were. Most still think that ethnicity doesn't matter; everything was about race and class as in the "Revenge of the poor and working class whites." I believe that even well-educated, and well-off, Italian Americans are an

excellent example of the wide range of white ethnic voters who were perilously ignored, except for "deplorable [7]" comments, by Hillary and the Democratic National Committee. Although not a compliment, Italian American are no more racist, homophobic, and misogynist than non-Italian Americans.

What made the difference for the majority of Italian Americans in voting for Donald, besides his pomposity, I believe, was concern for their own, and their families', security and economic future; not the plight of others. The remnants of traditional Italian values of insularity (family and home) also easily translate to protectionism, and even isolationism. Placing their faith however in the promises of someone so much like Silvio Berlusconi [8] does not bode well for "our" future. As I had predicted, in "The Italian-American Vote" in I-ItalyNY magazine, Italian American New Yorkers, or at least the vast majority of their right-leaning neighbors, cast their ballots for President-Elect Donald Trump. From a quick reading of the election returns outside of the Big Apple far and near, Italo-Trumpism had spread from sea to shining sea. New York City-wide, Hillary Rodham Clinton garnered almost 80% of the vote while Donald got slightly more than 18%. In the Bronx, it was Clinton 88%, in Manhattan 86%, in Brooklyn 79%, and in Queens 75%. Staying true to form, and as I also foresaw, "La Bella Isola" (Staten Island) was the only New York City borough to put their faith in The Donald; there he beat Hillary 57% to 40%.

This was true even though Richmond County's only, and therefore most influential, daily newspaper, The Staten Island Advance, mistakenly endorsed His Nemesis. Every other New York daily also got it wrong, and even The New York Post which had endorsed Trump in the Republican Primary as "A plain-talking entrepreneur with outer borough, common-sense sensibilities," decided not to stick its neck out in the general election. In Staten Island's many Italian American strongholds such as Todt Hill, Trump racked up 70% of more of the vote and, even though Brooklyn and Queens carried overwhelmingly for Clinton, identifiable Italian American enclaves there mimicked their co-ethnics (see figure above, based on www.dnainfo.com).

Of course, Italian American weren't the only white and nearly-white ethnics who overwhelmingly voted for Trump. A peek at other ethnically identifiable neighborhoods, shows that other deplorable voters pulled the Republican Party lever; but probably for different reasons. Religious affiliation and beliefs seemed to have mattered most for many. Most puzzling might be Orthodox Jews who, despite a campaign characterized as Anti-Semitic, outdid Italian Americans in their Trumpism. For example, in some Borough Park, Brooklyn election districts he got more than 80% of their vote. Some analysts tie their support to Trump's promise to recognize Jerusalem as the Capital of Israel. Nationally, it is claimed that Latinos gave almost a third of their votes for Trump, despite what most commentators regarded as the anti-Latino wall-building rhetoric. For the "Religious Right," that includes Evangelical Latinos, as well as many Roman Catholics, the Republican Party's promise to "pack" the Supreme Court with illiberal judges to limit access to abortion and prevent recognition of a wide range of LGBTQ rights seem to have had currency.

"Fake news" during the election may also have had an effect on Catholics. For example, someone I used to think was an intelligent friend shared with me a report that Pope Francis had endorsed Trump. For what it's worth, Irish American enclaves like Breezy Point Queens gave three-quarters of their votes to Trump. Other European American neighborhoods such as "Russian" Brighton and Manhattan Beaches, filled with a variety of New Americans from the Former Soviet Socialist Republics, mirrored Breezy Point's slavish devotion to The Donald. Their membership in the Vladimir Putin-Donald Trump Mutual Admiration Society might help explain their support these "strongmen." In the 1950's Theodor Adorno called this the "authoritarian personality."

Part Two: How?

As was obvious during the campaign, more or less prominent Italian Americans were way out there as loud supporters of The Donald and his agenda. Among them were America's Mayor Rudy Giuliani [9], New Jersey's Governor Chris Christie [10], and "America's Toughest" Sheriff Joe Arpaio [11] of Maricopa County, Arizona. As opposed to Trump, the latter lost his (re)election bid to fellow Italian American, but more liberal, Democrat Paul Penzone. Shortly following the Trump victory, Reuters ran a story "Factbox: Short list of potential picks for Trump administration" that included a number of Italian Americans (as of about twelve days before Christmas, however, it looks like Trump's most

ardent Italian American supporters will find mostly Koch brothers' coal in their stockings): For Secretary of State: Rudy Giuliani.

For Attorney General: Rudy Giuliani, Chris Christie, and Pam Bondi, (Florida Attorney General). For Homeland Security Secretary: Joe Arpaio. For Environmental Protection Agency Head: Mike Catanzaro (energy lobbyist, G.W. Bush EPA official). A day later The New York Daily News added: For U.S. Trade Representative: Dan DiMicco (Former Nucor Corporation CEO). For Commerce Secretary: Chris Christie and Dan DiMicco. While I am writing this, it was announced that Kansas Congressman Mike Pompeo would be proposed for CIA Director.

As might be expected, some of these choices have not been well-received by The New York Times and other newspapers that had endorsed Hillary Clinton. According to a NYT Editorial, "Why Rudy Giuliani Shouldn't Be Secretary of State," "...he would be a dismal and potentially disastrous choice." Noting among other things his problematic business ties and "Mr. Giuliani has given paid speeches to a shadowy Iranian opposition group that until 2012 was on the State Department's list of foreign terrorist organizations." One might also think that Chris Christie's appointment to almost anything in the new administration would be problematic given his potential indictment vis a vis the George Washington Bridge Gate scandal. Especially since a few of his minions, Bill Baroni and Bridget Anne Kelly, have already been convicted and facing a lot of hard time. However, not only won't Chris get rewarded for his yeoman campaign services, he was removed from the presidential transition team by The Donald's son-in-law and closest adviser Jared Kushner. Jared purged Chris because, as U.S. Attorney he sent Jared's father Charles up the river in 2005 for tax evasion, witness tampering and (My oh my!) illegal campaign donations.

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