

Tony Soprano Made Me Do It!

Joey Skee (March 09, 2008)



Turncoat mafioso's statement about media depictions of Italian Americans is "smoking gun" say some Italian-Americans. No kidding.

Last month, mafia informant Francesco (Frank) Fiordilino, "former Bonanno crime family associate," decried the mafia and its glorification in the media. According to the New York Daily News, Fiordilino's statement read, in part:

"I apologize as well, especially to anyone of Italian background, by conspiring and utilizing our



culture in the same manner the entertainment industry does with its stereotypes.... Hollywood intensified my love for that life, and in the process blindsided what being Italian meant" (February 22, 2008).

Italian-American spokespeople, activists, and scholars have been all-too quick to respond to this latest development.

"This is the smoking gun, no pun intended, we've been looking for," said Vin Chocchie, director of the Museum of the Italian Experience in America, who single-handedly petitioned the U.S. Congress to issue a formal apology to him personally on behalf of "the Italian-American community" for decades of unspecified ethnic discrimination (Resolution HCR11099/HR42545). "My son couldn't get on the Harvard polo team because his name ends in a vowel. (Chocchie's son Vin. Jr., a freshman at Westchester Community College, was unavailable for comment.)

Professor Vanessa Longo-Murphy of Montclair State University and author of *Strega: The Sorceress as a Mago Figure in Italian Literature* asserted, "A Princeton study showed that 74 percent of Americans associated Italian Americans with organized crime. Why would they do this? Because of the way the media depicts us."

Ms. KaNèesha Leilani al-Jamil-O'Neil née Yamaguchi, Esq, of the Organization of Great Grandsons and Great Granddaughters of Ribottoli, frazione di Serino, of North Bergen, New Jersey (OOGGAGGOR,FDS,ONBNJ), reacted to Fiordilino's statement, "My maternal grandfather's paternal grandmother's comare didn't leave her mountain village just to be depicted as a suburban housewife in "The Sopranos." We're doctors, lawyers, and cinema studies scholars. How come we don't see Italian-Americans depicted as cinema studies scholars on TV?"

Dr. Charles Lombroso of the Melanocorypha Lark Foundation for Italian Diasporic Studies has been directing a team of researchers for two decades studying the long-term impact of mafia movies and television shows, said. "This [Fiordilino's statement] only corroborates our findings. In one study [see data below], we proved conclusively that every time a 'Sopranos' episode aired, 6.5 Italian-American youths joined the mafia, or, at the very least, they thought about joining the mafia."





Poet Al E. Ghieri, who advocates for artistic expression on his blog "Sacred Farce," characterized the "knee-jerk response" by Italian-American "self-styled leaders" as "a shuddering din of strange and various tongues, sorrowful words and accents pitched with rage, shrill and hard voices."

Since Fiordilino's February 21st statement, other convicted mobsters have come forward with similar accounts linking negative media portrayals with their nefarious deeds. Peter Paulie (and Mary) Pietropaolo, serving 5-10 years in Attica Correctional Facility, explained,

"I'll never forget. It was 1976 and I was going for the paper, for the paper, and I heard Bob Dylan on the radio in Mrs. Cappa's candy store. He was singing that song 'Joey,' you know, about Joe Gallo. And there's that line, 'When they asked him why it had to be that way, 'Well,' he answered, just because'." WOW! I knew just what he meant! It was like there was no direction home. It was that song that made me the criminal I am today."

Juvenal (What's his name?) Anniballa, convicted for perjury and joculari indiscretus gravamen, and alleged member of the Genovese crime family, recalled:

"It was spring of 1980 and I was finishing up at Brooklyn College when I decided to take this class on Italian-American literature with this professor. What's his name? I don't remember now. Anyway, he had us read The Godfather. You can sort of say I took the gun and left the cannoli. Now, I regret ever having read a book. What was that guy's name?"

Reached for comment yesterday at Brooklyn College, Prof. Robert Viscusi, who has taught and written extensively on Italian-American literature, was surprisingly speechless. Seriously.

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