

A Few Random Thoughts after The Loss of Two Friends!

Anthony Julian Tamburri (July 02, 2008)



When our role models leave us, where do we go to look for others? This is, for sure, one of the questions that arises after the loss of both Rudi Vecoli and Rocco Caporale, two intellectual giants of the Italian/American community nation-wide.



Precisely because Italian Americans have willy-nilly “complicated the notion of whiteness in America,” as Gardaphe keenly indicates, so too those of us who have come after Rudi Vecoli and Rocco Caporale need to “problematize” this and many other issues at hand. I use this seemingly “ugly” term because, at the very least, it calls attention to the issue at hand.

Too often spokespeople for our community and the defense thereof have flattened the discourse, similar to revisiting an opened bottle of champagne three days later and being surprised at the lack of bubbles. This, to some extent, is what has been going on in a certain corner of Italian America.

Two other recent posts during these past couple of weeks call our attention to (a) how we chose our heroes (Joey Skee, “Watching ‘Serpico’ with my Thirteen-Year-Old Son”), and (b) the unspoken past of POWs (Laura Ruberto, “Becoming Italian American: POWs and National Identity”), which also calls to mind the similarly unspoken, related history of enemy alien status.

Our discourse has been flattened, to be sure. Early on, during that generation of first-time high school graduates and, subsequently, college graduates, we do find a few names of those who have tried to keep the bubbles alive. But they are few and far in between, and they are now beginning to leave us. We have lost two in the last few weeks: Rudi Vecoli last month and, a few days ago, Rocco Caporale.

Each of them exhibited in their work a rare combination of intellectual acuity and integrity. As we remember and honor both of these fine individuals, we should also keep in mind their unbending conviction that subtended their research, as they sought the truth by asking those questions that brought them into areas that often interrogated the status quo.

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