

"Siamo Tutti Abbronzati"

George De Stefano (November 10, 2008)



Italians are embarrassed and outraged by Berlusconi's Obama gaffe. But maybe a blackface protest isn't a great idea.

My friend Giovanni in Catania e-mailed me today with a pithy comment about our President-elect and Italy's premier, in which he both quoted and dissed the latter:

"Qui siamo tutti felici per Obama: giovane, bello ed abbronzato. Noi invece abbiamo un leader vecchio, brutto e nano."

(We're all happy here about Obama -- young, handsome, and tanned. We instead have a leader who is old, ugly and a dwarf.)

It's good to see that Italians are outraged and embarrassed by the "psiconano." I totally get their longing for a leader who doesn't disgrace them before the world, one who instead inspires hope and idealism.



But it's probably not a good idea to express disgust with Berlusconi by demonstrating in blackface, as some in Rome have done. The protestors clearly were well-intentioned. No doubt they felt they were expressing solidarity with our new President by blacking up. But their lack of awareness of the history of blackface in America, as part of racist minstrelsy, is almost as embarrassing as Berlusconi's dumb remarks. Maybe more so.

Check out the photos of the protest at La Repubblica:

<http://www.repubblica.it/2006/05/gallerie/politica/abbronzati-roma/1.html>

Do you think this was ill-advised or not?

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