

Proud to be White!

Donna Chirico (April 29, 2012)



When did we become the White privileged? When did we leapfrog over our fellow tenement dwellers to a position of lofty self-righteousness? When did we lose sight of our own immigrant heritage of discrimination and exploitation?



"Proud to be White!" is the subject line of an email that keeps bubbling up from the cesspool of Internet disinformation. In 2007, Michael Richards' name was added to the email claiming the assertions are part of his defense statement at a trial resulting from racist comments made while performing at the Laugh Factory (in November 2006). The truth is there was no such trial nor are the statements those of Richards. The aim of the email is to legitimize the anti-Black and anti-Hispanic sentiments expressed behind closed doors by declaring, "There is nothing improper about this e-mail." The tirade challenges the notion of white privilege as expressed in models such as critical race theory where white supremacy is seen as ingrained in American society and used to perpetuate the second-class citizenry of minority groups such as Blacks and Latinos. Whites are not racists they are only seen to be so when they try to salvage their entitlements without having to share them.

The email has been aggrandized in its latest manifestations to bring Jews and Muslims into the harangue.

You have Martin Luther King Day.

You have Black History Month.

You have Cesar Chavez Day.

You have Yom Hashoah.

You have Ma'uled Al-Nabi.

The convoluted logic of the email maintains that while others are free to have days that celebrate their cultural pride, if Whites tried to do this, "we" would be seen as racist.

I note that Columbus Day is not included. Perhaps this is why I received this email multiple times from individuals who present as Italian/American. The latest came from one of my oldest and dearest friends, a person from the "old" neighborhood, a neighborhood of startling diversity. The support for such outright drivel among Italian Americans is troublesome at many levels. When did we become the White privileged? When did we leapfrog over our fellow tenement dwellers to a position of lofty self-righteousness? When did we lose sight of our own immigrant heritage of discrimination and exploitation?

The email gives the sender a chance to vent about a changing America and do so as a member of the historical White power monopoly, even though there is no basis for inclusion from the perspective of the Italian American immigrant experience. The charges in the email are a denial of a past filled with hostility towards Italian immigrants. It is easy to understand the psychic need for the rant in a world where political and economic control is still out of reach for the working and middle class, but disheartening to hear it from folks whose parents and grandparents were the targets of the same misguided rhetoric.



This new American hate expressed by Italian Americans was vivid in their support of the recent failed presidential bid of Rick Santorum. Backing a candidate whose ideology would have sent most Italian immigrants back where they came is a supreme act of self-deception. By shifting allegiance to the Republican and Conservative parties, Italian Americans get to distance themselves from people of color. Frank Sinatra and Ronald Reagan. Gary Sinise and John McCain. White by association if not by birthright. Proud to be White and apparently not ashamed to be racist.

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