



## **The Tales of Italian “Hardships and Triumphs While Battling Stereotypes and Myths”**

Natasha Lardera (February 12, 2015)



The Italian Americans is a four-hour PBS series which is scheduled to premiere nationally at 9 p.m. on Feb. 17 and 24. Narrated by Stanley Tucci, the celebrated actor of Calabrian descent, “The Italian Americans” is made of four masterfully constructed one-hour episodes written and produced by John Maggio. The film was presented in a special event organized by NYU's Casa Italiana Zerilli Marimo' in collaboration with public broadcasters WETA and WNET and introduced by a passionate speech given by NYC's mayor Bill de Blasio.

It all started with a “Dear John” letter, but in this case instead of being a letter of good bye to inform “John” that a relationship is over, the receiver in question, John Maggio, was offered, by executive producer Jeff Bieber, a great story which he transformed into a great film.

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history and finding out what makes America what it is today.

The tales of Italian “hardships and triumphs while battling stereotypes and myths” are told in classic documentary format through interviews with historians, authors and well-known Italian Americans. They include Rep. Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., singer Tony Bennett, Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia, writer Gay Talese, the Sopranos creator David Chase, actor John Turturro, David Giovannitti, grandson of Arturo Giovannitti, a celebrated union leader, political activist, and poet best known for his involvement in the Lawrence Textile strike in 1912, and NYC's Mayor Bill de Blasio.

The Mayor attended a special preview of the series at NYU's Eisner & Lubin Auditorium, organized by Casa Italiana Zerilli Marimón in collaboration with public broadcasters WETA and WNET. “Anything that celebrates our heritage, which has given so much to us and has framed our lives here in this country, and makes us think about it, is worthy. This is a particularly powerful project that has already touched people very deeply. This is going to mean so much to so many people, it's a discussion we've not had enough of,” the Hon. De Blasio said at the beginning of his speech.

Mayor de Blasio is a proud Italian American who has spoken, with great enthusiasm about the importance of this film, of his experience growing up Italian American, his family has origins in Sant'Agata dei Goti, by Benevento, and in Grassano, by Matera, of all the stereotypes attached to Italians that came to America, of the great sacrifices and the strong willpower to do something good in life belonging to all those who came here without speaking the language and with no support. But most of all, de Blasio spoke about the importance of taking his wife Chirlane and their kids Dante and Chiara back to Italy with him in order to see things firsthand.

“Our family is blessed to have kept a very strong connection to the towns our families came from. Part of the beauty of our summer trip to Italy was to be able to see this through the eyes of my wife, who for someone who did not have the joy and privilege to be born in a family of Italian heritage has done a pretty good job in catching up. She's one of the greatest Italophiles you'll ever meet. But also with the eyes of my children Chiara and Dante. From the very beginning of their lives they were given a very strong sense of their heritage. Watch them take in all the different pieces of what makes them who they are was amazing. They were challenged of course, like any other young people trying to sort out identity... I strongly urge to spread the simple notion that talking about heritage is powerful,” he said.

De Blasio went to his grandfather's hometown for the first time when he was 15 and his life changed from that moment on, “It gave me an entirely different understanding not only of who we were as a family but of who we are as Americans, all of us. It's up to us to take the ideas, the messages and the meaning of the culture and maintain it, and keep it fresh. It's important to pass it on, so please pass it on.”

De Blasio's speech was followed by some clips, including the Mario Cuomo footage from his 1984 speech to the Democratic National Convention, which still brings tears to a viewer's eyes and by a panel moderated by Casa Italiana's director, Stefano Albertini, featuring bestselling author Gay Talese, director and producer John Maggio and journalist Maria Laurino, author of *The Italian Americans: A History*, a companion book to the series. Panelists discussed the importance of this film, and its exploration of the evolution of Italian Americans from the late 19th Century to today “to reveal a world uniquely Italian and uniquely American.”

The series has already been aired on Italian television (RAI storia) and it consists of four episodes: *La Famiglia*, explores the journey to America, *Becoming Americans*, focuses on the issues of assimilation into American society, *Loyal Americans*, addresses the struggle of Italians who were declared enemy aliens and *The American Dream*, features many Italian Americans who became prominent in the world.

Each episode is a must see!



triumphs-while-battling-stereotypes

### **Links**

[1] <http://test.iitaly.org/files/theitalianamericans1423796223jpg>