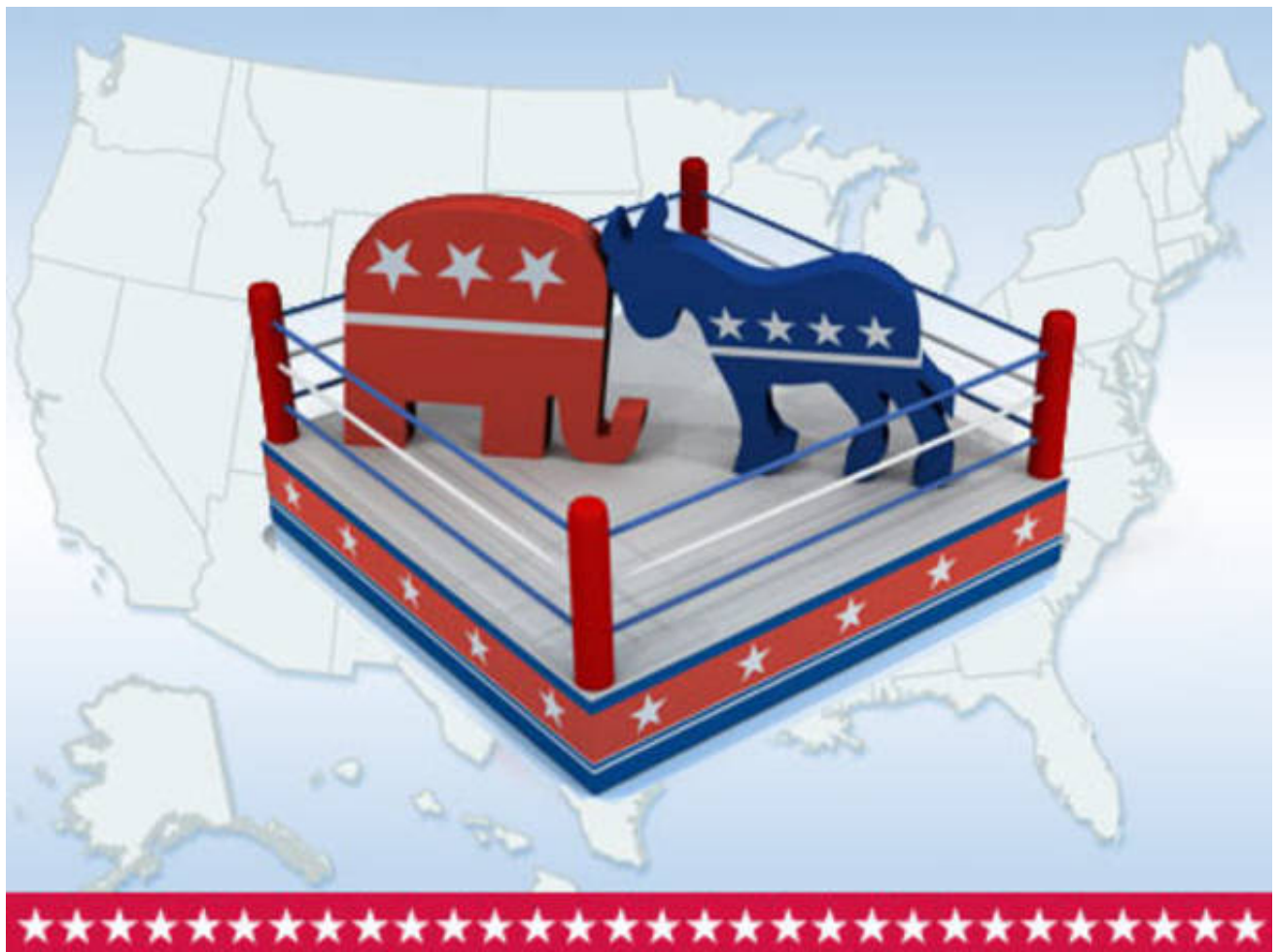




U.S. Presidential Elections: Some Italian/American Intellectuals Express Their Opinions

Gina Di Meo. Edited by Marina Melchionda (November 03, 2008)



"Who will win the upcoming elections? And why?" That's what a number of Italian-American university professors have been asked. Some of them also revealed whom they will vote for...

Just a few hours to November 4. Pubs, restaurants, clubs all over the country will welcome Americans of all ages for the Election Night.

Both Republican and Democratic supporters have organized parties to celebrate the possible victory



of their candidate.

Nevertheless, everyone is holding his/her breath. For, if it is true that a real Obama-mania has overtaken the U.S., history has taught Americans that surveys do not always get it right. And the Presidential Tracking Poll for Sunday showed Obama at 51% of the popular vote, with McCain only five points behind: too close to call!

Is America ready for a revolution? Some think that it would really be a revolution if a democratic, black, young candidate managed to defeat a white and "experienced" opponent after 8 years of Republican government. Others believe it would be a disaster.

A group of Italian-American intellectuals presented its point of view on this issue in a survey organized by Oggi7/America Oggi. They said who, in their opinion, will win - and why. Some of them also revealed for whom they will vote.

We thank Oggi7 for permitting us to publish the following declarations.

The Editors, i-Italy.org

Grace Russo Bullaro, Associate Professor and Director of Graduate Program in English at the City

University of New York-Lehman College, answered quite categorically:



"I absolutely cannot bring myself to vote for either one of the candidates so I'll write in my vote for the only politician that I've ever trusted: Colin Powell. I cannot vote for McCain b/c not only do I see him as a Bush surrogate, but in addition he is too old and ineffective. Worse than that even, is the horrendous thought that if he should die in office Palin would become Pres. Her experience amounts to this: mayor of a tiny town, governor of a state that has more bears than people, never been out of the country....In short, I consider her frighteningly unsuitable for the office.

As for Obama, his arrogance, before he is even elected, grates on my nerves and makes me fear for the future. We have seen the disastrous consequences of a President whose arrogance has turned him into a virtual dictator. What's more, Obama's connections are way too suspicious: first Rev. Wright, then Ayres, then Acorn, now Khalidi. Way too many! He is being catapulted into the presidency by a press that forgives him everything and by a public that essentially is voting not for him but against Bush and the current disaster that has become America".

Joseph La Palombara, Arnold Wolfers Professor of Political Science and Management Emeritus at Yale University, states that the economic crisis and the choice of Palin as VP candidate are McCain's weak spots:

"Barak Obama should win next Tuesday for essentially three reasons. First, it appears from the polls that economics trumps racism. Without the economic meltdown, I do not believe he would have won, notwithstanding that his campaign has out-spent McCain's by a huge margin. Second, the choice of Sarah Palin as McCain's running mate has clearly had an overall negative effect. Not just the independent or undecided voters, but many Republicans as well, are dismayed to discover how badly prepared Sarah Palin is to enter the Oval Office, were circumstances to require it. The third factor is the probable turnout at the polls. The first two advantages, served up for Obama by Wall Street and McCain, might still not have sufficed were it not for the fact that not just Afro-Americans but also younger voters of all description are expected to vote in unprecedented numbers. Because of the racism factor, I believed earlier that this election was not Barak Obama's to win but, rather, was John McCain's to lose. McCain, it seems to me, has turned out to be astonishingly accommodating on this score. And the errant behavior of Wall Street provides perhaps the clinching factor in his probable defeat".



Stanislao Pugliese, professor of History at Hofstra University, answered:

"America Oggi's online poll shows readers prefer Barack Obama 71% over John McCain 23%. But a more interesting question might be to ask readers how we might have voted if Rudy Giuliani was the Republican candidate. Never have Americans and Italian Americans faced such a stark dichotomy in their choice for President. How would I have voted if the Republican candidate was Rudy Giuliani? For Barack Obama. Why? For several decades now, Italian Americans have made a marked political journey from left to right. We have transformed ourselves from Carlo Tresca to Fiorello LaGuardia to

Mario Cuomo to Rudy Giuliani to Antonin Scalia to Robert Alito. But in doing so, we have abandoned our own political and cultural traditions. The real task before us, as Ignazio Silone, author of "Fontamara", once wrote to Italian Americans, was to dig beneath the colorful folk costumes and customs, the regional and local dialects, the traditional rivalries and the traditional feasts, where we will find a greater imagined community of workers around the world. Only in recognizing the terrible shared sorrow of the memories of their native lands can Italian Americans fully realize their humanity. "That sorrow, which is like a deep and bloody wound in the heart of every one of us southern Italians abroad, is not something individual and particular, but a great, universal sorrow. It joins us in fraternity with Negroes, Indians, Romanians, Poles, Portuguese, Slovenes, Jews and all the others." It is only in overcoming "our native shame" and simply and truthfully recounting a universal story, that we are telling our own story. "This is the message of Fontamara. This is its secret truth. You will be faithfully and truly Abruzzesi, Pugliesi, Calabresi, Siciliani, only if you are courageously rebels and internationalists." Something to keep in mind as we enter the voting booth"



Alexander Stille, San Paolo Professor of International Journalism at Columbia University, has it in for the Bush Administration:

"There are three big reasons why I think Barack Obama will win and deserves to win.

1) Eight years of the Bush administration have created a toxic environment in which it would be almost impossible for a Republican to win. The Bush administration was handed a surplus and has doubled the national debt and greatly increased the deficit. Average wages have continued to decline and the average family is actually worse off than it was eight years ago. Now, the financial system has virtually collapsed in part because the deregulation pushed by Bush and the Republicans for years meant that no one interceded when the financing of mortgages and mortgage-backed security became more and more risky. Then, of course, there is the disastrous and unnecessary war

in Iraq. The United States

enjoyed almost universal solidarity around the world after September 11 and, under Bush, it is now widely hated and, what's worse, the war has served as a great recruiting tool for the terrorists we were supposed to be defeating. Bush used deception, selective use of intelligence to bully the country into war under a threat of imminent danger that they themselves either knew or strongly suspected to be false. The backlash to all this is that more than 80 percent of



the electorate believes that the country is headed in the wrong direction. Moreover, while the percentage of voters who called themselves Democrats and Republicans was essentially even in 2004. Democrats now outnumber Republicans by ten percentage points. All this represents an almost-impossible challenge for a candidate from the incumbent party. And all this before the collapse of Wall Street that probably sealed McCain's fate. To win under these circumstances, it would take an extraordinary candidate, a brilliantly-run campaign and a very weak democratic candidate.

2) John McCain seemed like the one Republican candidate who had a decent chance of overcoming these odds because of his long record of independence and his ability to appeal to moderate Democrats and independents, despite a strongly conservative records. Instead, he ran a very poor campaign, directed not at the moderates but at energizing the right-wing base of the Republican Party and running a highly divisive campaign. The selection of Sarah Palin only made matters worse, undermining McCain's principle strengths, that he was a principled politician who put the country first, that he was prepared to defy the extremism within his own party, that experience matters and that he had sounder and steadier judgment than his much younger opponent. By contrast, Obama has waged a very strong campaign with superb organization and has never lost his cool in the heat of the campaign, which has greatly increased his standing with uncertain voters. The Obama campaign has done a much better job of using new technology to mobilize voters, particularly younger voters.

3) The changing demographics of the country have changed the electoral map in important ways that favor the Democrats. The growth of the Hispanic vote has suddenly made certain states that were once reliably Republican, like Nevada and New Mexico potential wins for Obama. Similarly, the hispanic vote has made California, which was, after all, the state of Ronald Reagan, a virtual lock for the Democrats. The growth of suburban areas, full of well-educated moderate voters, has changed the electoral environment in other reliably Republican states like Virginia and North Carolina".

Fred Gardaphe, Distinguished Professor of Italian American Studies and

Queens



Obama because I believe he best represents the values of compassion that I learned from my family and have taught to my children and will teach to my grandchildren. He also represents the passion that I have also learned to bring to my life's work. To me, an Obama administration represents the possibilities of inclusion, the practicalities of tapping a wide base of wisdom, and the best potential for solving today's problems that threaten our future. His ability to lead has been proven through this election; I have no doubt that as a leader of this country he will succeed in bringing the best of what America produces to the benefit of all".

Jerry Krace, Murray Koppelman Professor and Professor Emeritus at Brooklyn College of The City University of New York, echoes him:

"For more than a half-century, I have been involved in American electoral politics as an activist,

consultant, campaigner, fund raiser, educator, researcher, and writer. The current racially-tinted US Presidential race (excuse the word playing) is especially important to me as I began my community organizing and grass-roots political work in the 1960s trying to bring together black and white ethnics in the deteriorating cores of American cities. Barack Obama's election will show that my decades of difficult and often times professionally unrewarding, if not dangerous, efforts have been worth while. In my Italian American Studies work, I have often tried (mostly in vain) to draw parallels between the historical experiences of Italian- and African-Americans. I don't expect Obama to get a majority of Italian American votes but I hope that if they vote for "the other guy," they do it for the right reasons".

Also Salvatore Rotella, Professor of Political Science and former Chancellor of Riverside College in



California, has no doubts at all:



“As of today, given the collapse of the market and the problems of the economy, there is no question in my mind that the winner will be the Democratic Party. Or, put it differently, the loser has to be the party in office, i.e. the Republican Party. Sen. Obama has fired the imagination of the electorate, especially of the young, but Sen. McCain has run a spirited campaign. As much as he attempts to distance himself from George Bush, he cannot distance himself from a reality that is seen in negative light by almost everyone. For this, look at the approval rate of G.W. Bush. Had the economic situation been different, McCain could have had a chance. Don't look at the poll of the national electorate, but go state by state and look especially at the states that put G.W. Bush in office in the last election”.

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