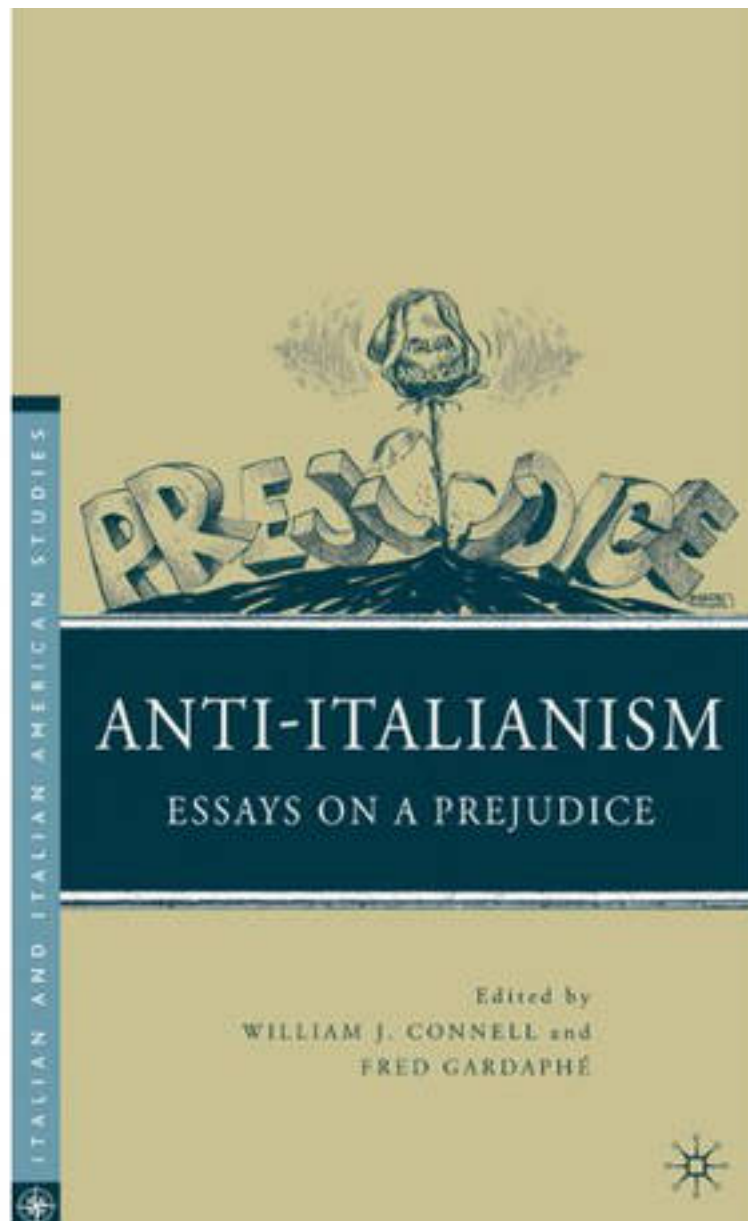




Anti-Italianism. Essays on a Prejudice

Luca Delbello (January 31, 2011)



At the John D. Calandra Italian American Institute roundtable discussion with book editors William Connell and Fred Gardaphé to discuss stereotypes, prejudice, and assimilation experienced by Italians and Americans of Italian ancestry



A few influential social scientists and humanists gathered on January 24th at the [John D. Calandra Italian American Institute](#) [2] of the [City University of New York](#) [3] to present the new book “Anti-Italianism. Essays on a prejudice”, edited by [Fred Gardaphé](#) [4], Distinguished Professor of English and Italian American Studies and [William J. Connell](#) [5], who holds the Joseph M. and Geraldine C. La Motta Chair in Italian Studies at [Seton Hall University](#) [6].

The Calandra Institute is the most important center of research in Italian American studies in the United States; it is often used as a meeting place for conferences, lectures, seminars and symposia on the Italian American experience.

Dean of the Institute, Professor Anthony J. Tamburri moderated the conference and introduced the authors. Professor William J. Connell was the first to speak, presenting the various contributions of the book. Oblivion is a disease that some Italian Americans wish for themselves, “what often happens is that Italian Americans want to bury their history, I want to dig it up” affirms Professor Connell.

The book is a collection of essays written by several social scientists and humanists, regarding prejudice against Italians and Italian Americans. Literature, television and cinema are some of the media used to foster prejudice and clichéd images on Italian Americans, and the essays try to analyze the misuse of these forms of communication.

Fred Gardaphe



William J. Connell



Anthony J. Tamburri

Professor Fred Gardaphé explained how important it is to utilize a multidisciplinary effort in some particular kind of social research. Contributions from several experts in different fields constitute the strength and the secret behind this interesting book.

In the introduction, "Invisible People", Gardaphé writes: "Italian Americans became invisible the moment they could pass themselves off as being white. By becoming white, they have paid a price, and that price is the extinction of their culture". Professor Gardaphé would like to know "Who's not going to read the book? The people who don't want to be associated with anti-italianism...", these people are the ones the book is about, the ones who deny their origins. He talks about a clash between classes. Images of working class people are the most used to depict Italians and their living conditions. "It has always been a matter of class, even if they didn't talk about it..." he adds.

Three other contributors participated in the conference: Peter Vellon, assistant professor of history at Queens College, CUNY; Elizabeth Messina, psychologist in private practice in Manhattan, faculty member in the Department of Psychiatry at Lenox Hill Hospital and cofounder of the Italian American Psychology Assembly; and Jerome Krase, Murray Koppelman Professor Emeritus at Brooklyn College, CUNY.

Professor Vellon described the brutal reality of the lynching of Italians in the South and how Italians



have tried to emphasize their civilization, pretending to have everything in common with white people, in order to overcome fears of being marginalized. They kept “talking about what they were not, instead of who they were”.

Dr. Messina expressed her interest in history in order to understand where prejudices came from. Her essay focuses on racist ideologies behind intelligence testing. Darwinian sociology was used in order to establish the “inferiority” of Italian race and the dangers of contamination for the American society.

Jerome Krase presented his essay, explaining to the audience his very interesting experience as consultant to civil rights for the animated film “Shark Tale”, in which the main character is played by an Italian Mafioso shark. The movie emphasizes a mistaken and clichéd idea of Italian Americans, underlining the stereotyped “italianità” of the big boss of the sea. Prof. Krase stressed the problems related to the potentially damaging effect of the film, especially on young Italian Americans. The activist campaign against the movie was in every major newspaper, but the results were not satisfying; expression of negative stereotypes is still a common practice in the American mass media.

We hope this compelling book might even serve as a reminder, especially for the many who tend to forget and to deny their past.

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