



What's Cooking with this Johnny Meatballs Business?

William Russo (June 18, 2012)



John DeCarlo aka Johnny Meatballs has developed a vocabulary, image and brand that draws from stereotypical Italian American culture, some of which is exaggerated and degrading and some of which is endearing. I am a firm believer in free speech so his public pronouncements are not my concern. It's what he's serving that may be distasteful.

Terminology of 'cugine' and 'goombah' that he uses in his self-promotions are crass in my opinion, and contrary more and more to the waves of new Italians making their way to America who do not fit that stereotype. And, 2nd, 3rd, 4th generations of Italian Americans less and less identify with that language. The general public however may find that language funny but also could assume it to be the contemporary norm for Italian American youth, in particular as in Jersey Shore.



In that regard I do wish that that type of vocabulary disappear but I know that it won't judging by the popularity of shows like Jersey Shore. Johnny Meatballs just reinforces that lexicon.

With that said, from a cultural timeline perspective his focus on Italian food traditions and the passion for food making is endearing.

It remains to be seen, as far as I am concerned, how and for what purposes Johnny Meatballs may use his new found fame. For example, Mob Wives certainly hadn't contributed to advancing the standing of Americans of Italian descent.

If the associations that Johnny Meatballs bolster his image and brand on the 'cugine' and 'goombah' side of the equation rather than on the genuine Italian cultural side (see Lidia Masticcchio Bastinich) then it's just more of the same perpetuation of awkward and buffoon-like stereotypes.

However, if Johnny Meatballs chooses to take a different, better path, a course of identifying with Italy and the genuine good of the Italian American experience then his free speech, vocabulary, image and brand will be to every American's benefit.

Only Johnny Meatballs knows the recipe he'll follow.

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