

9-15-1984

## National Italian American Foundation Dinner Remarks

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### Recommended Citation

Ferraro, Geraldine, "National Italian American Foundation Dinner Remarks" (1984). *Speeches*. 104.  
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ITALIAN AMERICAN FOUNDATION DINNER

SEPTEMBER 15, 1984

THANK YOU, CHAIRMAN RODINO, FOR THAT WONDERFUL INTRODUCTION. WHEN THE POLITICAL HISTORY OF OUR TIME IS WRITTEN, AND THE CONSTITUTIONAL CRISES REVIEWED, THE NAME PETER V. RODINO WILL HAVE A PROMINENT PLACE ON THE SIDE OF JUSTICE.

MR. PRESIDENT, VICE PRESIDENT BUSH, FELLOW MEMBERS OF THE FOUNDATION, AND MY OLD ITALIAN FRIEND, FRITZ MON-DAH-LAY.

LIKE PETER, FRITZ ALSO HAS A SPECIAL PLACE IN HISTORY. FOR WHEN THE STORY OF SOCIAL JUSTICE IS WRITTEN, MY RUNNING-MATE WILL GO DOWN AS THE PERSON RESPONSIBLE FOR PLACING NOT ONLY THE FIRST WOMAN BUT ALSO THE FIRST ITALIAN AMERICAN ON THE NATIONAL TICKET.

AS MANY OF YOU KNOW, WE'VE BEEN NEGOTIATING WITH THE PRESIDENT AND VICE PRESIDENT OVER THE DEBATES. WHAT YOU MAY NOT KNOW IS THAT JUST TODAY WE AGREED ON THE FORMATS. FOR THE DEBATE BETWEEN THE PRESIDENT AND FRITZ MONDALE, WE HAVE TOTALLY ACCEPTED THE PRESIDENT'S FORMAT. AND MR. PRESIDENT: I THINK IT WAS VERY GRACIOUS OF YOU TO ACCEPT OUR FORMAT FOR THE VICE-PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE, AND TO LET MR. BUSH DEBATE ME IN ITALIAN.

*Giorgio*

SEI PRONTO PER LASCIARE COMMENCIARE IL DIBATTITO, GORGIO?

AS A MEMBER OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE NATIONAL ITALIAN AMERICAN FOUNDATION, IT GIVES ME GREAT PRIDE TO BE HERE TONIGHT. I AM PROUD TO JOIN IN SALUTING THE FIVE OUTSTANDING MEN AND WOMEN WHOM WE HONOR. AND I AM ESPECIALLY PROUD THAT THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES IS HERE.

BY HIS VERY PRESENCE THIS EVENING, THE PRESIDENT PAYS TRIBUTE TO ITALIAN AMERICANS. AND I'M SURE HE, LIKE ALL OF US, IS LOOKING FORWARD TO THE DAY WHEN AN ITALIAN-AMERICAN IS SWORN IN AS VICE PRESIDENT -- OR PRESIDENT -- OF THE UNITED STATES.

AND SO, MR. PRESIDENT, AM I.

I MUST SAY THAT I FIND A SPECIAL SATISFACTION IN THIS EVENING'S PROCEEDINGS. THESE PEOPLE -- ART DECIO, DANIEL TRAVANTI, GIANCARLO MENOTTI, DR. ROBERT GALLO, AND SISTER MARGUERITE MARCHIONE -- RICHLY DESERVE THIS HONOR, AND I WOULD BE PROUD TO BE ASSOCIATED WITH THEM UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES.

BUT IT FEELS JUST A LITTLE BIT BETTER WHEN IT IS ITALIAN-AMERICANS HONORING OUR OWN. AND I WANT TO CONGRATULATE NIAF FOR ITS TEN-YEAR RECORD OF PROMOTING ITALIAN-AMERICANS. THANKS TO LEADERS LIKE JENO PAULUCCI, AND JOHN VOLPE, AND FRANK STELLA, NIAF HAS BECOME A FORCE IN WINNING FOR AMERICANS OF ITALIAN DESCENT THE RECOGNITION AND RESPECT WE DESERVE. IT IS A TRUE SUCCESS STORY.

IT IS EXCITING THAT WE HAVE COME SO FAR AND ACCOMPLISHED SO MUCH. BUT IT IS NOT SURPRISING. FOR WITHIN THE OVERALL SUCCESS STORY THERE ARE COUNTLESS INDIVIDUAL SUCCESS STORIES.

THE STORY OF MY FAMILY IS ONE OF THESE. IT IS A SPECIAL STORY, NOT BECAUSE IT IS UNUSUAL OR UNIQUE, BUT BECAUSE IT IS SO MUCH LIKE THE STORY OF SO MANY ITALIAN-AMERICAN FAMILIES.

MY FATHER CAME HERE FROM THE SMALL TOWN OF MARCIANISE, IN CASSERTA. HE CAME TO THIS LAND OF GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY, BELIEVING THAT IF YOU WORKED HARD, AND PLAYED BY THE RULES, AND KEPT FAITH WITH YOUR GOD, YOU COULD CARVE OUT A BETTER FUTURE FOR YOURSELF AND YOUR FAMILY.

MY MOTHER SHARED THAT BELIEF. AND WHEN SHE WAS WIDOWED WITH TWO YOUNG CHILDREN, SHE WENT BACK TO WORK IN NEW YORK CITY'S GARMENT DISTRICT, TO MAKE SURE MY BROTHER AND I WOULD HAVE THE OPPORTUNITIES SHE NEVER HAD.

AND BECAUSE SHE WORKED HARD, I WORKED HARD. I WASN'T ABOUT TO LET HER DOWN. AFTER COLLEGE I TAUGHT IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF NEW YORK BY DAY, AND WENT TO LAW SCHOOL AT NIGHT. IT WAS HARD WORK, BUT I OWED THAT TO HER.

EACH OF YOU KNOWS WHAT I MEAN. YOUR PARENTS AND GRANDPARENTS CAME TO THIS COUNTRY WITH DREAMS FOR A BETTER FUTURE FOR THEIR CHILDREN. THEY SACRIFICED AND STRUGGLED AND WATCHED AS THEIR KIDS

GREW UP. AND THEY WERE REWARDED WHEN WE BUILT BETTER LIVES FOR OURSELVES AND OUR CHILDREN. IT IS AS TRUE TODAY AS IT EVER WAS, "NOI PONIAMO I NOSTRI SOGNI NEI FIGLI -- E CON FEDE IN DIO, LAVORIAMO AFFINCHÉ QUESTI SOGNI SI REALIZZINO."

THAT IS WHAT THE IDEA OF FAMILY IS ALL ABOUT. WE HONOR THE SACRIFICE OUR PARENTS HAVE MADE FOR US BY THE SACRIFICES WE MAKE FOR OUR CHILDREN.

BUT LET ME ADD: WITH ALL THE HELP MY FAMILY GAVE ME, NONE OF WHAT I TRIED TO DO WOULD HAVE BEEN POSSIBLE IF IT HADN'T BEEN FOR THE EDUCATION I RECEIVED. IN FACT, THE MAIN REASON MY PARENTS WORKED SO HARD WAS SO THAT I COULD TAKE ADVANTAGE OF AMERICA'S OUTSTANDING EDUCATION SYSTEM.

IN AMERICA, EDUCATION EQUALS OPPORTUNITY. IT OPENS DOORS FOR THE DISADVANTAGED, HONES OUR SKILLS, LIFTS OUR SIGHTS, AND IS, IN THE END, THE BEST INVESTMENT WE CAN POSSIBLY MAKE. IF WE WANT TO HAVE A STRONGER DEFENSE, A MORE COMPETITIVE ECONOMY, AND A MORE FAIR SOCIETY, WE SHOULD MAKE THIS THE BEST EDUCATED GENERATION IN AMERICAN HISTORY. EDUCATION WAS THE KEY TO SUCCESS FOR ~~THOSE~~ <sup>everyone</sup> OF ~~US~~ IN THIS ROOM. LET'S MAKE SURE IT'S THERE FOR OUR CHILDREN, TOO.

DEPENDING ON THESE TWIN PILLARS -- FAMILY AND EDUCATION -- ITALIAN AMERICANS HAVE COME A LONG WAY. AND SO HAS THIS COUNTRY. NOT LONG AGO, EVERY TIME YOU SAW AN ITALIAN WOMAN ON TELEVISION

SHE WAS LEANING OUT OF A WINDOW, YELLING, "ANTHONY, IT'S SPAGHETTI DAY."

*Prince*

BUT THEN ELLA GRASSO BECAME GOVERNOR OF CONNECTICUT -- AND SHE WAS THE BEST GOVERNOR ANY STATE EVER HAD. PETER RODINO PRACTICALLY SAVED THE CONSTITUTION IN ITS HOUR OF PERIL TEN YEARS AGO. JUDGE JOHN SIRICA REAFFIRMED THE BASIC PRINCIPLE THAT NO PERSON IS ABOVE THE LAW. AND TODAY, BOTH MEN AND WOMEN OF ITALIAN DESCENT ARE SEEN ON TELEVISION DISCUSSING NOT PASTA, BUT POLITICS, THE FEDERAL BUDGET, AND THE FATE OF THE EARTH.

STEREOTYPES ARE FALLING AWAY, DOORS ARE OPENING UP, BARRIERS ARE COMING DOWN. THIS COUNTRY, AS GREAT AS IT IS, IS BECOMING EVEN GREATER.

I AM PROUD TO BE AN AMERICAN, AND TO BE AN AMERICAN OF ITALIAN DESCENT. NO ONE BELIEVES MORE DEEPLY IN THE AMERICAN DREAM, NO ONE IS MORE PROUD OF BOTH HER HERITAGE AND THIS COUNTRY, THAN THE DAUGHTER OF AN ITALIAN IMMIGRANT NOMINATED BY HER PARTY TO BE VICE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES.

FOR THAT PRIVILEGE I HAVE TO THANK THE PEOPLE IN THIS ROOM, INCLUDING FRITZ MONDALE; MY PARENTS AND THE MILLIONS OF ITALIANS WHO BROKE DOWN THE BARRIERS OF DISCRIMINATION BEFORE MY TIME; AND THIS NATION, WHICH IS THE FREEST AND FAIREST ON EARTH. THANK YOU VERY MUCH.