

Fred Gardaphe Named Distinguished Professor of Italian American Studies

Dominic Candeloro (April 14, 2008)



Career Profile of Fred Gardaphe

New Distinguished Prof at CUNY is One of Us—Fred Gardaphe'

Fra Noi is filled with stories about "Local Boy (or Girl) makes Good." This is one of them; but it is more. When Fred Gardaphe` was named Distinguished Professor of Italian American Studies by the City University of New York recently, it was one good step for a good man and one giant leap for the promotion and preservation of Italian Americana. If the name looks familiar, it's because Fred Gardaphe' has been writing for the Fra Noi since 1980 and has been the Associate Editor for the past two decades.

As one of the highest ranking professors in the CUNY system, Gardaphe's new charge is to teach, research, and write about Italian Americans at Queens College and facilitate the study of Italian American literature and culture on all the 23 campuses of CUNY through the John D. Calandra Italian American Institute.

At age 55 and as a tenured professor, he can look forward to decades of scholarly activities and



public programming that will reach the 3.4 million Italian Americans in the New York metropolitan area. That's because Fred is not just another academic, engulfed in a narrow specialty. He is a true Public Intellectual. His research and publication credentials are excellent, but Fred also has a flair for bringing his creativity to both the scholarly public and the Italian American public.

His writings include "Italian American Ways" (a book of short items and recipes), "Italian Signs American Streets" (a critical study of the evolution of Italian American literature); "Moustache Pete is Dead? (taken from experience in interviewing residents at Villa Scalabrini); "Dagoes Read" (a collection of first 10 years of book reviews that had appeared in the *Fra Noi*); "Leaving Little Italy" (a series of essays about IA culture through the lens of multi-cultural America); "From Wiseguys to Wise Men" explores why everyone is so fascinated by the gangster and explores its connection to concepts of masculinity. He is currently working on a memoir—growing up in Chicago, and a study of the subjects of irony and humor in Italian American literature. Surf the net and Amazon.com for more information about these important books.

In addition to that, Gardaphe' has partnered in the establishment of Bordighera Press which has published hundreds of titles by and about Italian Americans, served as President of the American Italian Historical Association and MELUS (the Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States), and organized dozens of literary conferences and workshops that explored Italian Americana in the context of the US as a multi-ethnic nation. In the last ten years, in his appearances on the Italian American banquet circuit in New York Gardaphe' raised friends and funds for such causes as the Alphonse D'Amato Chair of Italian American Studies at SUNY Stony Brook.

Gardaphe' credits many people along his career for his success. "Rudy Vecoli [Director Emeritus of the Immigration History Research Center at the University of Minnesota] was my mentor. I was awarded a fellowship to go up there and do research even before I had a Ph.D. He saw the value of the work I was doing and gave me that early support that was no necessary."

Professor Gardaphe's journey CUNY was not a direct one, but each experience enhanced the skills he was later to use in his rise to the Distinguished Professorship. Fred was born and raised in Melrose Park, the son of Fred and Anne Gardaphe', the grandson of Michael and Paolina (Bianco) Rotolo of Grotte di Castellana, Puglia and Fred Gardaphe and Isabella (Fusaro) of Canada and Cosenza, Calabria. He lived the Italian American experience and came to understand the household Barese and Calabrian dialects. Fred attended Sacred Heart Grammar School and Fenwick High School (class of 1970) where he studied Latin and Greek. At Triton College he prepared for the University of Wisconsin-Madison where he majored in English and Communication Arts. After his graduation in 1976 Gardaphe' taught high school English in Wisconsin and Iowa before returning to Chicago in 1979.

"As soon as I went to Italy for the first time, I became a born again Italian. Then I would go back every summer between 1979 and 1982. In '82 in September Susan and I got married in my grandparents' village." Since that first trip, Gardaphe' has traveled to Italy more than 30 times.

While teaching in a Chicago alternative high school, Gardaphe' earned a master's degree in English from the University of Chicago, but was discouraged there from pursuing the advanced study of Italian American literature. His advisers told him that the field of Italian American literature did not exist, and even if it did, there would be no future in it. A few years later, influenced by the success of



his own creative writing on Italian American themes and his contact with Fra Noi founder Fr. Armando Pierini, and the Italians in Chicago Project, Gardaphe' enrolled in the English Ph. D. program at the University of Illinois at Chicago ---where his professors supported his determination to do his dissertation on Italian American literature. While teaching full time at Columbia College, he completed his doctorate and soon after published his dissertation under the title "Italian Signs, American Streets," the first comprehensive study of Italian American writing since Rose Basile Green's, "The Italian-American Novel" in 1974.

In 1998, Gardaphe' left Columbia College to devote full time to his passion as Director of Italian American Studies in the Department of European Languages, Literatures, and Cultures SUNY-Stony Brook. For the next decade he and Professor Mary Jo Bona enrolled hundreds of Long Island students each semester in courses on Italian Americans and literature, film, women's studies, inter-ethnic relation, and gangster images, creating a minor in Italian American studies. Professor Gardaphe' may be reached on email at fgardaphe@qc.cuny.edu.

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