

The President Becomes a Student

Stefano Albertini (May 26, 2010)



Washington. Prof. Stefano Albertini, Director of Casa Italiana Zerilli Marimò at NYU, met the President of the Italian Republic Giorgio Napolitano on the occasion of a private encounter with a group of professors in important American universities. Here are his impressions and feelings... Stay tuned. For more on this important topic...

After having briefly greeted the representatives of the Italian community, President Napolitano retired to a side-room of the bright and majestic hall of the chancellery of the Italian Embassy in Washington.

There were only about ten guests plus the President, who was accompanied by Ambassador Terzi and his retinue. People were wondering who the President had withdrawn with and what he had to say to these few chosen ones that was so reserved. But these people weren't policy-makers, elected



within the representations of Italians abroad, or successful entrepreneurs.

The President asked to meet a group of Italian scholars, professors of Italian in various American universities and colleges.

And the most surprising thing is that the President, after Ambassador Terzi's introduction, wished to listen and understand – through the experiences of each and every teacher present – the state of Italian studies in the United States. Stories differed from the small colleges to the large research universities.

And while the professors spoke about their difficulties and successes, of the rising interest of students in Italian studies, and of their programs in Venice, Florence and Perugia, the President carefully took notes or asked questions to clarify or broaden his points of interest. Finally, the President made a brief closing comment especially committing himself to ease relations with Italian universities, but most of all he thanked the professors for what they do and the passion they put into it.

But apart from his words, what I will always remember of that hour will be the image of this man, burdened with years, wisdom, culture, recognized by everyone as having rare intellectual honesty and lucidity, sitting there humbly and carefully listening, taking notes and asking questions to better understand how the language and culture of the country he represents are perceived in the United States, a country whose history and political tradition he knows better than just about anyone.

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