

Finding the Mother Lode. Documenting Italian Historical Success

Giulia Madron (March 04, 2014)



Gianfranco Norelli and Suma Kurien presented their new documentary, "Finding the Mother Lode: Italian Immigrants in California," at the Calandra Italian American Institute of New York

Finding the Mother Lode is "a thoroughly woven narrative of the Italian experience in the Golden State ... the perfect companion piece to Pane Amaro, which together form a one-two punch of the history of Italians on both coasts of the United States." Anthony Julian Tamburri, Dean, [John D. Calandra Italian American Institute](#) [2] (Queens College, CUNY).

Finding the Mother Lode: Italian Immigrants in California, the new documentary produced by Gianfranco Norelli and Suma Kurien on the history of Italian immigrants in California, was presented at the Calandra Italian American Institute of New York. Many people attended the screening of this wonderful film which explores the success of many Italians who moved to California during the XX century.

With this documentary, Norelli and Kurien reveal a different side of immigration, showing how the hopes and the dreams of many Italians reached their fulfillment in the US.

The Italian immigration experience in the West Coast, as we can see from the documentary, was



very different from the one on the East Coast, and it resulted with easier achieved economic and social success. Italians first moved to California starting as gold rushers, but then begun to develop industries, putting into practice the skills they already had in farming, fishing, commerce and making wine. Italians have demonstrated to be essential contributors in the creation and maintenance of California's identity. The vineyards, the olive and cyprus trees, which distinguish the West Coast landscapes, were first planted by Italian immigrants. The Italian success spread also in many other fields such as banking for instance. Indeed, what we know as Bank of America, initially was created as Bank of Italy by Amadeo Pietro Giannini.

Finding the Mother Lode tells several stories set in seven Italian American communities throughout the Golden State, weaving together oral histories from community members and contextualizing historical analysis by scholars to tell a thorough and engaging narrative of migration, transformation, assimilation and self-identification.

After the viewing, Dr. Joseph Sciorra led a post-screening discussion with the filmmakers, who gave the audience some insights into their research and on the origins of their documentary.

"The experience of Italians in California was shaped by the skills that they had. Therefore, their integration was faster," said Norelli.

"We were very curious about why Italians were so successful in California. It was not the story that we knew. So we started researching and found that there was a wonderful match between the skills that they had and what they found in California,' added Kurien, "and they arrived when possibilities were endless. There was space for Italian immigrants."

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