

Storia e memorie: Connecting Italy and Italian America

Italian students spend three weeks in D.C. to learn about Italian immigration

Fifteen high school students and six teachers from Friuli and Sardegna were in D.C. this summer as part of the “Storia e memorie” program to learn about Italian immigration to America.

The program is promoted by a Commission of the Italian Senate (Commissione per la Biblioteca e l’Archivio Storico del Senato della Repubblica), and managed by the school network “Fri.Sa.Li World,” which includes high schools from the Friuli, Sardegna, Liguria and Piemonte regions. The Commission set the program’s overall theme of Italian immigration.

The curriculum for the three-week program was created, implemented and managed by the Casa Italiana Sociocultural Center Inc. (CISC), at the request of the Embassy of Italy’s Director of Education, Maria Fusco. The CISC team was led by Elizabeth DiGregorio, Anna Isgro and Mary Ann Re

CISC’s focused curriculum allowed students the chance to explore, research and expand their knowledge of Italian immigration through the lens of race and discrimination, the machinery of the three branches of the U.S. government, and through the Italian and Italian American “pioneers” who created a culture in food, music, and film that is now part of the American lexicon.

In this first program in the D.C. area, the students and teachers resided at Georgetown University for three weeks in July and attended classes each morning, mainly at Casa Italiana. They also visited various D.C. landmarks and museums. For most in the group it was a first-time visit to the United States.

The program opened at the Italian Embassy, where Maria Fusco and First Counsellor Domenico Bellantone welcomed the group to the Embassy. Kimberley Bassett, Secretary of State for Washington, D.C., delivered a warm, enthusiastic welcome to the city, followed by a presentation about the city’s history by Steve Livengood of the U.S. Capitol Historical Society.

The first day at Casa Italiana included a talk by Holy Rosary pastor Fr. Sergio Dall’Agnese about the work of Blessed John Baptist Scalabrini to improve the lives of early Italian immigrants. A lively and informative presentation by former Sons of Italy official Dona De Sanctis focused on Italian Americans and anti-Italian sentiment over the years.

Italian Senator Stefania Craxi, in town



with a delegation on official business, stopped by to speak with the group, followed by a tour of the Italian American Museum of Washington DC, which is on the premises.

During the course of the program, presentations were also made by civics, history and legal experts on the executive and judicial branches of the U.S. government. Speakers included Donnis Barkley from the U.S. Capitol Historical Society, Matthew Costello of the White House Historical Association, and immigration lawyer and CISC president Francesco Isgro.

Gianluca Nigro and Lauren Amendolara McDermott at the U.S. Capitol explained how laws are made and gave the group a personal tour of the Capitol. At the Library of Congress, Lucia Wolf provided an insider’s tour of the Library and its extensive Italian Collection.

Chef and author Amy Riolo and a panel of food experts discussed the evolution of Italian American food. Louise Schiavone, a news anchor at NPR, quizzed the group on perceptions of Italian Americans. CISC Chairman Ciro DeFalco led a panel who offered personal immigration stories. Luigi Diotaiuti of Al Tiramisu restaurant, and Joe Farruggio of Il Canale hosted the group at their restaurants.

CISC president Isgro hosted the group



At top: On their last day, students and teachers from Friuli and Sardegna, in D.C. to learn about Italian immigration and the U.S. government, enjoyed lunch at Il Canale after an assessment of the program. Above, Italian Senator Stefania Craxi, who was on an official visit to Washington, spoke to the group at Casa Italiana.

for informal dinners with local residents who have origins in Friuli and Sardegna. Guests who shared their personal immigration stories included Brett Rugo of Rugo Stone Co., with ties to the Friuli area, and Sardinians Mark Letenzi and Giuseppe Argiolas.

On the last day, the group assessed the pro-

gram, concluding that it had been organized with “love” and “attention to detail.” The group left with a positive and warm impression of Italian Americans in the area.

“The hospitality and how everyone treated us, especially at Casa Italiana was perfect,” the students remarked.