

## Why I Marched Against Hate On Labor Day

By Ralph Palladino

We can learn a great deal about the “Make America Great” movement by observing the white males protesting the decision by the people of Charlottesville to take down the statue of Robert E. Lee, while chanting “You will not replace us!” and “Jews will not replace us!” and using anti-immigrant and homophobic slurs.

It was troubling to see a few days later the enthusiastic nearly all white crowd in Arizona cheering for Trump stating again that he was going to “Build a wall” and shut down the government if need be to do it.

My Jewish girlfriend and I looked on in dismay at these events. We also saw the anti-semitic, anti-immigrant and racist flyer being distributed in the Asbury Park area. It is a shame how so many people could be taken in by this hate rhetoric. Not all of Donald Trump’s supporters are sympathizers of the KKK and Neo-Nazi’s but too many share similar views.

The vast majority of white folks that I know who support Donald Trump feel they are being “displaced” by all the “others.” This fear is misplaced. While millionaires have prospered, everyone else has lost ground, including people of color and women, who still earn less and hold fewer positions of power.

My life experience as a white working class youth growing up in conservative and overwhelmingly white Staten Island, New York also tells me they are misguided. In fact, I have learned that when communities of color (particularly the black community) win, we all can advance. Looking at my own Italian-American history has taught me that immigration and diversity is a national strength and not something to fear.

I was a high school dropout living in the New Brighton Projects. I eventually got a GED and was able to get a free education at Staten Island Community College (part of the City University of New York system) thanks to a special program. If not for students of color organizing a movement for, and winning, open admissions at CUNY, this would not have been possible.

My local union is comprised mainly of black and Hispanic women, but also includes many Muslims and Jews. Thanks to their votes and support, I have been able serve them in the capacity of Vice President for 16 years.

When I hear racist remarks about or directed at people of color, especially from other Italian-Americans, the largest ethnic group to vote for Trump in the New Jersey-New York area, I feel great sorrow. It is ironic that Italian immigrants endured the same types of slurs and attacks that people are directing at immigrants today. They either do not know their own people’s history or choose to ignore it.

My people were called “guineas,” a term meaning “black pigs.” Also, “Mafia” and “rapists.” Like the Irish before them, they were called “job stealers” and “shiftless.” Contrary to the belief of many Italian-Americans, many came here undocumented on ships as stow a ways. The derogatory term “WOP” means Without Papers, and “Dago” is from Day Laborers.

Italians were victims of lynchings in Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana. In New Orleans Sicilian dock workers were lynched in the 1890’s because they tried to organize a union.

They were suspected of being “anti-American” in the 1930’s and 40’s because of the rise of fascism in Germany and Italy. My people were threatened with detention and had to follow curfews, while Japanese people on the West Coast were in fact interned in detention camps. A

“registry” of all Italian-Americans was created and they were spied on by the government. This was wrong, as is the attack on Hispanics and Muslims now living in this country.

But there were no Americans who were more loyal at that time. They enlisted and fought in large numbers during WWII, as did Japanese Americans when they were permitted. We contributed so much to American culture and growth in the arts, entertainment, food, business and politics. We helped make America what it is today.

The same can be said of blacks and Hispanics today. New immigrants from Mexico, South America, Asia, Middle East and Asia are already contributing to building this country. Muslims and Hispanics are members of our armed forces and police departments. They want to be part of the American Dream just like my grandfathers, one of whom helped build the Empire State Building and the other who was a NYC Sanitation worker. This diversity makes us stronger.

The Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts were signed as the result of a movement by people of all backgrounds and religions but primarily organized, led and inspired by black people. Both Acts guarantee rights not just for black people but for ALL people.

We should learn our history, see what we have in common and join together to build a stronger, more just society for ALL. This is why we are marching for justice and against racial violence. I encourage everyone to do this in honor of the memory of Charlottesville’s Heather Heyer, who gave her life in the struggle for equal rights and justice.

(Ralph Palladino is a vice president of a large public employee local in New York City)