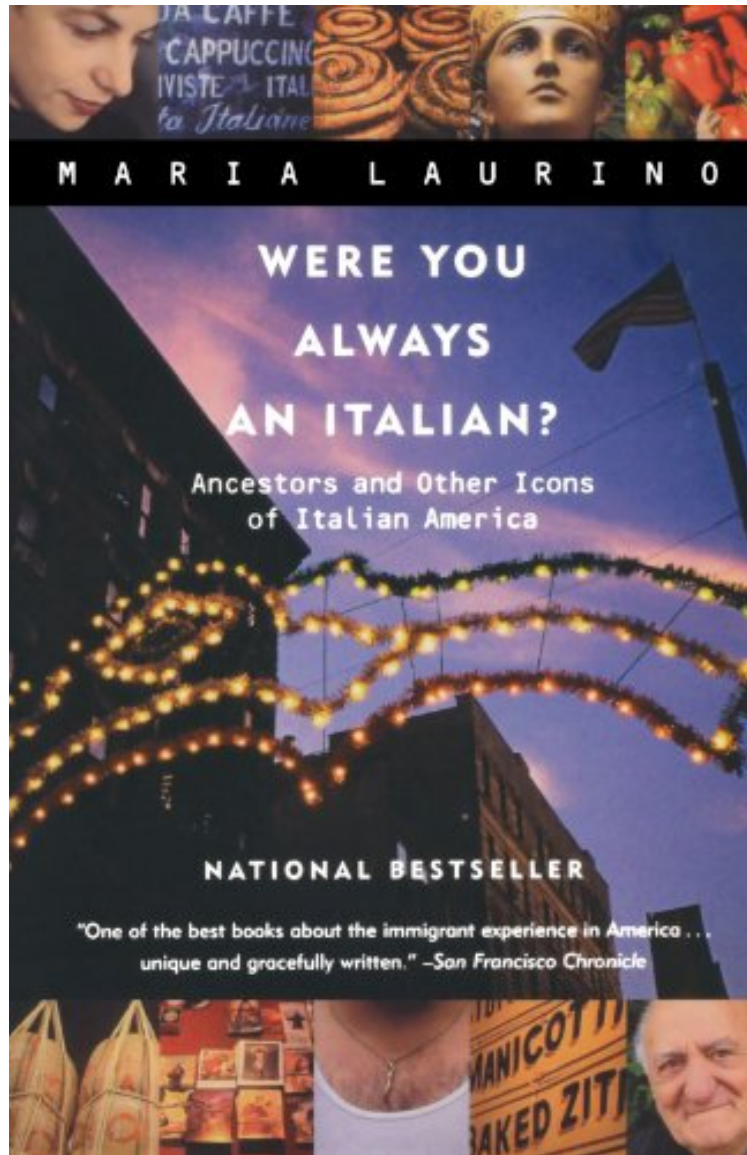


(Mobile ebook) Were You Always an Italian?: Ancestors and Other Icons of Italian America

Were You Always an Italian?: Ancestors and Other Icons of Italian America

Maria Laurino

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Maria Laurino : Were You Always an Italian?: Ancestors and Other Icons of Italian America before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Were You Always an Italian?: Ancestors and Other Icons of Italian America:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. SUBSTANTIALLY better than most books on Italian-American life
By Janis Cortese
Maybe we're all searching for ourselves now; maybe that's why genealogy has become so popular, because we're all trying to figure out what it means to be who we are. Whatever the reason, I've amassed a collection of books relating to the Italian-American experience, and along with Alfred Lubrano's working-class manifesto "Limbo," this is one of the best. Books about Italian-American life seem to fall into one of three categories, none good or helpful: 1) Saccharine false memories 2) Racist mob/guido garbage 3) Self-abnegating junk by Italian-American academics trying to apologize for their heritage to their white tenure committees
This book manages to avoid all of this and present a candid view of the experience, warts and all, and the kinds of confusion it can bring to be not-quite-white in a country where race, culture, and ethnicity is only allowed to come in a very limited crayon-color palette. There are a lot of books on this topic that should be avoided, and a few that should be thrown out as far as you can throw them. This one, however, is a keeper.
1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Always Proud to be Italian
By Frank Donato
I just love Maria's experience. My ancestors came from Southern Italy, I came out of the Italian ghetto of East Harlem at a time Puerto Ricans were migrating into the neighborhood. My parents moved out in my early teens and that is when I started to notice the prejudice of others to Italians at that point my identity of being Italian was firmly established and the barbs of others didn't bother me as much as Maria when she was growing up. I found most interesting the derogatory terms Northern Italians used towards those from the south. Great companion piece to the recent PBS documentary. I too like Maria am troubled when I see the overt racism Italians portray in their neighborhoods.
26 of 28 people found the following review helpful. A Look at Being an Italian American
By Diana Faillace Von Behren
As my son is a fourth generational Italian American who has assimilated into the American mainstream with a much greater and unconscious ease than the generations that came before him, he has the luxury of taking a look at the past without getting beleaguered by it. I purchased this book to help him understand how what he calls his difference from other Americans of European descent will help him understand himself and better define his dreams and desires. I grew up on Long Island where many of my peers were also Italian American--certainly the melting pot of Irish, Italian, and Polish middle to upper middle class groupings has little to do with the more mainstream America in which my son matured. My first foray into the canyons of Wall Street quickly altered my sheltered definition of American society. Suddenly, ethnicity was not something you declared as easily as your name in an introduction. On the contrary, your surname, ending with that telltale vowel, relegated you to a second ranking of sorts--nothing that was actually said in so many words, but indeed felt. Not my idea of the American Dream. The title of Maria Laurino's book of essays addresses just this issue. Were you always an Italian? I'd have to say 'yes', but I didn't go out of my way to share my culture with anyone that was not of the fold. I don't think Laurino did either; she speaks knowledgeably of her 'difference', at first speaking of personal differences of food and clothing choices and then citing Harvard sociological studies on the Southern Italian mentality on issues like family, community versus the individual and distrust of outsiders. She corrects the mistake that many Italian Americans make when they visit 'the homeland' for the first time, erroneously thinking that Florence, Milan and Rome are synonymous with Naples, Corsenza and Palermo. Her study of dialect borders on the hilarious--this is strictly an Italian American viewpoint--no other ethnic group is going to get a kick out of hearing the dialect words compared to their Tuscan Italian equivalents and hear the Naples linguist explain their significance. Eventually, Laurino's own quest for an understanding of her own ethnic identity takes her to earthquake-torn Calabria where she embraces cousins she never knew she even had. Laurino's book for the most part is a personal journey of ethnic discovery and acceptance for the Italian American who breeches the gap between the immigrant and full-fledged American. Her particular issues don't always reflect my own, but there is a thread running through each of the individual chapters that resonates some deep chord within me that I thought I'd forgotten.
Bottom Line: I enjoyed this book immensely. I recommend it with the same reservation I made to my son: use it as a kickboard to your own voyage of discovery, don't expect it to answer your specific ethnic assimilation quandries--you're better off speaking to an older relative and actually writing down what this elder statesman tells you so that your adult mind can see what your child's mind wanted to forget.

"One of the best books about the immigrant experience in America....unique and gracefully written." San Francisco Chronicle
Maria Laurino sifts through the stereotypes bedeviling Italian Americans to deliver a penetrating and hilarious examination of third-generation ethnic identity. With "intelligence and honesty" (Arizona Republic), she writes about guidos, bimbettes, and mammoni (mama's boys in Italy); examines the clashing aesthetics of Giorgio Armani and Gianni Versace; and unravels the etymology of southern Italian dialect words like gavone and bubidabetz. According to Frances Mayes, she navigates the conflicting forces of ethnicity "with humor and wisdom."

From Publishers Weekly
Recalling guidos, gavones and gedrools, Laurino presents a concise but stimulating look at Italian-American culture as a model for the immigrant experience as a whole. The author, a third-generation Italian-American, grew up in 1950s New Jersey as a minority whose ethnicity was long stifled. Not until then-Governor Mario Cuomo asked her, "Were you always an Italian?" did she consider the implications of her roots and identity. This entertaining memoir chronicles Laurino's experiences from childhood to marriage, eventually getting to the heart

of what it means to be Italian in America. She creatively approaches various cultural facets, from clothing to politics to religion, with candor and personality, using specific examples to illustrate general cultural themes. Her take on Italian fashion is amusing; she claims that the contrasting styles of Versace and Armani are symbols of the dichotomy faced by many immigrants and their families: cutting-edge boldness vs. European class. The historically tumultuous situation in Bensonhurst, Brooklyn, serves as an example of the friction between Italians and other cultural groups in this country, and Laurino suggests that the Italian-American experience, rife with stereotypes and struggles, is not unlike that of African-, Korean- and Ecuadorian-Americans. She covers the hallmarks of Italian culture, including dialect, family and faith. In examining each component, Laurino openly expresses the mixed feelings of pride and embarrassment she felt as a child, which eventually developed into understanding and veneration. This book will serve as a welcome reminder that there is more to Italian culture than *The Sopranos*. (July) Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Booklist Laurino, a New York writer who grew up in suburban New Jersey and was once a speechwriter for NYC mayor David Dinkins, explores the disconnect that many Italian Americans, rooted in the rocky soil of Southern Italy, feel between images from Bensonhurst and Mafia movies, on one hand, and Northern Italian style and verve on the other. Her essays ask questions that follow like beads on a rosary: Do we smell bad? Is our food weird? Why is it so hard to accept leisure in our lives? Her deconstruction of Italian dialect--captured snatches of parents' and grandparents' unwritten past in words like *gavone* and *stunodis* mesmerizing, both as a journalist's examination of words and their uses and as a woman's study of what makes her herself. And her witty analysis of the difference between Versace and Armani from an Italian American standpoint is itself worth the price of admission. Essential for Italian Americans, enlightening for anyone else. GraceAnne A. DeCandido Copyright American Library Association. All rights reserved From Kirkus s Three generations in America doesn't necessarily take the sting out of being an immigrant, as described in this appealing and sometimes thought-provoking memoir that moves from suburban New Jersey to Italy's southern provinces. The title question was posed by former New York governor Mario Cuomo as journalist Laurino was interviewing him on his own roots. Laurino's honest answer was no, as she recalls her adolescent efforts to distance herself from her Italian heritage. They began in earnest when a classmate characterized her as the smelly Italian girl: assured by friends that she did not have an odor, Laurino nevertheless began to understand that, despite her wardrobe from Saks, her darker skin and the vowels at the end of her name put her on a lower rung of the social ladder than the WASPs or JAPs who were the popular cliques at her high school. Broadening her perspective, Laurino examines the stereotyping of Italian-Americans via Mafia movies and a visit to the Brooklyn neighborhood of Bensonhurst (where gold-chained guidos and big-haired guidettes mark one very visible end of Italian-American rankings). Laurino blends personal experience and academic research in examining class bigotries not only in America, but also in Rome and Milan (where she found the northern Italian contempt for southern Italians as powerful as the prejudice against African-Americans in the US). When she and her husband finally visit what is left of the family in southern Italy (on the ankle of the boot), she finds them poor, hardworking, and closely knit, as they were when her grandparents sailed for America. Their habits and concerns resemble those of Laurino's mother (in her work rituals, for example, or in her inclination to hoard any luxury), leading the author to speculate that her own tendency to hoard may have been born in the fields of abject poverty. Other hyphenated Americans who have experienced discrimination and confusion about their heritage will find this often funny and graceful book *simpatico*. -- Copyright 2000 Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.