



The Per Niente



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Fiorello H LaGuardia, the first Italian American elected mayor of New York City.

Fiorello H. LaGuardia (1882- 1947), arguably the most famous Italian American political figure of all time, was virtually a legend in his time. Born in New York City in 1892 of a Catholic Italian father, who became an American soldier, and a Jewish Italian mother, he was raised as a Protestant in the army camps of the American west. This unusual background rendered him unique among his peers. Fluent in several languages, LaGuardia

worked as an interpreter for the United States Immigration service. He also obtained a law degree from New York University and became involved in local politics as a Republican steadfastly opposed to Tammany Hall, the Democratic machine in New York.

In 1916 Republican LaGuardia won a Congressional seat in lower Manhattan. With the outbreak of the World War he was one of a handful of congressmen to volunteer for the service where he distinguished himself as a pilot in the incipient Army Air Force stationed in Italy. By 1919 he set his sights on New York City political heights and became the President of the Board of Alderman, then a major position in the city hierarchy. He then returned to Congress where he represented the bur-

geoning "Little Italy" of East Harlem. By the early 1930s he was acquiring national fame as sponsor of progressive legislation such as the Norris-LaGuardia Act of 1932 that aided American labor by limiting injunctions.

Firmly embracing an ethnic identity that struck responsive chords in his district where he organized fellow Italian Americans into his own political club, he was anxious to become the city's chief executive. Although LaGuardia's first effort to become mayor in 1929 was unsuccessful, he nevertheless persisted in the dream and was elected as a fusion party candidate in 1933. The first of his nationality to become mayor of New York City, he won reelection twice. His tenure as mayor occurred during some of the most tumultuous years in American history including the Great Depression and World War II, during which time he established a merited reputation as a progressive, caring government official who worked steadfastly in behalf of his people. He succeeded in obtaining federal funds

for New York City, promoted a grand display of public works projects, and reformed city government. He is generally regarded as New York City's greatest twentieth century mayor, the one against whom other mayors are measured.



Source: The National Italian American Foundation: Milestones of the Italian American Experience

