

The Two Hundredth Anniversary of Giuseppe Mazzini's Birth

Remarks of Spencer DiScala at the State House
Boston, Massachusetts, October 3, 2005

When Giuseppe Mazzini was born on June 22, 1805, Europe was under the control of Napoleon. When Mazzini began his struggle for liberty in the 1830s, the monarchs had been restored and reaction seemed triumphant not only in Italy but in the Europe. He established Young Italy and Young Europe to fight for his democratic philosophy and all over the world people responded to his appeal to overthrow tyranny launched from his London exile. But Mazzini was also a thinker whose writings fill over forty volumes.

In the United States, the most influential 19th century intellectuals read his writings and converted to his democratic ideals. He influenced Harriet Beecher Stowe's father and husband and inspired John Brown. His Boston followers established a Mazzinian "congregation" and a school for poor Italian children on the model of the one he had established in London. Among the most famous American intellectuals linked to Mazzini was Margaret Fuller, a Transcendentalist leader and a founder of the American women's movement. She strongly supported the Roman Revolution's struggle for human rights and liberty in 1848-49 with her presence, her hospital work, and her newspaper articles. Born into a well-connected family in Canton, Massachusetts, Fuller hobnobbed with the Emersons, the Alcotts, and Thoreau. She died along with her husband and infant son in a shipwreck outside of New York returning from Italy and is remembered in a Mount Auburn cemetery monument.

Through the avenue of Boston and other American intellectuals, Mazzini's ideals entered the American mainstream, so that Woodrow Wilson could say while paying homage to him in 1919 in Genoa:

On the other side of the water we have studied the life of Mazzini with almost as much pride as if we shared in the glory of his history, and I am very glad to acknowledge that his spirit has been handed down to us of a later generation on both sides of the water. It is delightful to me to feel that I am taking some small part in accomplishing the realization of the ideals to which his life and thought were devoted. It is with a spirit of veneration...and with a spirit I hope of emulation, that I stand in the presence of this monument and bring my greetings and the greetings of America with our homage to the great Mazzini.

In fact, Mazzini's democratic ideals have entered the world's bloodstream, as the commemorations of the two hundredth anniversary of his birth all over the world demonstrate. Mazzini is celebrated as the person who preached that every nationality has a special mission, given to it by God, which requires liberty to fulfill, and that this mission leaves room for repression nowhere in the world. Just as he accurately foretold the fall of the empires of his day, the task of implementing his democratic ideals is the task of the twenty-first century.