CENTER FOR ITALIAN STUDIES

THE ALFONSE M. D'AMATO CHAIR
IN ITALIAN AND ITALIAN AMERICAN STUDIES

The Status of Interpretation in Italian American Studies

Edited by Jerome Krase

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The Status of Interpretation in Italian American Studies

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Edited by
Jerome Krase

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Table of Contents

Conference Rationale

The recently instituted Alfonse D'Amato Chair in Italian and Italian American Studies at Stony Brook University is committed to launch and promote a number of academic, cultural, and social activities across several disciplines. Among these a central concern will be Critical Thinking. Conceived as an on-going collaborative effort and addressing some of the pressing issues of our times, the *Forum in Italian American Criticism* (FIAC) project will engage with and bring together the most probing interdisciplinary work by scholars, thinkers, professionals and artists who are engaged in matters Italian, Italian American, and American Italian.

During the past twenty years, Italian American Studies in particular have made great strides at all levels, from increased archival work to the publication of rare or forgotten materials, from growth in college course offerings to the establishment of newer academic lines, from far ranging critical production to translations and international conferences. The first FIAC conference aims to take stock of these advances, effect a critique of competing views, and propose new hermeneutical models of analysis for the future.

The interventions at the first FIAC Symposium will touch upon different aspects of the discipline in relation to the changing times and the pragmatic need to reconsider the viability of creating more Italian American Minors, Majors or Concentrations within existing university departmental offerings, and whether an Italian American curriculum should make certain other academic requirements mandatory, such as learning Italian, sojourning in Italy for a semester or more, or studying social history. The FIAC project is strongly committed to engage and team up with other disciplines as presently defined in university curricula not only to expand the range of knowledges required to better understand this hybrid and unsettling field of investigation, but also and more concretely to explore more tangible employment opportunities for our students and make evident the usefulness of this background in various non-academic professions, such as social work, jurisprudence, various media and publishing sectors, politics and a host of community organizations.

But in order to effect meaningful changes in these areas, a broader set of issues is now due for re-examination in light of more complex transformations in the society at large, especially since the beginning of the new mil-

lennium. Clearly some of the keywords, and academic-political movements that created them, and which have helped re-launch Italian American Studies in the eighties and the nineties, have lost some of their urgency or at the very least must be reconceptualized. Though still an academic "minority" Italian American Studies are no longer at "the margins." Italian Americans have put much work in the issue of identity, but this understandably mostly in terms of socio-political recognition. The same goes with gender, which has opened up new pathways of research. Yet we need further metacritical commentary on these topics. This goes hand in hand with the by now overworked association of the field with ethnicity: how necessary and indeed useful is it to continue to locate Italian American studies in the province of ethnic studies? Are not ethnic studies themselves in deep need of revision?

FIAC intends to look at whether these interconnected issues are still viable in a perennially uncertain post-9/11 era. The mood is different, the national and international agendas have significantly changed, institutional and financial priorities are much more clearly marked (generally away from the humanities), even the postmodern is dead. The question, then, remains: what is Italian American Criticism a criticism of? Is it just of the activities and production of a variously defined "minority"? Or, and turning the tables, could it not rather become the launching platform to further explore the sense of language, society, history, Italy, America, the West?

Audacious as this perspective may be, it is in this light that FIAC intends to raise the critical and philosophical stakes. We intend to see whether it is still fruitful to continue working with the known self-canceling dichotomies: Italian-American, identity-difference, marginal-mainstream, immigrant-assimilated, and other either/or dyads, when there is always a risk of validating essentialist projects and logical conundrums: is one Italian or American? And what if one claims to be both? Does arguing for one's specific difference by necessity negate the fact that one possesses one or more identities? Can a person not be at the same time partly foreign, partly assimilated, as concrete social intercourse all too often demonstrates is what actually takes place in the real world? It is high time we take leave of facile dualisms and investigate instead pluralities, convergences both local and international, hybridity, mobility, and the interstices where a variety of apparently unrelated forms of interaction yield new social subjects and new lines of inquiry and intervention.

The object of the first FIAC conference is precisely to see what is the status quaestionis of criticism with regard to the above questions in order

to map out where we stand, and where we might choose to go in the future. The symposium will emphasize theory, from the Greek *Theōria*; the *Theōrós* is one sent on a delegation to observe and participate in a celebration. The root of the word contains the sense of light, of god even. Metaphorically, then, a theory offers an overall picture of something, whether a spectacle, a concept, or a situation. It is from within a theory that we can determine specificities, pathways, patterns, discursive formations, clusters of symbols, and so on. Accordingly, the symposium is organized around "views" or perspectives anchored in the different disciplines or emanating from a circumstance, an event or even existing keywords.

Peter Carravetta
Alfonse M. D'Amato Professor
of Italian and Italian American Studies
Stony Brook University
(October 2008)

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(February 2011)

Introduction

The First Annual Forum in Italian American Criticism at which internationally renowned scholars were invited to comment on "The Status of Interpretation in Italian American Studies" was by all accounts a resounding success. Peter Carravetta, D'Amato Chair in Italian and Italian American Status at Stony Brook University did the heavy lifting in organizing the event, and I was honored with the intellectually challenging task of organizing and lightly editing its proceedings. Most difficult for me was crafting this introduction to what is a most eclectic collection of essays by many of my old, and a few new, friends, and colleagues. What brings these all too thinly disguised subjects together that cleverly masquerade as merely about Italian America and Italian Americans but which are actually boundless? After careful reading, it appears to me that their strongest commonality is the love of the subject, and in many cases, each other's work. As was the face-to-face interactions during the FIAC conference itself, the collection is, taken together but not as whole, a noisy celebration of melodious cacophony. While reading them, I felt as though I was sitting around the table, in the basement kitchen of course, where such scholarly friends are allowed to eat and drink but who would never qualify as "company."

When Carravetta put the project in my hands I remembered that he had spoken mischievously at the opening of the forum about the contributions, as well as the contributors themselves, as being from inside and outside the "fold." I took this to mean at least a threefold distinction between: those whose major professional identity is with Italian American Studies; those who find themselves within either the Humanities or the Social Sciences; and those who either identify themselves, or are identified by others, as Italian or non-Italian Americans. These are the three folds, if not extremes of continua, that contribute to the unsettled status of the under-, perhaps un-, appreciated field of Italian American Studies today.

In the most curious and fascinating cases, some contributors to this volume serve as the subjects for other contributors. For good reason, Robert Viscusi, Fred Gardaphè, and Anthony Tamburri are the major recipients of this wanted attention by William Boelhower, Djela Kadir, and, only peripherally, by Martino Marrazzi. Another shared focus, by Stefano Luconi and Francesca Sautman, is on "whiteness" and race that has led to significant insights recently in the field of Italian American Studies that would otherwise be left (for some perhaps "better") unseen. Historically class and

culture have been the preferred vehicles for the usually less than penetrating analysis of things ethnic. The placement of my own paper, near the center of the collection, I felt might serve as a link between these icons and iconoclasts as well as the more discipline-bound but substantial offerings of Gerald Meyer, Donna Chirico, and Ottorino Cappelli. What follows is an outline of this set of essays on "The Status of Interpretation in Italian American Studies" in the form of a slight editing of the contributors' abstracts and some brief commentary on their papers.

In " The Ice Margin," his Keynote Address to the assembled conferees, Robert Viscusi, eloquently reflected on the theoretical issues that have been posed by what he sees as "the necessity of Italian American criticism to reinvent the social and historical matrix of Italian America." He metaphorically views these needs as parallel to the challenges of glaciology, an apt analogy of the current Italian American Studies miscellany given that glaciology is described as a hyper-interdisciplinary science. He advises that each enterprise needs to work by inference because the subject doesn't exist as a whole but "in parts and traces." In the case of Italian America, for Viscusi, the partial evidences can be found in four categories: "fragmentary, facsimile, invisible, and illegible." Each of these can be studied alone or together as theoretical challenging fields. Given my own interest in things spatial, I found most pleasing his insight that "At the heart of this incoherence is a stubborn structural fact: Little Italy goes away, but Italian America still has to deal with the Little Italy in its air and water. "

Fred Gardaphè provides the reader with an intellectual's lament in "Commedia della Morte: Theories of Life and Death in Italian American Culture." He remarks that the word "death," or *morte,* is used so often by Italian American writers that there should already be a theory about it. However, he informs, except for occasional references, the subject of death that almost dominates many of the major works by Italian Americans is yet to be theorized. In this essay, he attempts his own theorization of death through a reading of previous critical approaches with a special focus on Pietro Di Donato's last, unpublished, novel "The American Gospels." Written late in the 1980s, "American Gospels" is Di Donato's pointed commentary on injustice in twentieth-century America. In the work, Gardaphè tells us, he used the skilled storytelling and criticism launched with *Christ in Concrete* (1939), to prophetically relate a "story of life after the death of humanity, a life that speaks of pleasure for the just and pain for the unjust." Clearly, it is a work that the Italian American working class and their more

numerous descendants must learn to appreciate.

With "After-hour Musings and Other Night-thoughts on Italian Americans and 'Otherness,'" Anthony Julian Tamburri provides us with a two-part essay, the first of which looks back to historical events both within and beyond the Italian-American community. He ponders out loud about how Italian Americans might be able to learn from historical experiences such as the lynching of Italians in the early part of the twentieth century, or concurrently the birth of the motion picture industry that shaped ideas about the group. Both of these, in different ways of course, demonstrated that Italian Americans have suffered more than their fair share of racial discrimination and ethnic defamation. The second part of his essay addresses the question of what might Italian Americans learn from these experiences and how members of the group might better appreciate their own history and culture. During the course of his essay, Tamburri interweaves revealing examples of inter- and intra-ethnic comparisons that have been selected from both the print and visual media.

"Renewing the Conceptual Dimensions of Italian-American Writing and Scholarship" by William Boelhower, has as its stated goal "the secure placement of Italian-American historiography and other related studies within the larger emerging paradigm of Atlantic world theory." In it, he cogently argues that while the three conceptual dimensions he refers to in his essay have always implicitly been a part of Italian-American critical scholarship as well as creative writing, there continues to be a need to formalize these efforts and, in turn, to suggest to those in the field the heuristic advantages of these dimensions. He suggests that all three of the dimensions, which he describes as "circumatlantic," "transatlantic," and "cisatlantic," offer specific perspective vantage points on Italian American Studies. Boelhower concludes that, taken together, these particular vantage points could provide scholars with a new sense of complexity and tension that might enrich the way we have been studying and writing about *cose italo-americane.* As usual, Boelhower presents a challenging intellectual target that few will hit but aiming at it is still well worth the effort.

In response to the major questions posited by the conveners of this Forum, Djelal Kadir's crafted a multi-layered paper. "Via the Margin of the Poetic" emphatically argues that "some of the forms, or currents, of criticism within Italian American Studies of the past ten-fifteen years — and especially the quaternion identity, race, class, and gender" requires some "overhaul" and "reconfiguration," especially in view of recent history.

The author deftly argues the case for the addition of "the poetic" to the quaternion identified by the conveners, that he believes is "a fifth dimension already implicit in the incipient history of Italian American Studies as defined by the principal agents provocateurs who have made the present Forum possible." The author traces his own role as an "outsider" in the genesis of this project and differentiates Italian American Studies from the development of other ethnic studies efforts in academe during and since the cultural politics of the late 1980s in the United States.

In "Questioning the Traditionalism of Italian American Literature," Martino Marazzi offers some of his first reflections on the rhetorical and ideological significance of the use of tradition that he found amid the artistic and literary productions of first-generation Italian Americans. Following a trajectory from tradition to traditionalism and then to oblivion, he attempts to delineate one possible cultural trajectory. He then advocates for a better analysis of the role of the Italian past in Italian American Studies. Few either inside or outside the "fold" could hardly disagree with his conclusion about the value of knowing and, more importantly, understanding the past. As Marazzi writes, "We can all forget, and sometimes we decide to turn our backs, but as scholars, I think that we have an obligation to remember, and to remind others, where we've come from. We might find out that the misunderstanding of Italians in American society starts in a place very close to home."

My own (Jerome Krase), illustrated essay "Interpreting the Italian Look, Visual Semiotics of Ethnic Authenticity," concerns the often-misinterpreted notion of ethnic authenticity as it concerns contestable versions of Italian America. By employing autobiographical narration, various symbolic and semiotic theories are discussed that challenge the commonly accepted sociological opinion that Italian Americans have little claim to ethnic "authenticity." As to "Interpretation" it offers a theory of interpretation of texts that emphasizes the sociological *verstehen* method pioneered by Max Weber. It might also fit the sub-field of "Heritage Interpretation" that is presented to museum visitors, and other consumers of more or less "authentic" ethnic cultures. Society is dependent on shared "text" and here the texts are visual images. Therefore, twenty photographs taken in two iconic Little Italies are presented and captioned as to their claims of authentic *Italianità.* These, what I call, "Ethnic Disneylands" or "Ethnic Theme Parks" are for many observers appropriate theatrical stages for the presentation of the "Italian Look." Given the agency that we all have as scholars or not,

readers/viewers can make their own interpretation.

"Creolizing the Lack: Interpreting Race and Racism in Italian America" by Francesca Canadé Sautman seeks to reinterpret the difficult question of how race and racism have impacted on Italian America. She envisages race as a deep-seated "lack" that structures Italian-American existence in ways both explosive and barely visible. The argument is made at many levels such as the history of US immigration and twentieth-century race relations as well as the historical racializations, along North-South lines, brought from Italy. The essay reviews significant moments in the theorizing of race and ethnicity in relation to Italian Americans. Against an Italian-American identity confined by the negative legacy of racism or by static, conservative views of race and ethnicity, Sautman calls for a revitalization and sustainable future of identity by cultivating its creolization. She suggests that a creolization of Italian-American identity can build on the cultural hybridity that Italy today increasingly mobilizes in response to racism, as well as on historical patterns of racial and ethnic mix and interfaces present in Italian-American life.

Stefano Luconi, writes in "Whiteness and Ethnicity in Italian-American Historiography" that the "whiteness" paradigm has recently been shaping the literature about the experience of European-American ethnic groups. Historical and sociological inquiries concerning Italian Americans have not been exempt from this trend. Yet, while the thesis is generally accepted that Italian newcomers initially occupied a racial middle ground between Americans of Anglo-Saxon descent and African Americans in their adoptive country, the idea that subsequent generations have been "whitening" has been somewhat controversial in Italian-American Studies. Indeed, most scholarship has stressed the ethnicization of Italian Americans as opposed to their racialization. After surveying a sample bibliography on this subject and comparing it to a background of historical events, his essay examines why whiteness has made scant inroads into Italian-American studies. In particular, Luconi points to ethnic defensiveness and to identity politics as the main reasons for delaying a turn in the field's orientation toward the most recent trends in ethnic and racial research.

For Gerald Meyer, Italian-American history is being documented at an increasingly rapid rate. However, he argues, the interpretive work that would give wider meaning and greater depth to this area of study has not kept pace with the documentation. His "Theorizing Italian American History: The Search for an Historiographical Paradigm" discusses two seminal

works that he believes have successfully theorized critical areas of Italian American history. These pillars in the pantheon of Italian Americana are Rudolph Vecoli's "Contadini in Chicago" and Donna Gabbacia's *From Sicily to Elizabeth Street.* These foundational works present contrasting interpretations of a critical issue, i.e., the degree to which the earliest stage of the Italian-American experience represents a replication of the mores and lifestyles of the Southern Italian *paese.* In addition, Meyer posits that Leonard Covello's cultural pluralist views deserve primary placement in advancing the larger project of discovering a vision of the history of Italian Americans that is both "fearlessly accurate and palpably useful." He makes a convincing argument for all of these propositions as well as providing a direction for current and future historians of the Italian-American experience to follow.

Narrative Psychology is the method used by Donna Chirico to explore how the fragments of personal history affect our overall psychological development, and also shapes our sense of identity. "The Dog Catches His Tail: A Critical Reflection on the Value of an Italian American Identity in Personal Development" discusses theories of identity development while focusing on racial and ethnic identity in the experience of Italian Americans. She strongly feels that this recognition is an essential first step in understanding how a positive self-identity is formed in an individual that includes acknowledgment of the important influence of race and ethnicity within that structure. It should be noted that, like Sautman and Luconi, she also deals with "whiteness" but without explicitly using the term. In this self-reflection Chirico notes that in her own family "There was a sense of an immigrant past, but it was amorphous." By looking at the fragments of her personal history she shows how our ethnic experience affects our overall psychological development as well as how it shapes our sense of identity.

Ottorino Cappelli asks a deceptively simple question: "Does Italian-American ethnic politics exist at all?" By this he means a political strategy to mobilize Italian Americans to vote "as Italian Americans," regardless of individual interests, policy preferences, or party affiliation. His interest is not in how Italian Americans vote but how Italian-American politicians get elected. To what extent do they utilize ethnic political strategies and why do some do so while others do not? He frames these questions with three competing models: Local Politics, where the vote is acquired through patronage and clientelism; Issue Politics, where the vote is traded in the mar-

ket of opinions and policy preferences; and Party Politics, which encourages voters to align themselves according to partisan divisions. Based on an analysis of in-depth interviews of New York State legislators of Italian descent, Cappelli concludes that, although they may have sensibilities that make them more or less receptive to ethnic factors, Italian-American politicians consider their options pragmatically. Like all politicians, their primary goals are gaining, consolidating and expanding their own power.

JEROME KRASE

The Ice Margin

Robert Viscusi
Brooklyn College / CUNY

Abstract: This essay reflects on theoretical issues posed by the need of Italian American criticism to reinvent the social and historical matrix of Italian America. It parallels the challenges posed by this task with the challenges of glaciology. Each of the enterprises needs to work by inference, as the object of its attention exists only in parts and traces. In the case of Italian America, the evidence falls into four categories: fragmentary, facsimile, invisible, and illegible. Each of these is canvassed as a field of theoretical challenge.

We were in Cape Cod this summer, where someone explained to us that this long lobster-claw of land had been formed by the melting of a glacier, its hills and coves deposited there at the close of the ice age about 21,000 years ago. Across a period of a few thousand years, the blink of a glacier's eye, the Laurentide ice sheet advanced southward, melted, and retreated, laving a moraine of rocks and rubble and sand, then advanced and retreated again, leaving a second moraine on top of the first.[1] Huge blocks of ice broke off from the retreating glacier and remained, eventually forming deep round pools, they call them kettle ponds, that are still there. The one best known on the Cape is Wellfleet Pond. The best-known kettle pond of all is the one on the mainland where Henry David Thoreau built his little house in Walden, Mass.

This intersection between catastrophe and creation, between accident and culture, seemed resonant enough to me that I started reading books about glaciers, all the while thinking about what happens when a vast and apparently permanent state of things gradually disappears. In such histories, death has a way of seeming sudden and categorical and devastating; but though changes are decisive, they usually have long preparation beforehand and produce paradoxical results afterward. True, we worry a great deal about the melting of glaciers these days, but such events have been moments not only of obliteration but of transformation as well. And I was struck by what seemed to me arbitrary but somehow irresistible compar-

isons between the movements of glaciers and the movements of peoples, some underlying sympathy between the melting of the Italian glaciers in the latter half of the nineteenth century, when they were reduced by about 40%,[2] and the disappearance of Italians from Italy in the same period, and in similarly great proportion. Glaciers, like peoples, are at the same time stable and restless. In defiance of their great mass and density, they glide across space and time, and despite their placid and unitary appearance, they are riven by internal contradictions and differences that make them fascinating objects of study and, often enough, subject to tragic destinies. And all the while, I was thinking about this address, about the status of interpretation in Italian American studies, in a moment when one Italian America, the familiar one where the *pasticceria* and the *salsicceria* and the *fruttivendolo* line the streets and the *società del santo* carries the sacred image down the middle, seems to have disappeared, leaving in its wake an untidy moraine of Italian American organizations where fewer and fewer people speak Italian and occasional kettle pond surrounded by scholars of Italian Americana watching the campfires and talking in low voices about what to do next.

There is no question that the very nature of Italian America has changed. The rich complex of families and settlements and organizations that used to form its fabric has changed its shape, its location, its modes of being and of reproduction. Richard Alba and Fred Gardaphè have both written memorably on this theme, and it has continued to preoccupy many of us.

We live in a place like the ice margin, where the glaciers have receded, and sometimes returned, creating forms that have only indirect relationships with what preceded them. I'd like to talk about a few of these new shapes and about how we understand them, or might understand them. In such a landscape, it is hard to find the relationship between what one sees and what one remembers. But before facing that problem, there is the prior question of finding what one can see. At the outset, the things that are most visible are fragments and facsimiles. These evident presences require interpretation almost as a corrective to the inevitable falsity of the representations they create or imply. Later one comes to those things that one can either not see directly or that are written in characters that are too strange to read without interpretation: the invisible and the illegible.

Fragments

Perhaps it seems strange to think of Italian America as a gone world, subject to the laws that govern planet, snow, and sleet. But there is no question that something has changed forever. The Italian colonies of the 1890s,

those bustling and frenetic slices of Naples and Palermo that we read of in the novels of Bernardino Ciambelli and Garibaldi LaPolla — these places began receding from view after two generations. By the end of the World War II, the Little Italies had begun their second life — they became places people now dreamt of leaving and then left forever, moving to suburbs where they hoped to become indistinguishable from neighbors who were not Italian in any visible sense of the word. The Little Italies survived as stage sets, places where the suburbanites would go to enact their *italianità*, to stock up on the *prosciutto, capicola, sopressata, salame,* and other *roba di maiale* that would give an authentic tang to the sandwiches and antipasti they intended to serve on the deck or in the family room out where they lived among the Americans. This second life of Little Italies lasted a long time, because a second wave of migration in the postwar period provided the old colonies with fresh Italians, people not born there who inhabited the old houses and built rows of brick bungalows as if they were planning to stay forever. But this wave receded as well, leaving a second moraine of survivals. This is a smaller heap of rubble. No new waves of immigrants have come in. Now there are no new Little Italies. Instead there are signs everywhere that Italians have been present.

Some of these signs are fragments of what once was here. In former Italian neighborhoods, the old churches sometimes still stand, some of them almost never open. Not much else. The American Italian Historical Association had its convention in Denver last November. There was, among other things, a session about the struggle between Native Americans and Italian Americans that had caused Denver's Columbus Day Parade, the oldest in the nation, to be canceled in 1992. That event had made national news, so this year some conventioneers expected to find trouble at the session on the struggle surrounding it. Instead, while they found many remnants of stubbornness, they saw mostly a general desire, on all sides, to forget the matter and to get on with business. Some activists revived the parade a few years ago, but not very many people have been attending. Why was this? The answer was not long in coming. For the day following this session, the convention organizers had arranged a tour of Denver's Little Italy. This tour explained the lack of heat in the struggle. There were no Italians left in Little Italy. There was no Italian store, no storefront *società.* There were a few substantial houses, standing solitary like boulders, solid brick piles once inhabited by Italian American politicians and undertakers and other *prominenti.* "All the Italians have moved on," the guide told us. In other cities, some Little Italies have survived as spectacles. At the San Gennaro Festival in New York City, no longer run by Italians, the booths

can still provide a plausible sausage-and-peppers hero.

What account do these surviving fragments allow us to give of this gone world? The fragments present problems of method to interpreters. They suggest kinds of intensity that are bound to issues of class, gender, nationality, race, and sociality that are difficult to recover or to reconstruct. Inevitably, as time goes by, phenomenological accounts, if they exist, become harder to comprehend fully; and, if such accounts do not exist, they become harder to construct in ways that make sense to readers whose sense of *italoamericanità* has built its own habitus out of issues of class, gender, nationality, race, and sociality that bear only passing resemblance to those that prevailed on a given spot when there was still standing upon it that unknown mass of phenomena whose fragments one is now examining. At this point, one has recourse to the methods of the social historian, the discoverable lists of imports and exports and wages and weights and heights and cranial circumferences diligently annotated by the accountants and anthropologists, the voting records of council districts, the speeches of politicians and the hyperbolic narratives of reporters writing for the colonial press. Such methods reassure us that we can trace the long recession of the vast solid mass that has left behind these disjunct scraps and traces. But they hardly give us any insight into the lived meaning of things.

For this we need the work of the phenomenological literary historian, the Bill Boelhower or Peter Carravetta, and of the engagé semiotician Anthony Tamburri. And of course, those most engaged historians of all, our still-neglected novelists. Perhaps the best feeling for life in the first wave comes from those novels of Ciambelli and LaPolla. And for life in the first moraine, the novels of John Fante. And for life in the postwar return of Little Italy the stories of Joseph Papaleo. And for life after the second deglaciation, life among the fragments, the peculiar dilemmas of this moment provide grist for the comedy of Rita Ciresi and the social dilemmas of Anthony Giardina. In these novels, old Italian rules of thumb and moral guides acquire the status of nuisance possessions inherited from relatives that survive in the closet until it's time to move, when they are discarded or left behind.

Facsimiles

It is fair to say that most people who might call themselves Italian Americans no longer make regular visits to even the second wave of Little Italies. In many places, there are still vibrant staging areas, it is true, but Little Italies as empty as the one in Denver grow more common with each passing year. What we have now are facsimile Little Italies, or perhaps it would make more sense to call them Little Italy Missions, places where

one can venerate some authentic relic of an old Little Italy — some pieces of sheet music, a pasta machine, a flag with the red cross of Savoia superimposed in the white of the *tricolore* — but where the rituals of shopping all center around the purchase of new versions of old things: coffee machines, electric *pizzelle* irons. There is a movement to revive and restore the Little Italies of the past in the towns and cities of upstate New York, where many branches of the Erie Canal still have water in them and the old factories where the Italian immigrants made America still sit surrounded by cracked parking lots grown over with weeds. These revived Little Italies are animated, or sometimes fail to be animated, by displaced family feelings, aiming to be shrines to a way of life that is no more.

The homes of many Italian Americans nowadays have this same facsimile effect. They are a new kind of Little Italy, one mostly made in Italy and exported for purposes of installation in spectacle kitchens featuring glittering espresso machines sitting on gleaming expanses of granite counter. Overhead, the recessed spotlights illuminate scenes designed to flatter the complexions of homemakers when they appear in the inevitable videos and cell phone photos that show them reenacting the household rituals of an imaginary once-upon-a-time — or perhaps living as they remember always having lived, but with a fresh gloss and glory that change the general effect of the scene.

This new facsimile Italian colony is scalable. It can occupy the ubiquitous Italian Store in a pocket mall on the state highway, or it can be a boutique in an upscale department store, it can light up a kitchen or the dining room of a restaurant chain like Carmine's or The Olive Garden, it can spread itself throughout the great room of a McMansion — or else, one can visit, or shop in, or worship at, or get married in, the full-throated many-fountained international extravaganza version at Las Vegas where the facsimile Little Italy expands into a circus dream of the entire Little Old World: Venice, Rome, Paris, Cairo, the Alps. The facsimiles have become what Jean Baudrillard called *simulacra* — that is, imitations without an original. For they have been carefully stripped of most of the features that tie them to specific places and times. But, in the peculiar metamorphosis of the ice margin, the new forms bear marks of the disappearances that allowed them to spring into existence.

Facsimile Italies serve political and economic purposes that derive from the Little Italies that preceded them. The old Little Italies grew in the meeting of the international labor market with the exigencies of Italian nation-formation, with its appetite for new national subjects, always more easily produced in factory sites far distant from the towns and regions that

held Italians in Italy back from full identification with national identity programs. The new facsimile Italies, Little and Large alike, form at a similar intersection. But here, instead of the labor market, the forces of international capital speculation collaborate with the techniques of transnational identity construction. The present age has learned how to produce transnational identities with the same facility that the nineteenth century learned to produce nationalisms. These new transnational identities meet very real and very exigent political and economic requirements. Facsimile Italies produce these glittering facsimile Italians and provide these new identities with considerable resilience and modularity, so that they can be transported and redeployed.

In the recent Las Vegas action epic *Ocean's Thirteen,* a group of international gamblers collaborate to avenge their leader, played by Elliot Gould, who has been betrayed by another leading capo, played by Al Pacino. In this film, the Jewish gambler is the Godfather, and throughout the movie, Gould and his defenders use lines from *The Godfather,* the film that has become a virtual Book of Proverbs for men who like to think of themselves as operating outside the national norm. Its origins in Little Italy no more provide it with an Italian national root system than Italy itself is able to claim the hotel-casino called Bellagio.

Little Italy has been a stage set open to all comers for a long time. W.R. Burnett, the author of *Little Caesar* (1928); George S. Kaufman, Morrie Ryskind, Al Boasberg (uncredited), Buster Keaton (uncredited), and James Kevin McGuinness, who wrote *A Night at the Opera* (1935); and more recently, Francine Prose, the author of *Household Saints* (1981), a novel about the devout daughter of a sausage-maker in Little Italy. Prose writes:

> I'm not a Catholic — at least not in this lifetime — so Household Saints is mostly imagined and invented. And my childhood was nothing like Theresa's, though as a girl I did like the lives of the saints, which I thought of (not knowing any better) as thrillingly morbid fairy tales.

She even goes so far as to praise the contributions of the Italian American director who made the 1993 film based on her book: "I loved the film — I thought Nancy Savoca did an extraordinary job" (http://www.bookreporter.com/authors/au-prose-francine.asp). The screenwriters and directors who made *Analyze This* (1999) and *Do the Right Thing* (1989) and many other contemporary films that employ the old stage set have little or no visible connection with the national identity machine that produced the Italian migration and made itself felt during the various phases of the history of

America's Little Italies. That doesn't mean there is no connection, but it may not be obvious. The difference between a hybrid knowledge and a facsimile can only be specified through a certain amount of close questioning.

But the facsimile, even if produced, as it sometimes is, by someone with no Italian forebears, belongs to the field of Italian American studies. A present state of things may illuminate its own preconditions. That Little Italy has become a template for all kinds of improvisations shows the degree to which the political economy of Little Italy belongs to the long history of Italy as a producer of cultural exports — *trecento* lyric poetry, *quattrocento* perspective drawing, *cinquecento* architecture, *seicento* music drama — that have taken their places alongside Greek sculpture and Roman comedy as parts of the lingua franca of international arts and letters. Italy's place in this history of intellectual and financial internationalism lies behind these canonical contributions to cosmopolitan elegance. The facsimile Little Italies of Las Vegas and Hollywood are now part of this history.

The Invisible

An aspect of glaciology that is most attractive to the interpreter is its practice of inferring the shapes of things no longer in existence from the shapes of things they touched while they were still visible, and especially while they were in process of disappearing. Most of what we understand about the history of ice is the result of collaboration among scientists committed to careful documentation, measurement, and comparison, scholars accustomed to interpreting their evidence in terms of well-understood and generally-accepted physical principles. In the various fields of inquiry that are likely to meet under the banner of Italian American studies, there have grown up new curatorial, bibliographical, museological, anthropological, ethnomusical, literary-historical, political, economic, semiotic, hermeneutic, pedagogical and other scholarly practices that have aimed to negotiate the invisibility of the evidence.

There are two kinds of invisibility here: erasure and secrecy. Erasure grows from the ordinary operations of time and events. Dialects are no longer spoken. Buildings are torn down. Boxes of letters are thrown away. Photographs are mute. Witnesses die with their stories untold. In dealing with this kind of invisibility, we rely first of all upon our archivists and bibliographers. Things leave more traces than we can ever guess, and in the long run, scholars can bring many things to light that were never suspected. Material historians work on contributions to cookery, embroidery, brickwork, stonecutting, fresco painting, accordion-playing, and many other arenas. The fine Italian hand keeps revealing itself in unsuspected places. A

friend tells me that Barack Obama wears Ermenegildo Zegna suits, but I have not been able to confirm the report, because the Zegna firm tries to stay exclusive enough that no one can exactly say who's wearing its suits. On the other hand, publicity can have its surprises: Sarah Palin, the hockey-mom governor, made her debut at the Republican National Convention wearing a silk shantung Valentino jacket that cost $2500 (http://www.socialmedian.com/story/1043178/sarah-palins-valentino-rnc-jacket-cost-2500). Material history slips into anonymity until and unless interested parties decide to study its traces. And the same is true for the history of literature. Italian Americans mostly do not read Italian, and they have forgotten the things their forebears used to read in the 1800s. Here there is a call for the fundamental humanist work of the scholar-adventurer: Francesco Durante, compiling his landmark anthology *Italoamericana,* or Martino Marazzi discovering the original Italian edition of Luigi Ventura's *Peppino* in a library in San Francisco, long after others had accepted that this very early Italian American novel must have been written in another language.

The second kind of invisibility is secrecy. As ambitious Italian Americans became aware of the social boundaries that had placed their high but impalpable walls around Little Italy, they began to obscure their own origins there. This has been true of all sorts of people who wanted to pursue social ambitions; some writers have made this kind of a concealment a central theme in their own work, demonstrating the process by which signs of the past are consumed by an appetite for social transformation. The study of such works has provided some of the most illuminating and entertaining pages in the annals of Italian American literary criticism. John Paul Russo's study of Gilbert Sorrentino and Fred Gardaphè's essay on Don Delillo in *Italian Signs, American Streets* may be the most memorable examples of how interpreters have worked with texts that struggle to conceal and suppress their own Italian American origins. DeLillo effectively responded to Gardaphè's essay a few years later with *Underworld,* which, as James Periconi has suggested, reads like an allegorical autobiography, with a hero who has a boyhood much like the writer's own but then changes his name and becomes an international waste management executive.

Secrecy in Nick Shay's life derives from his childhood as son of a murdered gangster and his own inadvertent commission of a murder as a teenager. He changes his name from Costanza to Shay, and this act becomes a sign of his passage from a life in the narrow world of an immigrant enclave to a life on the horizon of international arms dealers and waste recycling, synthetic feces, and underground nuclear explosions. This place of his arrival is one where all the particulars have been transformed into things

that are infinitesimally fungible. "Capital burns off the nuance in a culture," DeLillo writes.

> Foreign investments, global acquisitions, the flow of information through transnational media, the attenuated influence of money that's electronic and sex that's cyberspaced, untouched money and computer-safe sex, the convergence of consumer desire — not that people want the same things, necessarily, but that they want the same range of choices. (785)

On this horizon, a secrecy born in a fable of ethnic self-hatred and self-concealment expands to a vision of universal waste and an irreducible winter. Of his own world, Nick Shay says,

> I fly to Zurich and Lisbon to exchange ideas and make proposals and it is the kind of desperate crisis, the intractability of waste, that doesn't really seem to be taking place except in the conference reports and the newspapers. (805)

Of his lost father James Nicholas Constanza, he writes on the same page, "He went out to get a pack of cigarettes and never came back."

The invisible is what has been rubbed out, what has been hidden, what has been transformed beyond hope of recognition. We have moved from the passage of a creole neighborhood and have come to a flat plain where the laws of capital and the laws of destruction change places without color or feature or, as he says, nuance.

The Illegible

Another aspect of glaciology that is attractive to the interpreter is the principle that it assumes: what the glacier produces looks nothing like the glacier itself. The earthworks of Cape Cod bear marks of the ice sheet but they also bear signatures of other forces, least visible among them vast long-ago changes in global temperature and in sea levels, more visible the prevailing winds that have for millennia lifted sand from the lower Cape and carried it northward, accumulating and sculpting the vast dunes of Truro and the seaward shores of Provincetown.

This is a category of ice-margin phenomena impossible to read, not just the field of things the ice takes away with it when it goes. Jimmy Costanza, for example. This is the field of the illegible present. Little Italy was a place, an address, an actual community with its ancient rites. Frag-

ments and facsimiles, summer-school Italies and Virtual Italies do not function as cities where all the complex comings and goings of daily life can take place. To see what has happened, we need always fresh interpretive devices. We need the searching eye of Jerry Krase's camera, recording the kaleidoscope of intermingling signs in the city streets, we need the psychomachia of David Chase, recording and appealing to an Italian America that cannot find its bearings in the suburbs without continually returning to a myth it loudly proclaims itself to have outgrown. We need, in short, a method that allows us to interpret Italian America with a measure of respect to its formidable incoherence. At the heart of this incoherence is a stubborn structural fact: Little Italy goes away, but Italian America still has to deal with the Little Italy in its air and water. That is, no matter how many Little Italies have melted and faded away, there have remained people who call themselves Italian Americans, Americans who carry the mark of migrant Italy, displaced Italy. They find, they still find, they will find, ways of returning to the lostness and inconsequence that, belonging to the Italy that emigrants left, belonged as well, and in another way, to the Italies they constructed. One may sympathize at moments with the self-hatred that John Paul Russo outlines in the fiction of Gilbert Sorrentino, where the Italian American characters are usually grotesques. One may sympathize as well with Nick Shay, who wanted to leave it all behind. But one may also recognize another kind of waste management than Nick's, or for that matter, Tony Soprano's. The reality of waste and the profound feelings it inspires are the themes of Francesco Durante's new book *Scuorno* (*vergogna*), a work inspired by his living through the clamorous failure of Naples to respond to a crisis of waste management. A major theme of this work is the profound stubbornness of the author, a successful journalist, translator, anthologist, and editor, who asks himself why, after leaving several times for other places, he has returned to live and work in Naples, despite its continual state of collapse and incapacity. He recounts that a fellow journalist, a German who lives in Venice, has said to him, about how he would deal with the crisis of the *rifiuti,* if he were living in Naples. He has said, "as if it were the most obvious thing in the world, 'I would just leave.'" Durante writes:

> And I, who have left already twice, and returned twice, and each time had to begin at the bottom, without anyone's caring — and I am telling the plain fact — about anything I had already done, for the simple reason that I had not done it *here,* because I had not had the patience to wait for the Neapolitan merry-go-round of the business, slow and muddled, to lavish upon me some sort of recognition; I that knew something

> of departures and returns, despite that knowledge, I didn't know what to say to him, and, rather, I have not been able to do less than to go back and ask myself: these two daughters that I have, what doctor has ever ordered me to raise them here?" (20)

This is the illegible heart of the matter. When people say to us, why do you write about *The Sopranos* and *The Godfather*? why obsess over the pathology that has bound and limited your people? and for that matter your own career? why not just leave it all behind?, do we know what to say to them? As for me, I hold out the hope that somehow behind the brute disfunction there may stand another Italian America, *luxe calme et volupté,* waiting to inherit the best of what it is to be Italian, and I can see myself reading the poems of Leopardi under the portico of a Palladian villa, I may just even have a photograph of myself in that posture; but to tell the truth, this is a small hope, a fugitive dream, just another fantasy escape, not to a suburb of San Diego, not to a name without a vowel at the end, but to another class and another time, and I can't help knowing this because I am unaccountably in love with the class and time that produced my destiny, and I walk the beaches of my ice margin, occasionally finding an old Brioschi bottle or even, since I live in Brooklyn, a still-functioning café that will serve me, on some hot afternoon, something too sweet or too cold, an *orzata,* a *granita di limone.*

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[1] Most of the glaciology that appears in this paper depends upon Knight's standard text. The specific glacial history of Cape Cod depends upon Oldale.

[2] http://www.disat.unimib.it/ghiacciai/Distribuzione%20Ghiac-ciai1.jpg, downloaded Sept. 22, 2008, is the source of this suggestive statistic. I neglected to write down the actual name of the site, and when I came to search for it, it had been removed. A remarkable instance of sympathetic glacial melting.

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Commedia della Morte: Theories of Life and Death in Italian American Culture

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Abstract: The word death or *morte* appears so often in the writings of Italian Americans that one would expect someone to have given it broad critical treatment, but save for occasional references in very few critical essays, the subject remains widely represented and dismally underexplored. This paper attempts a theorization of death in Italian American culture through a reading of previous critical approaches and through Pietro Di Donato's last, unpublished novel entitled "The American Gospels." Composed when he was nearly 80 in the late 1980s, "American Gospels" continued the cultural storytelling and criticism that he began with his 1939 best-selling novel, *Christ in Concrete,* only this time he tells a prophetic story of life after the death of humanity, a life that speaks of pleasure for the just and pain for the unjust. "American Gospels" continues Di Donato's life long commitment to class criticism through story. God fearing and God loving is taken to new levels by the author,who imagines Christ taking on a number of human forms, two of which are female. The dead Christ of his first novel now becomes a living Christ who realizes that God is responsible for not taking care of humans who died through the injustices of others.

Death Italian style is a luscious banquet,
a bruising game of chance, or crime and
punishment as pagan survival of the fittest.
— Camille Paglia,
"The Italian Way of Death"

The miracle of death I first had
the privilege to witness when I
was about five years old.
— Regina Barreca,
"My Grandmother, a Chicken, and Death"

Why would we need a theory of death and what would creating one or more theories of death help us to do? These are questions that are too big to handle in such a short paper as this, but they are queries driving the work I am doing now on humor and irony, for I believe that many of the ways Italian Americans have created their arts have to do with the ways that they have come to ponder death and accommodate its impact on their lives in their works. I believe this can be found by examining their use of humor and irony. Whether we are a people who can laugh in the face of death, or face the death of laughter remains to be seen. What matters is that we begin thinking about what it is we bring to the expression of life and death that is different from other hyphenated American cultures.

Those who have worked with the idea of theory know that theories more often than not result from observed practices. It is rare that a useful theory emerges prior to any experience of something practiced. This is not to say that theories aren't created everyday without practical experience, it's just that the theories worth keeping through generations are those based on actual collected data. The time has come for us to theorize the place of death in Italian American literature, and as we pursue this activity, we find that it will be quite different from the way that death has been theorized in American critical studies.

This essay is an attempt to begin creating a theory of death that will help us read its representations in a variety of works by Italian American writers. Though a mediated meditation, I hope to point to some unique perspectives on life that Italian Americans have brought to the American experience of death and to help us read some of the stranger uses of death in works that have been ignored or so recently developed that they are still in press. My exploration is the result of over forty years of my literal and literary experiences of death and emerges now in my own writing as I've struggled with the making of a new book on the use of irony and humor in Italian American culture, and through my experiences of writing a memoir entitled "Living with the Dead." The need for such a theory has struck me in my most recent project of editing Pietro Di Donato's last, unpublished novel entitled "American Gospels" and writing an accompanying "Afterword." I believe that inside this last novel we have, at last, the artist we were hoping for when we put down *Christ in Concrete* and began looking for that next work that would achieve greater heights in the literary arts. I would argue that his "American Gospels" is what we've been waiting for, and it took a lifetime and what I will call a death time, that is the period after an artist's death that it takes for the work to surface.

Some good work has been done with the idea of death in Italian Amer-

ican culture, and as a way of preparing my readings I offer a view of some of the major comments of Italian American thinkers. Critic Robert Viscusi has advanced ideas of death in Italian American literature by showing us how its references contribute to the creation of the Italian American character. Especially useful is his idea of how the immigrant character becomes a god in American literature by sacrificing his or her life in a matter similar to Christ's. In *Buried Caesars and Other Secrets of Italian American Writing,* Viscusi crystallizes a most useful notion of Italian American death:

> In Italy, people do not worship the dead, but they consult with them often. . . . Italians learned from the dead. This process is basic to the way that Italians reinvent themselves, century after century. They follow the sun that emerges from the underworld. They are experts in raising the dead. (6–7)

It is this resurrection and its repression that is the foundation of this great critical study. This raising of the dead, he suggests, provides the basis for the great Italian Renaissance and Risorgimento. It is, as he notes it in his gloss of Tina De Rosa's *Paper Fish,* a fundamental aspect of Italian American writing to "make these ordinary lives eternal" (137). Viscusi suggests that each time an Italian American writer deals with his or her dead, they ennoble the life that has been lived.

The use of the dead noted by Viscusi nearly always occurs as a tragedy of life. If there is any irony at all in Italian Americans dealing with death, it is almost always a self-irony that reflects on the literal reality of the living. It is as though death in Italian American culture is a way of providing meaning to the lives of survivors. Death becomes an experience to be endured, remembered, and transcended as each new generation goes about the business of making life matter.

The most thorough reading of death in Italian American literature comes to us in the recent study by Mary Jo Bona, *By the Breath of Their Mouths: Narratives of Resistance in Italian America.* In a chapter entitled "Death/*Morte*: What They Talk About When They Talk About Death" Bona utilizes theoretical tracts on death and suffering to illuminate the role that death and dying play in the literature of Italian Americans. Like Viscusi, Bona characterizes death as a tragedy through which lessons are taught to the living survivors, those who write and read these works. Bona sees death in Italian American literature as a key trope in reading the humanness of those Italian immigrants who were often perceived as something less than human, or, as I have suggested in my earlier work, as "signifying donkeys." She writes:

> That Italians in American suffered, died, and were mourned in the literature of Italian America, illuminated not only their new-world status, but also, and more importantly, their humanity through dying. (176)

Bona keenly observes:

> The influences of Italian Catholicism (and its conventional belief in an afterlife), migratory status, regional provenience, and nostalgic recursions to a paradisiacal homeland illustrate a complex and ambivalent attitude many writers take towards topics of death and grief. (176)

This ambivalence, I would argue, is the result of limiting death to tragic renditions, and freedom from it might just come when we begin to deal with death in a comic vein.

Bona sees the portrayal of death as a response to the way Italian immigrants were treated. "As if in response to the xenophobia of the new world," she writes, "Italian American writers made sure their characters died. The deathbed scenes are employed to fascinate and stir pity, to incense and teach lessons" (178). Some of the lessons she points to include the realization that one's life's work can be seen as art that enables the dead one to continue living long after his or her funeral.

A somewhat different take on death comes through Camille Paglia's essay that riffs on the subject in her usual animated and cavalier style:

> As an Italian-American, I was raised with respect for, but not fear of, death. Italians dread incapacity and dependency, not extinction. Since the dead are always remembered, they are never really gone. In rural Italy, cemeteries are like parks where the survivors picnic and tend the graves. In America, family plots are purchased like vacation condos; one knows one's future address decades in advance.

While her writing is certainly light and lively, Paglia never suggests any of the comic possibilities of death in Italian American art; death remains a tragedy that one must learn to incorporate into her approach to life.

Frank Lentricchia's novel, *The Italian Actress,* deals with death in a way that may seem strange but it more closely approaches my notion of a comedy of death, as he presents Jack Del Piero a "former avant-garde viedographer" who creates an experimental film with two cameras: one that time-lapse videographs a corpse as it decays, and the other captures the pornographic interactions of a pair of professional prostitutes. The cre-

ative thrust here might seem to fit in with critic Leslie Fiedler's grotesque notion of death in American literature as practiced by such classic authors as Edgar Allen Poe, but it is better understood through Paglia's notion of an Italian informed approach to death:

> Italians recognize both the inevitability of death and its unique grisly signature, which seems fascinating to us in a way that strikes other people as morbid or insensitive. And as in TV soap operas, we like prolonged debate about how a death will affect others — pathos and voyeurism as mass entertainment.

Indeed, Lentricchia's images present an in-your-face morbidity that takes the in-your-face portrayal of murders by the likes of Coppola, De Palma, Scorsese and Cimino, to new levels of voyeuristic indulgence. These portrayals, which have been marked as rough, ragged, and even blasphemous by critics, actually, as Paglia points out represent aspects of Italian American culture.

> That the Italian directness about death is part of a more general world view is clear in the first two parts of Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather* (1972, 1974). Genuine masterpieces of our time, they dramatically demonstrate the residual paganism of Italian culture, with its energy, passion, clannishness and implacable willfulness. The abrupt, choreographic violence of these films is like a sacrificial slaughter where blood flows as freely as the water of life. Coppola constantly intercuts images of food and death to suggest the archaic Italian, or rather pre-Christian, cycle of fertility, destruction and rebirth.

Paglia's comments make sense especially if we remember that the Latin word "paganus" is the basis for the word "peasant" and that so much of Italian immigrant life, as we have come to know it in the United States, is based on peasant culture that was absorbed into Catholicism to create a version different from other practices of Catholicism.

This difference is visible in films such as John Turturro's *Mac,* especially in a striking scene in which three sons surround their father's corpse waked in their family home. As the women are keening their sorrow through ritualistic mourning, each son reflects on the way their father's life had impacted on his own. At one point the dead father opens his eyes and comments, in Italian, on the shoddy craftsmanship that went into the making of his coffin. He asks who made this coffin, and then complains that it

doesn't fit him right. He then spews out a lesson that he probably taught throughout his entire life:

> By the product you will know the maker. Whoever made this coffin was not an artisan. There are only two ways of doing things: my way and the right way, and they are both the same.

While we have learned in other films that the living speak to death, in this film, we learn that death speaks to the living. As haunting as this scene is, it takes us to the threshold of the comic, something Mario Puzo attempts briefly in his description of how Lucia Santa's first husband dies in a work accident; he, along with other workers, is killed by tons of the bananas that they are unloading from ships.

Understanding these depictions of death is helped through insights found in Bona's words:

> Portraying suffering, death, and mourning in an effort to make certain that Italian in America were perceived if not accepted as more than expendable laborers, metonymically reduced body part, authors performed an inestimable pedagogical service in fleshing out hearts and souls. The topic of death gave writers permission to insist on the profoundly human nature of their grief-stricken characters, aligning them more centrally with in the American family. The folk materials offered by storytelling characters to their families and communities are lessons in survival and lessons for the future, reinforcing the fact that relationships change but do not end after death. (338–39)

And so through tragedies we have developed great insights into the role of death in Italian American culture, but our work will be more complete if we begin to examine how a comedy of death informs the experience.

The Art of Dying: From Dante to Di Donato

There'll come a time when all of us must leave here
Then nothing Sister Mary can do
Will keep me here with you
As nothing in this life that I've been trying
Could equal or surpass the art of dying
— George Harrison

> *Like their devotion to storytelling, folk and culinary traditions, writers of Italian America make dying an art, and by turns, perform the pedagogical function of edifying an often indifferent and hostile public.*
> — Mary Jo Bona (178)

With his 1939 bestselling novel *Christ in Concrete,* Pietro Di Donato became a hero of the working class, a champion of the exploited worker struggling to express his experiences of being used and abused. Early publicity photos included some of him bare chested, laying brick on a job site, as if it were evidence of his worker-god status. The novel achieved such success that he was able to hobnob with the likes of Ernest Hemingway in Havana and Key West. Many critics believe that that early success stunted his literary growth and kept him writing the same story over and over again until his death, a fate, according to the late Leslie Fiedler, suffered by most American writers.

> The great works of American fiction are notoriously at home in the children's section of the library, their level of sentimentality precisely that of a pre-adolescent. This is part of what we mean when we talk about the incapacity of the American novelist to develop; in a compulsive way he returns to a limited world of experience, usually associated with his childhood, writing the same book over and over again until he lapses into silence or self-parody. (24)

All of Di Donato's fiction after this novel can been seen as fitting into this pattern of "pre-adolescent" "self parody" focusing on his obsession with the relationship of the sacred to the profane.

This Woman (1958), Di Donato's second novel, is a good example of Fiedler's claim. Greeted with many negative reviews, the novel never achieved the status of his first. In it, Di Donato describes the path taken by the young Paolo after his rejection of both the American dream and the traditional myth of Christ. The protagonist, Paolo di Alba, becomes, "The boy who later felt the terrible exultation of pagan freedom when his mother died in his arms" (14). This freedom from the strictures of traditions Italian and American, enable the protagonist to re-create himself through a new moral order built on a triad of work, sex and soul:

> The three-act drama of his mental theatre would revert first to the factual solidity of building construction, evolve to the mercury of sex, and

then culminate with the spiritual judgement. (8)

The central story of the novel concerns Paolo's innumerable and incredible sexual encounters with women in a manner reminiscent of the Marquis de Sade and his faithful Italian disciple Gabriele D'Annunzio (Di Donato often told a story of how his father was the illegitimate son of D'Annunzio). The dead husband of his lover Isa becomes an obsession: "The unseen cannot die. The dead, viewed, remain truly dead without interruption" (193). He forces Isa back to the grave to see the mutilated corpse and the experience drives her to a nervous breakdown. Later, and incredibly, this all ends happily as Isa and their son prance about the beach in a scene which becomes for Paul, "a vaulting apocalypse" in which "his immediate pagan satyr mortal, and Catholic Soul eternal dashed into close secret embrace" (220). In 1960, Di Donato returned to the material of *Christ in Concrete* with *Three Circles of Light,* a novel woven of stories that serve as a prequel to and carry on stories from *Christ in Concrete.* Other than a few short stories that embrace similar themes found in his earlier work, that's was the extent of his fiction until very late in his life when he worked on a novel.

Composed in the late 1980s, Di Donato's last completed novel, "The American Gospels," sat among his papers, with only the peep of an excerpt published in a 1992 issue of *Voices in Italian Americana.* At nearly 80, Di Donato continued the cultural storytelling and criticism that he began with his 1939 best-selling novel, *Christ in Concrete,* only this time he told a prophetic story of life after the death of humanity, a life that speaks of pleasure for the just and pain for the unjust. "American Gospels" continues Di Donato's life long commitment to class criticism through story. The novel will appear posthumously this year and is a long, overdue response to the injustices of life in twentieth-century United States, and with this novel, a new Di Donato emerges, one who defies Fielder's depiction of what happens to most great American writers.

The man who wrote this book is a very different man from the one who created the classic *Christ in Concrete.* God fearing and God loving is taken to new levels by the author who imagines Christ taking on a number of human forms, two of which are female, one of whom the protagonist lusts after. There's an historical sense such as what we find in Dante's *Commedia,* but also of the predictive paranoia that we find in Orwell's *1984*:

It is 2000 anno Domini, advent of Apocalypse and threshold of the 21st Century that will know Earth only as another dead planet inhabited by

> insects. Orwell's '84 happened — skinhead rabble Nazis, Right wing rich, religious reactionaries and self-serving patriots had won complete power with the collusion of the robot masses. The rare few — such as I — had solely the freedom of mute invective. By coincidence or fancy of fate the four independent Christs, two male, two female, came out of Stony Brook U. (11)

The dead Christ of his first novel now becomes four living Christs who realize that even God can be held accountable for not taking care of humans who died through the injustices of others.

This novel, inspired by the great works of writers such as Dante, Orwell and composers such as Wagner, explores some themes similar to his earlier works, but which are expressed in a very different style that can be characterized as "commedia" in the Dantean sense. Unlike the *Commedia* of Dante, Pietro Di Donato's "American Gospels" features a storyteller who is clearly from and of the working class. It is through his witnessing of the events that result from the second, third and fourth and fifth comings of Christ that we are presented with the final justice through which the worker is elevated to paradise and the ruling classes thrust into the inferno. But unlike the working class victims of his earlier works, the working class in "The American Gospels," often through the device of a "Chorus," realizes its role in the injustices that it experienced as this excerpt shows:

> CHORUS OF DEMOS
> World's End is our fault our most grievous fault . . . without us the overwhelming multitudes HISTORY would not be . . . without we the lowly common people — we the faceless crowds, we the polyglot proles, we the hand-to-mouth wage-earning class — without us to bear all the world's burdens, there would be no Gods, no Lords, no Premiers, no powerful bestial incestuous Popes, no clown Presidents, no sacred-cow Leaders, no public wimp-overseers, no charlatan Dictators . . . we, Demos were the energy, the body, limbs, backbone, the essence, the force of the world — the tower of Babel world . . . we feared good, we were enchanted with evil . . . because we scorned love and lovingkindness we forfeited the Earth world — He goes on to explain why the working class masses behaved that way.
>
> -yea we clamored for Hollywood, for baubles, glitz and show, we adored sleaze and hype, drums and fifes, balloons and trumpets and cheap shots and rags on sticks and pimp politicians and harlot officials, fraudulent heroes and we created government of super-rich ventrilo-

> quists and shoddy whore White House dummies to make covert and unconstitutional wars and genocide for what difference does it make when we all must die? . . . and why should we not want lies, reactionaries, contras, banana-republic death squads, conservatives, Nazis, Fascists, fables, fantasies, comic books instead of reality, travesty-Gods, illusions, rapes, arsons, violences, horrors, spies, informer-Ham Actors, finks, double-dealers when truth, honesty, intelligence, virtue, wisdom and brotherly-sisterly-love cannot possibly make us immortal! . . . (130–31)

Death is the price paid for creating injustice, eternal joy is the reward granted to those who suffered on earth.

> But shame on applauding crowds . . . shame upon us screaming cowardly faceless headless torrents of ex-humanity . . . shame upon us incontinent hordes . . . unfathomable inexplicable Mystae Mysticus Mysterium justly destroyed our world and closed down the mankind drama because of our majority-slave-breed-excremental mind — given freedom of choice we the lumpen masses invariably elected the Shit-Man to lead us into committing ceaseless killings . . . we disobeyed the cardinal commandment THOU SHALT NOT KILL! . . . we earned eternal damnation . . . our world was . . . (131)

His criticism of all the world's religions is based on the inability of each one to follow that one single commandment: Thou Shalt Not Kill. For Di Donato, life was energy, and death its absence, and as he grew closer to his own death, the power of that reality was realized in his prose. The writing here is that of a man facing the end of his life and contemplating the eternity promised by Christianity. He contrasts eternity in light of the failure of that, and any other religion, to make a just world for the living. His thinking is rendered in a unique pastiche of Dantesque *terza rima,* Joycean stream of consciousness, biblical cataloguing, and Whitmanesque neologisms. The entire work is a testament to intertextual complexity of a postmodern world that brought you multiculturalism, political correctness, and the waning of art that defies the status quo. "The American Gospels" is truly a "commedia" in the spirit of Dante who his use of the word in a letter he addressed to Lord Can Grande della Scala:

> To understand the title, it must be known that comedy is derived from comos, "a village," and from oda, "a song" so that a comedy is, so to

> speak, "a rustic song." Comedy then is a certain genre of poetic narrative differing from all others. For it differs from tragedy in its matter, in that tragedy is tranquil and conducive to wonder at the beginning but foul and conducive to horror at the end, or catastrophe. . . . Comedy, on the other hand, introduces a situation of adversity, but ends its matter in prosperity, . . . Tragedy uses an elevated and sublime style, while comedy uses an unstudied and low style, which is what Horace implies in the Art of Poetry. . . . (100)

Dante begins his Commedia in hell and ends in Paradise. Di Donato begins his "Gospels" on the hell of earth and ends in Venusberg his version of Paradise. Di Donato's novel begins with the adversity faced by those who have historically endured injustice and ends with those souls prospering in heaven while those who have perpetrated the injustices writhing in hell.

"American Gospels" is to the U.S.A. what those of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John's gospels were to Christianity — written witness of the life and death of God made human. This novel is a search for truth and justice, words that have been lost in the play of postmodern parody and cynicism. For those familiar with Di Donato's earlier work, his *American Gospels* is a fitting capstone to a significant, and often strange, corpus of work.

What separates Di Donato from other American writers of his time is his representation of a Catholicism that has its roots in pre-Christian, matriarchal worship. He achieved a deep sensuality through his writing that became evident through his visceral descriptions and complemented his recreation of a troubled Catholicism. Di Donato's Catholicism has its roots in pre-Christian, matriarchal worship. As Di Donato himself admitted,

> I'm a sensualist, and I respond to the sensuality of the Holy Roman Catholic Church, its art its music, its fragrances, its colors, its architecture, and so forth — which is truly Italian. We Italians are really essentially pagans and realists. (von Huene-Greenberg 36)

Di Donato's pursuit of this sense of pagan realism is what sets him up to produce a true *commedia della morte* in his final work, and the works that came after his masterpiece would lead the way. Without this novel, Di Donato's literary career never transcends the pitfalls that Leslie Fielder suggests has created the great problem faced by most American writers.

Di Donato's "American Gospels" can be seen as an attempt to resolve the sacred/profane dilemma presented in much of his earlier work, and in the process he shifts from the material of his previous works. The redemp-

tion of the victims of capitalism through the final judgment of a female African American Christ becomes the matter of this novel, which should be read as his primal scream out of the world just as *Christ in Concrete* was his cry into the world. Through a resurrection of sorts Di Donato can have his 'revenge on society' by revealing "all the nonsense of authority and of Church" through what he calls a "conscious evaluation of myself" (von Huene-Greenberg 33–34). To Di Donato, salvation for the world lies in man's ability to become his own god, to take responsibility and control of the world he's created and to act for the good of all. Di Donato attacks the forces of power that he believes are responsible for the suffering of the masses.

One of the keys to Di Donato's shift out of the same material rut is the way he portrays women in this novel, something that Fielder once suggested, remained a weakness of many American writers.

> Our great novelists, thought experts on indignity and assault, on loneliness and terror, tend to avoid treating the passionate encounter of a man and woman, which we expect at the center of a novel. Indeed, they rather shy away from permitting in their fictions the presence of any full-fledged, mature women, giving us instead monsters of virtue or bitchery, symbols of the rejection or fear of sexuality. (24)

"The American Gospels" utilizes an overt sexuality that becomes the focus of the afterlife: "Love conquers all things — GOOD has vanquished Death! — pale despicable Death is eternally destroyed! Venus has replaced evil Death." In *Christ in Concrete,* woman is portrayed as a reactionary failure, in "*The Gospels,*" she is the all powerful god who saves mankind from death. The final book, the Veneriad, sets up Venusberg, echoing Wagner's *Tannhauser.* Yet, while Wagner's opera opens in Venusberg, Di Donato's closes his final work in Venusberg, reversing, in a sense, the traditional Christian quest that usually ends in redemption through renunciation of the flesh. For Di Donato, the world is redeemed through the acceptance of the flesh as it becomes immortalized for an eternity of joy.

> VENUSBERG
> CHORUS OF MORTALS
> The animal, man, fouled humanity, polluted the seas and all waters, the earth, the lifebreathing heavens, fatally wounding Nature . . . man's lies and meretricious religions poisoned the soul . . . mankind earned its annihilation and disappearance . . . Mystae Mysticus Mysterium the

> ineffable arbiter of man's and God's story, in final adjudication ordered Lucifer the much maligned Morning Star-Son of Light to establish the select society of good mortals for Godhood.
>
> Dashing stylish Lucifer surfeited of capricious evil divested himself of horn, hoof and tail and transfigured himself into Venus divinely gorgeous desirable female imaginable to preside over Paradise--for the incomparably beautiful woman has always been, is, and forever will be man's dream of dreams.
>
> Over the fantastically bejeweled flower-entwined entrance to Paradise is the direction: EXPECT AND EMBRACE EVERY HEART'S AND SOUL'S PLEASURE, LOVE AND HAPPINESS YE WHO PASS THROUGH THIS PORTAL!
>
> It is the abode of Venus Goddess of LOVE and properly called Venusberg. There is everything to please spirit, mind and flesh: communal cheer, victuals beyond compare, rollicking beverages, music for any mood, each night and day festive as the guileless joy on former earth of Thanksgiving, May Day, Easter, Halloween, Christmas and birthdays . . . (132)

There can be no doubt that while this is the most American of Di Donato's fictions, the power behind it and the foundations beneath contain a heavy dose of Italian philosophy. There's nothing like death Italian American style, as Camille Paglia has put it: "writers of Italian America make dying an art, and by turns, perform the pedagogical function of edifying an often indifferent and hostile public" (295).

Through his "American Gospels," Pietro Di Donato accomplishes this feat and, at the same time, carries out a literary vendetta to achieve personal and professional justice. In this novel Di Donato enacts the vendetta called for by the work place murder of Geremio enacted by Mr. Murdin, the man who used workers to reap profits of Capitalism. The Mr. Murdin of *Christ in Concrete* has been replaced by the world leaders throughout history who have murdered the working class who they have exploited for their own selfish purposes. Vendetta is the province and responsibility of the survivor, usually, but not exclusively a male. The wrong that must be righted has created an imbalance in the survivor who must complete the act to return to a personal and publicly balanced self. Whoever enacts the vendetta must first determine the truth via identification of the wrong doer and then inflict punishment that is similar to if not an exact imitation of that which was visited upon the original victim; one of the keys to a successful vendetta is notifying the object of vendetta of the purpose of this action prior to its

performance. Then the community must be notified, or be able to determine that the vendetta was enacted, and the survivor is appropriately awarded respect. It is with this final novel, that Di Donato achieves the attention and respect from the working class community that he lived, wrote, and for which he ultimately died.

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Reflections on Italian Americans and "Otherness"

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Abstract: This essay looks back to events both within and beyond the Italian-American community and asks how and what Italian Americans might be able to take away from such experiences. Be it the lynchings of Italians in the early part of the twentieth century or the concurrent onset of the motion picture industry, Italian Americans have surely undergone their share of discrimination and defamation. The second part of this essays asks what might Italian Americans learn from these past experiences and how might they better appreciate their own history and culture. Examples of inter- and intra-ethnic comparisons come from both the print and visual media.

There is no ontology without archeology!
— Felix Stefanile

Preliminary Musings

As I wrestled with some thoughts late one night soon in the aftermath of the Don Imus vs. the Rutgers University women's basketball team incident, I wondered what lesson(s) there could possibly be for us within the Italian/American community.[1] I subsequently mused: If there is one thing — and I must underscore, one of many — we might learn from the Don Imus debacle of spring 2007, it is that "names [indeed can] hurt you," to paraphrase the old children's retort to name-calling.[2] We might indeed rethink the twenty-first-century deconstructionists and rework Descartes' "Cogito ergo sum" into "Loquor ergo sum"; or, to be more precise with regard to the theme at hand, "I speak, therefore, I can hurt."

More significant to the matter at hand, if there is anything positive that can come out of such a media debacle, it is the possibility of rekindling such a discussion on race and ethnicity within the Italian/American community.[3] Yes, we have had ample opportunities in the past decade to rekindle

such a conversation — indeed, with very little success, if any at all — but we should not lose hope. We did, I believe, as the collective imaginary of the United States, lose something somewhere between the 1980s and 1990s, when, so it seems, certain concepts fell by the wayside. One sad result in all of this is the loss of the word "acceptance" and its concept of inclusiveness. If memory does not fail me, this was indeed the operative word in the 1960s and 1970s, during the progressive period of socio-political advancements in a collective consciousness with regard to race and gender. Yet, today, it seems to have been replaced by the ever so implicitly exclusionary term "tolerance." Furthermore, to be sure, the power of language became tantamount; people stated things (be it fact or fiction), and these things often became Truth.[4]

This most significant difference in terminology, as simple as it may seem at first glance, could make a wonderfully productive starting point for a reworking of an Italian/American collective imaginary on race and ethnicity, so that, while we are always wanting to move ahead, this might be one moment where we indeed decide to go backwards (if ever so briefly), in order to move forward eventually in a much more constructive manner, which has clearly proven otherwise in this regard. This can, for sure, be a beginning for a discussion between all the main "players" — media, political, and intellectual/academic figures alike — in order for Italian Americans to tackle head-on the discourse of race and ethnicity that, over the past twenty-five-plus years, seems to have been conveniently muzzled by the power of language, be it verbal or visual.[5]

Where We've Been

How might all of this relate to Italian Americans, one might further muse, at this juncture?[6] First, I would suggest that race is an issue we still need to explore — interrogate, if you will — within the Italian/American communities. This question, I would further contend, is twofold in nature and scope. It deals with, on the one hand, how Italians in America (read, Italian immigrants and Italian Americans) have been considered, portrayed, and treated throughout the long history here within the United States. One might readily argue that the plight of the Italian began back in 1905, at the onset of the motion picture industry; one need only hark back to silent films such as F. A. Dobson's *The Skyscrapers of New York* (1905), Edwin Porter's *The Black Hand* (1906), and D. W. Griffith's *The Avenging Conscious* (1914), each of which may figure as early *good* candidates to springboard such stereotyping; the Italian character in this third film — played by a

non-Italian, as was often the case — is an ill-reputed blackmailer.

Themes such as sex, violence, sentimentality, family relations, and the like will seem to dominate the cinema of and about Italian Americans, generating a most contested debate, within the Italian/American community at the end of the twentieth century about the portrayal of Italians and Italian Americans in United States media in general. In fact, even in his earlier film, *At The Altar* (1909), Griffith seemed to raise concern within the dominant culture by underscoring, in an apparently positive story-line, sexuality and violence as part of the Italian character. To be sure, both aggressive behavior and sexuality ultimately figured as two components of the Italian and Italian/American character as cinema developed, within the first half of the twentieth century, in the United States.[7] Be it the gangster films of the 1930s, which laid the foundation for the violent mobster, or the oversexed individuals of the later years, the Italian male will, in many respects, ultimately culminate in a figure such as Tony Soprano, a violent, oversexed capo-regime whose sexual proclivities bring him to the edge of seducing his own nephew's fiancé, Adriana.[8]

On the other hand, the afore-mentioned Imus debacle calls into question the issue of how race is perceived, processed, and treated by a certain component of the Italian/American community. We need only to think back to the two infamous episodes of the 1980s, Howard Beach and Bensonhurst. These were two tragic sites of racial strife that involved to varying degrees the Italian/American community. Yet, so it seems, the majority of the then leaders of the Italian/American community remained silent on the issues. Yet, again, the counter-demonstrations did nothing but underscore the fairly widely perceived stereotype of the Italian American as racist, bigoted, and, ultimately, capable of engaging in dumb-show, as a number of Italian Americans countered the protests of the African/American community with vulgar gestures, racial epithets, and the despicable display of watermelons, as the African-American contingency marched down the streets of Bensonhurst. Two Italian Americans spoke up in print. Immediately after the Brooklyn tragedy, Jerome Krase, then professor of sociology at Brooklyn College, wrote an op-ed in *Newsday.*[9] A few months later, Robert Viscusi, also of Brooklyn College, published an essay in *Voices in Italian Americana,* in which he laid out a series of "strategic imperatives" for Italian/American culture.[10]

One of the primary steps that we in the Italian/American community need to do at this juncture is to re-visit our history. It is a record that is rich with achievements and successes. It is also a record that lists a series of sad

and tragic events and episodes that have befallen our own turn-of-the-twentieth-century Italian Americans. But, it is also a record that, as the more recent cases of racial strife have demonstrated, has also proven at times to be inimical to the racial challenges that blacks have had to confront throughout the years.[11] Such challenges, so it seems, have often been seen as "their" problems. But, as the history of Italian America proves, these have also been "our" problems. During the first half of the twentieth century, actually since the onslaught of the major wave of immigration (1880–1924), Italians, like other southern Europeans, were perceived as non-white in this country. Indeed, while it is true that blacks constituted the larger amount of people lynched, Italian immigrants have the dubious distinction of being the largest group hung at one time.[12]

Furthermore, well before the onset of cinema at the beginning of the twentieth century and its negative representations as we have seen above, Italians had already been suffering acts of visual vilification in the print media. Be it in magazines such as *The Mascot, Judge,* and even *Life,* the cartoon depictions of the Italian immigrant were fundamentally mean and, both literally and figuratively, *dehumanizing.* The following two cartoons underscore the vituperative attacks against Italians at the turn of the century, well over one hundred years ago. The first cartoon was published in 1888 in *The Mascot*:

This drawing proves to be, for sure, one of the vilest depictions to date of any ethnic group, to be sure. The triptych in the upper half is divided into the following categories: (1) "A Nuisance to Pedestrians (read, the Italians hanging out on street corners); (2) "Their Sleeping Apartments (read, their supposedly over-crowded living conditions); and (3) their "Afternoon's Pleasant Diversions (read, violent characteristics as a people).[13] As one views the lower half of this vignette, one finds a diptych that represents violence toward the Italians, which, in the case of the first of the two sections, would seem reserved for the rodent or reptile that one wishes to dispose of. Similarly, when arrested, as the second section recommends, they should be packed into a cage like the proverbial sardines; again, an action reserved for the non-human.

Such dehumanization is actualized in the following cartoon that appeared in *Judge* magazine in 1903, "The Unrestricted Dumping-ground," where the Italian immigrants are half-human and half-animal, as we see below:

THE UNRESTRICTED DUMPING-GROUND.

Of course, when one thinks of that creature that is half-human and half-animal (i.e., horse), the first image that comes to mine is the centaur, which

though half-animal — and possibly representative of an unbridled nature — it was also, like the mythic Chiron, civilized, kind, and intelligent, renown for his knowledge of the sciences. Our Italians in this vignette, to the contrary, are part human (head) and, in their animalistic characterization, part rodent, that which is, along with reptiles, the lowliest of the animal kingdom, one might readily argue. Thus, the Italian immigrant, "direct from the slums of Europe daily," as the shute from which they fall is labeled, is represented as the lowliest from the animal world — the rat — and, as human, carries in his mouth those very weapons — stilettos — for which the Italian immigrant was accused of carrying and wielding when he so desired. Labels such as "mafia," "anarchists," and "socialists" written across their hats or bandanas, and the stereotypical dark complexion, black hair, and moustaches, only underscore the negative and dehumanized image of the Italian immigrant.

Indeed, while the specific theme of this vignette is that of the Italian immigrant, the overall notion of immigration is called into question by the image of President William McKinley in the upper left-hand corner in a cloud, as if looking down from heaven in disapproval, he having been the victim of assassination at the hands of immigrant Leon Frank Czolgosz. Finally, there is an extra-textual aspect to this vignette, in the form of the recently added "georgetownbookshop.com," obvious vendor of this image. Why, one wonders, is it acceptable for such negative and vituperative imagery of the Italian to be sold so it can be possibly framed and hung as a wall decoration? And, I should add, this now Internet book shop also sells similar posters of dehumanizing and vilifying imagery of other groups. The obvious question that comes to the fore would be that since posters of all ethnic groups are sold, the damage is cancelled out. Not necessarily. If anything, it reinforces the Wasp / Ethnic (read also, race) dichotomy that has and continues to divide the socio-political fabric of the United States.[14]

Such vituperation did not end early in the twentieth century. It indeed became intense once more after the alliance between Italy, Germany, and Japan during WWII, together with Italy's declaration of war on the United States on December 11, 1941. These two consecutive acts, especially, placed many immigrants on an enemy aliens list. One unspoken result, for sure, was what would seem to have been the subsequent generation's linguistic inheritance. "Don't speak the enemy's language," clamored the innumerable posters and other public announcements during that time. Furthermore, Italians were underutilized in numerous professions over the years, and in more recent times when it seems we became white and, consequently, respected members of the upper middle class, things have not

improved as one might have expected.[15]

These are some of the reasons we need to revisit our history. Let us not forget that, according to what we might surmise from the behavior of some in the entertainment world, Italians are sometimes still fair game for ridicule in the public arena. We cannot always take for granted that we enjoy all the benefits of those who inhabit on a daily basis that world of WASP-dom. This, I would submit, is still not the case in spite of the wonderful successes of those past and present, including our current Speaker of the House, who broke both ethnic and gender boundaries, "at a single bound," as the old TV show proclaimed about Superman. Joey of *Friends,* George of *Seinfeld,* and the Romanos of *Everybody Loves Raymond* are three examples of what some might consider more recent negative portrayals of Italian Americans in the medium of television.[16]

Why then, one might continue to ask, do individuals and companies continue to use a most offensive stereotype in a public forum, regardless of the context? The answer is quite simple, as disturbing as it may seem. Kinsley, MillerCoors LLC, Verizon, as well as others, basically feel entitled to do so because the so-called dominant culture thought process in the United States allows, indeed encourages, people to do so. From Kinsley one Italian-American groups sought a public apology (Not sure that happened. If it did, it was behind closed doors); others, like the Italian American Human Rights Foundation, succeed in having the spot pulled. This, I would underscore, is admirable to be sure. But it is not the end all. Indeed, it is only the beginning. we need to move forward from these apparent end goals.

Remedy to some of the above was sought out and obtained by individuals in the past. The late New York state senator John D. Calandra and colleagues took it upon themselves to investigate the treatment of Italian Americans — faculty, staff, and students — at the City University of New York in the 1970s, since there had been numerous complaints about the treatment of Italian Americans within CUNY. The finding was that Italian Americans were indeed under-utilized and under-represented at all levels university-wide. The immediate result was then Chancellor Kibbee's proclamation (December 9, 1976) that Italian Americans were to be considered a protected class throughout CUNY, with all the rights and privileges of the federally recognized Affirmative Action groups. Another result was the eventual formation of the Italian-American Institute to Foster Higher Education, in 1979, which, over the years, has been transformed, in both size and mission, into The John D. Calandra Italian American Institute, a university-wide, research institute under the aegis of Queens College, CUNY.

The 1979 Institute was founded primarily to foster higher education

among Italian Americans (through academic and career counseling especially) and impart, to both Italian Americans and non-Italian Americans alike, knowledge of the culture of Italian America. Over the years, the mission broadened, to include social, psychological, and demographic research on Italian Americans both within and beyond the walls of CUNY; one of its primary channels of communication is the television program *Italics.*[17] Today, these earlier research components are now buttressed by an equally rigorous sector of cultural activities that range from lectures to symposia to film series. Such an institute dedicated to Italian Americana — be it the original structure of 1979 or the more expanded unit of today — is a unique entity. No other center or institute both here in the Americas or in Italy (the exception being the *Fondazione Giovanni Agnelli* of Turin) approaches its magnitude and the possibilities therein.[18]

Where Might We Go from Here?

In his by now classic essay, *Race Matters* (1993), Cornel West suggested that the "fundamental crisis in black America [was] twofold: too much poverty and too much self-love."[19] I wonder if we might not be able to say that the problem, if this is the right term, within Italian America is "too much [affluence] and [not enough] self-love," to borrow from West. Strong words, some might say. Problem? What problem, since many Italian Americans run major companies — national and international — and some of our best writers, for example, are of Italian descent? This, indeed, is, I would contend, part of the problem.

The affluence among Italian Americans has led them out of the city and into the suburbs, thus believing that all is well, all obstacles have been surpassed, and now we can move forward. With such an exodus, the various Italian/American neighborhoods (proverbial Little Italies and the like) underwent dramatic change. First of all, the younger members left, often selling off parents' homes and businesses to new immigrants, non Italian Americans, for which the various old stomping grounds, especially the Little Italies, turned into what Jerome Krase and others have recently labeled "Italian-American theme parks."[20] Second, the original cultural artifacts and practices were willy-nilly transformed into commercial ventures, losing their original cultural and historical valence. A more recent example is the brouhaha over the San Gennaro festival of Manhattan's Little Italy, when a subcommittee of Community Board 2 rejected the application for the 79th annual San Gennaro Feast, reason being that no representative of the Feast appeared before the subcommittee. If "The San Gennaro feast is a very important tradition for the Italian-American community, and I hope to see it

continue," as Ms. Derr stated when offering to postpone the vote so the application can be defended, one wonders why no one from the San Gennaro committee showed up in the first place to present the application? In addition, one surely wonders about the current cultural and historical valence of the feast; as the *New York Times* article, in closing, quoted an unidentified customer in a barbershop, "When I was a kid, the feast was about family, religion, and food. Now it's about CDs and three socks for $10" (April 15, 2007).

AFFLUENCE: There is no doubt that our *paesani* have "made it" in all walks of life. Some of the more notable companies, national and international, have had and continue to have Italian Americans at the helm. There are those who run major home-furnishing companies, those who run major investment firms, those who run major publishing houses, those who run major medical companies, and those who are at the helm in significant governmental positions (in this case perhaps more influence than affluence), from local to national. Affluence, therefore, and, dare I say its inseparable twin, influence, are up front and present in the Italian/American community.

"And so what's your point?", one might readily ask. To be sure, there has been an admirable display of a certain type of philanthropy within the Italian/American community: various sectors of hospitals, endowed chairs in business and the sciences, and sports arenas have all been the beneficiaries of Italian/American philanthropy. Where we are dramatically lacking, I would contend, is with regard to what I have labeled in conversations with friends, *book culture.* Here, of course, I use the term "book" as a wide-reaching label that necessarily includes all of the arts: classical and contemporary, high-brow and popular; figurative, performative, visual, and written. One example: Only in 2008 was there the announcement of a set of three buildings acquired for an Italian/American museum in New York City. To date, a brick and mortar museum, *come Dio comanda,* as we might say in Italian, does not exist.[21] The 1999 co-sponsored New York exhibition of Five Centuries of Struggle and Achievement (co-sponsored by the John D. Calandra Italian American Institute and the New York Historical Society, and curated primarily by the late Philip Cannistraro) was a wonderful project that ran for four months. It consisted of at least a half dozen rooms in which artifacts were displayed and, in some cases, living and travel conditions were reassembled in order for the twenty-first century individual to have some sort of concrete idea of the conditions at the turn of the twentieth century. In all, it was an excellent exhibition, with an impressive catalog; it surely could have been the impetus from which to move forward in an expeditious manner. Instead, it has taken, so it seems, close to eight years

just to get possession of property for a future museum. Basically, we have had to wait more than one hundred twenty years for an independently standing Italian/American museum, whereas other United States ethnic groups got the job done well before we did.

AMOR PROPRIO: self-love, we would call it in English. One of the first steps, to be sure, which demonstrates that we possess a healthy dose of Italian/American self-love, is for us to be aware of our culture and its history. A second step is that, when the situation warrants, we are willing to bring forth the cause of Italian America, even if it means that someone from outside our community may indeed question our *modus operandi.*

One of the most egregious examples of one's unawareness is Gay Talese's 1993 essay, "Where Are the Italian American Novelists?" Until the appearance of this essay, Talese, to my knowledge, had never truly negotiated in any profound manner the cultural terrain of Italian America, except of course for his 1970 bestseller, *Honor Thy Father,* a journalistic investigation into the history of the reputed Joe Bonanno, crime family. The book eventually earned Talese a great deal of respect in the world of print journalism and consequently solidified his name as one of the founders of what was then dubbed "new journalism." (The irony in Talese having written a book on the Bonanno family, however, is that today he is one of the more vocal people against those who adopt similar themes [organized crime] in their work. All this seems to be a 1990s awakening on his part, which appears to have coincided with the publication of his genealogical account, *Unto the Sons.*) The type of activity that Talese exhibited in his 1993 essay on the Italian/American novel, nevertheless, resembles to some degree what I have previously dubbed, in conversation with friends and in a 2003 essay, as *intellectual ethnic slumming*: that is, a visitation upon the greater realm of, in our case, Italian America by someone whose quotidian space is, to the contrary, the *non Italian/American* world, and yet, every once in a while, decides to visit the *Italian/American masses,* so to speak, for an array of reasons, many of which are not always clear. In his essay, Talese demonstrated precisely how misinformed he was at that time of the extent to which the Italian/American novel had already been in existence.[22] The scholar Rose Basile Green had already documented the history of Italian/American novels in her 1974 study, *The Italian-American Novel,* both in the ninety-plus number of books she discussed within her main text and the more than two hundred entries of novels she listed in her bibliography. The question then, for Talese, should have been not so much "where are the novelists?" but "why are the novelists ignored?" Talese himself, however, was obviously not familiar with the Italian/American fictional landscape, for which the more relevant and therefore exceedingly more sig-

nificant question to pose did not form part of his semiotic horizon.

There is, more significantly, another side to the metaphorical coin of *ethnic slumming,* and it is Gramscian in content, to be sure. Namely, what are the *duties* and/or *responsibilities,* if any, of someone involved, however so slightly, in Italian Americana? Must this person take on that Gramscian role, or some semblance thereof, of the "organic intellectual," or can (should?) s/he just go about his/her business and d*o his/her thing* as the individual s/he is? This is, I would submit, one of the most important issues that impact our community, one that clearly deserves much greater attention from all of us. It is, I would contend at this point, that second step required by one's sense of *amor proprio.* We need, for sure, to ponder further the issue of the group versus the individual, that person similar to a Gay Talese who has the ability (read, *cultural currency*) to further the group's cause. This is an age-old question that Italian Americans need to tackle since we can now readily say that we have, literally and metaphorically, arrived.

Allow me to suggest possible remedies, modest to be sure, in the form of a series of questions that follow. First, why is there no section in certain bookstores, especially those larger establishments in a city like New York, dedicated to Italian/American writing? Why would a manager, owner, and/or corporate CEO shun such an idea? Given the thousands of square feet a bookstore occupies, what impact could a regular bookshelf (five to seven yards of space) of Italian/American books have? Second, why is it that of the six or seven of the dozen or so forthcoming books on the home page of a book publisher, the one title that is dedicated to Italian Americana does not appear? Does the director not think the Italian/American title warrants mention on the first page of the press's website instead of being relegated to the second page among the second half of the titles mentioned? Third, how is it possible that a book dedicated to United States poetry, one that seems to present itself as historically analytical and prescriptive, does not include a chapter on any Italian American, not even someone like John Ciardi?

In an interview with author George De Stefano, I posed the question of responsibilities of those of us in positions of authority in our respective fields. His first words were, poignantly so, "cultural transmission." We need to be sure that those who follow, the younger generation, are aware of our culture, past and present. They can indeed have access to such knowledge in two ways: (1) People need to be there to impart the information necessary for such cultural awareness. This includes teachers and professors, on all levels. Such a strategy for success is twofold: (a) people need to get into the various K-12 curricula lessons on significant Italian Americans. To date, the New Jersey Italian and Italian American Heritage Com-

mission has a wonderful plan they are trying to get passed on a state level; (b) Professors at the college/university level need to include Italian Americana in their various courses and, especially at the graduate level, in their seminars. (2) This, in fact, leads to the second of two ways — an area where "push comes to shove," so to speak. This is where cultural philanthropy comes into play; professorships in Italian Americana need to be established; centers for Italian/American Studies need to be established. Both, clearly, can be done through endowments of approximately $2,000,000 and $1,000,000 respectively. Endowed professorships and centers run the gamut for other United States ethnic groups, funded by individuals and/or their foundations. Very few individuals among the Italian/American community have engaged in such cultural philanthropy; we can count the number on one hand, with an extra finger to spare.

So, what to do? We need to be sure that Italian and Italian/American history and culture are part of the USA curriculum at the public school level, K-12. We also need to be sure that professorships in Italian Americana exist on the college level; I have spoken to this issue in this venue on a couple of occasions. The success of such actions lies with us, the Italian/American community. We need to support our own activities in that we attend events, and this means sitting through lectures that, in the end, truly do inform us toward a greater completeness of knowledge of our culture in spite of the fact that we might believe we know it all already. We need to respond with courteous yet firm indignation when — whether it be at a social event or business meeting — someone makes an offensive comment about Italians or Italian Americans in his/her feeble attempt to make a joke. We need to engage in a cultural philanthropy that is second to none!

More significant, it is tantamount that our public officials engage in a greater degree of ethnic discourse, one that clearly surpasses those ethnic boundaries of social events. Namely, it is simply not enough for our elected representatives (congressional, senatorial, state, and municipal) to proclaim their Italian pride at Italian events such as Italy's National Day or the Columbus Day Parade. They need to do so at events and in venues that are NOT Italian and Italian/American. They need to uphold the value of our Italian legacy in these venues precisely because, for instance, (1) what we know today as "modernity" has its origins in the Italian Renaissance; (2) what we know as philanthropy today has its "modern" roots in the Italian Renaissance practice of patronage; (3) what we know today as the United States legal system, it has its roots in an eighteenth-century Italian legal philosopher, Cesare Beccaria; (4) what we know of the art world is that more than sixty-percent of the world's production is Italian in origin; (5)

what we know of United States contemporary literature is that some of our best sellers are Baldacci, Ciresi, DeLillo, Scottoline, Trigiani, to name a few. Simply stated, we need to go beyond "pizza" and "nonna"!

We need, in the end, to learn to take our culture much more seriously than we have as a community at large. We cannot continue to engage in a series of reminiscences that lead primarily to nostalgic recall. Instead, we need to revisit our past, reclaim its pros and cons, and reconcile it with our present. Namely, we need to figure out where we came from, ask those unpopular questions of both ourselves and the dominant culture, and continue to champion our Italian/American cultural brokers of all sorts — artists and intellectuals — so that they can continue to engage in an Italian/American state of mind, if such is their choice.

Ultimately, all of this is dependent upon our recapturing our own sense of *amor proprio* and combining it with our abilities — financial, performative, aesthetic, intellectual, etc. — in order to document, maintain, transmit, and further propagate our Italian/American culture; anything short of such activity is tantamount to failure.

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[1] For more on my use of the slash in place of the hyphen, see my *To Hyphenate or not to Hyphenate: The Italian/American Writer: Or, An Other American?* (Montreal: Guernica Editions, 1991).

[2] For more information on the story, see for instance, http://nbcsports.msnbc.com/id/17982146.

[3] Jerome Krase is one of the names that come to mind when one thinks of race relations and the Italian/American community. He has indeed revisited much of the many related issues in his i-Iraly.org blog at http://www.i-italy.org/user/krase. In this regard, for instance, I would also point to one of the more recent publications on the topic of race and Italian Americans, *Are Italians White? How Race is Made in America,* edited by Jennifer Guglielmo and Salvatore Salerno (New York: Routledge, 2003).

[4] This seems ever so present in our national discourse on politics as articulated by both elected officials and the many media. With specific regard to Italian Americans, for sure, the analogous topic of individualism and all that it comports within the Italian/American community is a topic ripe for exploration, though better suited for its own venue. To date, no one has truly addressed the issue in any profound manner. The one thing that has become apparent is that the Italian/American community has an excess of dinner dances and black-tie galas for the purpose of fundraising, but very little of those funds raised ever go to cultural events such as symposia on the social sciences, theater, film, or literature, to name a few. Germane to these opulent celebrations, some have even called them mutual admiration events. Furthermore, in informal conversations some have mumbled about so-called "self-proclaimed leaders" who, regardless of their lack of expertise in certain socio-political and/or cultural arenas, insist on being

the lead voice(s). It comes down to, so it seems, a sense of entitlement and lack of humility of any sort for which the self-appointed, paradoxically, consider themselves the obvious choice for that situation at hand. These are, in fact, some of the issues that, in a disinterested self-assessment of the community, would come to the fore for further examination and analysis.

[5] While I have opted for the term "starting point," one might readily substitute it with "rallying point." This, I would submit, is the necessary ingredient for the community to cohere. To date, it seems we have yet to identify such an issue. I have dealt with this issue in my "The Italian/American Writer in "Exile": At Home, Abroad, Wherever!," *The Hyphenate Writer and The Legacy of Exile*, edited by Paolo Giordano (New York: Bordighera P, 2010) 1–25.

[6] I have dealt with various aspects of these issues in greater depth in two recent essays of mine: "Uno stato d'animo italiano/americano," *Nuova prosa* 50 (2009): 61–68; and "Appunti e notarelle sulla cultura diasporica degli Italiani d'America: ovvero, suggerimenti per un discorso di studi culturali," *Campi immaginabili* 34–35 (2007): 247–64.

[7] On this and other themes surrounding the culture of the Italian American, see the following collection of essays: *Teaching Italian American Literature, Film, and Popular Culture,* edited by Kathleen Zamboni McCormick and Edvige Giunta (New York: MLA, 2010).

[8] In this regard, see my "Italian Americans and the Media: Cinema, Video, Television," in *Giornalismo e Letterature tra due mondi,* edited by Franco Zangrilli (Caltanissetta: Sciascia, 2005), 305–24. Also, for an acute reading of this early period of US cinema vis-à-vis the representation of the Italian, see Ilaria Serra's excellent study, *Immagini di un immaginario: L'emigrazione italiana negli Stati Uniti fra i due secoli (1890–1924)* (Verona, Italy: CIERRE, 1997), especially 102–59, now available in English as *The Imagined Immigrant: Images of Italian Emigration to the United States between 1890 and 1924* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2009), 96–130, and Giorgio Bertellini, *Italy in Early American Cinema: Race, Landscape and the Picturesque* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2010).

While there have been numerous essays over the years dedicated to the cinema and/or representation of Italians and Italian Americans in US cinema, since the turn of the century, conversely, only seven books of a general nature have appeared in the United States, one edited, six authored. They are: Anna Camaiti Hostert and Anthony Julian Tamburri, eds., *Screening Ethnicity. Cinematographic Representations of Italian Americans in the United States* (Boca Raton: Bordighera P, 2002), published simultaneously in Italian as *Scene italoamericane: Rappresentazioni cinematografiche degli italiani d'America* (Rome: Luca Sossella Editore, 2002); Anthony Julian Tamburri, *Italian/American Short Films & Videos: A Semiotic Reading* (West Lafayette: Purdue UP, 2002); Peter Bondanella, *Hollywood Italians: Dagos, Palookas, Romeos, Wise Guys, and Sopranos* (New York: Continuum, 2004); Fred Gardaphè, *From Wiseguys to Wise Men: The Gangster and Italian American Masculinities* (New York, Routledge, 2006); George De Stefano, *An Offer We Can't Refuse: The Mafia in the Mind of America* (New York: Faber and Faber, 2006); Giorgio Bertellini, *Italy in Early American*

Cinema; and Jonathan Cavallero, *Hollywood's Italian American Filmmakers: Capra, Scorsese, Savoca, Cappola, and Tarantino* (Urbana-Champaign: U Illinois P, 2010).

[9] See, Jerry Krase, "Lest We Forget: Racism Will Make Victims of Us All," *The Brooklyn Free Press* 22 September 1989; and John Kifner, "Bensonhurst: A Tough Code In Defense of a Closed World," *New York Times* 1 September 1989. See also Krase's later essay, "Bensonhurst, Brooklyn: Italian American Victimizers and Victims," *Voices in Italian Americana* 5.2 (Fall 1994): 43–53; also available at http://www.geocities.com/enza003/Via/ViaVol5_2Krase.htm; Joseph Sciorra, "'Italians against Racism': The Murder of Yusuf Hawkins (R.I.P.) and My March on Benson Hurst," *Are Italians White? How Race Is Made in America,* ed. Jennifer Guglielmo and Salvatore Salerno (New York: Routledge, 2003) 192–209.

[10] See his excellent essay, "Breaking the Silence: Strategic Imperatives for Italian American Culture," *Voices in Italian Americana* 1.1 (1990): 1–13.

[11] How ironic that as far back as 1974 Patrick Gallo wrote the following: "What is needed is an alliance of whites and Blacks, white-collar and blue-collar workers, based on mutual need and interdependence and hence an alliance of political participation. But before this can realistically come to pass, a number of ethnic groups have to develop in-group organization, identity, and unity." Gallo then concludes that "Italian-Americans may prove to be a vital ingredient in not only forging that alliance but in servicing as the cement that will hold our urban centers together" (*Ethnic Alienation: The Italian-Americans* [Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1974], 209). His words speak for themselves.

[12] In this regard, I refer the reader to the following documentaries: *Linciati: Lynchings of Italians in America,* dir. M. Heather Hartley, 2004, and *Pane amaro,* dir. Gianfranco Norelli, 2009. See also the following books: *The 1891 New Orleans Lynching and U.S.-Italian Relations: A Look Back,* ed. Marco Rimanelli and Sheryl Lynn Postman (New York: Peter Lang, 1992); Tom Smith, *The Crescent City Lynchings: The Murder of Chief Hennessy, the New Orleans "Mafia" Trials, and the Parish Prison Mob* (Guilford, CT: The Lyons Press, 2007); Richard Gambino, *Vendetta: A True Story of The Worst Lynching in America, The Mass Murder of Italian-Americans in New Orleans in 1891, The Vicious Motivations Behind It, and the Tragic Repercussions That Linger to This Day* (New York: Doubleday, 1977; now available by Guernica, 1998); and *On Lynchings: Southern Horrors, a Red Record, Mob Rule in New Orleans* (New York: Ayers, 1969).

[13] This depiction of Italians in 1888 is an uncanny anticipation of some of the lamentations we hear today about "illegal" (read, Hispanic) immigration in the United States. Namely, the three categories of Italian yesteryear resonate ever so loudly in today's discussions on Hispanic immigration: the day laborers and "gang-bangers" hanging out on street corners; Hispanics in over-crowded living conditions; and, as was thought about Italians of a century ago, violent characteristics of the Hispanic immigrant laborer. For a cinematic representation of the undocumented Hispanic immigrant, see the Italian/American movie *Amexicano* (Dir. Matthew Bonifacio, 2007).

[14] For a general overview, Salvatore LaGumina, *WOP: A Documentary History of Anti-Italian Discrimination* (Toronto: Guernica, 1999; originally published 1973). Let us, in the meantime, keep in mind that discrimination for discrimination's sake should not be an end product. Victimization unto itself is, in the end, counterproductive.

[15] For a chronology of governmental documentation, see the following websites: http://italian.about.com/gi/dynamic/offsite.html. Also check: http://www.foitimes.com/internment/chrono.html. For more on the history of this unspoken event, see Alien Justice: *Wartime Internment in Australia and North America,* ed. Kay Saunders and Roger Daniels (St. Lucia, Qld.: U of Queensland P, 2000); Lawrence DiStasi, ed., *Una Storia Segreta: The Secret History of Italian American Evacuation and Internment During World War II* (Berkeley, CA: Heyday Books, 2001); and Steven R. Fox, *UnCivil Liberties: Italian Americans Under Siege During World War II* (Boca Raton: Universal Publishers, 2000 [1990]).

[16] See Jonathan Cavallero, "Gangsters, Fessos, Tricksters, and Sopranos: The Historical Roots of Italian American Stereotype Anxiety," *Journal of Popular Film and Television* (2004): 50–63. Of course, the greatest issue here is one of a lack of a unified national Italian/American voice on these larger questions of the dominant culture's perception of Italians (read also, Italian Americans) in the United States. It is, of course, a question of hegemony, on the one hand; that the collective imaginary of the United States has put forth an image of the Italian that most Italians know to be false. Yet, conversely, it is also a question of intra-collaboration on the part of the Italian/American community; that it must indeed unite itself around one or two issues that coalesces the group and, *una volta per tutte,* move forward in a constructive manner. I have discussed this further in my above-cited essay "The Italian/American Writer in Exile."

[17] *Italics* first aired in 1987, and has since broadcast monthly programs of thirty minutes in conjunction with CUNY TV. For more on its more recent broadcasts, go to http://cuny.tv/series/italics/ index.lasso.

[18] There is still much to resolve vis-à-vis the question of Italian Americans within CUNY as a "protected class" and thus part of the "affirmative action" policies and procedures. For more information, see the Calandra Institute website: http://qcpages.qc.cuny.edu/calandra.

[19] See his *Race Matters* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993) 63.

[20] See Jerome Krase, "The Spatial Semiotics of Little Italies and Italian Americans," *Industry, Technology, Labor and the Italian American Communities,* ed. Mario Aste et al. (Staten Island, NY: American Italian Historical Association, 1997), 98–127.

[21] As I write, there is the emergent Italian American Museum in Little Italy, in Manhattan, which opened in April 2008. But its space is currently limited to the original site of the old Banca Stabile, which closed in 1932. Something similar to the other ethnic museums in New York, for example, can only make us ponder why it has taken so long for such an entity to come into existence. Of course, other questions abound. But they are more suitable for another venue.

[22] "Beyond "Pizza" and "Nonna"! Or, What's Bad about Italian/American Criticism? Further Directions for Italian/American Cultural Studies," *MELUS* 28.3 (2003): 149–74.

Renewing the Conceptual Dimensions of Italian-American Writing and Scholarship

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Abstract: This essay aims to place Italian-American historiography and studies within the larger emerging paradigm of Atlantic world theory. While the three conceptual dimensions that I refer to here have always been implicitly present in Italian-American critical and creative writing, there is a need to formalize them and suggest their heuristic advantages. All three dimensions — circumatlantic, transatlantic, cisatlantic — offer specific perspective vantage points; but taken together, they add a new sense of complexity and tension that should enrich the way we have been studying and writing about *cose italo-americane.*

Italian-American writing — creative, historical, and critical — has always been textured by various conceptual dimensions, although they have not always been equally recognized for their heuristic value, and it is the complexity and possibility of these dimensions taken as whole that I would like to discuss in this essay, however briefly. Above all, I will try to clarify the advantages of each dimension — literally, throw a clear light on them — within the context of current discussion on the paradigm status of Atlantic history and Atlantic studies. It seems to me that with the rather recent emergence of this paradigm, we, as writers and scholars of Italian-American history and culture, have the opportunity to become even more sensitive to the issue of not only standpoint but also something much more complex and sophisticated: namely, the *switching* of standpoints and, more importantly, *switching standpoints.*

The first issue, that of standpoint, would seem to need little explication after the hard-won achievements of multi-ethnic and feminist studies of the 1970s and 1980s. And even earlier, in the mid-1960s, we saw the first effects of hermeneutics in cultural studies, with such seminal books as Hans Gadamer's *Truth and Method* and Paul Ricoeur's work on interpretation and subjectivity. Cultural pluralism and general acknowledgment of our *de facto* multi-ethnic society also have led to new theories of identity politics

and the politics of respect — which build on the foregrounding of standpoint theory.

As the literary critic and writer Fred Gardaphè points out in a charming personal account of his struggle to become a reader and then a writer of *cose italamericane,* "If there is one thing I've learned about advocating ethnic American literature, it's that you can't avoid getting personal about the literature that comes from your ancestral culture" (7). A few sentences later he adds this additional word of attestation, "I grew up in a little-Italy in which not even the contagiously sick were left alone." This Mangione-styled remark — which we could have equally culled from the opening chapters of *Mount Allegro* — is enough of a shard, I should think, for us to acknowledge the importance of empathy and personal entanglement in research, critical discourse, and even more to the point, the shaping of historical ideas.

In his important study *History and Eschatology,* the German biblical scholar Rudolph Bultmann noted that "the most subjective interpretation is at the same time the most objective" (122). In the Gardaphè kitchen, not unlike that of Giambattista Vico's in eighteenth-century Naples, the young high school student's scholarly subjectivity is informed by the infraordinary chatter of his extended family. Poet and writer Robert Viscusi would call this enlarged subjectivity "the order of Astoria [the Little Italy of Queens, New York]" (184) and then, with the twitching scalpel of his post-vaudevillean syntax, would immediately qualify this order as "an abyss of recursion." Of course, even recursion — by its very etymon — seeks nostalgically to configure a cultural inside.

It may be worth repeating here an observation made by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu that a point of view is always a view from a point. Both Gardaphè and Viscusi implicitly suggest that "everything is interdependent: personality becomes ecology" (Gaddis 148). So much for Little Italy as standpoint and source of personal authority and literary intrigue. What at least momentarily destabilizes this standpoint, however, is the second factor I mentioned at the outset, namely that of switching standpoints and the consequences this strategic jumping has for story, for explanation, for continuity, and for the standpoint of Little Italy as a symbol of collective authority.

We can put this in a more radiant way by repeating one of Robert Viscusi's typically Tocquevillean blinks: "every place in America speaks of another place" (70). In order to explain better the marine effects of having to speak of another place from a position outside it and perhaps at a considerable distance from it both in time and space, allow me to invoke Siegfried Kracauer's discussion of two historical laws, the *law of perspective* and the *law of levels,* as I seek to clarify the various conceptual dimen-

sions this essay will now begin to address. Both help us to identify the cognitive fluidity and textural resilience which the conceptual dimensions of Italian American writing and scholarship exhibit when placed in the strategic matrix of Atlantic studies.

While I have chosen Fred Gardaphè's underappreciated autobiographical essay *The Italian-American Writer. An Essay and an Annotated Checklist* and Robert Viscusi's masterful autobiography *Astoria* as my chosen *exempla* here, any number of other authors could have served, from Jerre Mangione to Helen Barolini. Among the most immediately recognizable instances of switching standpoints in Italian-American writing, the journey back to Italy is certainly paramount — a journey often planned with the idea of getting to the bottom of the always elusive site of Little Italy. Such a journey, an instructive and usually pleasurable one, is a well-tested way to gain a fuller perspective and a surer grip on the ancestral mysteries and guarded silences of one's own extended family, as well as the social ecology of *Italianità* that ritually beams out at one across the ethnic neighborhood and makes it difficult for children to go unnoticed at school.

Evidently, there are many different versions of this quest for a fully narrated standpoint, but in its bare structural outline the above vintage script of the return journey is perhaps the most culturally resonant for our own immediate purposes. Perspective concerns the process of distancing ourselves from the object of scrutiny in order to cast certain aspects of it in a clearer light, even while placing others in the dark. Putting Little Italy into perspective by traveling to Agrigento or Bari or Naples captures the play of engagement and withdrawal that enables the traveler to see it from a *transatlantic* — and thus comparative — point of view. Here is a passage from Gardaphè's autobiographical essay that helps to illuminate the point I wish to make:

> Now my grandparents had never told me why they left Italy. They never talked of their childhood. I guess they thought it was enough to be in America and that all that had come before no longer made any difference in their new home. (11)

When Gardaphè's maternal grandfather dies, he assumes the burden of ethnic melancholy when he notes: "With him were buried many of the Italian traditions our family had followed in his presence" (11). As Viscusi's narrator in *Astoria* further confirms, from the perspective of America, it was:

> . . . an Italy we had never possessed to begin with and could only imag-

> ine here as the combined product of obsessive recollection and compulsive digging, planting, hammering, sawing, sweeping, painting, cooking, sewing, talking, and writing. (154)

It is this ceaseless participial activity of the day-in-day-out living — represented in *Astoria* as a veritable instauration — of the first-generation families of Little Italy that has led critics like Anthony Tamburri and Mary Jo Bona to elaborate Viscusi's "visible semiotic of dominion" (155) into a densely articulated cultural morphology.

The immigrant script or viewpoint in question is perhaps best known as "*fare l'America*" [making it in America]. The transatlantic perspective which informs most of Viscusi's *Astoria* leads his narrator to anticipate Gardaphè's own extremely candid *pensiero*: "I am yet again [. . .] my battered, shipped, chipped, sold, faked, and resold genealogy" (261–62). As for Viscusi, it should be noted that his autobiographical narrator, too, trafficks in "ancestors whose names we didn't even know how to discover" (298). The trip back to Italy is meant to be a personal and cultural coming to terms with that first donative transatlantic iconography, encoded as Emigration to America and made up of both push and pull factors.

In historical scholarship this comparative, ocean-spanning saga embodies an extremely broad historical idea, so broad and general that it cannot be right without also being wrong. And this for a very simple reason. Individual lives like those mentioned by Gardaphè from Castellana Grotte (who, in order to appear on the written page, require a dense form of social history from the bottom up) are inevitably absorbed in a higher level narrative, one involving political, economic, and diplomatic history in an international perspective that embraces several nations.

Having once adopted this transatlantic, large-scale perspective as her controlling framework, the historian, novelist, or autobiographer needs to step back far enough in order to gain a panoramic visual field. The very choice of this inflated scale will then already determine not only the *spatiotemporal* unit they will be dealing with but also the *kind* of data corresponding to that scale. Each narrative scale has its own symbolic order and its own cohering milieu. In cinematic terms, we are now using a long shot as our visually compelling frame, even though we are quietly certain that its authority must ultimately arise from the countless details, case studies, and examples that inevitably texture it.

Nevertheless, this latter series of micro-historical data are unilaterally transformed — at least in the intentions of the historian — when enlisted to prove a different narrative than the one the micro-facts themselves may

intrinsically embody. If the conceptual dimension or scope is that of a transatlantic history or autobiographical narrative, then the researcher's or writer's distance from their material will also be proportionately transatlantic. In terms of the relation between narrative duration and story duration in both the writing of history and fiction, we recognize that this distance is conventionally mediated by strategies of summary (foreshortening), scene, narrative pause, and ellipsis (Chatman 22–26).

In addition, the meaning of a fact or an event in the perspective site of Little Italy changes completely if it is placed in an englobing and comparative Italian context (as in Donna Gabaccia's study *From Sicily to Elizabeth Street*) or treated according to a higher-order transatlantic scale. Generally speaking, we cannot have both comprehensiveness and depth without either changing or multiplying or creating a hierarchy of scales. And in plotting a strategy of multiple perspectives, we also need to be fully aware of what Siegfried Kracauer calls the law of levels and its consequences (104–38). Thus, when switching from general to particular or from the macro- to the micro-level, we usually (and often deceptively) are trying to join together what ultimately amount to incommensurable sequences. We are also interrupting the very continuities that each perspective level is charged with establishing.

Once again, let me repeat that perspective allows us to see some things while simultaneously blinding us to others. Switching point of view and levels, therefore, requires us to jump or jumble them, but at the same time we have no right to presume that a higher level narrative and a more general scale actually explain — let alone *cover* — the lower-level data (the details, for example, that make up Clifford Geertz's category of thick description). In short, *Italy does not really explain Little Italy.* Nor is the opposite true! It simply provides us with a spectrum that enables us to explain what is *between* them. The conceptual dimension of a relatively homogeneous transatlantic narrative basically generates or calls for a history of similarities and differences. What it produces is an essentially international narrative involving nations, peoples, and mentalities insofar as it is worth the effort to compare them.

While the journeys of Gardaphè and Viscusi cited above are ocean-spanning in their scope, they are appropriately tempered by what the historian David Armitage would call a *cisatlantic* ultimatum, in which a particular place like Chicago's Little Italy or Queens's Astoria is understood as unique precisely because of the irradiating implications its very boundedness solicits. Perhaps an example will help. Gardaphè's transatlantic journey, during which "I visited the house where Grandpa was born," leads

him to appreciate his family's prehistory in Italy. We read, "When I left his home, I felt for the first time that I had a history . . . a history that would have been lost if I had not traveled to Castellana Grotte" (12). But there is an equally dense pre-history in Chicago and it is to this reality that Gardaphè inevitably returns when he decides to choose a writing career as an Italian American.

In his turn, Viscusi describes his own hermeneutic circling as the "transformation of *la storia* [history] into l'Astoria" (82), although he also glosses this activity as "a story inside a story referring to another story" (189). In doing as much, his narrator has provided us with a good working definition of the *cisatlantic* dimension of his own text, and that of many others — Mangione's autobiography *Mount Allegro,* and Helen Barolini's and Frank Lentricchia's Utica, to name a few. The point here is not so much that the trip to Italy provides us with an embedded transatlantic narrative but rather that it allows the narrators to see Little Italy in a new *cisatlantic* light.

In other words, Little Italy's cultural ecology is singular precisely because of the intersections and trajectories that connect it to a local, regional, or even national Italian scenography. And not only Italian! The sharply bounded morphology of Viscusi's Astoria makes a claim over — and aspires to equal status with — the macro-narrative of immigration. It pulls the latter (the macro-narrative) within its own reigning cisatlantic perspective as it aspires to recognition in "a landscape where every place [. . .] speaks of another place." The transatlantic and cisatlantic scales represent two totally different conceptual dimensions, even as they strategically reinforce each other; provide us with a quite different set of meanings; and require us to explicitly negotiate the passage between them.

Still, a full representation of the various conceptual dimensions of Italian-American writing would require us to introduce yet another equally important form of attention: namely, the *circumatlantic.* The term has already been put forward in the now exemplary work of scholars like Paul Gilroy (*The Black Atlantic*) and Joseph Roach (*Cities of the Dead*), and more recently David Armitage has employed it to capture a unique area of activity and scholarship over and above the merely international sphere of nation states. The circumatlantic, in short, is used to define a zone of exchange, circulation, confluence, and translation that involves many peoples, goods, and cultures simultaneously. In Louisiana, for example, the circumatlantic dimension has produced the highly celebrated creolized culture of New Orleans, where people of different national origins often share different cultural traits and activities on various occasions and in a variety of milieus; while also appreciating the syncretic moments or scenarios based

mainly on performance and segmented scripts of scheduled cultural encounters. For an example of this process of creolization both in Little Italy and in Italy, see the sociological studies of Jerry Krase (2006; 2007).

To conclude, these three conceptual dimensions — the cisatlantic, the transatlantic, and the circumatlantic — may co-exist but each has its own research and narrative agenda. Taken all together, they suggest a potentially exhaustive total history and total narrative. They also demand a sophisticated familiarity with the passages among them and of the consequences that switching standpoints always implies. How we, individually, configure their inter-relations reveals where we ourselves stand as historians, scholars, and writers. A total history involving all three conceptual dimensions is, I think, impossible and perhaps ultimately counter-productive. At some point, we must simply choose and then begin to write or read. The story we tell will itself be our interpretation. And the texture of the writing — whether critical, creative, or historical — will reveal an image of our choices in the very process of weaving.

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[1] See, for example, the new university degree programs addressed to Atlantic History and Atlantic Studies, both in the United States and in Europe. For a discussion of the rise of Atlantic Studies as a new paradigm, see Boelhower 2008.

[2] See Ricoeur 1976.

[3] See Charles Taylor's classic work on *Multiculturalism* and Alex Honneth's work *The Struggle for Recognition.*

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Via the Margin of the Poetic

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Abstract: In response to the question posited by the conveners of this Forum, this paper argues that, yes, "some of the forms, or currents, of criticism within Italian American Studies of the past ten-fifteen years — and especially the quaternion identity, race, class, and gender" do indeed require some "overhaul" and "reconfiguration" in view of recent history. The author argues the case for the addition of "the poetic" to the quaternion identified by the conveners, a fifth dimension already implicit in the incipient history of Italian American Studies as defined by the principal agents provocateurs who have made the present Forum possible. The author traces his own role as an outsider in the genesis of this project and differentiates this Italian American Studies from the other ethnic studies endeavors during and since the cultural politics of the late 1980s in the US.

In his letter of invitation, Professor Peter Carravetta stated that one of the objectives this first Forum in Italian American Criticism hopes to achieve is

> to determine if some of the forms, or currents, of criticism within Italian American Studies of the past ten-fifteen years — and especially the quaternion identity, race, class, and gender —, might not need to be overhauled or reconfigured to take into account a changed, post 9/11 national and international panorama.

My response is, yes, provided we keep in mind that issues of identity, race, class, and gender have not gone away. In this regard, we would do well to differentiate between the proliferation of discourses of human rights and the actual status of rights themselves, especially in an epoch when the greatest production of capital, intellectual and otherwise, is discursive, informatic, and virtual.

The "quaternion identity, race, class, and gender" has indeed served as the paradigmatic precept in cultural politics and institutional discourses.

In the last quarter century of the twentieth, and for most of the first decade of the twenty-first century, this paradigm has oscillated between two discursive poles: the *distributive* and the *retributive.* The first has endeavored for a redistribution aimed at achieving equality; the second has sought an attributive mode of recognition with the goal of affirming a cultural identity within a striated and asymmetrical political economy. By the end of the twentieth, beginning of the twenty-first century, the result of this oscillation between the distributive and the retributive has been diagnosed as a paralytic form of de-politicization by such cultural critics as Etienne Balibar and Slavoj Zizek. Balibar refers to the neutralization of any meaningful social action as an empty universal he terms *égaliberté,*[1] Zizek characterizes the consequences of what went by the name of "multiculturalism" as a passage from interaction to what he calls "interpassivity."[2] In response to Peter Carravetta's timely convocation, and in an effort to allay the neutralization of agency diagnosed by Balibar and Zizek, I wish to put forward a third quotient in this calculus of distribution and retribution. I propose the foregrounding of a third dimension I shall refer to as the *poetic,* which I shall explain presently.

The poetic has been implicitly an integral part of this cultural economy all along, but it has been shouted down, muted, eclipsed. By now, it has gone from mute to invisible. At the end of this first decade of the twenty-first century, what I call the poetic, I believe, needs to be accorded primacy at institutional center-stage, allowed to assume a defining role in the sociality and politics of cultural life. In my view, whether it be a view from the inside or the outside, this recalibration has been necessary for some time, not only in the USA, but globally, since all local discourses now have global resonance, not because of their volume or decibel level necessarily, but because the conditions they address are globally interlinked and have planetary repercussions.

What, then, should we understand by the *poetic* that I am advocating here? First, I must say what I do *not* intend by the term "poetic." I do not wish to reduce the term to its commonplace definition as "the literary imagination." It certainly is that, but I mean to point us to a more significant and more nuanced denotation of the *poetic* as a potentially determinative element in culture and its political economy. The American ethicist Martha Nussbaum hints at this element in a series of lectures she delivered in the early 1990s on law and literature, subsequently published as a volume of essays under the title *Poetic Justice: Literary Imagination and Public Life.* In the preface to her book, Nussbaum identifies the poetic as "an essential ingredient of an ethical stance that asks us to concern ourselves with the

good of [. . .] people whose lives are distant from our own."[3] Having pointed toward this life-world significance of the *poetic* in her preface, Nussbaum falls back on the commonplace definition of the term as literary imagination or fancy and its linguistic productions. Her particular focus is on the genre of the novel. She proceeds from there to attempt a correlation between aesthetic practice and the potential pedagogy of imagination's emancipatory works for possible political and juridical applications. The *poetic,* in other words, is instrumentalized as a means for possible ethical ends, a slippage that removes the *poetic* from its potential as a heuristics for social praxis, or governing principle for action, and places the source of what she says is "an essential ingredient of an ethical stance" in the products of the imagination and their utilitarian prospects, rather than in the proactive responsibility of human agents as imputable subjects, whose comportment is actionable, or who are responsible for their social, cultural, or political acts. The closest Nussbaum comes to such connotation of the *poetic* is in utilitarian philosophy's traditional notion of "rational choice," though she skirts the question of the dialectical ambiguity that bedevils the act of "rational choice" as performative contradiction. That ambiguity and its contradictions, as you will recall, resides in the question of how much of a choice is a choice that is qualified as rational, and, concomitantly, how rational is any choice that is inevitably rationalized — prospectively or upon reflection? Stated in terms of our historical life as critics and historiographers, the question becomes, to what degree is the cultural historian made by the culture of history, and how much of that history is made by the historian? In the concrete instance at hand, the question is to what extent are Italian American Studies practitioners and their practices a symptom of their Italian Americanness, whether this be a condition of filial kinship or of affiliation by affinity?

Who makes what, and what makes who are the key, especially when dealing with ethics, and by giving the *poetic* a salient role alongside the *distributive* and the *retributive,* I mean to recuperate what Nussbaum calls this "essential ingredient of an ethical stance" which, in the context of our life world and culture's political economy, along with distributive and retributive justice, might possibly yield a modicum of poetic justice, within and beyond the "quaternion identity, race, class, and gender."

The phrase "poetic justice" has taken on less than felicitous connotations, implying a malicious rejoicing or gloating, what the Germans call *Schadenfreude,* at the sight of an ironic turn that gives the deserving their just desserts or hoists the rascals on their own petard. This is not what I mean by poetic justice. Rather than as the potential of imaginative means

and their possible outcome (Nussbaum), or as the consequences in certain events (American Pragmatism), I see poetic justice as the quality of one's actions. The sense of "poetic" I am urging on you does not describe the nature of recognition solely as due attribution or characterization of another's identity. Nor does it simply grant justly retributive distribution with an eye to even the score or to achieving due equality. The ethical poetic certainly would abet and foster the aims of equality and recognize identities for whatever they might think they are. But the poetic I am suggesting is not simply the recognition itself. More properly, the poetic I am urging is the aptitude itself, the capability to recognize the situation of the other and know what to make of it, or have a sense of what to do with it, analytically and as repercussive political praxis. In this sense, the poetic is the exercise and proactive engagement implicit in the etymons of *poiesis,* derived from *poiein* — to make or to do. Poetic in this regard implies a subject's active engagement with the object predicate of one's acts. This is the moment when action turns into ethical comportment that conditions one's own acts of recognition and modulates one's stance toward what is recognized. It is not spectatorship, or looking upon one's own or another's predicament as spectacle of due justice or unfortunate injustice. And it certainly is not a reflection or self-reflection that appropriates the other as one's own mirror, what tradition defines as narcissism.

In light of what I propose, then, the poetic obliges us to do more than recognize what Professor Carravetta accurately summarizes as "the quaternion identity, race, class, and gender," especially our own identity, our own race, our own class, and our own gender — elements which, in their possessive form, plural or singular, have defined the parameters and nature of critical discourse, whether in Italian American Studies, or any other studies in the cultural politics of the USA used previously in the past two decades. The dimension of the poetic I propose is of some urgency in the historical present, especially, when critique and critical discourse are deemed more irrelevant than ever in the new world order's political economy and in a belligerently privatized public sphere. The dangers of solipsism and cultural invagination aside, our own proprietary privatization of our "identity, race, class, and gender" leaves us bereft of our very selves when our privatized selfhood is put up against and subsumed into the depersonalized privatization of larger institutions such as the public university, and the more predatory vested interests for which the commonweal, much less anyone's self, cultural or otherwise, is rendered all but immaterial, except as capital target or as market niche. The self-centering proprietary claims of multiculturalism are now dwarfed by self-serving imperial self-assertiveness that trans-

forms all others into capital's instruments, or into targets of bellicose dispossession. The plurality of cultural identities and egalitarian entitlements have converged, rationalized more powerfully than ever into a monad: The founding formula of the US national ethos, appropriated from Virgil's Roman republicanism and prominently inscribed on the national emblem, *E Pluribus Unum.* The Virgilian recipe from imperial Rome's salad days has re-emerged as the reigning principle, and those occupying the lower strata of a striated political economy have been equalized as the human fodder for imperial adventurism and conferred a national identity as instruments of war, at home or abroad, with war being an economic phenomenon that reconfirms its historical definition, yet again, as the act of killing for profit. The poetic I am urging as complement to the distributive and to recognition perhaps might mitigate the frenzy of this mobilization and mass psychology that has subsumed all other life worlds of culture into its gerrymandered and cynically manipulated consensus, irrespective of "identity, race, class, and gender," categories rendered so equalized in their bellicosity that their most salient commonality now is their irrelevance as individually recognizable elements of culture and its political economy. Hence, to anyone listening from the outside, John McCain and Barack Obama resonate in undifferentiated harmony with George W. Bush and Hillary Clinton, Dick Cheney with Nancy Pelosi, Barney Frank with Joe Lieberman and Joseph Biden with Sarah Palin. The poetic I am urging on you might reawaken our prosodic discernment for the parsing of a monotonous and monaural public discourse. The poetic might hone our acumen for the analysis of a homogeneous political economy, which just might help recuperate an ethical edge for cutting through the monolith and let in some light. In the process, I believe it is just as crucial, especially after the recent economic crisis and on Wall Street and around the world, that the projects of re-distribution and recognition not be abandoned. They should be critically re-examined through the lens of the poetic in view of their morphed status as depoliticized social projects, now turned into little more than virtual templates for an academic discourse that is as immaterial as ever to the political economy that frames and defines it.

Like the question tabled by our letter of invitation, which I have endeavored to address thus far, the title of this session, "The View from the Outside," clearly states our brief. I must confess I carry out this charge not altogether as an outsider, though I speak as one who has grown accustomed to and has made a professional vocation of the necessity of viewing things from the outside. By classical precedent and literal definition, a view from the outside is what antiquity called "theoretic." I parsed the philological

etymons of *theoria* and the institutional history of *theoros* some fifteen years ago in one of my books, *The Other Writing,* in a chapter I called "Surviving Theory."[4] "From the outside looking in" implies a position at the margin. I am speaking to you today as other and from the margin still. It is not a matter of an academic choice or an intellectual caprice. It always has been, rather, a matter of political and cultural necessity, or an imperative of cultural politics and personal genealogy. I entitled the first chapter of the book I just referred to as "Otherwise Reading and Writing." I did so because social and institutional reality dictated that I could have not done other than what I was doing and how I was doing it. It would not be much different now since our critical discourse, which I propose to inflect with what I have defined for you as "the poetic," continues pretty much to be defined by what Professor Carravetta has accurately distilled as "the quaternion identity, race, class, and gender," only now depoliticized, augmented, and charged up with the fifth element of religious affiliation, perhaps the most volatile catalyst and currently most active ingredient that turns the twentieth century's quaternion into defining quintessence of human culture's vicissitudes at the opening of what the apocalyptic numerologists call the Third Millennium.

As a comparatist specialized on Latin America, the defining cultural politics of the last quarter of the twentieth century in the United States of America abruptly informed me of what was an indisputable given for the reigning principle of blood and soil, namely, that I am no Latin and that I am no American, except as someone literally just off the boat. My career, thus, came to rest on the remaining fall-back position of my status as a political refugee and immigrant, namely, the position of comparatist. In life's inscrutable laws, if they indeed be laws and not demiurgic caprices, there seems to be no loss that could not turn to gain and, through this uncanny economy of compensation, I have managed to discover the virtues of the margin and avoid the implosions of what would deem itself central, or what clamors for centrality in the identity claims of the academy's cultural politics. This is the margin from which I am inevitably addressing you now, not necessarily because of our gracious hosts' directive, but because I can occupy no other position from which to speak to you and with you. While I was writing *The Other Writing* in the latter part of the 1980s, I was also directing the Program in Comparative Literature at Purdue University and chairing the editorial board of the Purdue University Press. I take the liberty of sharing the details of this professional itinerary with you because, while at the margin of the admirable endeavors of our hosts, these historical details are not altogether unrelated to our current conversation.

It was a decidedly unsettled time in literary and cultural studies. At the height of the discourse on multiculturalism and its attendant politics in the academic disciplines and critical theories, a proposal emerged at the University Press that left most of the editorial board members perplexed, if not feeling downright dubious about its prospects. In the midst of reading and writing otherwise, I saw the virtue of a proposal coming, as it declared, from the margin and bucking the standard of the scholarly university press book. The first reaction to it was that it was largely a miscellany. By and by, I managed to persuade my fellow editors to look at it as a discursive hybrid rather than an Italian medley. The project's virtue resided in the mix of primary literature, historical narrative, and critical discourse, rather than being an attempt at constituting yet another normative identity fortress. Its aim was not solely scholarly but avowedly pedagogical. And its intellectual aspiration was not purely academic but broadly socio-cultural. Its most persuasive virtue that advocated for further consideration was the performative quality of the project — an illustrative instance of a cultural phenomenon called Italian American, rather than a proclamation of historical recuperation and self-assertion that arraigned everyone else. It laid no universal claims, retributive or territorial. It defined its cultural jurisdiction not as center but as margin, though clearly historical marginality is what it sought to ameliorate. It declared itself to be vocal — a collection of voices —, but demonstrated that it was not vociferous, and certainly not shrill. It had historical range and ambitious foresight, a sense of the past and critical prescience of the future. It said to be coming from the margin, but showed it was not out of left field. While not ambivalent in its stated aims, it self-consciously enacted a performative contradiction. Perhaps I was more emphatic in my advocacy than the proposal itself in its declared aims, but given the unorthodox nature of the project I felt the way over the pitch was steeper than usual. I was obliged to take personal responsibility for editorial cogency as precondition for further consideration of the project since a number of board members felt it was rather centrifugal, or, as one of them phrased it, "it could end up all over the place." I sought to assure them it would not and pledged editorial indemnity. In my half dozen years on the editorial board, it proved the most complex project to see through production, though one of the most rewarding, for myself and for the press's marketing program. Unlike most university press books, the first run sold out, was reprinted, and went into a second edition. The book in question, as most of you will have recognized, is *From the Margin: Writings in Italian Americana,* and the co-conspirators responsible for it are not unfamiliar to you — Fred L. Gardapè, Paolo A. Giordano, and Anthony Julian Tamburri.

Barely had the dust settled from the commotion raised by this trinity, when the manuscript of a volume of essays with an ancient Greek title floated into the editorial boardroom. Naturally, I assured my fellow editors, this was the theoretical companion to what we all came to agree was a terrific idea. If the *agents provocateurs* of the commotion *From the Margin* elicited the epithet of "The Three Musketeers," we now had a quadriga of "The Four Horsemen." The fourth in question, as no doubt you suspect, is Peter Carravetta and his now well-read book is *Prefaces to the Diaphora,* which Purdue University Press published in 1991, the year I left the university to assume the editorship of *World Literature Today.* No connection between these publications and my leaving Purdue, though the two are always linked for me since I consider these publications, among the last I shepherded through the press process, among my most meaningful legacy to the press' list.

A preface, of course, is also a margin, and diaphoras are liminal spaces where differentials coincide, interface, negotiate, become adjudicated, or neutralized. Perhaps the most salient virtue, one among many, of these projects with which I have had the privilege of becoming acquainted, is their exploration of this interstitial ground, the cultural imbrications within the discourses of a particular culture, as well as the resonances that culture's voices turn loose through their own polyphony. The distance between, or among, those voices, their cultural formations, and the philosophical positions they articulate is a key area of critical exploration. This is true of any ground that occupies the distance between historical and cultural formations. The articulations or ligatures between such formations bear scrutiny. Now, with regard to those ligatures, the eighteenth-century master geometer of cultures Laurence Sterne, in his pedagogical opus entitled *Tristram Shandy,* taught us that the longest distance between two points is a straight line. Anthony Tamburri uncannily inferred that the longest of those straight lines is the ethno-cultural hyphen.

Instead of the hyphen, Tamburri's preference is for the forward slash, say, between Italian and American. Thus, he partakes of the wisdom of Laurence Sterne, but also of the paradox of Zeno of Elea, for whom the straight line is the least traversable labyrinth since it is infinitely sub-divisible, that is perpetually susceptible to mediation. It is perfectly reasonable, then, to expect that no traversal is possible, no matter from which end of the hyphen one sets out, especially when the human agency doing the mediating is itself the very object of mediation. In terms of Peter Carravetta's diaphoretics, every excursus or attempted razzia is inevitably destined to remain a preface, an exergue to intermediation at margins to be

breached, the distance between them to be negotiated, to be crossed over, the literal meaning of *diaphora.* The solution, secundum Tamburri: Slash it! A slash, especially a forward slash, is a bridge, a ladder against Babel's tower. It might not get us to heaven, but it gets us off the spot. Which does not mean that it lets us off the hook, mind you.

In these pedagogical and theoretical acts of critical self-assessment, one can discern an insight into the paradox of distributive and retributive politics that bedeviled the identity crises of the late twentieth century. It is this measure of insight, I believe, that made it possible for Italian American Studies as reconfigured by the projects I am referring to here to move beyond the perils of replication and escape the loops of self-reinscription. Through a number of conscious, and conscientious, acts that correspond to what I have defined at the beginning of these remarks as the *poetic,* now intuitively, now with keen alertness, the editors of *From the Margin,* the author of *Prefaces to the Diaphora,* and their like-minded colleagues moved deliberately away from replicating the self-privileging self-centeredness of the dominant culture they sought to de-center. They did so through the dual track of simultaneous self-differentiation and inclusiveness, what Peter Carravetta diagnoses as the performative contradictions of the diaphora, which he distills from Giambattista Vico, through Nietzsche, as the limitations of our knowledge, with what is knowable limited to what the human subject itself has invented and is given to narrating. As articulated by Carravetta's critique and rehearsed by the editors of *From the Margin,* the dangers of the tautology of the self-knowing cultural subject are also breached through the performance of a series of performative contradictions that are integral to cultural actors as historical subjects. This strategic move of self-differentiation as self-salvaging from tautology, or from the perils of hubris that would supplant the divine in declaring "I am that I am," goes back to Parmenides, the pre-Socratic philosopher from whom our modernity and post-modernity inherited diaphoretics, as Peter Carravetta and company have been fully aware.

Having taken the first step in voicing a specific cultural history of Italian Americanness and re-articulating the fragments of that culture into a pedagogical, critical, and theoretical project, they made a next move other cultural identity formations did not feel inclined to do, or proved incapable of doing — they articulated, through certain acts of generosity and judicious pragmatism the cultural body politic they reconstituted to the political economy of American culture at large. They put into effect what their scholarly and pedagogical work suggested all along and made it possible for those inclined to partake of their enthusiasm and support their efforts to do

so — they opened out, rather than closing inward into self-redundancy. Thus, the momentum and residuals that accrued to *From the Margin* engendered *Voices in Italian Americana,* or *VIA,* which found its imprimatur in Bordighera Press, brainchild of the same principals, which, in turn, emerged in the last decade as umbrella organization for a number of publishing initiatives. Having worked to subvert the imposed Italian stereotype, the protagonists of this cultural revisionism did not allow themselves to become yet another stereotype of the multiculturalism of US identity politics. Notable in this regard was the deliberate decision not to turn *Voices in Italian Americana* into an echo chamber of an Italian American soliloquy, or to reify the corpus of Italian American culture into a neo-fascist avatar of 1930s *Italianità.* Through a programmatic strategy, exemplified by the efforts of Daniela Gioseffi and Mary Jo Bona, *VIA* emerged as the hospitable locus of a cultural polyphony, hosting such diverse voices as Grace Paley, Amiri Baraka, Ishmael Reed, Carilda Oliver Labra, Robert Bly, Stephanie Strickland, Bob Holman, and Lawrence Ferlinghetti. This reaching out across cultural voices has been complemented by a reaching across generations through Bordighera's publishing program and through the Bordighera Poetry Prize.

Obviously, our distinguished hosts know their own endeavors first hand and, as we have heard, and will continue to hear, they speak to the historical significance of their achievement much more intelligently than anyone from the outside. The possibility for someone from the outside to be making these remarks is simply another instance of their generous openness and gracious reaching across. My remarks, then, should be understood as nothing more than yet another prelude of a diaphora between inside and outside, wherever those positions might happen to be.

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[1] Étienne Balibar, *La criante des masses. Politique et philosophie avant et après Marx* (Paris: Galilée, 1997).

[2] Slavoj Zizek, *En defensa de la intolerancia* (Madrid: Ediciones Sequitur, 2007).

[3] Martha Craven Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice: Literary Imagination and Public Life* (Boston: Beacon, 1995), xvi.

[4] Djelal Kadir, *The Other Writing: Postcolonial Essays in Latin America's Writing Culture* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue UP, 1993), 31–44.

Questioning the Traditionalism of Italian American Literature

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Abstract: This essay offers some first reflections on the rhetorical and ideological significance of the use of tradition within the artistic and literary productions of first-generation Italian Americans. From tradition to traditionalism to oblivion, the article tries to delineate a possible cultural trajectory, and advocates a better analysis of the role of the Italian past in Italian American studies.

If you read the most recent entry for the word "Italian-American" in the *Oxford English Dictionary*[1] you would, I think, be impressed by the breadth of ground covered in about twenty lines. Ten are dedicated to the adjective and nine to the noun. The definition touches, no matter how sketchily, on the historical, social, ethnic, political, artistic, and — sure enough — criminal aspects of the Italian American experience. As a result, the entry offers a rather reliable mirror of the prevalent attitudes of bona fide Americans (with just a little help from their British friends) toward those new citizens making their way from the Old World. This is also why I find on the whole that these mirror images are justified in also reflecting stereotypes at many levels.[2]

My main area of research, though, invites me to concentrate on a curious and in a way nobilitating instance of name-dropping. This is the case of the 1938 quotation culled from the Federal Writers' Project's historical volume *The Italians of New York,*[3] which refers to the "many popular novels on Italian-American themes" composed by a writer named Ettore Moffa. Now, this sounds to me as close as we can get to an authoritative recognition, provided by an institutional body like the OED, of, precisely, the popular culture produced by first-generation Italian Americans. Typically enough, this recognition is an oblique and basically inadvertent one, even more so since the real name of the writer, Moffa, conceals the telltale penname, Italo Stanco, under which he had made his fortune in the *colonia* since the 1910s. It is a half-way homage, in other words, and a quotation which demands explanation. The OED entry poses a challenge: what do

we — culturally, historically, politically — mean by "Italian American"? Is there, *really,* a link between turn-of-the-century italophone Italian Americans, and contemporary Italian Americans? Between Italo Stanco, a movie like *Big Night* (also quoted), and Camille Paglia? Even if we can't think of one, I am convinced that if we really want to write a history of Italian America we must try to establish a connection between such elements — and that we should work together, from both sides of the Atlantic, to arrive at the result. Since I have been dabbling in early Italian Americana quite extensively in the last fifteen years or so, I could not honestly put such questions aside. I am going to try, herein, to address these and similar topics combining my scholarly findings and comparative observations.

Has there ever been a common ground, and/or a common narrative, in the production of Italian American writers since the last decades of the nineteenth century? Was there one *then,* and is there one *now*? I am limiting myself to literature for want of a better and more nuanced competence in other fields: but underlying these questions, a much more insidious one keeps nagging me — is there a tried-and-true culture which we can distinctly label as "Italian American"? Or, how did the individuals that we brashly lump together as emigrants elaborate their forced dialogue between two very different societies? What was symbolically and mentally their way of coping?

The Italians who came to this country certainly had a very strong sense of tradition; even of a literary tradition. They knew it and they cherished it. Their average low level of literacy did not prevent them, in the least, from taking part in the usual, customary modes of transmission of knowledge. And it was this sense of belonging to a secular and diversified body of notions, tastes, styles, and craftmanships that — despite strong streaks of chauvinistic jingoism — appealed to an American audience:

> But the ill-clad Italians, with their odious pipes puffing out mal-odorous smoke, who crowd into the dramatic stable yard and make the atmosphere within the old mule shed unbearable to all save themselves, do not go there for vulgar vaudeville or cheap variety. You would not expect it, and it is hard to believe when you see it, but these ignorant, untutored men, who labor with their hands all day at the worst work in New York, flock to the Star [the Star Theater at 101 Union Street, in South Brooklyn] to see the highest of Italian drama attainable here. They flock there every night and listen enthralled at the words, written centuries ago by the immortal Tasso, the Italian epic poet, who, together with his father, Bernardo Tasso, contributed some of the best of Italian

> epics. [. . .] The Star Theater is a dirty place to go: it is filthy and sickening to the sight and senses, and one sees men there who surely never wash. Yet with all its dinginess and dirt; its bad odors and mean looking men, it is worth a visit, and if one is of the people of the Italian quarter and doesn't object to the smoke and grime and understands the Italian language, it might be worth enough visits to cover at least a canto of "Jerusalem Delivered."[4]

This re-enactment of Tasso, with marionettes, in its entirety in Brooklyn (love, nocturnes, treachery and loyalty, and above all the signature melody of his unique, troubled poetry) is a bold statement. It's a spontaneous affirmation of a canon.[5] Even if we consider the rich, indeed impressive, body of literature produced by first-generation Italian Americans, the diversity of themes, plots, diction shows only one side of the story. The other side reveals a conscious appropriation and re-use of styles and languages passed down through the centuries along the Italian peninsula and elsewhere. For instance, the "popular novels" from which we started were a conflation of central European motives exploited and brought to success by Eugène Sue and Conan Doyle, to name only a few. All this points to an obvious familiarity with the staples of Italian and indeed European cultural debate and its main aesthetic results, both high and low. Novels, autobiographies, novellas, variations on the *commedia dell'arte*, and poetry composed according to the golden rules of the most exquisite and even trite rhythms . . . when we try to recollect the pieces of the personae of those Italian Americans, there is little doubt that they were moving along the lines of a quite definite tradition — and that they were making use of it not only referentially, objectively, but also *ritualistically.* It's the phase, so to speak, "of rotting tradition and living men."[6] And just think of how opera — from Verdi to Puccini's "Western" *La Fanciulla del West* — was eagerly absorbed almost verbatim inside and outside the *colonie,* representing a common ground between popular and sophisticated forms of art, indeed between America and Italy. Singing the *arie* by heart was, within the arch-Italian code of familistic religion, a proof of command, on the part of the *tenori-patres familias,* which demanded admiration and respect. It is not by accident that Caruso became an icon a century ago, and that, with his drawings in "La Follia di New York," he demonstrated that he functioned in part as the mouthpiece of the community.

To be sure, a tradition is not, or should not be, by itself, synonymous with conservation. (Forget Italy right now, where, in my personal opinion, tradition is not much else other than a thin veneer of a sad teaching practice

— the final corruption of the old illusion of the centrality of the humanities: imitation, historicism, tradition. . . .) On the other hand, I think it would be hard to disagree that, by employing tradition, Italian Americans showed off their obedience to one of the chief tenets of *italianità.* Their strategy could be interpreted as a message thrown back to the peninsula, almost like the response of the underdog. "You don't see us as Italians any more because we've left, and betrayed national unity? Well, we'll show you that we know where we come from, that we respect the rules of the past and follow the teachings of the masters. And having elevated homesickness to one of our main narratives, we cannot be accused of lack of patriotism."

In turn, as the use of traditional mores (in the arts but not only there) defined and strengthened their sense of identity, first-generation Italian Americans were almost unwittingly transforming such identitarian practices into a form of defensive ideology. At the same moment that tradition was stiffening into rigid traditionalism (fully blown, just to give an example, in the poetic vocabulary, which is often preposterously antiquated, or in the elegant and consolatory historiographies of Howard Marraro and especially of Giovanni Schiavo[7]), the nurturing of identity was being developed while the actual cultural differences with mainstream America appeared to be slowly on the wane. The Italian community in search of identity had to face the menace of affluent society and its culture of suburbia.

But maybe I'm going too fast. Our own research has prompted, over the years, questions and analyses parallel to the findings of an entire, forgotten textual territory. We (the small number of scholars engaged in the rescue of the history of the Great Migration) have been working in a social field which has not been abandoned yet, and where issues of identity and belonging are still relevant. What we observe, and try to articulate today about the past has very much to do with the present that shapes our awareness as citizens of a world where the "multi-" prefix means expansion and opportunity as much as tension and conflicts. On a more mundane level — our present is shaped by the material conditions that make our research possible. These, in turn, are instrumental in mapping a history which, one suspects, under different circumstances could well be written otherwise. Objectivity, if it exists at all, is the transitional product of a process of observation. No matter how fastidiously accurate, our thirst for data, names, and events has been, it has always tried to be conducive to an attempt at a wider, historical interpretation.

One of the exciting aspects of working in these conditions has been the feeling,if you forgive me the ghastly and I'm afraid quite American colloquialism, of providing the ammunition to intellectuals who are more directly

engaged with the current panorama of third- to fifth-generation Italian Americans who came of age during and after the Civil Rights movement, Vietnam, and the upheaval of reaganomics. Instead, or rather on our part, we haven't gotten that far: we've built only half of the bridge, if that, but the insight we acquire from the constant debate on contemporary issues helps us to interpret the raw data that we gather from the columns of *Il Progresso Italo-Americano,* or from the chronicles of the Catholic otherworld and the Trade Unions' ethnic network. At its most simplistic: our research at the Center for Migration Studies and at the Immigration History Research Center is put in perspective only if we take part in the Cornelia Street Café's poetry readings and if we follow what's being done by the Italian American Writers' Association and other groups of Italian Americans. Emigration and the complex reality that was born out of it are undeniable historical facts; but if we limit ourselves to the historization of Italian migration abroad, we run the risk of misrepresenting its wider cultural and existential meaning. A collective human experience of *longue durée* can be a hard thing to comprehend if we customize it in a supposedly professional way. Italians have always been masters in using history as a shield, and their attitudes toward emigration past and present tend to reflect this. It's not easy to come to terms with a gigantic social transformation, but this is exactly the task we are confronted with, and which calls for a human understanding wider than academic disciplines.

To go back to suburbia and our current, largely fragmented, deterritorialized and hyper-virtual, scenario: is there, today, a prevailing Italian American narrative? If there is, I'm afraid I, personally, haven't been able to grasp it; I see, hear and read about a striking diversity that often rises to a sense of community that comes from a shared set of habits and practices. That experience is still dynamic and pliable enough to cover both daily lives and the active memory of things past. Like the moon, it has a dark side, which hides the ultimate failure of the ideological traditionalism that fueled the hopes of the forefathers. It's not dark in any morally negative sense; there has been no sin or vice to repent. But this side of present day Italian American life is seldom, if ever, brought to daylight, even though it is an essential part of its narrative.

The upholding of tradition during the first decades of Italian American literature was from the start apparent on a stylistic level. Over time, as I surmised, it became one of the ingredients that held a larger ideological concern. The current plurality of Italian American culture seems to me, in part, the result of a successful confrontation with that practice of tradition. Interestingly enough, those popular novels by a writer who, through his

pen-name, proclaimed to be a "Italo Stanco," a tired Italian (or someone tired to be an Italian), proved to be effective in a sense that could not have been anticipated. The old narrative of proud loyalty to the glories and languages of the homeland in some way helped to distinguish, by contrast, the identity of the first generation of immigrants from that of contemporary Italian Americans.

Identities, once a staple of community-building, have fallen prey to policy-making. There's no longer the need to turn a mirror toward a non-existent motherland; the shared experience corresponds now, like for so many other strata or components of American society, to a constantly moving process that is capable of drastic and radical change. Oblivion is a very real possibility. Seen from the land of the eternal and condescending *gattopardi,* this might even be interpreted as one of the most striking Italian American achievements.

One of the most distinguished Italian art historians of the last century, Eugenio Battisti, summed up his seminal essay *Rinascimento e Barocco* writing that "Ogni situazione [. . .] è segnata da due linee che s'incrociano: una è la tradizione, l'altra è la disordinata fenomenologia del presente."[8] If this is true for the most classical period of Italian civilization, then I think that we should make an effort to start adopting a similar method in our study of that renaissance of Italy which flourished outside the peninsula. We can all forget, and sometimes we decide to turn our backs, but as scholars, I think that we have an obligation to remember, and to remind others, where we've come from. We might find out that the misunderstanding of Italians in American society starts in a place very close to home.

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[1] The OED opts for the hyphenated form. In its online edition the entry is dated June 2006.

[2] My favorite is the least conspicuous, that is the common misspelling of an Italian word in the 1873 entry from the *Boston Daily Globe,* which mentions the San Francisco Italian-language daily *La Voce del Populo.* Such minute misspellings, both by Italian Americans and non Italian Americans, have indeed always been so pervasive that they would deserve a thorough in-depth analysis.

[3] The volume, published by Random House, bore an Italian-language non-identical twin brother: *Gli Italiani di New York, versione italiana riveduta ed ampliata da Alberto Cupelli* (New York: Labor Press, 1939). A comparative analysis of the two books is, to my knowledge, still to be assessed.

[4] "Local Italian Theater Crowded Every Night," *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle* 3 Dec. 1899: 7.

[5] *Polpetto,* an incisive and sour-mellow 1973 novel by Frank Mele (New York:

Crown) is dedicated, among others, "to / Great-uncle Giovanni and laborer / Angelo Lezzi, my tutors, / who knew Dante, Tasso, and the / United States Constitution / by heart." The main aspect of Italian American art that the story concentrates upon is a night of "macchiette" at a local theater in Rochester, NY.

[6] Such was the self-definition that Arturo Giovannitti adopted for his highly charged poem *The Cage,* written in Salem Jail in October 1912. See the colophon of its rare pamphlet edition (Riverside, CT: Hillacre, 1914).

[7] On which I refer to the insightful considerations, in these Proceedings, by Stefano Luconi.

[8] Eugenio Battisti, *Rinascimento e Barocco* (Torino: Einaudi, 1960), 310.

Interpreting the Italian Look: A Visual Semiotics of Ethnic Authenticity

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Abstract: This illustrated essay concerns the often-misinterpreted notion of ethnic authenticity as it regards contestable versions of Italian America. By employing professional biographical narration, various symbolic and semiotic theories are discussed that challenge the scholarly opinion that Italian Americans have little claim to ethnic "authenticity." As to "Interpretation" it offers a theory that emphasizes the sociological *verstehen* method pioneered by Max Weber. It might also fit the sub-field of "Heritage Interpretation" that is presented to museum visitors, and other consumers of "authentic" ethnic cultures. Society is a dependent shared "text." Here the texts are visual images, twenty photographs taken in two iconic Little Italies that are presented and captioned as to their claims of authentic *Italianità.* These, what I call "Ethnic Disneylands" or "Ethnic Theme Parks," are for many observers appropriate theatrical stages for the presentation of the "Italian Look." Given the agency that we all have, readers/viewers can make their own interpretation.

Introduction

I was very honored to participate in the inaugural "Forum in Italian American Criticism." Especially to be included among those whom the promotional materials heralded as "the most far reaching, innovative and interdisciplinary oriented scholars in the field." Since my contribution concerns ethnic authenticity, I must ironically note that my inclusion with scholars in "the fold" (assumedly an Italian American one) is contestable as, given my visual ethnic markings — physical appearance (light brown hair and blue eyes) and last name (Krase) — I have seldom been seen as either an Italian or an Italian American. At most I am a sociologist who conducts visual studies of modern urban communities, especially city neighborhoods. In this illustrated essay, after some discussion of the theories and methods I use in my work, I will present as an appendix twenty photographs taken in recent years on location in the most iconic of New York City's Little Italies that continue to make claims of authentic *Italianità.* These, what I call, "Ethnic

Disneylands" or "Ethnic Theme Parks" (1997, 2003) are for many observers appropriate theatrical stages for the presentation of the "Italian Look."

Italian or not, it takes courage, or better stated as "arrogance," to think that what you have to say is important enough for others to be forced to hear. In the academic worlds, there also seems to be a need, even a requirement, to embed one's own work in that of more prominent others, even if those notables played little or no role in its construction. So, just like embedding war correspondents within military commands, the reportage I give here may appear to be something it is not. In the social "soft" sciences especially, retroactive connections and infusions of history are necessary to create the illusion of continuity and cumulativeness. Science is supposed to be a continuous progression, and blind leaps over chasms require the jumper to build a bridge back to where the leaper's mind left the ground. With this in mind, and with the aid of some biographical narration, I will outline the various symbolic and semiotic theories I use in my own visual studies of Italian ethnicity and challenge the most potent scholarly opinion that Italian Americans have little claim to ethnic "authenticity."

As to where my work might fit as "Interpretation" from "The View from Ethnography & Social Science," I can offer it as a hermeneutics, or a theory of interpretation of texts, that emphasizes the sociological *verstehen* [understanding] method pioneered by Max Weber. More practically, it might be of value to the sub-field of "Heritage Interpretation" which aims to develop understandings of history, environment, and culture that can be represented to museum visitors, students, and other audiences. Weber argued that human society is made possible when social actors can imagine themselves in the place of the others with whom they interact, and thereby correctly anticipate the others' behavior. We might think of society as dependent on such common, or shared, "text." In my own case, the texts I analyze and "write" are composed of, and framed by, visual images. I also insist that mages just don't sit there, they "do things."

I must admit that making sense of the Semiotics of Ethnic Authenticity is extremely difficult. This would require pulling together all the many beginnings and endings into one tight theoretical ball. The version of social semiotics that I practice moves, sometimes inexplicably, between what Jay L. Lemke sees as two major traditions; Ferdinand de Saussure's generalization of formal, structuralist linguistics and Charles S. Peirce's (Wiley 2006) extension of reasoning and logic in the natural sciences. And, as outlined by Lemke, whereas:

> General Semiotics tends to be formalistic, abstracting signs from the contexts of use; Social Semiotics takes the meaning-making process, "semi-

> osis," to be more fundamental than the system of meaning-relations among signs, which are considered only the resources to be deployed in making meaning. Social semiotics examines semiotic practices, specific to a culture and community, for the making of various kinds of texts and meanings in various situational contexts and contexts of culturally meaningful activity. Social semiotics therefore makes no radical separation between theoretical and applied semiotics and is more closely associated with discourse analysis, multimedia analysis, educational research, cultural anthropology, political sociology, etc. (www-personal.umich.edu/~jaylemke/theories.htm#General%20Semiotics)

In Sociology we have many brands of semiotics and the most relevant for my own work is "spatial semiotics," defined by Mark Gottdiener as "the study of culture which links symbols to objects" (15–16). For Gottdiener, the street scenes I photograph in cities around the world, for example, have been ". . . built by people who have followed some meaningful plan for the purposes of containing economic, political, and cultural activities" (16).

In *On Signs,* Marshall Blonsky emphasized not only the cultural and ideological content of signs but the value of semiotics as a practice as well. He notes how, in the 1970s, semiotics flowed over into architecture and urban studies by looking at the production of meaning (signification) and challenged their official meanings. He had also called for the development of strategies to investigate the empirical world and for semiotics, and semioticians, to leave the ivory tower in order to be "part of society" and "tuned in." Blonsky wrote:

> So long as it remains something added, it will be small. Hands have to get soiled, Sartre said. "Semiotics is operable, analytically and creatively. It can be applied in the world. But one has to crack it out of its present uses and override refusals to abuse it. It is not a corruption of the semiotic enterprise to use it politically, or commercially. Quite the contrary, isolation will be destruction of semiotics." (L)

I have chosen here to emphasize and accentuate those theories, methods, or simply ideas that are in one way or another "visual" and to weave them together in a sort of personal narrative. To start, I would argue that society, and therefore the study of society, is essentially dependent on the visible. Our first experiences of life as "social life" are mostly visible ones, as when we encounter and recognize multiple persons. It has also been consistently argued in the Social Sciences that face-to-face (therefore also eye-to-eye) in-

teractions in primary groups are the basis of subsequent social life. True, it has been argued that it is the sense of smell that is more primal than sight, but one can hardly imagine complex scent-based sets of social interactions that would evolve into the kind of full-blown societies in which we currently reside.

Georg Simmel early on established the central role of the visible in theorizing about the complex and constantly changing metropolises that I study. This continues as a tradition in all the urban sciences, if only as a powerful subtext. A century ago, he wrote:

> "Modern social life increases in ever growing degree the role of mere visual impression which always characterizes the preponderant part of all sense relationships between man and man, and must place social attitudes and feelings upon an entirely changed basis. (1924: 360)

My own synthesis of theories about visualizing spatial practices, applied in a number of different places, is simply that ordinary people change the meaning of spaces and places by changing the appearance of those spaces and places. (1993, 2002, and 2003)

Allow me briefly to pretend to be an intellectual rather than the dilettante I am accurately accused of being most of the time. As a lazy Pragmatist, I learn only enough to get something done correctly and efficiently. I don't trust people who call themselves "scholars." Frankly, I have always suspected that intellectuals change the meanings of words in order to keep them secret from the rest of us. Somewhat like the merchants who talk to each other in a language we don't understand while we are in their shop looking for a "good buy." I think of the arcane world of academe, as did my father think of the Yiddish-speaking merchants of New York City's Lower East Side where he bought, and I therefore wore, mal-manufactured clothing "bargains."

Long before American intellectuals were introduced to Post-modernist and Deconstructionist buzz words, many scholars in the fields of sociology in which I was engaged who practiced crafts such as Phenomenology, Ethnomethodology, Symbolic Interactionism, and the Social Constructionism of Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, had already challenged the basic tenet of the Positivist faith community that "society exists prior to an individual's entrance into it." These counter-notions, that gradually became counter-cultural notions in the Social Sciences, posited that, among other things, individual (minds) are active in the social creation/construction of society. My own dissertation, "The Presentation of Community in Urban Society," for example, offered a Goffmanesque Dramaturgical solution to the

Structuralist denial of the possibility of an (oxymoronic) Urban Community. Even though the two terms "urban" and "community" seemed to the common sociological mind to be logically mutually exclusive, employing what at that time were professionally marginalized texts such as those by Erving Goffman, Harold Garfinkle, Edmund Husserl, Aaron Cicourel, and Alfred Schutz, I demonstrated that even the least respected urban residents create community by performing it (1973, 1977, 1979 and 1982). I must also note here that, historically, community was thought of as an ideal condition for human society and therefore it was a possibility denied to "despised" real and imagined racial groups such as Jews and Blacks who were actually and symbolically confined in pathological "ghettoes."

My sociological life world began as a Symbolic Interactionist working under the occasional guidance of Frank Westie and Alfred Lindesmith at Indiana University. At New York University, I was coaxed into Phenomenology and Ethnomethods by Alan Blum and Derek Phillips, and then into multidisciplinary Urban Studies by Richard Sennett (1972). Decades later, I became a Visual Sociologist because a colleague thought that, since I used photos in my work, I should join the International Visual Sociology Association. Spatial Semiotics came to me via the "New Sociology" work of an ex-Brooklyn College colleague, Mark Gottdiener, as well as by accidentally discovering Henri Lefebvre while reading a book by David Harvey.

An example of this biographical synthesis is expressed in my writing about Italian neighborhoods in the US:

> Beyond the great public spaces and edifices lies a vast domain of little people and little structures which in fact comprise most of our material society and where ordinary people have created distinct landscapes and places. The designs of these neighborhoods are such in the way that space is socially constructed. Italians, like all migrants, carry designs or living from the original home environments and adapt them to the resources and opportunities in new locales. (2004:27)

Much of my work is also greatly informed by that of Lyn H. Lofland and the theoretical perspective of Symbolic Interactionism. Lofland had noted that Interactionists have contributed to urban studies by showing how people communicate through the built environment, for example, seeing settlement as symbol. (2003) Individuals and groups also interact with each other visually by effecting what it is that people see on the streets. Lofland also argued:

> . . . the city, because of its size, is the locus of a peculiar social situation;

> the people found within its boundaries at any given moment know nothing personally about the vast majority of others with whom they share this space. (1985, 1998)

She adds that, "city life was made possible by an "ordering" of the urban populace in terms of appearance and spatial location such that those within the city could know a great deal about one another by simply looking" (1985: 22).

For Henri Lefebvre the visual was central for all discussion of the production and reproduction of social space of any scale.

> Thus space is undoubtedly produced even when the scale is not that of major highways, airports or public works. A further important aspect of spaces of this kind is their increasingly pronounced visual character. They are made with the visible in mind; the visibility of people and things, of spaces and of whatever is contained by them. The predominance of visualization (more important than "spectacularization," which is in any case subsumed by it) serves to conceal repetitiveness. People look, and take sight, take seeing, for life itself. We build on the basis of papers and plans. We buy on the basis of images. Sight and seeing which the Western tradition once epitomized intelligibility, have turned into a trap: the means whereby, in social spaces, diversity may be simulated and a travesty of enlightenment and intelligibility ensconced under the sign of transparency. (75–76)

Urban society is defined by heterogeneity, and Richard Sennett, in *The Conscience of the Eye* discussed poet of nineteenth-century Paris, Charles Baudelaire, who wrote a poem about the illustrations of everyday city life by Constantin Guys. For Baudelaire seeing diversity in the modern city made it possible to step outside one's own self as in this reflection by Sennett:

> Since I've lived in New York I've liked walking, avoiding subways or taxis whenever I can. These days I usually walk from my apartment in Greenwich Village up to midtown on the East Side to eat, an amble of about three miles. The are plenty of restaurants in the village but none quite like those just about the United Nations, in the side streets of the fifties. They are French, but not fashionable; food is still prepared with butter and lard and cream, the patrons are bulky and comfortable, the menu seldom changes. The restaurants are in the ground floors of townhouses, and most are done up alike: a bar in the front leading to a long

> room lined with banquettes of red plush or red leather; Sunday-painter oil paintings of provincial France hand in gold frames on the walls above the banquettes; a kitchen is tucked in the back. People say New York is an unfriendly city, and I suppose any one of these restaurants could be cited as evidence. The waiters, Italians or Frenchmen in late middle age, lack the air of reassuring familiarity tourists like. But the restaurants are filled with people seemingly content to be left alone, many regular, solitary clients as well as couples speaking quietly. (123)

Michel De Certeau's metaphor of seeing the city from the top of the Twin Towers helps us to understand that, theoretically, we can't really see what is below from "up there." We must go "down" to where "the city's common practitioners dwell." Beyond the limits of visibility from above to where "the city is created" by the "Practices of Space" and "Pedestrian Uttering":

> History begins at ground level, with footsteps. They are the number, but a number that does not form a series. They cannot be counted because each unit is qualitative in measure; a style of tactile apprehension and kinesic appropriation. They are replete with innumerable anomalies. The motions of walking are spatial creations. They link sites to one another. Pedestrian motor functions thus create one of those "true systems whose existence actually makes the city, but which have no physical receivability." They cannot be localized: they spatialize. They are no more inscribed in a content than are the characters the Chinese sketch out on their hand with one finger.
>
> Of course, the walking process can be marked out on urban maps in such a way as to translate its traces (here heavy, there very light) and its trajectories (this way, not that) However, these curves, ample or meager, refer, like words, only to the lack of what has gone by. Traces of a journey lose what existed: the act of going by itself. The act of going, of wandering, or of "window shopping" — in other words, the activity of passers-by is transposed into points that create a totalizing and reversible line on the map. It therefore allows for the apprehension of a mere relic set in the non-time of a projective surface. It is visible, but its effect is to make the operation that made it possible invisible. These fixations make up the procedures of forgetting. The hint is substituted for practice. It displays property (voracious) of the geographic system's ability to metamorphose actions into legibility, but thereby causes one way of existing to be overlooked. A comparison with the act of speaking enables us to go further and not be restricted only to criticism of graphic representations as if they

> were aiming at from the limits of legibility at some inaccessible Beyond. The act of walking is to the urban system what the act of speaking, the Speech Act, is to language or to spoken utterance. (129)

As noted earlier, but less metaphorically, Marshall Blonsky also implored us to get down from the ivory tower and walk around. It is another good reason why I always have my students take a walk around the block in every class that I teach, so to speak. It is also why, for both business and pleasure, I have been giving walking tours of city neighborhoods to colleagues and visiting scholars.

For most of the uninitiated, a visual approach in the Social Sciences is simply taking or showing pictures as an adjunct to the "regular" process of research. In my own work it is, as noted by John Grady, both a theoretical and methodological practice for ". . . producing and decoding images which can be used to empirically investigate social organization, cultural meaning and psychological processes" (Grady 1996: 14). Here the techniques, methodologies and concerns of Visual Sociology are the best known and where the camera and other techniques of representation play crucial roles in the analytic process. Douglas Harper earlier divided Visual Sociology into two types: "Visual Methods, where researchers 'take' photographs in order to study social worlds." And "Visual Studies" in which researchers "analyze images that are produced by the culture." In this second approach, "sociologists typically explore the semiotics, or sign systems, of different visual communication systems" (Harper 1988).

In things visual, sociologist have followed the lead of anthropologists such as Marcus Banks who noted that:

> Visual anthropology is coming to be understood as the study of visible cultural form, regardless of who produced them or why. In one sense this throws open the floodgates — visual anthropologists are those who create film, photography, maps, drawings, diagrams, and those who study film, photography, cinema, television, the plastic arts — and could threaten to swamp the (sub)discipline.
>
> But there are constraints; firstly, the study of the visible cultural forms is only visual anthropology if it is informed by the concerns and understandings of anthropology more generally. If anthropology, defined very crudely, is an exercise in cross-cultural translation and interpretation that seeks to understand other cultural thought and action in its own terms before going on to render these in terms accessible to a (largely) Euro-American audience, if anthropology seeks to mediate the gap between the 'big

> picture' (global capitalism, say) and local forms (small-town market trading, say), if anthropology takes long-term participant observation and local language proficiency as axiomatic prerequisites for ethnographic investigation, then visual studies must engage with this if they wish to be taken seriously as visual anthropology. (1998: 11)

In these closely related sub-disciplines of Visual Anthropology and Visual Sociology there is a "pre" versus "post" modernist dispute regarding not only the uses of images, but also the objective, scientific status of the disciplines themselves. Douglas Harper, commenting on essays by Howard S. Becker (1974), John Grady (1996) and other seminal pieces in the establishment of the field of Visual Sociology extends the vision of visual sociology by taking into account postmodern and other critiques and concludes that:

> Visual sociology should, I think, begin with traditional assumptions of sociological field work and sociological analysis. The photograph can be thought of as "data"; in fact the unique character of photographic images force us to rethink many of our assumptions about how we move from observation to analysis in all forms of sociological research. But note that I suggested that image making an analysis begins with these and other traditional assumptions and practices. It does not end there! (1998: 34–35)

On the other hand, a leader in the field of Visual Ethnography, Sarah Pink rejects this objective-scientific approach, and argues for greater attention to the reflexivity and experience by which visual and ethnographic materials are produced and interpreted. After discussion of the work of some of those noted about she states:

> In this book I take the contrasting view, that to incorporate the visual appropriately, social science should, as MacDougall has suggested, "develop alternative objectives and methodologies" (293). This means abandoning the possibility of a purely objective social science and rejecting the idea that the written word is essentially a superior medium of ethnographic representation. While images should not necessarily replace words as the dominant mode of research or representation, they should be regarded as meaningful element of ethnographic work. Thus visual images, objects, descriptions should be incorporated when it is appropriate, opportune or enlightening to do so. (6)

My own work falls mostly on the "pre-post" modern side. The images I

present are clearly connected to structural and cultural theorizing about society. In order for any visual approach to the study of society to be of value to social scientists it must be securely embedded in the theories and methods of the disciplines themselves, as well as not merely being an example of employing images as decorations for words.

In other works I have dealt in passing with the issue of Symbolic Ethnicity but here I must engage it further. For me, authenticity is clearly a matter of "agency" (Giddens 1984), but for me it is symbolic agency, or the power of people to define or create meaning. In my view, as opposed to that of a more demographically oriented scholars such as Richard D. Alba, there can be no "Twilight of Ethnicity," if we take twilight to mean only "sunset" and not also "sunrise." Furthermore, to say that something is not "authentic" is to deny the agency (read: possibility of authorship) of the individual or the group making the claim to it. The practice of visual, spatial, semiotics allows one to see how ordinary people have the ability to create meaning by affecting the appearances of places and spaces. All one needs to do is to open one's eyes and take a walk around anyplace and anywhere. Even the most absurd, obnoxious, and/or patently false claims are nevertheless "authentic" even though they can be criticized and critiqued, analyzed, or of course "interpreted."

In my work I often reiterate, mostly because so many of the points I intend to make seem to be missed. And then there is the annoying tendency for ideas, once they leave their authors' pages, to become something they are not. Professors, for example, learn that they must avoid asking rhetorical questions at all costs lest their eager students "correctly" answer them. As with so many other sociological concepts, what is lost in translation usually disappears in the distance between the theoretical (abstract) and the empirical (concrete) levels. As already made clear by de Certeau, what looks reasonable at the top of the ivory tower often makes no sense at all on the ground. Another fault of unrequited scholarship is that both sides of dialogical scholarly arguments tend to take place at different levels and, unlike ships that pass in the night, collide only when they are off course.

Margaret C. Waters has most strongly argued against the authenticity of Italian and other white European-American ethnicity in *Ethnic Options: Choosing Identities in America.* There, in her oft-cited, but in my opinion misconstrued, discussion of "The Future of Symbolic Ethnicity" she wrote:

> . . . symbolic ethnicity persists because it meets a need Americans have for community without individual cost and that a potential societal cost of this symbolic ethnicity is in its subtle reinforcement of racism. Per-

> haps this is an inherent danger in any pluralistic society. The celebration of the fact that we all have heritages implies an equality among those heritages. This would obscure the fact that the experiences of non-whites have been qualitatively and quantitatively different from those of whites.
>
> It is true that at the turn of the century Italians were considered by some to be non-whites. It is also true that there were signs in many East Coast cities prohibiting the Irish form applying for jobs or entering establishments. The discrimination faced by Jews was even greater. They were excluded from certain neighborhoods, organizations, and occupations. Yet the degree of discrimination against white European immigrants and their children never matched the systematic, legal and official discrimination and violence experienced by blacks, Hispanics, and Asians in America. The fact that whites of European ancestry today can enjoy an ethnicity that gives them options and brings them enjoyment with little or not social cost is no small accomplishment. But does it mean that in time we shall have a pluralist society with symbolic ethnicity for all Americans? (194)

Following in the tradition established by Herbert Gans (1991) and others who wanted to downplay the role of non-class factors in explaining American urban life, the validity of ethnic culture is seen as dependent on the degree of its direct impact on an individual's life chances. The approach seems also to dismiss as irrelevant the individual psychological value of ethnic attachment. This "minor" effect of ethnicity for White European Ethnics is in the eye of the beholder, as I argue that abstract and/or concrete, real and/or virtual; all social identities are "symbolic" and at the same time they are "authentic." All ethnicities are symbolic and the severity of concrete consequences of the identification or how they affect life chances ought not be an excuse for either diminishment or exaltation. Today in the Social Sciences, ethnicity has returned in discourse but only as a factor in "Social, "or as "Cultural," and perhaps, as a last resort, "Symbolic" Capital (Fernandez Kelly 1995).

Capital of one sort or another, or not, Roland Barthes seems to be able to recognize ethnicity when something is "Very French":

> I saw on the television (I had to wait till midnight) a very French film: "Vincent, Francois, Paul and the Rest." Why "very French?" We see a young woman take her dresses out of a closet and stuff them in her suitcase; she is leaving the conjugal bed and board — situation, adultery, cri-

> sis. Well, then it is a good dramatic film. Here is what makes it more French: the actors seem to spend their time in a cafe or at family meals. Here the stereotype is nationalized; it belongs to the setting, not to history: hence it has meaning, not a function. Well, then it is a good realistic film. Finally, and above all, each actor his fit of rage which terrorizes everyone else; after which comes the reconciliation. That is all because of Gabin. Yes, but where did Gabin himself come from? Doubtless he had realized that there is a kind of French delight in quarrelling and making up: starting a street fight, or one in the privacy of the home, and finishing it off in the café, or in bed. In the first part, there is a display of oratorical qualification. One belongs to a rhetorical nation, one coins phrases, one delights in this or that superlative remark: the remark in anger. In the second part, one reveals a different qualification: one is good at pathos and shows as much, and simultaneously one shows that one can restrain it. It is always the same routine: first of all to signify that one is not deceived, and then that one is 'after all,' 'deep down,' a decent sort. Well then it is a good psychological film. (103)

Passing as "French," or any other white ethnic, can have consequences. I spent many years performing as an Italian American at the Center for Italian American Studies at Brooklyn College at a time when it seemed that no one, including Italian Americans, was really interested in things Italian American. Whereas, I have never been able to convince people that I am Italian American, many of my Italian American Studies colleagues who epitomize the best of our common ethnic strain in form, function, and especially "swarthy" appearance have often complained about essentially being "fingered" as Italian. In fact while I was Director of the center, someone complained that a non-Italian was in charge there. Also, while I was an officer of the American Italian Historical Association I wasn't invited for a free trip to Italy because a fellow officer, who organized it, didn't think I was Italian. I know this because he told me so when he apologized some years too late. Sorry, but, "I didn't know you were Italian." Italian ethnic identity can also be conditional and/or situational. While I may not look "Italian" to southern Italians to northern Italians (some of whom look German or Slavic) I often do.

Similarly, at meetings of the Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences in America, of which I am also a member, and where I "look Polish" but am not, I frequently fail the ethnic litmus test linguistically. At a PIASA conference in Washington DC where I was to give a talk about Polish and Polish American vernacular landscapes, a registrant asked if a I spoke Polish.

"Very little [*tylko troche*]," I admitted. At which he turned to his companion and said in Polish: "If he doesn't speak Polish why is he here?"

Summary and Visual Appendix

I think of this paper as another small step toward a collected works. Over the decades, I had put aside the project of my intellectual *oeuvre.* As Pietro Di Donato had written about Geramio in *Christ in Concrete,* my first and only, essentially lifetime, professorship had the name of "Job." It was, first and foremost, a way to support my family and stay close to our families and friends in our Brooklyn, New York, home. In fact my wife Suzanne Nicoletti and I, with the exception of my US Army service and years at Indiana University, have never lived more than about a mile from our Brooklyn neighborhood birth places.

Even with my nose to the turf, however, I keep my notes, unfinished papers, bits of scraps, clippings, images, and, now often meaningless, jottings of references, so that some day — "when I retired . . ." I could claim an "opus" of some sort. I began my first real step in this "project" with a public lecture I was invited to give for the Cities Programme and Urban Research Centre at the London School of Economics and Political Science in the spring of 2007. My wife was in the audience and after some considerable time of my speaking and showing images, I noted that her hand was raised. I thought perhaps she had received an emergency message on her cell from one of our daughters back in The States. Interrupted, I stopped and asked what was wrong. She thought it was time for me to sum up and take questions. As now, perhaps I overstayed my welcome.

We turn now to a selection of images illustrating some of the many different ways by which various, disputable, visual claims of Italian ethnic authenticity are currently made on the streets of New York City's Little Italies. As I have argued, in agreement with De Certeau, Blonsky, and Sennett, to experience authentic social life all one has to do is come out down from one's more or less ivory tower and take a walk, with me in this instance, around Mulberry Street in Manhattan or Arthur Avenue in The Bronx. There we can look at the places and spaces created by the ordinary people who live, work, and shop there and in the process provide us with multiple, often marvelously contradictory, presentations of the "Italian Look." The photographs here are presented with little in the way of captions as not to distract from the claim of authenticity that is made by the image of a place and space that in an earlier turn has made its own similar claim about which the image speaks. It must be emphasized that the captions to the photographs provided by me in the following photo essay might be dif-

ferent if written instead by those who accompanied me on the excursion, or by Michel de Certeau, Roland Barthes, Richard Sennett or Jean Baudrillard for that matter.

Appendix I: A Walk around The Bronx' Belmont Little Italy. (New York)
In the spring of 2006 I gave a walking tour of Belmont for some Latino colleagues at Lehman College of The City University of New York.

Image 1: In "Italian" neighborhoods one finds many things labeled as such as this "Italian Shoe Repair." One must ponder whether it is the shoes or Ralph that is Italian.

Image 2: In Italian neighborhoods one finds many things festooned in Red, White, and Green. This is the case of Cerini Fresh Roasted Coffee. Cerini, it is assumed, is also an "Italian" name.

Image 3: In Italian neighborhoods one almost always finds a "Pork Store" and a "Caffè." This is D.D. Auria and Sons Pork Store. I don't believe the Café next store is owned by Italians, but it can pass as such.

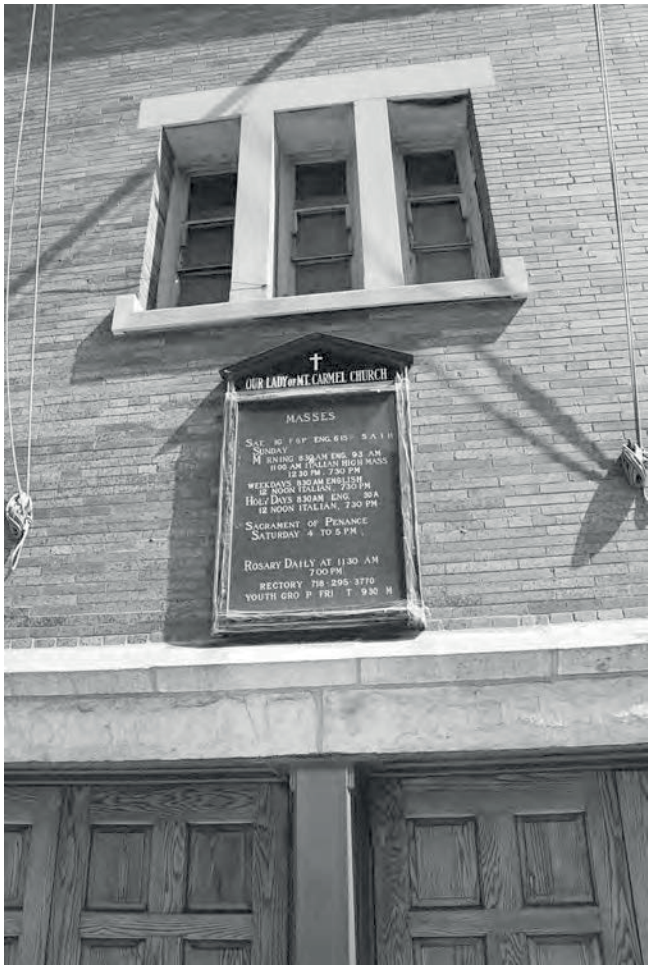

Image 4: In Italian neighborhoods one finds Roman Catholic Churches such as this, Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church. More of an authentic claim is made when, as in this case, there are masses said in Italian.

Image 5: In Italian neighborhoods one "naturally" finds Italian restaurants. This one, "Pasquale's Rigoletto," is one of Belmont's most notable.

Image 6: In Italian neighborhoods one finds monuments of one sort or another to ethnic heroes. This is a statue of Christopher Columbus. It would be even "more Italian" if his name was spelled as Cristoforo Colombo.

Image 7.
Caption: In Italian neighborhoods, which cater to tourists, one often finds stores that sell "ethnic" mementoes of the visit. These are sold at the DeCicco Brothers Linen Store.

Image 8.
Caption: In Italian neighborhoods one finds family bakeries that sell Italian bread and pastries. Here on Arthur Avenue is G. Addeo & Sons Bakery.

Image 9: In Italian neighborhoods that have achieved high stature as tourist venues one finds large signs, street banners, and other indications of that exaltation. Here is the welcome sign from the "Little Italy in the Bronx."

Image 10: In Italian neighborhoods one might find simulations of notable Italian places. This is a replica in Belmont of Umberto's Clam House that was made famous by the murder therein of an organized crime figure.

Appendix II. A Walk Down Mulberry Street in Manhattan's Little Italy (New York City)

In the fall of 2006 I gave a walking tour of New York's Mulberry Street Little Italy for an Elderhostel group. The ten images that follow are a small selection of the sights that greeted us on the trip. As with the preceding Belmont images, these ten photographs are a selected sample.

Image 1: In Italian neighborhoods one might find notable Italian places. This is a second version of the original Umberto's Clam House (two blocks away) that was made famous by the murder there of an organized crime figure, Crazy Joe Gallo, in 1972.

Image 2: As in Belmont, which also is a tourist destination, one can easily find on Mulberry Street "ethnic" travel mementoes.

Image 3: In Italian neighborhoods one expects to find public expressions of religion. Here is a statue of San Gennaro in the window of the Mulberry Street Cigar Company.

Image 4: In Italian neighborhoods one expects to find "classical" art of various sorts. Sometimes it comes in the form of lawn or entranceway sculpture. On Mulberry Street this simulation of Michelangelo's "David" is on exhibition outside Il Piccolo Bufalo restaurant.

Image 5: In Italian neighborhoods one finds visible expressions of heroes large and small such as collections of famous photographs on the walls of local establishments. Here is the "Little Italy Wall of Fame" in the patio of The Most Precious Blood Church. It features a photo of Frank Sinatra.

Image 6: In Italian neighborhoods one expects to see “Italian” icons such as this Vespa.

Image 7: In Italian neighborhoods one finds establishments that sell Italian pastries, espresso, cappuccino, and gelato like at Café La bella Ferrara.

Image 8: Just as in Belmont's Little Italy, Mulberry Street's version announces itself loudly. This sign was provided by Sorrento Cheese and the Little Italy Merchants Association.

Image 9: In Italian neighborhoods one can usually find stores that specialize in products such as pork, bread, pastry, and this one, Alleva Ricotta and Mozzarella, for cheese.

Image 10: In Italian neighborhoods, Italian place names attached to shops such as Caffè Roma give even great authenticity to the tricolore of red, white, and green appointments.

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Creolizing the Lack: Interpreting Race and Racism in Italian America

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Abstract: This essay seeks to reinterpret the vexed question of how race and racism have impacted Italian America. It envisages race as a deep-seated lack that structures Italian American existence in ways both explosive and barely visible, and travels through multiple layers such as the US history of immigration and of race relations in the twentieth century, and the history of racialization along North-South lines brought from Italy. The essay reviews significant moments in the theorizing of race and ethnicity in relation to Italian Americans. Against an Italian American identity confined by the negative legacy of racism or by conservative views of frozen race and ethnicity, it inveighs for a revitalization and sustainable future of that identity by cultivating its creolization, as theorized by Martinique poet and philosopher Edouard Glissant for the All-World. It suggests that a successful creolization process of Italian American identity can build on the cultural hybridity that contemporary Italy increasingly mobilizes in response to racism, as well as on historical patterns of racial and ethnic mix and interfaces present in Italian American life.

> *Yet these deported Africans pulled apart the walls of the world. They too opened up the spaces of the Americas, even as they witnessed the flowing of their own blood. They entered the power of the United States, as one of its foundations, but also as one of its lacks. Indeed, as a power, and as lack, and as the most precious of fragile things. They are in us. They are, Sir, in you. . . .*
> — Edouard Glissant and Patrick Chamoiseau, *Address to Barack Obama* 1–2[1]

Introduction: Race, Gender, and the Lack

This essay is about a many-faced, and perhaps inerasable, lack. To be invited to reflect on the status of interpretation through race and gender in relation to Italian American[2] studies is not merely a daunting task in a limited space. Indeed such a reflection is at the onset "lost" in a "translation" that is also a transition, or a slow transiting, that migrates through the opac-

ity of many different discursive screens. At the end, there is the acknowledgment of an obdurate lack — perhaps a deep anxiety about the lurking presences suggested by that lack, one that continues to structure Italian American lives and existence in deep-seated ways, sometimes explosive and violent, sometimes inchoate or barely visible at the surface.[3]

Powerful categories in the order of social containment and enforcement, and whose outcomes may be unpredictable, race and gender are modes of representing and (mis)understanding the world through the endless articulations of discourse — a discourse that more often than not, escapes its originator. To suggest that they are "constructs" or part of a constructed reality is not to say that they are any less "real," or that they do not dramatically, even tragically, shape, mold and transform reality as we live it — including other morphing categories, such as identity. Race and gender seem joined through the acknowledgment of the lack — first as general categories of exclusion, haunted by those r/ejected racial or gendered Others who yet refuse to be denied. Italian America experiences the lack again as markers of bad faith/consciousness etched in group experience, as the Doppelgangers of guilt and resentment, as only temporarily elided zones of contention, as uncomfortable implications shoveled away under hasty concealments, as shoddy "frontings" that become the public face of ethnicity. The Lack is also the inability to reconcile with the complexities of identities and their components, with their dizzying currents of change that outlive lifetimes of painstaking self-examinations. And then there is a lack inherent to Italian American histories of race and racism instituted by the desire for full-fledged, unmovable, membership in the "whiteness" order of US society. It is, at the same time, inherent to a migration that carries from the land of origin a particular racialized[4] stigma that negates the notions of belonging to one nation, of full citizenship and of cultural parity, so that the relation to the place of origin can never be fully validating or a true homecoming. Indeed, Southern Italians and Sicilians came to America with a particular ethnoracial status acquired from a long history of racialized identity along North-South and Italy/Sicily divides that operated in racist ideological, representational and linguistic codes, thus tattooed with the negative marks of race — of blackness, of the proximity of Africa (Cosco 176–77; Gabaccia 1999 1130; Wong 92–95[5]), and of some unwanted, unknown, membership in a suffused Diaspora. While immigration stories all have their share of pain and loss, a particularity of the Italian experience is indeed to be inscribed in Italian racial narratives originating in the suffering –and yet creative — lack.[6]

In the folds of consciousness, gender has operated a collapsing wall

of silence and denial that would take much more than the following twenty pages to address. This is not merely to state the obvious — that we need more attention within Italian American studies to the experiences of women. Beyond that work, the power of gender as an interpreter of identity resides in its ability to disassemble neat scaffolding endowed with apparent permanence, to create discomfort zones about gender identification and sexual orientation, to debunk and contest myths of masculinity, to expose the lie of compulsive heterosexuality — in the end, to chip away at that purportedly self-evident, sacro-saint, and seemingly unmovable bedrock of Italian life — the family.[7] Indeed, taken to its full potential, gender can completely upturn and sever the moorings of what is liberally taken as Italian American identity. But it cannot do so alone, and without having seriously considered that which has determined every phase of US society since its inception — *race* (Grillo and Wildman). As a result, this essay will temporarily set aside the multiple interrogations gender elicits, and focus on race and racism, indeed fundamental to the experience of being "Americans" — to the very discursive and historical violence that allows citizens of the United States to call themselves "Americans." The periodic violence of race conflicts negates indifference — and with respect to people of Italian descent, this is the confluence of the violence perpetrated against them in the past (Cosco 172–73), the violence of encounters in which they were actors on various levels, and finally, the violence perpetrated against racial others by some — too many — in their midst.

From the arrival in the US of Italian immigrants at the end of the nineteenth century to contemporary interrogations about the representation and self-perception of Italian Americans, questions elicited by the uncertainties of ethnic and racial classifications have shaped their identity — and their identification. Such questions were originally hostile — how to place undesirables such as Southern Italians in the closely guarded racial hierarchies of US society (Cosco 172–75)? With the rise of ethnic consciousness they gave way to asking how people of Italian descent could best combat prejudicial attitudes and representations of themselves (LaGumina 1973; Mangione and Morreale 1992). The late 1980s, and more so the 1990s, have generated a troubling and potentially enriching spate of problems, detailed below, such as: do Italians identify with the dominant racist ideology, especially against Black Americans? If so, when did they begin to do so? Are they more racist than other white sub-groups? When did Italians become white? *Are* they truly white? How do they view themselves as racial subjects? And, a question too often treated as secondary, how have they been viewed and raced by non-whites? (Jennifer Guglielmo; Gennari) Scholars

and interpreters across disciplines have proposed a varied and imposing volume of answers, recently (2006) reviewed with insight and thoroughness by Rudolf Vecoli — yet the vexed matter of the relation of Italian Americans to race continues to perplex, hail,[8] and disturb . . . while the impact of gender on interpreting their praxis remains largely underestimated.

Italian Americans are generally economically integrated into contemporary US society — and where marginalization subsists, it results from class exclusions.[9] These are the starkly evident obstacles to "happiness" and the pursuit of basic survival, now aggravated by a decade-long war on the working class, unleashed by unfettered laissez-faire capitalism, with its spiraling economic gaps between rich and poor, glut and total deprivation, unabashed waste and despised labor. Yet, we do continue this interrogation of what shapes the identity of people of Italian descent, not just because some of us are (close to thirteen million, as of 2000) but because aching inflections and omissions endure, because imaginations of Italian (American) bodies remain stamped with that special Italian racialization — that "Orientalism within one country" (Schneider) — then incorporated in the existing light/dark US hierarchies, and reactivated in present-day Italian society (Cole 59; Calavita 150). These matters remain compelling both in theoretical and personal/biographical terms because even economic standing, even social mobility, and even the committed right-wing politics of some of its famous scions, cannot shield Italian Americans from the continued appropriation of their representation, from an abjectifying public gaze that wanders from a clownish grotesque to one horrific and fearsome. These unsettling appropriations remain entrenched in US culture regardless of how much rational exposition of another truth takes place, and while they have been a considerable factor in the drive towards assimilation and integration into white privilege, they also have other consequences — the continuous power of ethnic nostalgia that pulls Italian America to communities that never existed in the form imagined, to dreaming of lost spaces retrieved, to a total fusion with mythical origins and ennobling historical grand narratives.

Ethnic nostalgia may seem benign and harmless if sometimes misinformed. Yet, Arjun Appadurai's theorization of its function in the modern world points to its dire consequences when it is given full latitude to unfurl and impel action,[10] and leads me to take a contrary position in this essay. Some of its popular forms, which we might call "feel-good identity," justly lambasted by others (Sciorra),[11] are common harbingers of ultra-conservative gender scripts and justifications of ethnic and racial exclusions. I would further suggest that ethnic nostalgia is inimical to a cultural growth

linked to self-consciousness of race and racism, and that the painful unraveling of identity and its many quandaries can best be played out through creolization, as it has been theorized in the oeuvre of French/Martinican poet and philosopher Edouard Glissant, beginning with his *Poetics of Relation* (1990) and constantly refined in subsequent works (2006, 2008). Indeed, Glissant refuses the tyranny of the *root* and melds all distinct, acknowledged, and embraced diversities into the "All-World" — a model in which contemporary Italy has an important role to play.

Interpreters of Race Histories

The paradigmatic shifts in the interpretation of Italian (American) racial history[12] might be usefully restated here, although no linear or chronological narrative can do justice to its overlapping movements. The most dramatic shift occurred after the 1989 murders of Willie Turks and Yusuf Hawkins in Bensonhurst and its border, following the Howard Beach assault — they tilted the terms of the entire debate towards a pressing self-interrogation for many Italian Americans, disgusted by their association with this brand of violent street racism (De Santis; Laurino 2000; Sciorra). It was a rupture in the trend of the 1970s and early 1980s to document a totalizing history of Italian Americans according to a narrative of progress from oppression and discrimination towards success and inclusion, occasionally hampered by continued prejudice (LaGumina 1973; Starr; Mangione and Morreale). In his assessment ("We Weren't Always White: Race and Ethnicity in Italian American Literature," 2004 123–35) Fred Gardaphè provides context for the surge of anti-racist and multicultural activists among Italian Americans between 1989 and the 1997 *Shades of Black and White* conference, while pointing to previous instances of Italian Americans identifying with anti-racist struggles, such as Daniela Gioseffi (124).

That moment coincided with an explosion of deconstructive thinking beginning in the early 1990s and still blossoming into the late years 2000, as Critical Race Theory (Crenshaw et al; Delgado) and the theorization of the process of "becoming white" among European-descent immigrants (Frye; Lipsitz 1998 and 2006; Roediger 1999, 2005) converged. Yet, in Italian American studies, this shift was preceded by another, less radical albeit crucial break, from a defensive posture and unabashedly nostalgic view of Italian American life in the US, to a more reflective and conflicted view of resilient ethnicity in the context of the multiculturalism of the 1980s, combined with intensified attention to the radical social history of Italian America (Cordasco, esp. D'Antonio; Krase and DeSena). And as Italian (Americans) gradually became "white," there were some strange

twists to the process, well before "whiteness" became a house word in Academia. During the height of the take-over by racist politics in Italian American communities, exemplified in New Jersey by the campaign of Anthony Imperiale in Newark, another community leader proposed a counter-model that turned the response to virulent racism into a very operative form: in a clever political maneuver, an astute politician, Adubato, latched on to the open spaces in affirmative action doctrine to use it by claiming precisely that Italians "were not white" and thus should benefit from affirmative action in the same ways African Americans purportedly had. He thus situated himself and his organization between the far-right and the actual fight for racial justice — with a durable effect on Italian American conservative views of race and racial solidarity (Weed 70–75).

Critical race theorists of the 1990s honed concepts such as "buying into" the privilege of whiteness, or of being "white" as a form of property, and of becoming owners in this property (Bell, Cheryl Harris). Thus the mere fact of being "colored white" in a society which assumes the word to be transparent and common currency euphemizes race while demeaning the racial identity of others. Refusing the naturalness of being white (much as the self-evidence of gender/sex was being challenged as neither given for all nor unmovable by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble*) had radical and destabilizing implications for a social order founded on race — indeed inveighing for political choices, pealing away the mask of happenstance to reveal the deliberate workings of policy, political action, and, in particular, of the law, to create and maintain that order. The concept of "white by law" (López) became particularly germane to the study of people of Italian descent, evident in particular in Thomas Guglielmo's theory of Italians being "white on arrival" rather than subject to racial discrimination. "White by law" operated in various settings to the advantage of Italians, as when Sicilians in the California fishing communities were able to counter the Enemy Alien policies of the US government by becoming naturalized citizens, because the law allowed them to, while it prohibited the Japanese from doing so (McKibben 74–76).[13]

As compelling as it has been, the "deconstruction of whiteness" was not without problems. In his "Coda: Anti-Racist Apartheid" to a volume he edited on minority writing as resistance to whiteness, Stephen Knadler responds to Michael Eric Dyson's wariness towards a whiteness movement that could be "a sneaky form of narcissism" by pointing out his own distrust of a "project that focuses too much on what whites can do to unlearn advantages accrued from their possessive investment in whiteness." Thus whiteness studies can lead to narratives of a separate ethnic history and

community simply blended in a new multi-racial, multi-cultural world. Rather, he stresses, these narratives must be inscribed in the continuation of "a long history of co-racial interventions into the shifting and variously deployed formations of whiteness as both an ideology and an identity." Further we need to remember to provide as many mappings of the "multifarious formations" of "racism" as of "race." In conclusion, he insists that "we need a mobilization against whiteness (and not an imagined revolutionary abolition) that does not displace attention from racism to race . . ." Whiteness must shed any illusions of a supposedly cosmopolitan, post-race society and have "its roots in a co-racial counter-hegemonic tradition and not in a white liberal or radical tradition of 'colorblindness'" (Knadler 203–27). Similar objections are raised by Troy Duster in an important 2001 essay, in which he identifies race as at once "fluid" and "solid." Yet it remains true that "race, or in this case whiteness and its attendant privileges, is deeply embedded in the routine structures of economic and political life" (114). Whites who acknowledge racial privilege "cannot just shed that privilege with a simple assertion of denial." Race, he concludes, can be at once "multifac(et)ed — and also produce a singularly dominant social hierarchy," but we should take care to not " reify any one of those states as more real than another" (115). The endurance of privilege and its stonewalling effect on ethical purpose has indeed been underlined by many writers engaged in the mobilization of theory and disciplinary investigation against racism (Lipsitz; Cheryl Harris; Bush 186–87; Rains).

The status of the interpretation of race nevertheless remains deeply informed by the deconstruction of whiteness critical theory movement (Rasmussen; Knadler; Hill 2004). The 1990s had spurred an enduring reflection on the ways Italians (and other white ethnic groups) transmuted from foreigners into hyphenated Americans through the systematic but often choppy and uncomfortable process of becoming fully white (Gabaccia 2003). Italian American scholars responded actively to the challenges posed by whiteness studies, in particular with the essays included in the 1999 watershed *Shades of Black and White* collection (Ashyk, Gardaphè and Tamburri). Many of the papers in the collection contributed enormously to the precise analysis of the changing political and ideological tendencies of Italian Americans right before and after World War II, in particular, in relation to fascism (Argenteri, LaGumina, Luconi, Venturini). Others shed light on the conflicted political allegiances of Italian Americans around issues of racism in the 1950s (Bernstein, Cavaioli). Indeed, with the massive African American migration to the cities and the subsequent increase in struggles for justice, divisions among whites lessened, and in the 1920s

and after, "whiteness was reconsolidated, and the late nineteenth century's probationary white European immigrant groups were remade and reaffirmed as members of a unitary Caucasian race" (Cosco 177). A number of these questions were felicitously revisited in the essays edited by Jennifer Guglielmo and Salvatore Salerno, *Are Italians White?* in 2003 (Meyer, Salerno, Scarpaci, Sciorra).Whiteness studies have indeed led to envisage Italians in the United States as imperfectly or "not really" white, as harbingers of a troubling — and potentially rich — in-between-character of race (Merithew).[14]

Deconstructing "whiteness" has informed for instance the cultural activism evident in Joseph Sciorra's website on rap which embraces radical views of art and racial mix. It inspired the openly confrontational proposal of becoming a "race traitor" (to the very concept of the white race and its mendacious, oppressive order) put forward by John Garvey and Noel Ignatiev. It moved media analysis away from the discussion of "positive" portrayal, advocating instead attention to how Blacks look back at Italian Americans and shape their image — as John Gennari did with respect to popular music — or grounding the interpretation of Italian Americans in film in how Black films and film makers viewed them, and rejecting the abjectifying use of Italian Americans as mouthpieces for the normalization of racism (Canadé Sautman). As well, the psychoanalytical dimension of whiteness proved foundational to studying the reaffirmation of a damaged white racial order linked to an aggressive yet questionable heteronormative masculinity in the *Sopranos* series (Kocela).

Whiteness discussions were important because, in the 1990s, Italian American communities were earning the reputation of being stone-racists incontrovertibly associated with defensive identity and spatial wars.[15] The names of East Coast Italian American communities had become literally in-famous (Bensonhurst, Howard Beach, Canarsie, a list still open today)[16] as sites of racist killings or beatings — abject "*lieux de mémoire*" in a palimpsest of dead-end Italian American racial histories. Facing this disastrous remaking of the Italian American soul, academic deconstructions of whiteness became a useful political instrument in the fight to denounce such trends and their durable legacy

Some of the most radical readings not only irk the general Italian American public but cause discomfort to many academics — those effectuated by African Americans. The adamant, sometimes violent, rejection of the "taint of blackness" by Italian Americans earned them not just predictable enmity from African Americans, but a more destabilizing and scornful deconstruction of their identity for defending racial privilege and

false racial identity while their color credentials as second-tier whites remained in doubt. African Americans ranging from W.E. B. Du Bois, James Baldwin, Malcolm X or dj Chuck Nice, to Spike Lee, viewed the process of Italian American folding into whiteness not only as fraudulent, but also as a form of betrayal (Jennifer Guglielmo). Stefano Luconi, in particular, has carefully documented the processes of political conflicts between African Americans and Italian Americans in Philadelphia, during the era of fascism, after the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, and with the rise of the Rizzo machine, to show how alliances and identifications were made and unmade, sometimes in violent confrontations (2001, 2003). In a unique fashion, Italian Americans have thus remained under "suspicion of blackness" by Blacks themselves, who continue to question their full qualifications as members of the white racial order — something exemplified by the films of director Spike Lee. While many resist these perspectives, Black discourses on race correctly identified Italian Americans as the weak link in the US system of white supremacy — hence at once object and subject in the battles around race and racism.

In the end, however, it is social history that continues to bring a quiet but insistent corrective to overarching formulas regardless of their progressive content. Its detailed work has made it possible to move beyond scenarios of innate atavism and naturalized hatred of the other, or of narrow devotion to a neighborhood intrinsically excluding persons of color from one's worldview. These studies explicate the complicated processes by which Italians in the US were won over to conservative or rightist politics, especially around race — such as their enthusiasm for the Nixon lies about Blacks and welfare during his 1972 campaign in New York (D'Antonio 23), and incontrovertibly show that this did not just happen by itself.

In the United States, Italian Americans were less "naturally inclined" to fascism than subjected to an ideological barrage and under the sway of their *prominenti,* who were practically all fascist-supporters — including the famous Generoso Pope of New York — who put the many Italian newspapers they controlled in the service of fascism (Cannistraro 45–48). Further, in incidents such as the Matteotti murder, the US government and US press showed themselves to be completely tolerant if not complicit with the actions of the Mussolini government to cover the matter, and more hostile to leftist anti-fascists than to him (Nazzaro 59, 62). Italian American opposition to fascism in the early 1920s came from the left, the communists, the anarchists of Newark and Carlo Tresca's followers, the syndicalists of *Il Proletario* and other organizations, and the social democrat trade union leaders. Fascist rallies generated fights with anti-fascists. In response

to the formation of the Menicucci *fascio,* in April 1923, a coalition of leftist groups and unions formed the NY Anti-Fascist Worker Alliance of North America (then the Anti-Fascist Alliance of North America) but their efforts were constantly blocked by the actions of the Italian government successfully appealing to the US State Department, and Tresca, who was the soul of the movement, was constantly harassed and watched until his jailing in 1925 (Cannistraro 37–38 and n. 46). In effect, Mussolini actively encouraged the development of new *fasci* all over the south of the US. It is thus apparent that regardless of the energy they expended, anti-fascists, who were eventually undermined by internal divisions, were operating under an inimical regime in the US, and that, after the War, when opposition to fascism from a patriotic standpoint took over, the Cold War ravaged any longstanding influence of the Left, throughout the population of the US.

Secondly, labor and migration studies underline the need to review the impact of gender and reject presuppositions and clichés regarding the place of Italian American women in the family, the workplace, and society. Donna Gabaccia and Franca Iacovetta point to the way the experience of Italian women immigrants and workers modifies the now classic model of wages of whiteness — if men could be white on arrival, the same was not true of women, as full rights and full obligations of citizenship remained closed to women and racial minorities (24, 32). The outbreak of World War II and the issue of enemy aliens brought these exclusions to the fore. The temporary displacement of Sicilians led to new acculturation strategies, in which gender differences counted. Women more than men bore the brunt of forced relocations because so many women failed to become American citizens, and, as a result were suspect in the eyes of the state (McKibben 74). Jennifer Guglielmo has investigated and discussed the impact of racism on the garment industry, where a hierarchy created by Italian and Jewish men in the 1920s and 1930s to the eve of World War II had limited women's role and increased stratification along racial lines. By the1930s Italian American women had gained a majority in the garment trades, just when Chinese and Puerto Rican women began entering in mass. By the1930s and 1940s, Italian American women had thus fought for and won their place in the union and workplace, but also excluded women and men of color, did not work in inter-ethnic coalitions, merely reinforced Italian American solidarity networks, and consolidated their alliance with Jewish women. Thus Italian Americans did not "disrupt racial inequality"; instead, they used their position in unions to counter "nativism and racism that cast *them* as undesirable citizens and members of an inferior race and distanced themselves from the newcomers" (2002 249–50, 273).

We see a similar process at work in the California fisheries studied by McKibben. Sicilian women were one third of the workforce in the sardine canning industry in the 1930s and 1940s. They did not bond much with others, and stuck to themselves, creating a unbreakable united front against outsiders. When the cannery whistle blew the one woman with a car would pick up all the other women — but NOT the non-Sicilians although the neighborhoods were mixed with Japanese, Spanish, Portuguese and Mexican people — camaraderie was strictly limited to their ethnic group (38–40). In the cannery the coveted position of floor lady was often held by Sicilian women — it was reserved for them because "the cannery owners" perceived them as "'white' in contrast to Mexican workers, for example . . ." (41). They were often part of the "pet workers" system where the supervisors were kin and friends to workers and favored them in all sorts of ways (ignoring seniority for instance) (41–42). Further, the Monterey Sicilian fishing community rejected interracial marriages (with people of Mexican-descent or Japanese descent) and especially ostracized women who disobeyed. There was a general hostility to other immigrant groups (Spanish, Portuguese) between 1906 and 1935 (71–73).

Creolization: From Italy to Brooklyn to the All-World

The interpretation of identity with respect to race and racism would be incomplete if one did not also study Italy and integrate the impact of its historical practice of racialized discourse on migration, and its contemporary involvement in instituting racial hierarchies, confronting racism, and creating cultural creolization. On a certain level, the Italy/Italian America separation perpetuates the shadowy presence of the lack — that underlying narrative of the preponderance of immigrants of Southern origin in the United States with its simmering memory of abjectification and injustice, variously eliciting tremors of sadness or anger when brought back to the surface.[17] The chasm between North and South remains a raw memory of the negative Africanization and cultural abjection of Southern groups that is not eased by the continued virulence of contemporary Northern Italian racism against the South. The right-wing politics of contemporary Italy has generated calls for political dis-unification and revisionist views of unification, violent attacks on African, Arab, Asian, Albanian and Rumanian immigrants, both through an array of discriminatory and exclusionary laws and through street violence. These trends have been warily monitored and forcefully denounced by an array of scholars, Italians and others (Bidussa, Calavita, Cole, Sniderman et al., Tomasi).

The rigid separation of the Italian American experience from the com-

plexities of Italian society has also been specifically contested in the last decades. As Robert Viscusi points out,

> No U.S. Italians live entirely free of Italy's influence and reputation . . . Italians in the United States often know very little of Italian history, geography, economy, or sense of collective purpose. But they live subject to its effects nonetheless. . . . (153)

Further, as Donna Gabaccia has documented, many immigrants actually return to Italy, and returners are the majority of all emigrants from Italy although they scarcely appear in Italian national historiography and are the grandparents and parents of a sizable proportion of the current nation of Italians; returners counted for 49% in 1905–1920, and for 83% between 1920 and 1945 (1999: 1122, 1131). In effect, migration continues, in both directions, as smaller groups of Italians continue to emigrate to the US, not always as legal immigrants, blending into an Italian America which they replenish in "italianness," and "returners" maintain that cultural and memorial flow between the two countries.

Globalization has affected the Italian economy and its social structure with large influxes of immigrants, many of them destitute, resulting in an array of lamentable social practices — highly visible human trafficking at the very surface of the urban quotidian, massive prostitution of foreign-born women, child begging rings, police harassment and violence against immigrants, substandard prison-like housing of immigrants, and even (hidden) forced labor camps, while an enraged public perception that the rise in criminality is owed to the presence of foreigners, particularly those without documents, is fanned by the government of Premier Silvio Berlusconi and his phalange of rightist and fascistic parties. Racism now durably inhabits Italian politics and daily life. The record of incidents and legal interventions is now quite long, and unfortunately, daily refreshed in the Italian press.

Yet, the other side of this deplorable movement of Italian society is that it has made more Italians conscious of race and impelled them to oppose racism. It has rendered these terms familiar in the political conversation and political struggles in new ways. These stances have ranged from the individual, and sometimes heroic — when citizens put themselves at risk to come to the aid of a person attacked by racist hoodlums — to the collective, and sometimes trivial donning national significance — when for instance Denny Mendez's choice as Beauty Queen is upheld by "nine million Italian televoters" who successfully remove a contest judge for deeming a black woman

unfit to incarnate Italian beauty (Gennari 40). Italy has its own rich space of mixture and identities between races, and it also embraces and generates a vibrant cultural expression of such spaces. A growing and distinctive area is represented by the literally hundreds of Italian writers who are of non-Italian origin, in particular Arabs, Africans and Asians, and who create, as does the increasingly famous Algerian-born Amara Lakhous, a world where Italian is inhabited along with the language of origin and where "clashes of civilisation" are noted, negotiated, and transformed.

There are numerous examples of this unfurling hybrid culture, of which popular music and the new ethnomusicology are one of the most fervent sites. Thus the work of the singer Francesca Touré, born in 1972 of a Guinean father and Italian mother, who sings on her 2000 solo album *La Sfera "io sono europa, io sono Africa . . .*" and mixes Creole and Italian in another track, and who participated in an African project, the 2003 charity album *Les Nuits d'Afrique.* The Somali-Ethiopian actress and singer Saba, born of an Ethiopian mother and Italian father, played in the very popular RAI series *La Squadra* the part of a policewoman of her same background dealing with the prejudices of her colleagues and the effects of undocumented immigration from Africa. Her 2008 album *Jidka* delved into the interface of Italy and Somalia, mixing the sounds and instruments of both cultures. Saba, whose song themes combine exile, and its effect on women in particular, as well as the plight of Africa today, with standard romantic ones, has lived in Italy since the age of five when her parents had to leave Somalia, but she has learned Somali and sings in the dialect of Reer Xamar, the quarter of Mogadishu where she was born.[18] The Italian fusion group Agricantus (www.agricantus.info) combines world music with a strong Sicilian base, singing some tracks in Sicilian and others in Tuareg. Their 2007 album, presented in their own words on their site, seeks to create a sound "beyond and without borders": "*Spaziando tra sonorità siciliane, africane, indiane e peruviane,*" mixing rap, reggae, electronic music and orchestration. The group sees itself as the product of a world without limits, where musical voices and sonorities contaminate each other freely across five continents,[19] and its member Mario Rivera has taken cultural fusion into criolization with African American roots with his 2001 solo album *Roots'n'Bass.* The group Almamegretta has claimed the strength of African roots (Sciorra, italianrap site). Many other Italian groups have explored fusion in ways that flow from the World Music movement but take them in engaged directions that write back to Italy's current responses to race and racial diversity. This is particularly evident in the work of several Pugliese groups hailing from Salento, Nini d'Arac and Rosapaeda (Antonella di Domenico), and the Bari women's quintet Faraualla,

as well as with the Rieti (Lazio) group Novalia, and more.[20] One of the most significant is Luigi Cinque, creator of the albums *Passaggi* and *Tangerine Cafè* with Tarantula Hypertext O'rchestra (2002) who theorizes a nomadic music that incorporates all traditions and musical strains and rejects a landscape limited by ethnic origin ("*non ha più ragione d'essere nella sua identità originaria*"; "*oggi la musica è transgenica*"; "*contaminazione? Oggi siamo nomadi in casa nostra . . .*") (Cinque website, *La Repubblica* 13 Nov. 2007).

While contemporary Italy may lag in the theorizing and political address of race and racism, it is thus quite ahead in its formulation of creolization as an impetus and revitalization of Italian identity. It would seem that Italian Americans desirous of articulating identity through innovation and creation can find much to emulate in the Italian practices of creolized cultural production.

Indeed, Italian America is no stranger to the magical workings of cultural hybridity and the process of creolized identity — which have merely been fettered by clinging to the traditions of insularism and particularism and by being fed a false ethnic identity constructed largely by others. . . . Nevertheless, an increasing volume of work by scholars and cultural activists is making it possible to evaluate such steps.

Linguistically and culturally, Italian Americans embody a form of continuously evolving creolization. They have been speaking, on arrival, a mix of Italian, Italian dialects, Italianate languages, dialectically-inflected English, English with local accents (Haller), as well as different languages altogether, such as Albanian.[21] Culturally, they have been mixing, adding and inventing through the criss-cross of Italianate references with distinctly American manners, tastes and customs. Further, a model of total creolization has actually occurred in the United States: this was the pan-Latin community of Ybor City in Florida that emerged between 1880 and the 1930s and was deeply infused by labor and left politics, and by a culture of solidarity (Mormino and Pozzetta). Significantly, it was "in the multiethnic cigar makers' community of Ybor City" that the 1996 working conference for the newly formed scholarly network Italian Workers around the World was convened by Donna Gabaccia and Fraser Ottanelli (Gabaccia 1999 1120).[22]

Music has been a "crossover zone" of borrowings between Black and Italian genres, groups, and audiences since the forties — one that one must neither idealize as equal in segregated US society, nor separate from simultaneous "white flight" and embracing of racist politics in Italian American communities, nor envisage by neglecting the choices and active roles of African Americans (Melnick 145–46) to focus on "white" subjects experimenting with "black" expressivity. Rather, as John Gennari underscored,

documenting the way Blacks create and interpret (white) Italian American actors is crucial to any such project (42–43). However, as in Italy, some creolized cultural forms have not been as divorced from their political implications. Born from the mixed music of New Orleans, Louis Prima was a prime artisan of cultural hybridity,[23] an Italo-Black musical style, which Prima backed up with a politics of direct opposition to the racism upheld by Jim Crow laws. Prima's musical roots were fed by the mixity of the Italian music tradition in New Orleans' Little Palermo (Boulard). Originally trained as a jazzman whose trumpet work was deeply informed by Louis Armstrong, he "raised the shuffle rhythm to the peak of its genre" and was its "most formidable exponent" (Spedale 311). Some of his most famous performance moments were in mainstream venues, such as the 1935–35 performance at the 52nd Street Famous Door in NYC, and in Las Vegas lounge acts where he was known as the quintessential showman; but he also performed at distinctive Black venues, including the important Washington DC Howard theater in the forties (Gardner and Thomas). Personal narratives and autobiographical recollections, brief and vast, are important genres in the witnessing (and preservation) of Italian American cultures, and their presence is strongly felt across anthologies and studies of Italian American literature. The personal narratives of both rejection and relative integration by Italian Americans of color are crucial to expanding and reflecting on that record, such as Giancarlo Esposito or Kym Ragusa (Giunta, Ragusa), as well as the narratives of anti-racist pasts (Fagiani, Del Giudice in Bulkin). More of such testimonies must be sought, respected and treasured as part of a collective heritage of mixed and anti-racist identity.

To escape the multiple binds of essentialist and exclusionary identity,[24] a globally radical perspective on race and racism would be to seek an open-ended and non-identitarian identity, which is not the same thing as color-blindness — to creolize the Lack. Across US society and for all groups, race remains the Great Other, whose presence is permanent, defining, deafening and destabilizing all at once. Yet the twenty-first century is witnessing an increased visibility and outspokenness of people of mixed and hybrid (meaning here, more than two) racial origin who refuse to be categorized, subsumed or erased into one single category, beneficial or not — and thus public discourse has a higher level of recognition of the value of the mix, and of the in-between, even though white privilege remains entrenched on so many levels. The politically fertile and culturally critical contemporary notion of creolization articulated by Edouard Glissant is indeed a compelling force. His is a standpoint, a way of seeing the world, and a movement that steers clear away from frozen and unchangeable identity

positions, from the idea of the root that can only plunge down in one place and then becomes the basis for a politics of terror and exclusion, replacing it with the rhizome's lateral movement, which multiplies its space and zone of contact to the infinite, to the other, reforming the battling, fragmented world we know, into the All-World. Perhaps a politics of Italian American race-ing that can also prove a poetics can thus be devised through such routes of thinking about race and identity. Creolizing the lack is to take that path, forged by the poetics of relation, that leads to the endless exploration of nomads in their own home, in the words of Luigi Cinque — to the always renewed encounter with the All-World and its multiple, simultaneous, secretive folds.

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[1] Translation mine.

[2] Anthony Tamburri's foundational discussion of the matter has shown that terminology referring to people of Italian descent and of things pertaining to them is neither uncomplicated nor neutral. In this essay, I thus use "of Italian descent" for people living permanently outside of Italy, as it implies no identity choices. I refer to the cultures, economic and social status and political life of such people in the US as "Italian America," which avoids ascribing thoughts or motivations which I cannot presume to ascertain to large groups of people. I use "Italian" when prejudice or discrimination is first directed at recent immigrants or touches all people of Italian descent, wherever they live, or the modified form Italian (American). Finally, I use Italian American, without slash but without hyphen, when the identitarian difference within the US is crucial to the context.

[3] For a very insightful examination of the lack in relation to Italian history and writing see Laura Harris.

[4] I am mindful of the reservations of Critical Race Theory practitioners (such as Derrick Bell, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and Cheryl Harris) who have urged using "racialized" advisedly. Arguing that reading race is a political practice, even in the Academy, and that it requires rigor, commitment, self-reflection, and heeding distinctions between different terms, they suggest that the term minimizes the structuring effect of race in our society, implying that it is artificially forced, rather than fundamental to the entire operation of US society. I respect these objections, and only use the term either applied outside of the US, or in instances such as the migration of Italians, where negative racial characterizations are added to a group by dominant discourse, which is indeed "racist"—I then use the term to underline the unfurling of that racist discourse.

[5] Late nineteenth texts of 1821 to 1861 show that Italian intellectuals and politicians routinely perceived and represented the South as African, backward, primitive (Wong 12–16) and Garibaldelsi were particularly virulent; for instance, Nino Bixio in 1863 speaks of Puglia as a land that "would need to be destroyed or at least depopulated and sent to Africa to make them civilized!" (21–22). Republican Italian intellectuals

also contributed to a racially charged discourse regarding the United States. For instance, in an open letter to a friend dated 23 January 1882, Ferdinando Fontana's impressions of New York included unequivocal shock at the "disgusting scene" of an Italian shoe-shine "*inginocchiato ai piedi di un negro*" (Marazzi 106–07). Further, *L'Eco d'Italia,* founded in 1849 by Giovanni F. Secchi de Casali, was at the least ambiguous about race matters, as Marazzi notes regarding its coverage of the Civil War, freed slaves and conflicts between the latter and white soldiers in the South, and its encouragement to landowners from Louisiana and North Carolina to bring in "better" European manpower (104–06).

[6] See Robert Viscusi (*Buried* 146): ". . . the stigma associated with Southern Italians has followed them to the United States, where we shall see that it has become by a striking and improbable paradox the source of deep historical strength."

[7] For some important texts that show that in effect, the position of women vis-à-vis the family and familist ideology was neither as good, or as bad, as is constantly assumed, see Boscia-Mulè, Messina, passim; Serra 116–29; McKibben 46–53.

[8] In the Althusserian sense, of the policeman who "hails the passerby," discussed by Judith Butler in *Excitable Speech* ("Linguistic Vulnerability" 1–41, esp. 24–25).

[9] In opposition to a classless version of Italian American identity, we might remember that "exclusion" can be a dangerous catch-all that hardly applies to corporation heads or conservative lobbyists. There *is* an Italian American ruling class: class is a vast silence in all of this and without it, we cannot even begin to make sense of anything in Italian America, especially race and gender.

[10] Appadurai develops these ideas mainly in the chapter "Life after Primordialism" in his *Modernity at Large* (139–57).

[11] For instance, in his review of Tony de Nonno's 2001 documentary *Heaven Touches Brooklyn in July,* Joseph Sciorra denounces "This uncritical and linear account of self-resolve, family cohesion, and religious conviction ending in the boardrooms and suburbia of white America . . ." (Sciorra 2004 459).

[12] I should stress that no serious contemporary discussion of the question takes "race" as biologically or genetically founded, and none of the texts cited here do. The superficiality of race at a genetic and biological level is briefly reviewed by Duster (113–14) and evoked by Seshadri-Crooks. The consensus is that race is constructed, not given, which, again, does not mean that one takes it as less "real." I refer to "race" in this essay as the congruence of the ways populations and groups are seen, labeled and reclassified in a specific society with its own historical hierarchies of race, and as the ways they have lived and interpreted that experience themselves, through cultural production as well as struggle.

[13] This worked very differently in the 1970s when the redefining of war narratives coincided with a newly regained ethnic consciousness, and Sicilian and Italian Americans were again comfortable with defining themselves separately as ethnics (McKibben 94–96).

[14] That so many Italians and people of Italian descent appear "white" in their features or superficial coloring changes nothing to the debate's fundamental terms. "Being white" is not about "how you look" or about arbitrary features catalogued by racist im-

migration experts whose theories were the groundwork of Nazi racial "science." Being white is about becoming or being made "white" culturally and socially in a society that attaches untold privileges or the simple enjoyment of basic human needs to being invested with whiteness.

[15] Including failing to forcefully denounce hate crimes in their communities, or falling back on old defensive postures to affirm that Italian Americans are no worse than everyone else—which may well be true, but rings false right after a group of Italian American young men commit a racial hate crime.

[16] Incident in Brooklyn, NY, right after the election of President Barack Obama in November 2008.

[17] There is also a fairly frequent narrative of being sold off or bartered away or simply "given the boot" for the betterment of those back home, and Robert Viscusi has discussed its literary expression (Carnevali's "great shoe") and ambiguous status (*Buried* 142–46)

[18] Courtesy of kongoi, at http://www.kongoi.com/new-releases/ethiopian-singer-saba-releases-jidka.htm, accessed 2 Oct 2008.

[19] Gender-wise, it's same old, however: "*in occasione del plenilunio, simbolo femminile legato ai cicli della nascita, della maternità e della vita.*"

[20] A number of scholars are doing important work on Italian music, "blackness," and African connections or their representation, in the genealogy of songs; among them, Jennifer Caputo (dissertation in progress; paper delivered at the *Neapolitan Postcards* Conference, John D. Calandra Italian American Institute, March 19021, 2009, entitled "*'Tammurriata Nera'*: Collective Memory, Recuperation, and Contamination in a Neapolitan Song.").

[21] Albanian was the first language spoken originally in my father's family (although only one side was Italian Albanian) with Italian as a second and English as a third. This seems to have been frequent in Italian Albanian families in New York up to World War II.

[22] The important Latin American connection to Italian America is often left out of the conversation because of the (negative) intensity of Black/White/African American/Italian American encounters. Indeed, nearly a quarter of Italy's emigrants before World War I went to Argentina and Brazil (Gabaccia 1999 1120) and because of the fluid movement in the history of many Italian American families, those Latin American people of Italian descent (as is the case in my extended family) maintained contact with and visit their Italian and Italian American relatives.

[23] "Choosing whiteness," writes Roediger, "took time and was not absolute or universal, leaving space for the hybridity" of important figures like Louis Prima or Johnny Otis (Roediger 1995 657). See also the Crests, originally a multiracial mix of Italian American, African American, and Puerto Rican performers, and the role of Dion DiMucci in interracial popular music practice.

[24] In this respect, the performance practices of gay/lesbian/queer people are worthy of attention, for instance, in 1987, Tommi Avicolli Mecca founds Avalanche, the "nation's only multiracial lesbian and gay theater group ("Memoirs of a South Philly Sissy" 25 in Tamburri 1996 13–28). See also gay and lesbian film and intersection of

transgressive looks (Tamburri 1999), and, regarding political activism, Teresa Del Giudice's search for integration into a community of color in the 1990s (Bulkin 215–28).

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Whiteness and Ethnicity in Italian-American Historiography

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Abstract: The "whiteness" paradigm has shaped the literature about the experience of US ethnic groups from European backgrounds in the last few years. Historical and sociological inquiries concerning Italian Americans have been no exception to this trend. Yet, while the thesis that Italian newcomers held a racial middle ground between Americans of Anglo-Saxon descent and African Americans at the beginning of their stay in the adoptive country is usually accepted, the concept of the whitening of their offspring has not been without controversy in Italian-American studies. Indeed, the latter scholarship has stressed the ethnicization of the members of the Little Italies rather than their racialization. After surveying the bibliography on this subject against the background of historical events, this essay examines why whiteness have hardly made inroads into Italian-American studies. In particular, it points to ethnic defensiveness and to identity politics as two of the main reasons for the delay of such an academic field in attuning its orientation to the perspective and findings of one of the most recent trends in ethnic and racial research.

In his 1903 collection of essays *The Souls of Black Folk,* African-American scholar William E.B. Du Bois pointed out that "the problem of the color-line" would be "the problem of the Twentieth Century" (34). Although the correctness of his forecast is undeniable, what DuBois apparently failed to realize was that such a pivotal divide was not static, but flexible. As another prominent Black leader, Malcolm X, later remarked in his 1965 *Autobiography,* "'white man,' as commonly used, means complexion only secondarily; primarily it described attitudes and actions" (340). After long denying that even good-intentioned white people were able to do something for African Americans, Malcolm X eventually acknowledged that they could indeed sympathize with Blacks if they accepted to renegotiate their racial identity and to reposition themselves along the color divide. In his eyes, therefore, race was a social construction rather than the result of inherited and unchangeable biological characteristics. His 1964 second pilgrimage to Mecca

— where "white, black, brown, red, and yellow people" were all united by their Muslim faith — played a leading role in persuading him that perception and behavior were more influential than physical features in defining somebody's racial status (X 330).

However, while Malcolm X implicitly referred to the shrinking terrain of whiteness, this latter field has actually broadened in the United States. A major contribution to such an extension has resulted from the arrival of immigrant minorities from other than Anglo-Saxon backgrounds. At the beginning of their stay in their adoptive country, the Irish, the Jews, and other nationality groups from eastern and southern European origin were regarded as holding a middle ground between people of color and whites, but they subsequently succeeded in gaining full acceptance among the latter (Stowe). Hispanics, too, struggled to undergo a similar process, although the US Bureau of the Census still classifies them as a race of their own (Guglielmo, "Fighting for Caucasian Rights"). So did ethnic minorities from the Middle East such as Syrian newcomers, who needed a 1915 circuit court ruling to be designated as "white persons" after being previously deemed ineligible for naturalization on racial grounds (Gualtieri).

Once scholars grasped this phenomenon, the racialization of immigrant groups has increasingly fascinated practitioners of American ethnic studies. A growing literature has indeed focused on the timing and the dynamics by which the descendants of newcomers of Irish, Jewish, or Greek extraction acquired a common white identity that let them secure accommodation within their host society and helped them enjoy the benefits of the US mainstream from which they had initially been excluded (Ignatiev; Brodkin; Anagnostou). From a broader perspective than the case study of a single minority, a few studies by David R. Roediger, such as *Colored White* and *Working Toward Whiteness,* have suggested that the acquisition of a white identity is the prerequisite by which European nationality groups that were not of Anglo-Saxon ancestry became Americanized and were assimilated within US society. Regardless of their different research approaches and academic value, nearly all the works in this field have come to share the conclusion that whitening involved yielding to anti-Black stereotypes and bigotry. In other words, ethnic minorities whose members had previously been victimized and marginalized because of their own ancestry ended up discriminating against African Americans as part of their claim for inclusion within the US mainstream.

Italian Americans have not been impervious to such an experience. It goes without saying that the dark complexion of many newcomers from Italy — primarily those who had landed from the southern regions of the peninsula

— made such immigrants look more similar to African Americans than to white Europeans in the eyes of their adoptive society (Orsi; Deschamps 61–66; Fasce). Common conditions of peonage and work on the sugar cane, cotton, and rice plantations in southern states — let alone the worship of black Madonnas and saints such as Benedict the Moor in other regions of the country — increased the similitude between these two minorities and resulted in Italian Americans' mistreatment, exploitation, and discrimination, as if these individuals were indeed people of color (Daniel 94, 103, 152; Milani, "Peonage at Sunny Side"; Birbaum; D'Angelo). In fact, especially in the flood plain of the lower Mississippi Valley, Italian immigrants were initially recruited as a more reliable and less indolent alternative to the Black labor force after the abolition of slavery had induced many former slaves to leave the cotton fields or to drift from one plantation to the other almost at their own pleasure (Stone 115–23, 188–208; Milani, "Marchigiani and Veneti"). According to the Louisiana Sugar Planters' Association, for instance, Italians were "hard-working, thrifty, and content with few comforts" (Sitterson 315). Paradoxically, however, the performance of African Americans' jobs in agriculture eventually caused Italian newcomers to lose their Caucasian characterization in the eyes of native whites. As Robert L. Brandfon has argued, "by replacing the Negro in the same type of work and under the same conditions, the Italians assumed the status of Negroes" (610).

Italian Americans even ended up falling victims to the same hate crimes that were perpetrated against African Americans. Like these latter, Italian immigrants, too, were the casualties of racial-motivated lynchings. Overall, a total of at least thirty-four people of Italian descent were murdered in such a barbarous way between the mid 1880s and the early 1910s (Salvetti). The first Italian-American victim was Federico Villarosa in Vicksburg, Mississippi, in 1886. A blood-thirsty mob broke into the county jail and hanged him after he had been charged with — but not yet convicted of — the attempted rape of the local postmaster's thirteen-year old white daughter.[1] But the most vicious lynching occurred in New Orleans in 1891, when eleven Sicilian immigrants were killed after a court had just acquitted them of murder in connection with the assassination of the city's police superintendent (Gambino, *Vendetta*).

Roughly a century later, however, on 23 August 1989, a gang of Italian Americans from the Bensonhurst section of Brooklyn, in New York City, killed Yusuf Hawkins, a sixteen-year-old Black youth who had been mistaken for the African-American new boyfriend of the Italian-American former fiancée of one of the hoodlums (DeSantis). In 1997, a descendant of Italian immigrants by the name of Frank DeStefano even became the leader

of the Long Island klavern of the Ku Klux Klan.[2]

Sicilian-American Paul Pisicano's recollections about the 1943 race turmoil in Harlem well expressed the timing and the mechanics of the re-elaboration of Italian Americans' racial identity.[3] He remarked:

> I remember standing on a corner, a guy would throw the door open and say, "Come on down." They were goin' to Harlem to get in the riot. They'd say, "Let's beat up some niggers." It was wonderful. It was new. The Italo-Americans stopped being Italo and started becoming Americans. We joined the group. Now we're like you guys, right? (qtd in Terkel 141–42)

As a few Italian Americans have crossed the color-related line between the victims and the perpetrators of race-induced violence since the outbreak of World War II, Pisicano's reminiscences as well as the cases of Hawkins and DeStefano aptly epitomize the transformation of the racial status and perception of the members of this ethnic group. Yet the racialization of the Italian immigrants' offspring is a controversial thesis in Italian-American studies and has hardly made inroads into this academic discipline.

Scholarship about whiteness has not been without flaws, including Karen Brodkin's overview of European anti-Semitism, as if Jews faced hostility and prejudice in the New World only. Academic criticism of this paradigm has usually focused on the lack of a class perspective, the overlooking of legal issues, and the nationalistic parochialism of the approach, especially in the aftermath of the critique of the conceptual notion of American exceptionalism by which, as the title of a recent book by historian Thomas Bender reads, the United States is only *A Nation among Nations.* As these arguments go, while David R. Roediger initially suggested in his *The Wages of Whiteness* that race and class should be intertwined in the study of the working-class experience, subsequent research on whiteness has incorrectly assumed that racial identity was more important than class allegiance, failed to realize that non-white immigrants' civil rights were never abridged on the grounds of their dubious racial status, and conceived the problem of the color line as if it were limited only to the United States (Stein; Kolchin).

However, rather than addressing heuristic problems, many practitioners in the narrower field of Italian Americana — most of whom are of Italian ancestry themselves — have voiced their disapproval almost exclusively out of ethnic-related concerns and have embraced only one side of the deconstruction of race. On the one hand, they have been glad to subscribe to the

thesis of Italian newcomers' early racial inbetweenness. On the other, however, they have also been reluctant to admit that the immigrants' offspring eventually confined their national ancestry to the background of their own sense of identity and came to think of themselves as European whites (Vecoli, "Italian Americans and Race"). Specifically, these scholars have made a point of stressing the reethnicization of the members of the Little Italies since the late 1960s, as if the emphasis on the alleged revitalization of a sense of national heritage could shield Italian Americans from charges of racism and bigotry, which are usually associated with the acquisition of a white identity. While these authors have acknowledged the strains in the relations between African Americans and Italian Americans, they have also tended to downplay the latter's racism and to emphasize conflicts in traditions, lifestyles, and cultural values (Gambino, *Blood of My Blood* 329–33; Vecoli, "The Search" 99).

A revealing example of this trend was the omission of any reference to the Summer 1967 race conflicts in Michael Immerso's history of Newark's Italian district. A statement by Stephen Adubato — one of the community leaders in those years — demonstrated that Italian Americans' resentment toward the supposed encroachments of African Americans and Puerto Ricans was expressed in terms of racial rather then ethnic identity. As Adubato put it, "Blacks have got all these special programs to help them get to college, or to rehabilitate their houses, or to help them find jobs. *We white ethnics* don't get any of these things. All we want is equity" (qtd. in Butterfield). The same phenomenon occurred in New York City in the same period. As sociologists Nathan Glazier and Daniel Patrick Moynihan have suggested,

> Whether we say "Italian" or "Irish" is not important, and yet we know we are talking about roughly the same people. [. . .] the people are the same, and the issues are the same: their feelings that they have been ignored, have received little from government in recent years, and have borne the brunt of the costs involved in the economic and political rise of the Negroes. (26)

But, to Immerso, strengthening and cherishing their own ethnic roots were Italian Americans' main concern at a time when racial conflicts plagued their city (Mumford).

In all fairness, even scholars who are not from Italian background have pointed to the allegedly current survival of Italian Americans' ethnicity. Specifically, in his *Roots, Too* Matthew Frey Jacobson has recently highlighted how nationality groups of European extractions, including specifically Italian Americans, have continued to revitalize and to recreate their

ancestral legacy in the last few decades. Consequently, in Jacobson's view, the ethnic revival of the late 1960s and early 1970s was not the last hurrah before assimilation and has not come to an end, yet.

Data from the 2000 federal census of the population apparently corroborate such a thesis. Indeed, since these figures were released and revealed that the number of US residents claiming Italian ancestry had increased from about fifteen million in 1990 to almost sixteen million ten years later (US Bureau of the Census 2000, table QT-02), a few scholars have pointed to this slight seven-percent rise to suggest that Italian-American ethnicity has undergone significant recovery in recent times and enjoys remarkable vitality nowadays (Vecoli, "Negli Stati Uniti" 55, 85–86; Juliani 14–15).

However, this interpretation blurs the difference between the quantity of Italian Americans and the quality of their sense of Italianness. Actually, the federal census reports list national ancestries. They do not record ethnic self-images. In other words, their figures provide quantitative information about the existence of roughly sixteen million US residents from an Italian background. But they do not tell us to what an extent the lives of these people are Italian-American or are perceived as such.

Sociologist Herbert J. Gans suggested as early as 1979 that the various minorities of European extraction had become almost indistinguishable from one another and retained only a symbolic ethnic identity generally confined to leisure time activities. As exogamy has been on the rise for decades, the Little Italies are disappearing nationwide, and Italian is hardly understood (let alone spoken), Gans' hypothesis aptly accounts for the 2000 census results against the background of what Richard Alba has called the "twilight of ethnicity." Ethnic attachment has come to play a negligible role in the lives of Italian Americans as for politics, education, residence, and marriage. But national heritage still manages to influence marginal choices of the immigrants' offspring such as vacationing in their ancestral country, wearing Italian-style clothes, and eating Italian food.

According to David Hollinger, by the late twentieth century the United States had entered a "post-ethnic era," in which racial affiliations had replaced ethnic identities to the effect that a "quintuple melting pot" of European Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Native Americans characterizes present-day society. It could be easily argued that such an outcome was a foregone conclusion. The ethnic revival of the late 1960s and 1970s coincided with the outburst of African Americans' claims and their ensuing conflicts with whites. Furthermore, the emergence of a full-fledged ethnic consciousness among some nationality groups of European ancestry in those years often took the shape of a shared white backlash

at African Americans' assertiveness. Michael Novak provided a case in point for this attitude. In a 1972 best-seller, *The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics,* he conceived of an alliance among minorities of eastern- and southern-European descent — including Italian Americans — that would find a common white identity in their mutual efforts to curb the demands of both the politicized inner-city Blacks and the "limousine liberals" of White-Anglo-Saxon-Protestant extraction who supported African-American claims.

Yet, the fact that Italian Americans became a cohort of white Europeans — who could not be distinguished from the other immigrant groups from Caucasian background — was hardly a social accomplishment for the members of an immigrant minority who had long endured intolerance and discrimination because of their national origin. Rather, it was a potential threat to their recently-achieved standing in American society and a contribution to their defamation. Indeed, George Lipsitz has pointed out that the attainment of a white identity is a rite of passage by which, besides Americanizing themselves, Caucasian immigrant groups undertake a racist route (15–18, 95). Whiteness is the leading means of accommodation within the mainstream, but also involves coming to share the notion that Blacks, rather than immigrant minorities, are the real aliens in US society. According to law scholar David A.J. Richards, the racialization of Italian Americans as whites resulted from a sort of "Faustian bargain." In his opinion, Italian Americans turned to whiteness and embraced its system of anti-Black racial values because distancing themselves from African Americans was key in order to prevent the Wasp cohort of the US society from discriminating against them and to avert the bloodiest and most vicious manifestations of that kind of bigotry such as lynchings.

However, positioning oneself on the white side of the color line implied social liabilities as well. Research into the Italian-American experience initially resulted from self-protection against denigration based on ethnic prejudice and intolerance. Emphasizing the contribution of the immigrants and their children to the cultural, political, economic, and material growth of the United States since the Independence, early erudite scholarship by John Horace Mariano, Howard R. Marraro, and Giovanni Ermenegildo Schiavo endeavored primarily to counter stereotypes that portrayed Italian Americans as strangers who could not get assimilated and were a liability to their adoptive country. These studies, thereby, intended to claim that Italian Americans, too, were legitimate and valuable members of US society.

Nonetheless, such an approach not only became outdated in the face of the subsequent and more sophisticated developments of social and ethnic history that distanced scholarly research from the previous hagiographic

extolment of the immigrants' achievements (Martellone 161–70). That celebratory interpretation also proved unable to advance the ethnic defensiveness of Italian Americans that filopietism itself had aimed at pursuing. Against the backdrop of the racial clashes and turmoil of the 1960s and 1970s, focusing on Italian Americans' accommodation within the mainstream and on their contribution to the development of US western-style civilization would have placed the offspring of the turn-of-the-century Italian newcomers next to the Mayflower descendants in the ranks of white Americans. Specifically, the continuity between the "Plymouth Rock whiteness" and the "Ellis Island whiteness" would have involved making Italian Americans part of the dominant racial group in US history (Jacobson 7).

Such a characterization would have been most detrimental to the standing of Italian Americans not only in the eyes of the US public opinion, but also in terms of identity politics as for material access to social benefits. This latter dimension became pivotal in the mid 1960s, in the wake of the elaboration of affirmative action policies that helped members of non-white minorities overcome previous discrimination by ensuring their members preferential treatment primarily in college admission and employment. These measures penalized Italian Americans because their provisions excluded them and empowered members of other ethnic groups to compete more effectively in education and on the job market.

As J. Harvie Wilkinson has argued, "in the end, affirmative action rests on the perception of America as an oppressor nation. The list of beneficiaries in an affirmative action program is meant to read like a litany of victims" (146). Consequently, inclusion among the minorities that were officially designated as previous targets of discrimination was key to profit by several forms of social benefits. This was the goal of a few Italian-American ethnic organizations, such as the Order Sons of Italy in America and the National Italian American Foundation, which lobbied for the extension of affirmative action programs to Italian Americans, instead of criticizing the principle of compensatory provisions in the name of color-blind citizenship rights (O'Neill 99–101).

One of the major obstacles to the characterization of Italian Americans as victims of prejudice because of their minority status and to the call for their entitlement to the benefits of affirmative action was their inclusion among the cohorts of the American population that had developed a white self-perception over time and potentially shared racist attitudes toward African Americans. Contrary to this view, some historians of Italian ancestry have made a point of showing that their fellow ethnics have retained an allegiance based on their national ancestry and have not merged into the larger

group of white Europeans. Advocates of the survival of Italian Americans' ethnic self-perception, as opposed to the latter's blending into a wider racial identity, have specifically pointed to the persistence of anti-Italian discrimination in present-day United States. Although the related *cahier de doléances* spans from employment to academic opportunities, the focus has been primarily on the hackneyed Mafia stereotype, according to which people of Italian descent are either criminals or potential lawbreakers.[4] In this view, such lingering biases have interfered with a fully-fledged accommodation of Italian Americans within US society and have, therefore, prevented racial allegiance from replacing a sense of ethnic attachment because intolerance keeps the immigrants' offspring out of the mainstream. As the argument further goes, if bigotry has kept ethnicity alive and stifled the elaboration of a racial identity, Italian Americans were hardly able to play a role in the white backlash at the Black movement for civil and political rights and, thereby, cannot be associated with the dominant ethnic groups of European extraction that have been excluded from the compensatory rewards to make social amendments for previous intolerance and discrimination (Vecoli, "Are Italian Americans Just White Folks?;" Belliotti 159–89; Gambino, "Are Italian Americans"; Monti). Even in the aftermath of Hawkins' assassination Italian-American sociologist Donald Tricarico managed to find some ground to denounce the allegedly bigotry targeting his own ethnic minority because the media highlighted a subculture of violence and criminality characterizing the Bensonhurst youths of Italian ancestry.

Indeed, among all possible forms of ethnic prejudice, the association of people from Italian background with organized crime is still widespread in public opinion. For instance, a 2002 poll revealed that three fourths of the interviewees thought of Italians as mob-connected individuals.[5] Nonetheless, many Italian-American scholars have failed to realize that their own fellow ethnics have become so assimilated that most of them no longer complain about the so-called "Mafia stigma" and are even fans of such alleged derogatory representations of Italian America as *The Godfather* or *The Sopranos.* As Rudolph J. Vecoli — one of the fiercest critics of the thesis about the racialization of his own immigrant minority — has sadly acknowledged while deprecating these kinds of "self-caricature and self-denigration," "when a school in Providence, Rhode Island, was observing ethnic days, the Italian American students came dressed up like members of the Corleone family. Godfather bars, restaurant, and pizzerias, owned by Italian Americans, are to be found throughout the country. The Godfather motif is used at Italian American festivals" ("The Search" 105).

Other scholars have contended that, at least in the early stages of the

Italian immigration, commonly-shared discrimination often brought Italian Americans and Blacks together. Adding to the ambiguities of complexion, Mafia-related stereotypes and antebellum slavery were allegedly similar social stigmas that caused an analogous marginalization for Italian Americans and African Americans (Cinel). Indeed, there has been a tendency to emphasize the unlikely similarities between the experiences of these two minorities. The reference to the previously-mentioned lynching of at least thirty-four people of Italian ancestry has played a key role in placing Italian Americans next to African Americans as victims of whites' homicidal anger. For this reason, the thesis that Italian Americans were killed in the South because they had interacted with Blacks, violating the codes of racial segregation and becoming what George E. Cunningham has called "a hindrance to white solidarity" has been quite popular (Gennari 40). In other words, this scholarship has acknowledged the flexibility of the color-based hierarchy of inequality in the United States, providing that the social construction of race classified Italian Americans among the unprivileged. Such a literature would rather agree with Malcolm X's remark in *Malcolm X on Afro-American History* that Italian Americans had black blood in their veins because they were the progeny of Hannibal (24) than with James Baldwin's suggestion that they had elaborated a white identity to pay the "price of the ticket" for full admission into US society (660–67).

However, casualties of Italian descent were only a negligible number of both the total 3,943 people and the specific 723 white individuals who were lynched between 1880 and 1930 (Brundage 259). Moreover, there was another dimension of the troubled relations between Italian Americans and African Americans. The outburst of anti-Black feelings had a long tradition. It characterized the Little Italy not only in the 1960s and 1970s or at the time of the Italo-Ethiopian War between 1935 and 1936 (Venturini), but also as early as 1896 in the aftermath of an unexpected and disastrous defeat of the Italian army by the Ethiopians at Adowa. Actually, New Yorkers of Italian descent celebrated the latter city's 1935 fall to Mussolini's troops as a vindication of the 1896 rout (Scott 146).

In the efforts to emphasize ethnic identity over racial affiliation, misrepresentation has affected the analysis of Irish-Italian relations as well. It has been suggested that the Irish were long the harshest rivals of Italian Americans at the workplace or in politics, organized crime, and especially religious life (Femminella). The 1984 Democratic vice presidential candidate, Geraldine Ferraro, echoed such an interpretation when she argued that "in New York, where the Irish were more established and controlled the Catholic Church and the political machinery, discrimination against Italian

Americans was codified — expressed both formally and informally" (28). Antagonism and struggles did shape the interaction between these immigrant groups before World War II (Bayor; Stack). However, while Irish Americans and Italian Americans were the targets of the same religious intolerance because of their common Catholic faith, overemphasis on such conflicts has contributed to stressing Italian Americans' strife with a nationality group of European descent and, therefore, their resistance to the acquisition of a racial sense of belonging as whites. Yet, in the postwar decades, the Irish and Italian Americans hurried to overcome their previous animosities and joined forces to curb African Americans' supposed encroachments. A case in point for such co-operation was the 1974 campaign against busing for school desegregation in Boston (Formisano).

Focus on the Irish-Italian rivalries has helped divert attention from the Italian-Black antipathies of the last few decades as well. In particular, a few scholars have endeavored to reassess the role of Italian Americans in the white reaction against African-American militancy. It has been suggested that, although the rise of Black Power in the 1960s helped revitalize the ethnic self-consciousness of the European immigration minorities, each nationality group rediscovered an identity of its own. The surge in affiliation with Italian-American organizations in the wake of the civil rights legislation enactment has also been cited to demonstrate that affirmative action saw a revival of the Italian self-perception of Italian Americans rather than their mere absorption into the broader ranks of white ethnics. Such an identity, as this argument further goes, did not cause hostility toward African Americans. Instead, Black militancy provided above all a model for Italian Americans' activism against the ethnic defamation and discrimination that their own minority still had to face in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Vecoli, "Ethnicity" 70; Barbaro).

Likewise, Italian-American scholars have generally overlooked the political figures of Italian ancestry who championed the white backlash or have tended to play down their racist attitudes. Remarkably, Frank L. Rizzo has become a sort of pariah in Italian-American history because his racial conservatism and taste for Black-baiting in the 1970s are obviously at odds with present-day political correctness (Paolantonio). Rizzo's hostility toward African Americans can be easily mentioned to undermine the hypothesis that Italian-Black relations have been friendly. It can also question the idea that Italian Americans have been discriminated against instead of being discriminators. Therefore, for instance, Rizzo does not have an entry of his own in *The Italian American Experience* (LaGumina), which is now a standard reference work on Italian Americans, notwithstanding the fact he was

a two-term mayor of Philadelphia — one of the largest US cities — and his biography was previously included in a mainstream and ethnically-neutral publication such as *Political Parties & Elections in the United States* (Baldino). By the same token, Maria C. Lizzi has contended that Mario Procaccino's notorious image as the "white backlash candidate" in New York City's 1969 mayoral race arose from a misinformation campaign launched by his opponent John Lindsay to discredit his rival. Yet, it was that very perception of racism that enabled Procaccino to carry the Italian-American vote in Brooklyn, Bensonhurst, and Bay Ridge (Vellon).

Figures such as Catholic priests Geno Baroni and James E. Groppi have been much more popular with Italian-American historiography. An assistant secretary for housing and urban development in the Carter administration as well as a civil rights activist who participated in Mississippi's Freedom Summer in 1964 and marched with Martin Luther King Jr. in Washington and Selma in 1963 and 1965, Baroni not only matched political correctness (Cavaioli). He also personified scholar Patrick J. Gallo's 1974 hope that Italian Americans and African Americans would rely on the similarities in their own experiences to forge an alliance and to "hold urban centers together" after the race riots of the previous years (209). So did Groppi who, after joining King in Selma, organized young African Americans to oppose *de facto* school and residential segregation and to promote racial justice in Milwaukee (DiSalvo).

While Italian-American studies are still affected by a sort of academic Balkanization by which most practitioners of the discipline continue to be of Italian ancestry, the recent emergence of a new generation of scholars with loose sentimental ties to their ethnic community has helped cast new light on Italian Americans' racial identity and its transformation over time. For example, making a sharp distinction between color and race, Thomas A. Guglielmo has contended in *White on Arrival* that Italian immigrants enjoyed the privileges of their white complexion in turn-of-the-twentieth-century Chicago and, therefore, never suffered from restrictions as for naturalization, property ownership, and access to material resources that, conversely, were denied to African Americans. This argument has addressed in part the concerns of scholars who have criticized whiteness studies for their neglect of legal issues. Yet Guglielmo has also stressed that Italian Americans were regarded as being racially inferior by Wasp standards and, consequently, had to endure social discrimination.

One can easily take issue with Guglielmo's conclusion that Italian newcomers were "white on arrival." Sufficient is to quote a construction boss at a hearing before a Congressional committee in 1890. Asked whether

he called an Italian a white man, he replied "No, sir. An Italian is a dago" (qtd. in Foner 147). Jurisprudence corroborated such a popular view. Actually, as late as 1922, a court of appeals in Alabama acquitted a Black man of miscegenation charges because it could not be demonstrated that his Sicilian-born wife was white (Tehranian 9). Notwithstanding the shortcomings in Guglielmo's interpretation, his monograph has contributed to placing Italian Americans on the map of whiteness studies. Similarly, a collection of essays edited by Jennifer Guglielmo and Salvatore Salerno — *Are Italians White? How Race Is Made in America* — has offered further evidence that race is a social and cultural construction which is negotiable in the case of Italian Americans, too.

The eventual opening of Italian-American studies to the whiteness paradigm has also resulted from a decline in Italian Americans' claims for compensatory benefits. On the one hand, the United States has retreated from affirmative action policies in the last fifteen years (McWhirter). On the other, Italian Americans have consolidated their standing in executive and professional positions. For instance, according to the 2000 Census, 38.3 percent of Italian-American workers held managerial or professional jobs, as opposed to 33.6 percent of the employed in the country as a whole. In addition, the average annual income of a family of Italian ancestry was $51,246, while the national standard was $41,994 (Egelman). Following the attainment of social prestige and opportunities, Italian Americans have become less concerned about affirmative action and other anti-discrimination programs than about ethnic-blind policies like tax benefits for the middle class as a whole. Preferential quotas for access to both education and the job market have eventually become less appealing to individuals who improved their social standing on their own. Such a reorientation has reduced the emphasis on past prejudice and discrimination that had previously contributed to insulating research into the Italian-American experience from the concept of whiteness. Consequently, Italian-American studies have begun to attune their orientation to the perspective and findings of one of the most recent and promising trends in ethnic and racial scholarship.

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[1] "Lynched by a Mob," *New York Times* 30 Mar. 1886: 5.

[2] "KKK Cancels Mass Recruiting Drive," *Newsday* 19 July 1997: A22.

[3] For the background of the riot, see Capeci.

[4] For criticism of the Mafia stereotype and its deconstruction, see Albini; Smith.

[5] "Stereotyping Italian Americans," *Parade* 12 Oct. 2002: 20.

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Theorizing Italian American History: The Search for an Historiographical Paradigm

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Abstract: The documentation of Italian American history continues at an ever-accelerating pace. However, the interpretive work that would give wider meaning to this area of study has not kept pace. This essay discusses two seminal works which successfully theorize areas of Italian American history. Rudolph Vecoli's "*Contadini* in Chicago" and Donna Gabbaccia's *From Sicily to Elizabeth Street* present contrasting interpretations of one critical question: the degree to which the earliest stage of the Italian American experience represents a replication of the mores and lifestyle of the Southern Italian *paese.* Lastly, this essay posits that Leonard Covello's cultural pluralist views deserve primary place in advancing the larger project of discovering a vision of the history of Italian Americans that is both fearlessly accurate and palpably useful.

Introduction

While Italian American history has certainly not gone unwritten, it has largely gone uninterpreted. Practitioners in the field have put forward theoretical interventions that have rescued Italian American history from self-congratulation and victimology; nonetheless, no one has constructed a larger historiographical model that better explains the course of the Italian American experience. This essay concentrates on two historical works that have gained widespread (and well-deserved) recognition for theorizing this field of study: Rudolph Vecoli's "*Contadini* in Chicago" and Donna Gabaccia's *From Sicily to Elizabeth Street.*[1] It will then consider the writings of Leonard Covello, especially *The Social Background of the Italo-American Schoolchild,* as providing a basis for the larger project of discovering a vision of the history of Italian Americans that is both fearlessly accurate and palpably useful.[2]

*Rudolph Vecoli: "*Contadini *in Chicago"*

Rudolph Vecoli's thirteen-page essay, "*Contadini* in Chicago: A Critique of *The Uprooted,*" published in 1964,[3] contested, specifically as it applied to Southern Italian immigrants, large parts of Oscar Handlin's

hegemonic interpretation of the "adjustments of emigrants from [European peasant society] to the American environment." In his influential work, *The Uprooted,* Handlin conceptualized the European peasant village, where class conflict was negligible and solidarity prevalent.[4] Vecoli's riposte reminded the reader that the Southern Italian *contadini* lived in what he alternately termed "hill towns" or "rural cities"[5] that housed one thousand to fifty-thousand residents. These communities featured complex class structures with their attendant conflicts.[6] Within the context of the semi-feudal conditions prevalent in late nineteenth-century Southern Italy, the *contadini* constituted not only an economic class but also bore many characteristics of "almost a distinct caste."[7] In broad strokes, Vecoli showed that the lives of the Southern Italian emigrants were dramatically different from the peasants who had emigrated from Norway, Germany, Poland, or elsewhere in northern Europe.[8] He also noted that the motives of the *contadini* for emigrating differed greatly from peasants of other European nationalities. Unlike other European immigrants to the United States, the Southern Italian peasants "viewed a sojourn in America as a means to acquire capital with which to purchase land, provide dowries for their daughters," and otherwise advance some interest in Italy. Vecoli grasped Handlin's fatal error, his indiscriminating aggregation of the European peasants into one homogenous bloc. Vecoli insisted, "The historians of immigration must study the distinctive cultural character of each ethnic group and the manner in which this influenced its adjustments in the New World."[9]

Vecoli specifically argued that Handlin's interpretation of the immigrants' experience in America did not apply to the Italians. According to Handlin, the European peasants were driven by extreme economic duress to abandon a way of life with many satisfactions, only to confront "an alienation more complete, more continuous, and more persistent" than that experienced by the migration of the "mountaineers to Detroit, or the Okies to California."[10] They endured the disorganization of the peasant communities when they arrived in America and the wrenching experience of substituting "the solidary community . . . for his own resources as an individual." Drawing upon his extensive research of the Italian immigrants in Chicago, Vecoli contested Handlin's view by showing that when the Southern Italian *contadini* and their *artigiani* neighbors arrived in America they "succeeded in reconstructing their native towns in the heart of industrial Chicago [, where] their townsmen continued to provide a sense of belonging and to sanction their customary world-view and life-ways." The *feste,* based around the cult of the saints and the Madonna, evidenced most completely the persistence of the Southern-Italian folk customs and mores within these Little Italies.[11]

Vecoli did not extend his critique to embrace Handlin's overall thesis. Whatever his reasons, this was unfortunate. Clearly, Vecoli's arguments apply to aspects of the experience of other European immigrants. Nowhere is this more true than the primarily peasant Eastern European immigrants who similarly founded stable communities reinforced by national churches and vast networks of mutual-aid societies. Vecoli further contradicted Handlin's dictum that the European peasants' associational life could not survive the ocean voyage by citing the persistence in the Little Italies of mutual-aid societies, "transplanted institution" whose members hailed from the same hometown. Gabaccia points out that the failure of the Italians to "sustain a rich institutional life like that of the Jewish settlers . . . [was compensated for by] the formal and informal organizations that [the men created which] surpassed Sicilian localism." No other immigrant group created as vast an interlocking network of organizations as the Eastern European Jews; in 1938 there were 2,468 *landsmenshaften* [hometown societies] operating in New York City alone.[12] In 1935, Italian Harlem boasted 110 mutual aid societies, one for each 225 males.[13]

"*Contadini* in Chicago" amounts to far more than a critique of one book, this seminal review-essay secured the Italian American experience as a separate field of study. Vecoli convincingly made the case that any understanding of the Italian Americans — the particularities of their adaptation here, their slower economic mobility compared to other groups of European immigrants, the nature of their involvement in the political arena, and longer lasting distinctiveness — could *not* be understood through a general study of the European immigrants. Vecoli, the son of immigrant parents from Tuscany who belonged to the *Libero Pensioro* [Free Thought] Fraternal lodge in Wallingford, Connecticut, honored his parents along with millions of other Italian immigrant through his work. Unfortunately, he left his work undone: his subsequent publications failed to offer an alternative concept to the hegemonic assimilationist assumptions.[14]

Donna Gabaccia: From Sicily to Elizabeth Street

Twenty years after the appearance of Vecoli's pathfinding work, Donna Gabaccia's *From Sicily to Elizabeth Street: Housing and Social Change among Italian Immigrants, 1880–1930* significantly expanded and challenged aspects of Vecoli's theses. *From Sicily to Elizabeth Street* is the first of a series of books and articles, which have established Gabaccia's place as the preeminent scholars in the field of Italian American Studies. This influence was much amplified when, soon after Vecoli's death in 2008, Gabaccia assumed the directorship of the Immigration History Research

Center, which Vecoli so successfully led for thirty-eight years. Unlike Vecoli and Covello, however, for Gabaccia "Italian American" is not an inherited identity; it is a consciously adopted one. Her choice depended on "a mysterious immigrant [Italian] grandfather" in a family that "demonstrated little interest in their origins." She explained:

> I never lived in an Italian neighborhood, and I am the only person in my family who feels a connection to an Italian-American ethnic group or who still understands the Italian language. . . . My ethnicity seemed mainly a product of my professional life and my scholarly interests in Italian migration.[15]

I am certain that many cultural workers in the field of Italian American Studies feel grateful for that "mysterious [Italian] grandfather," and the wonderfully empathetic work that he inspired in this granddaughter.

From Sicily to Elizabeth Street — Gabaccia's short, dense, and tightly structured study — investigated the role of housing on the changing mores of the *contadini* when they emigrated from Sambuca, an agrotown in Western Sicily, to cluster with other Sicilian immigrants in the tenements lining Elizabeth Street on the eastern boundary of New York City's oldest Little Italy, on Mulberry Street in Manhattan's Lower East Side. From its publication to the present time, her work raised a series of large questions, which have framed much of the discussion of the initial phase of the Italian American experience in the United States.

The methodology Gabaccia employed reached beyond social history to a yet-to-be-defined anthropological history. From a wide range of sources, she reconstructed Sambuca's material and social reality in turn-of-the-century Sicily. She mapped the town's social geography by examining conventional sources, such as the town's property records. In addition, she deconstructed myths, proverbs, and folklore of Sicilian social life as a means for better understanding this society's ethos. She closely observed Sambuca's material culture, especially its remaining traditional housing and its spatial configuration.[16]

In 1890, shortly before the onset of the great migration from Sicily to the United States, Sambuca's population numbered approximately ten thousand. Women and men's labor was rigidly segregated: in a *corona,* an oasis of greenery surrounding the town, *contadini* women engaged in the intensive cultivation of vegetables, nuts, and fruits. Beyond this lay the *campagna,* uninhabited expanses, where the men cultivated wheat and raised sheep and goats. Sambuca had a local market with connections to wider

markets where its surplus produce was sold. This economic base created the foundation for a class hierarchy that Gabaccia memorably describes as "bottom heavy." The *contadini,* only 12 percent of whom in 1901 owned land,[17] constituted the largest class. The *artigiani,* who (along with the merchants) represented 15 percent of the population, were better off than the *contadini* and socially more independent from the upper class. Over these productive classes rested the numerically smallest class, the landlords of feudal and post-feudal origins. While defining in some detail the various types and gradations of Sambuca's upper strata, Gabaccia makes only a few passing comments on the equally complex distinctions within the highly differentiated *contadino* class.[18]

Gabaccia notes, Sambuca was a typical agrotown; "One agrotown resembled the others economically." However, in one major way, Sambuca was *not* a typical agrotown. Clearly, the ownership of the land, the major form of wealth of an agrotown, was the primary determining influence on its social structure. The very low level of land ownership in Sambuca, the inevitable result of the prevalence of plantations in Western Sicily, deserved more attention in Gabaccia's study.[19]

Gabaccia's focus on housing yields significant insights. The Sambucari shared a deep-felt desire for homeownership, a goal most *contadino* households attained. However, for one-half of the town's residents this meant a two- (or even one-) room, one-story houses without windows or chimneys. The houses themselves were not freestanding structures, but "parts of larger spatial agglomerations" of contiguous dwellings. Whatever their limitations, the vast majority of *Sambucari* "loved their houses, no matter how humble." Parents also wanted their adult children's homes and the father's workplace to be close by. For the *contadini,* the second desiderata was rarely achievable because the males spent significant amounts of time traveling to and from their work, especially during harvest season, where they actually slept overnight near their fields in makeshift structures. The distance of workplace from home greatly reduced the fathers' presence in their families' life.[20] While Sambuca's *contadini* families "loved" their houses, they were not satisfied with them. In many ways, they desired to dwell in two-storey houses (the first floor serving as shelter for the farm animals and the fathers' *bottega* [workplace]; the second floor providing living quarters characteristic of their artigiani neighbors).

Gabaccia investigated a four-block stretch of Elizabeth Street, which contained some of the city's very oldest tenement housing, where in 1905 approximately 8,500 Italians (one-half of whom were Sicilians) lived. When the *Sambucari* arrived on the Lower East Side and in other Little

Italies, the multi-class agrotown was replaced by communities with a much "simplified hierarchy."[22] The landowning elite had neither the need nor the desire to exchange their superior status and living standards in Southern Italy to live in the dark, cramped tenements of the Little Italies of the United States. The reader wished Gabaccia had stated clearly that they were destined to become still more homogenous due to the proletarianization of the *artigiani,* who (with few exceptions) had lost their economic independence in America and concomitantly their ability to exert influence on the peasant-derived masses of Southern Italian immigrants.

Gabaccia noted that compared to Southern Italians, the migration of Sicilians was delayed by a decade or more; before 1880, fewer than one thousand Sicilians per year emigrated abroad. This fact deserved some comment. A one-half generation delay in arriving in the United States, in many instances, meant a one-half-generation or more delay in learning enough Italian to communicate with non-Sicilian immigrants,[23] learning some English, establishing formal and informal social institutions, acquiring new skills and material resources. To some large extent, these disadvantages accounted for the *Sambucari*'s concentration on Elizabeth Street, whose housing was constructed as early as 1860, prior to the enactment of any housing codes. With only a few exceptions, the houses that lined Elizabeth Street were "old-law" tenements consisting of cold-water, two- and three-room apartments lacking private sanitary facilities; often rooms did not have windows. There was no limit on the portion of the lot on which housing could be built, which greatly diminished the amount of sunshine and fresh air available to the apartments. The absence of even rudimentary zoning regulations allowed the tenements to be located adjacent to commercial and manufacturing uses, including a soap making factory and stables. The absence of parks led to an unusually undesirable environment.[24] Substandard by American terms, Gabaccia reminds us that tenement housing on Elizabeth Street, and by extension, most other Little Italies had features the Southern Italian immigrants desired in terms of their traditional values. In these tenements, the workers gained advantages associated with the lifestyle of the *artigiani.* The fathers no longer had to work great distances from home. Indeed, they could most often walk to and from work.

Gabaccia's most original (and provocative) proposition was her rejection of the standard dichotomy — the retention of Southern Italian mores and folkways versus assimilation into the mainstream American culture — that has dominated much of the discussion of the Italian migrants' experience in America.[25] Her research shows that the values embedded in the mores and folkways typical of first-generation (and persisting into the sec-

ond- and third-generation) Italian Americans did *not* replicate Old-World attitudes and practices. The immigrants did not slavishly recreate the patterns of their common culture. Instead, by adapting freely to include (or resist) new challenges and opportunities, they had, in fact, created a new culture. In other words, Gabaccia contested the paradigm of the Italian American experience that depicted it as a continuum where Old World traits were steadily discarded for American ones; in its place, she proposed a model that identified the construction of syntheses emerging from the clash of these two cultures. In the working out of an inherently shrewd and creative process, Italian Americans became their new country's most conspicuous and romanticized European minority group.

Gabaccia also rejected the almost universally held view that Southern Italy's semi-feudal social and economic conditions incubated a much-extended, exclusive *la famiglia.* Against this seemingly commonsensical assumption, Gabaccia argued that *la famiglia* in its essence was a thoroughly contemporary, made-in-America phenomenon created to meet the specific needs in the Little Italies scattered far and wide in cities small and large found in many areas of the United States.

Gabaccia identified dramatic changes that occurred in the social structure and mores of the *Sambucari* when they emigrated to Mulberry Street's Little Italy as emanating from changes in the nature and social geography of their new housing. Her research and observations led to the conclusion that Sambuca's families were uniformly nuclear in composition. *Parenti,* more distant kin, had two characteristics considered to be negative: they lived (relatively speaking) some distance away and were therefore unable to provide immediate and on-going assistance and they were likely to make demands on the family's resources. Aside from the small minority of renters, the *Sambucari* rarely moved, so friends and neighbors — more than *parenti* — could be counted on. They were at hand to help navigate the vicissitudes of day-to-day life. They represented resources (information about work, prices, local news, access to tools, and small loans) that did not entail obligations beyond the principle of reciprocity. Consequently, relationships with friends and neighbors were most carefully cultivated. Far from being familists, "if [the *Sambucari*] glorified any social tie outside the nuclear family, it was friendship, not kinship." Their loyalties were *not* invested in *parenti,* that is, extended family members so essential to the stereotypical conception of *la famiglia,* but in neighbors. To substantiate this point, Gabaccia uses to good effect proverbs. These include: "A friend nearby is worth more than a parente far away" and "A good friend is worth more than one hundred brothers." Gabaccia posited that it was on Elizabeth

Street in Mulberry Street's Little Italy and other Elizabeth Streets in every Little Italy throughout the United States that the Southern Italian family metamorphosed into its stereotypical configuration. This change represented not so much on resistance to Americanization; but a succession of steps the Italian immigrants took that were based on their traditional (*not* American) values. This reconfigured Italian American family, which could more effectively function in a new set of socio-economic conditions, enabled them to fulfill pre-existing values, such as providing more adequate housing and increasing the fathers' presence in the household.[26]

Gabaccia ascribed this shift in family configuration directly to the change in the location and nature of housing brought about by the migration from Sambuca to Elizabeth Street. Tenement living brought about another major change in the lifestyle of the *Sambucari.* In Sambuca, where families rarely moved outside the nuclear family circle, neighbors became the closest relationships. On Elizabeth Street, families constantly moved — albeit within the parameters of the larger Italian community. This degree of spatial mobility was sufficient to attenuate ties with neighbors and friends; thereby causing these relationships to lose relative importance to those with *parenti,* who rose in their social hierarchy to a place directly below the nuclear family. The dynamics of the change of housing from family-owned houses occupied indefinitely by the same *Sambucari* families to the transient, rented flats located along Elizabeth Street catalyzed this reconfiguration of the Southern Italian family.

The most challenging of Gabaccia's assertions refuted the accuracy of the description of the Southern Italian family in Italy and its transplanted version in America as "amoral familist," which stigmatized its members as being indifferent to the fate of those outside the family circle. This is best summed up by Covello's observation that the *contadini,* for example, could not conceive contributing to the Society for the Blind. This definition of the Southern Italian familist ethos then explains the difficulties experienced by the Italian immigrants in organizing larger organizations or mounting more comprehensive campaigns in its own general interest.[27] Gabaccia insists that far from being amoralists, the *Sambucari* conducted their lives based on:

> [the] common social morality, one of social reciprocity. . . . [which assumes that] a moral social tie exists when it served the interests of all those involved, that is, when reciprocation was ongoing with each partner giving and taking in roughly equal fashion. Sambuca's women were skilled "social architects," who constructed elaborate social structures based on a morality of reciprocity.

Here Gabaccia is stretching the definition of "morality." "Reciprocity" is normal, not moral, social behavior. Helping a neighbor or a friend extinguish a fire in his house or lending him a tool is prudential and commonsensical. Helping a passerby or a beggar would qualify as moral behavior. There is little evidence that the *contadini* felt an obligation to extendcharity or to "strangers."[28] It is somewhat surprising that Gabaccia does not note that this utilitarian morality has nothing in common with accepted Catholic doctrine.

Despite its methodological originality and her daring hypotheses, *From Sicily to Elizabeth Street* Gabaccia does not suggest a unifying explanatory hypothesis for the trajectory of the subjects of her study. This omission decreases the value of this otherwise remarkable study. She notes that Sambuca itself later became a Socialist stronghold. She explains that catalyst for this unexpected change was the activities of the *artigiani* who after the abolition of the guilds in 1830 continued to maintain existing and create new associational ties. For example, the fraternity dedicated to honoring Sambuca's patron saint dates from this relatively recent period. In 1880, *Sambucari artigiani* founded a mutual-aid society that forged alliances with the contadini; among other things, it sponsored literacy classes. Clearly, the *artigiani's* relative independence and group consciousness enabled them to oppose Sambuca's ruling strata.[29] However the question as to why the *contadini* embraced the hand held out to them by the socialist-minded *artigiani* remains unexplained. Gabaccia's description of the social world of Sambuca's *contadini* prior to this revelation provides no premonition, as to what would caused the *contadini* to shed their particularistic ways to embrace a universalistic ideology.

Especially in view of the Socialists' success in Sambuca, it is also notable that Gabaccia makes no mention of the failure of Mulberry Street's Little Italy, a thoroughly proletarianized community whose members faced discrimination, to establish a presence on the Left.[30] The Socialists gained a large presence in the predominantly Jewish district adjacent to the Mulberry Street Little Italy, which sent labor lawyer, Meyer London, to Congress in 1916, 1918, and 1920.[31] She doesn't raise a critical question: What prevented the tenement-dwelling, factory-working Southern Italian immigrants, from gravitating toward the Socialist Party on the Lower East Side?

These omissions reveal an underlying methodological preference: the adoption of Fernand Braudel's social history (and in general those of the Annales School), and the rejection, *in toto,* of historical materialism and the more broadly based Marxist tradition. This is a bit surprising because Gabaccia lays out in her book ample socio-economic data requisite for a classical Marxist analysis based on the level of technological development

and its attendant class structure. The social relations of production in Sambuca seem to explain every major feature of that society raised in Gabaccia's study. Most striking is her thoroughly materialist explanation for the change in the *Sambucari* family structure brought about by changes in the location and type of housing. Braudel deserves credit for restoring the masses to history, but only Marx assumed the possibility of their achieving the type of consciousness that would make it possible for them to actually make History. Without a theory that can explain transformative leaps potential in apparently rigidified structures, Gabaccia cannot explain neither why the Sambuca's peasantry later embraced socialism nor why they failed to do this upon their arrival in America.[32]

Leonard Covello (1887–1982)

Through best described as a philosopher of education, Leonard Covello deserves recognition as a groundbreaking social historian of the Italian American experience. Covello's scholarly and practical work was based on a keen understanding of the socio-economic realities of Southern Italy and the communities Italians established in the United States. Covello pioneered Italian American studies. He was the founder and executive director of the Columbia University-based Casa Italiana Educational Bureau, which Francesco Cordasco, the prolific author and editor of works on Italian American and other immigrant topics, identified as "initiating the sociohistorical study of the Italian-American experience on a systematic basis." From 1931 until its demise in 1942, the Bureau published thirteen *Bulletins* (three of which were written by Covello) on aspects of the Italian American experience; these constituted foundation stones of Italian American Studies.[33] The demise of the Works Project Administration, whose Federal Writers' Project had provided its staff, precipitated the Educational Bureau's closure. Unfortunately, the support Covello had hoped to obtain from the Italian American community to continue this work never materialized.[34] New York University's School of Education, where Covello lectured to its Masters-level students from 1928 until the 1940s, was another arena that encouraged research and published.[35] In 1966, Covello (with Rudolph Vecoli) founded the American Italian Historical Association, which today serves as the major organization devoted to the documentation and interpretation of the Italian American experience.[36]

For sixty years Covello lived in Italian Harlem, where he arrived in 1896 at the age of nine, from Avigliano, an agrotown in the province of Potenza in Basilicata.[37] He dedicated his entire professional life to meeting the educational needs of Italian American and, by extension, all minority-

culture school children.[38] Covello's scholarly output — his seminal *The Social Background of the Italo-American School Child: A Study of the Southern Italian Mores and Their Effect on the School Situation in Italy and America,*[39] his autobiography, *The Heart Is the Teacher,* as well as approximately forty articles, and texts of unpublished writings and innumerable speeches — document his ceaseless efforts to realize this goal. His intellectual and practical work resulted in "community centered education," an educational philosophy that synthesized the settlement house, progressive education, and cultural-pluralist movements refracted through the prism of the Italian-American experience. His approach evolved in opposition to the prevailing Americanizing mission of the American public-school system, which he viewed as inimical to the Italian American school children, their families and communities.[40]

Covello focused primarily on the problems of second- and third-generation Italian Americans. In a lecture presented in 1939 he argued that education must foster among the children of the immigrants the realization that "their foreign heritage is not necessarily an inferior heritage, merely because it is not American." He continued, "absorption [of the immigrant school child] is neither possible nor satisfactory if absorption means an effort to obliterate completely all traces of a former culture."[41]

Covello posited that Americanizing practices of the public school were responsible for two interrelated reactions which accounted for the Italian American school children's extremely poor educational progress.[42] The parents viewed the schools as hostile to the family values; a belief that, in part, explains their reluctance to support prolonged education. Covello often heard the parents wail, "The school is taking the, children away from us."[43] The Italian American students resolved the clash between the possessive-individualistic values inculcated by Americanization with the Southern Italian mores prioritizing family and community solidarity — values still prevalent in Italian Harlem and other Little Italies — by withdrawing from school.[44] Covello became determined to design a school program that would actually reunite children and parents with each other and both with their community. He believed that community-centered education could resolve this conflict by bridging the school children's cultures of origin with a democratic American culture.

Typical of all of Covello's work, he joined advocacy to activity. As Vice-President of the Italian Teachers Association, he led a successful campaign that in 1922 convinced the Board of Education to recognize Italian as a "first language" (on a par with Latin, French, German, and Spanish) that could be studied without students being required to previously enroll for a year in an-

other Romance language. This greatly expanded the teaching of Italian throughout the New York City public school system. Under his leadership as Chair of the Italian Department at DeWitt Clinton High School the number of students enrolled in Italian increased from 62 in 1921, to 485 in 1924; this figure peaked at 610 in 1928. This made it the largest Italian Department in the United States on either the high school or college level.

Covello powerfully and convincingly advocated cultural pluralism. In 1939, he argued:

> The familiar foreign languages must be used. It is the idea and not the language itself that is important. . . . It penetrates to depths beyond the [conscious] mind even — depths that can never be reached through the use of the newer, the unfamiliar, language.[45]

The Italian Teachers Association Annual, which were published from 1921 until 1939, listed ten reasons for learning Italian language, including its "commercial value," "simplicity," and "beauty."[46] However, for Covello Italian was a means of "instilling in the boys racial pride, pride of achievement . . . a true evaluation of the worthwhileness of their parents in spite of their humble origin, lowly occupation, and the social status they occupied in American life." He also saw the study of Italian for the second- and third-generation Italian American school children as a way of giving them "a sense of responsibility toward their people . . . [and] the feeling that it was their right . . . to participate in the large American life." (Ninety percent of DeWitt Clinton's students who took Italian were of Italian heritage.[47]) Similarly, he insisted that the Italian American communities (which he described as "an agglomeration of numerous disjointed groupings")[48] could only be united if both English and Italian were accepted.

Like the other cultural pluralists, and especially the most prominent advocate for and author about the immigrants, Louis Adamic, Covello viewed the retention of the language and culture of origin as solidifying the immigrant community but also providing them with the basis for a more authentic and energetic involvement in the general society.[49] To advance this larger goal, Covello stressed the importance of maintaining and teaching the Italian language. Covello insisted that Americanization did great harm to the immigrants and their children. For Covello, language transmittal had to do primarily with family and community unity. He asked, "How can the conflicts within the foreign-born home be adjusted, if no medium exists through which the various members of the family can arrive at an understanding of one another's viewpoint and purposes?"[50]

In 1934, when presenting the resolution for the opening of Benjamin Franklin High School, John Tindsley, the acting associate superintendent in charge of New York City's high schools, stated:

> [Benjamin Franklin High School] is to be a great social center, open days and evenings for boys and adults, to meet as many needs of the community as it can. . . . It should bring about the closest cooperation with [social agencies in East Harlem, such as] the Heckscher Foundation, the Boys' Club, Harlem House, Union Settlement. . . . This school is to be a fluid, experimental school and must have its entire personnel saturated with the spirit of experimentation.[51]

Under Covello's leadership, Benjamin Franklin became an academic high school for boys that surpassed these expectations.[52] At Benjamin Franklin community centered education meant new curricula and activities (such as assemblies and student clubs) that reflected a "reciprocal relationship between the good things in both foreign and native cultures." As he saw it:

> The enriching elements of all original cultural heritages can be blended and added to the American culture. [Among the students] a sense of pride must be developed both for the native heritage and in relation to the American heritage.[53]

Benjamin Franklin was located in the center of Italian Harlem, which was located in the eastern half of East Harlem. This district (bounded on the East River, Central Park, East 96th Street and East 125th Street) was an ideal community for the implementation of community-centered education. In 1930, its population consisted of: 13 percent African-Americans, 6 percent Puerto Ricans, 36 percent native white of foreign parents, and 37 percent foreign-born; only 9 percent of its population was native white of native parents — served as an ideal laboratory for his work. Covello gained the opportunity to implement large parts of his educational philosophy when in 1934 he was appointed founding principal of Benjamin Franklin High School, situated in the heart of Italian Harlem. During the decade of the thirties, Italian Harlem, which housed 90,000 first- and second-generation Italian Americans, was the largest and most Italian of all the Little Italies in the United States.[54]

As an immigrant who grew up in Italian Harlem, where he arrived when he was nine, and attended its public schools, Covello's lifetime devotion to the Italian American community, within which he lived until the mid-1960s, left him with a sternly sympathetic perspective toward his fellow Italian im-

migrants, their children, and grandchildren. His writing as well as his efforts at Benjamin Franklin High School focused on remedying what he saw as the negative side of the Italian American community, viz., its fragmented social infrastructure and political passivity, along with its opposition to extended education. Covello proposed the mobilization of the community to resolve community problems and an approach to education that honored the Italian language and culture, while integrating the community into the project of building a more democratic United States. Covello saw that the fate of the Italian community depended on collective action. In Italian Harlem, Covello integrated Benjamin Franklin into a coalition that led two spectacularly successful community campaigns, which resulted in significant community uplift — the founding of Benjamin Franklin High School in 1934 (and a subsequent campaign for the construction of an edifice specifically situated and designed to house this special institution), and the construction of the East River Houses, a public housing project, which in 1938 made available 1,800 modern apartments, in a parksetting, facing the East River.[55] Covello's insistence on the school's responsibility to help activate the community on its own behalf and to promote the students' knowledge of Italian language and culture are aspects of his thinking most relevant to the quest for a larger explanation of the course of the history of Italian Americans.

Italian American organizations and their spokespersons have often measured Italian Americans' success by the degree of their assimilation. Covello proposed more lofty criteria than increased income levels, professional status, acquisition of college degrees, and the pious denunciation of organized criminal activity. In 1939, in addressing the members of the Italian Teachers Association, Covello declared:

> None of us can escape the obligation that rests upon us for broader service. . . . We belong to the Italo-American communities founded by our fathers and mothers and these communities belong to us. . . . It is to us that that our Italian-American people must look for help in solving the many problems. These crowded communities, are seeking the path of progress . . . They demand action from us. . . .[56]

In concurrence with other cultural pluralists, Covello believed all cultural minority groups needed what the radical essayist Randolph Bourne called "co-operative Americanism." In this scenario, all of the country's nationalities were free simultaneously to maintain "distinct cultural allegiances" and "common political allegiance and common social ends."[57] Covello assumed that Italian Americans constituted a "cultural minority."

They had a culture and practices substantially in variance from the dominant Anglo-Saxon majority. Covello used the term "assimilation" in a sense that would have allowed for indefinite cultural retention. In 1939, he wrote:

> a true assimilation means absorption of the foreign groups without destruction of their fundamental characteristics and without the obliteration of an understandable pride in the fine things that come to them from the past history of their races and nations . . . . Uniformity is not desirable. The very differences that characterize the immigrant groups are important to America.[58]

Covello's theoretical and practical work were directed toward promoting a democratic ethos celebrating a pluralistic America.[59]

Covello is, I believe, the most important figure of the Italian American experience. Covello cannot be pigeonholed. He was an educational theorist/practitioner, a social scientist, social psychologist, sociologist, social historian, and a social activist. His assumptions about the Italian American community were based on a vision of a future where Italian Americans would be part of a cultural pluralist United States. In a singular and consistent way, Covello suggested an alternate vision of the course of the Italian American experience. To the inexorable, and deplorable, prospect of the demise of the Italian American community as a consequence of Americanization, viz., assimilation, Covello proposed cultural pluralism, which represented an alternative vision of how Italian American and other immigrant cultures could endure and flourish in their new homeland. The overarching view missing in the writings of others who have studied and published about Italian Americans can be found in the work of Leonard Covello, the Renaissance man of the Italian American experience. His legacy can greatly contribute to a more accurate interpretation of Italian American history and help set the course for its future.[60]

Conclusion

The Italian American experience is a story of great proportion and mythic qualities that honors all those who helped build its communities; it continues to inspire their descendents. Like all great historical movements, the mass migration of Italians to these shores and the communities the migrants constructed here are of great interest to all those attracted to humanity's best efforts. The Italian American immigrants found ways of overcoming and surpassing great obstacles in the quest for a more decent and hopeful existence. As admirable as is the production to date in Italian American Studies,

few would deny that it is paltry and cramped when compared to the subject it attempts to portray. This is especially notable when one considers the absence of one grand overview embracing this epic story — one that incorporates the sweep of its history. Prominent among those who have ventured to do part of this work are Rudolph Vecoli, who wrested the history of the Italian immigrants from a bland, homogenized mélange, and Donna Gabaccia, who synthesized social materials from the Old World with much from their new home to discover insights demanding out attention. Leonard Covello's vision of an Italian American community sustaining the essence of *italianità* while participating in a radically democratic project in the United States — especially because it was attached to a practical plan for its perpetuation — still deserves the most attention. If Covello's proposed intervention into the Italian American community represents a lost opportunity, then it is up to us, who work in the field of Italian American Studies, to explain how and why it was lost. If parts of Covello's view are still viable, then it is our responsibility to bring that to fruition. At the very least, Covello's legacy may be of greatest value to the communities of more recent immigration, So that they can guard against entering the twilight of ethnicity.

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[1] Rudolph Vecoli, "Contadini in Chicago: A Critique of *The Uprooted,*" *Journal of American History* 51 (1964); Donna Gabaccia, *From Sicily to Elizabeth Street: Housing and Social Change among Italian Immigrants, 1880–1930* (Albany, NY: SUNY P, 1984). Two outstanding works that similarly engage the underlying historiographical questions relating to their specific studies and the wider Italian American experience are: Robert Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880–1950* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1985); and Simone Cinotto, *Una famiglia che mangia insieme: cibo ed etnicità nella comunità italoamericano di New York, 1920–1940* (Turin, Italy: Otto editore, 2001).

[2] Leonard Covello, *The Social Background of the Italo-American School Child: A Study of the Southern Italian Mores and Their Effect on the School Situation in Italy and America* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 1969). The book was based on his doctoral dissertation awarded in 1944 by New York University in the field of Educational Sociology.

[3] Vecoli, "*Contadini* in Chicago" 404–17. Though not a prolific writer, Vecoli helped establish and broaden the field of Italian American studies by founding (along with Covello) and serving as the first president of the American Italian Historical Association (1966–1970) and later serving as the Director of the Immigration History Research Center at the University of Minnesota from 1967 to 2005.

[4] Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted: The Epic Story of the Great Migration That Made the American People* (New York: Grosset & Dunlop, 1951) 8–23.

[5] Gabaccia called them "agrotowns"; the *contadini* called them *paese.*

[6] Gabaccia, *From Sicily to Elizabeth Street* 13–14.

[7] Vecoli, "*Contadini* in Chicago" 404–05.

[8] Vecoli convincingly showed the enormous contrasts between the *contadini* and northern European peasants. Unfortunately, he made no mention of the similarities between the Russian peasants and the *contadini.* Both groups were immersed in a social framework that germinated in a precapitalist, pre-individualist psychosocial consciousness. The *contadini* owned some land on an individual basis, whereas among the Russian peasants the land was held communally by the *mir.* This led the Russian peasants to develop a very different ethos — one far more communal in attitude and consciousness — than the peasants in northern Europe.

[9] Veconi, "*Contadini* in Chicago" 407, 417.

[10] Handlin, *The Uprooted* 6.

[11] Vecoli, "*Contadini* in Chicago" 407–08, 410, 412–14, 416. Subsequent to the acceptance of Vecoli's dissertation, "Chicago's Italians Prior to World War I: A Study of Their Social and Economic Adjustments" (University of Wisconsin, 1963), he published a number of articles on this topic. Vecoli's focus (which he shared with Gabaccia and Covello) on the Little Italies is well placed. These communities were the greatest accomplishment of the Southern Italians in the United States. In the "Introduction" of *Adjusting Sites: New Essays in Italian American Studies,* its editors, William Boelhower and Rocco Pallone, define the Little Italies as "archival spaces in which '*tutto parle*': the streets, the buildings, the market stands, the statues of saints, the signs in the shop windows, people's dress. . . . [It is] a primal scene, a total social fact, where history and demography meet to fashion a cultural standpoint" (Stony Brook, NY: Filibrary, 1999) vii.

[12] Lizabeth Cohen, *Making the New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919–1939* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1990). Gabaccia, *From Sicily to Elizabeth Street* 105. The Jewish immigrants' greater degree of success in creating an organizational infrastructure than Italian Americans is best explained by its distinctive class structures. Few Jewish emigrants were strictly speaking peasants; predominantly artisans and petty businessmen; they were better equipped to quickly undertake these community-building projects. Hannah Loinger, ed., *Jewish Hometown Associations and Family Circles: The WPA Yiddish Writers' Group Study* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1992) 30; Gabaccia, *From Sicily to Elizabeth Street* 105.

[13] Gerald Meyer, *Vito Marcantonio: Radical Politician, 1902–1954* (Albany, NY: SUNY P, 1989) 114.

[14] At the time that Vecoli deposited the papers of the *Libero Pensiero* in the archives of the Immigrant History Research Center, he stated that these and other collections of materials from immigrant societies "personalize history and save it from abstraction, which broadening humanity." ("Rudolph Vecoli, Scholar of Immigration, Is Dead at 81," *New York Times* 23 June 1008). See also, Rudolph Vecoli, "The Making and Unmaking of the Italian American Working Class," *The Lost World of Italian American Radicalism: Politics, Labor, and Culture,* ed. Philip Cannistraro and Gerald Meyer (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003) 51–76.

[15] Donna Gabaccia, *Italy's Many Diasporas* (Seattle: U of Washington P, 2000) xii–xv.

[16] Gabaccia, *From Sicily to Elizabeth Street* 2, 16–22. Gabaccia is remiss in not crediting Covello for his ample (and highly effective) use of proverbs in "The Social Background of the Italo-American School Child." For example, when discussing the reluctance of Italian American parents to support their children's education, he cited this Southern Italian proverb: "Stupid and contemptible is he who makes his children better than himself" (407).

[17] Emelio Sereni, *Il capitalismo nelle campagne, 1860–1900* (Turin: Finaudi, 1968) 149.

[18] Gabaccia, *From Sicily to Elizabeth Street* 6, 8, 13, 14–15, 22–36, 55.

[19] Gabaccia, *From Sicily to Elizabeth Street* 23.

[20] Gabaccia, *From Sicily to Elizabeth Street* 12, 24, 13, 27, 32.

[21] Curiously, after mentioning that Sambuca boasted fifteen churches, Gabaccia omits any mention of the Catholic Church and its clergy either there or in Mulberry Street's Little Italy (*From Sicily to Elizabeth Street* 32, 40, 18, 42).

[22] Gabaccia, *From Sicily to Elizabeth Street* 54.

[23] Nancy Carnevale, *A New Language, A New World: Italian Immigrants in the United States, 1890–1945* (Chicago: U of Illinois P, 2009) 21–42.

[24] Gabaccia, *From Sicily to Elizabeth Street* 53, 16, 42, 68, 72–73.

[25] More recently, Cinotto's study of the food culture of Italian Harlem in the 1920s and 1930s, *Una famiglia che mangia insieme,* suggests a similar pattern: viz., typical Italian American food is a hybridized product, and does not exemplify the retention of Southern Italian food culture.

[26] Gabaccia, *From Sicily to Elizabeth Street* 5, 59–60.

[27] Covello, *The Social Background of the Italo-American School Child* 175. Vecoli concurred with Covello's assessment. In "*Contadini* in Chicago," he states, "The Italians were distinguished by their lack of philanthropic institutions" (414). The amoral familist paradigm has been accepted by social scientists sympathetic and unsympathetic to Southern Italians. Representative of the first group are: Covello, *The Social Background of the Italo-American School Child*; Carlo Levy, *Christ Stopped at Eboli* (New York: Time, 1964); and Elizabeth Yans-McLoughlin, *Family and Community: Italian Immigrants in Buffalo, 1889–1930* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1977). Edward Banfield's *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society* (New York: Free Press Paperback, 1958) is relentlessly hostile and condescending to the Southern Italian *contadini,* en masse.

[28] Gabaccia, *From Sicily to Elizabeth Street* xv–xvi, 7.

[29] Gabaccia, *From Sicily to Elizabeth Street* 50–51, 56.

[30] The Italians, 80 percent of whom came from Southern Italy, were likely the most proletarianized of the New Immigrants. The occupations of male Italian emigrants in 1910, for example, listed only 0.37 percent as "liberal professions," and only 10 percent as "artisans and manufacturing." Of those whose occupations were identified, nearly 90 percent were peasants or laborers. What distinguished the Italians from the German and Jewish immigrants was that the latter two nationalities included large numbers of skilled workers, many of whom were urban dwellers in their countries of

origin (*Bollettino dell'Emigrazione* 18 [1910]: Table 7, p. 20f).

[31] Mark Gelfand, "London, Meyer," *The Encyclopedia of the American Left,* 2nd ed., ed. Mari Jo Buhle, Paul Buhle, and Dean Georgakas (New York: Garland, 1998) 457–58; Cannistraro and Meyer, "Italian American Radicalism: An Interpretive History," *The Lost World of Italian American Radicalism* 8–25.

[32] Gabaccia later tackled some of these questions in *Militants and Migrants: Rural Sicilians Become American Workers* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1988).

[33] The three *Bulletins* that most influenced subsequent research are: William Sheed, *The Italian Population of New York City* (New York: Casa Italiana Educational Bureau, Columbia University, 1934); John D'Alesandre, *Occupational Trends in New York City, 1916–1931* (New York: Casa Italiana Educational Bureau, Columbia University, 1936); and, Leonard Covello, *Language Usage in Italian Families,* which was published in two parts in Atlantica (Oct. and Nov. 1934). Covello also authored *The Casa Italiana Educational Bureau — Its Purpose and Program* (1933) and *The Italians in America: A Brief Survey of a Sociological Research Program of Italo-American Communities with Population Maps and Tables* (1934).

[34] Francesco Cordasco, "Leonard Covello and the Casa Italiana Educational Bureau: A Note on the Beginnings of Systematic Italian American Studies," *Studies in Italian American Social History: Essays in Honor of Leonard Covello,* ed. Francesco Cordasco (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1975). See also, Robert Peebles, "Leonard Covello: A Study of an Immigrant's Contribution to New York City" (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1967) 332. Elsewhere Cordasco praised Covello as the one who "more than anyone else understood the need for he study of the Italian American experience" (*The Italian-American Experience: An Annotated and Classified Bibliographical Guide* [Manchester, NH: Ayer, 1974] xiv).

[35] At New York University, Covello taught "The Social Background of The Italian Family in America" and "School-Community Education" primarily to teachers matriculated in the Masters of Education degree program. His course lectures supplied much of the material for *The Social Background of the Italo-American School Child.* See Francesco Cordasco, "Urban Education: Leonard Covello and the Community School," *School & Society* (Summer 1970).

[36] Vecoli served as American Italian Historical Association's (AIHA) first president. Francesco Cordasco (1921–2001) was also conspicuous in the founding of the AIHA. Frank Cavaioli, in "The AIHA at the Millennium," in "The Rise of Italian Studies and the American Italian Historical Association," noted that "Americans of Italian descent became the last large group to organize a scholarly organization" (*Italian American Review* [Spring 1996] 7–8).

[37] For much of the period that he served as Benjamin Franklin's principal, Covello and Marcantonio lived in adjacent row houses on East 116th Street (Meyer, "Leonard Covello and Vito Marcantonio: A Lifetime of Collaboration for Progress," *Italica* [Spring 1985] 61).

[38] From his retirement in 1956 until 1968, Covello served as educational consultant to the Migration Division of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, where he applied the educational ideas and experience to meet the educational needs or Puerto Rican

school children. Covello served as a consultant for *The Puerto Rican Study: 1957–1958: A Report on the Education and Adjustment of Puerto Rican Pupils in the Public Schools of the City of New York,* Director J. Cayce Morrison, Intro. Francesco Cordasco (New York: Oriole, 1972) 253.

[39] Leonard Covello, *The Social Background of the Italo-American School Child.*

[40] Michael Johanek and John Puckett, *Leonard Covello and the Making of Benjamin Franklin High School: Education as if Citizenship Mattered* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple UP, 2007) 109–40.

[41] Leonard Covello, "Community Centered School," presented as part of his New York University course, "The Social Background of the Italian Family in America." Covello Collection: Box 19, Folder 13/19 (Citizenship). Henceforth, citations from the Covello Collection will appears as: CC: B, F (Subject). The Covello Collection, which is deposited in the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, in Philadelphia, consists of fifty-four linear feet of shelf space organized into 108 boxes that document Covello's lifelong work. The collection contains an extraordinarily wide range of material — including correspondence with family members and the most extensive collection of material about Italian Harlem.

[42] In 1931, only 11 percent of the Italian American students in the New York City public school system graduated from high school (Thomas Kessner, *The Golden Door: Italian and Jewish Mobility in New York City 1880–1915* [New York: Oxford UP, 1977] 96–97).

[43] Covello noted that while the Italian American school children initially identified with their Anglo-Saxon teachers, when they entered high school their loyalties tended to shift to their parents and communities (Covello, *The Social Background of the Italo-American School Child* 256–60).

[44] Covello extensively survey Benjamin Franklin's students and discovered a remarkable degree of retention of tradition Southern Italian mores among the boys. In some cases, third-generation boys showed higher degrees of retention than the second-generation boys. The up-tick in adherence to traditional Southern Italian mores among some third-generation Italian-American high school boys may have resulted from aspects of lower working class behavior (*The Social Background of the Italo-American School Child* 362, 364, 366–68, 370, 372–70, 377–79).

[45] Covello, "Community Centered School," CC: B19, F19/22 (Chap, XVI "Adult Ed."). DeWitt Clinton's Department of Italian was also the first high school department of Italian in the United States.

[46] Leonard Covello, President, "News from the Field," *The Italian Teachers Association: Eighteenth Annual Report, 1938–1939,* reprinted in *The Italian Community and Its Language in the United States: The Annual Reports of the Italian Teachers Association,* ed. Francesco Cordasco (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1975) 395.

[47] Peebles, *Leonard Covello: A Study of an Immigrant's Contribution to New York City* 144; Mario Cosenza, "Foreword," *First Book in Italian,* by Leonard Covello and Annita Giacobbe (New York: Macmillan, 1937) vii; Covello, "News from the Field," *The Italian Community and Its Language in the United States* 239.

[48] Covello, *The Casa Italiana Educational Bureau* 4–5.

[49] Meyer, "Cultural Pluralist Response to Americanization: Horace Kallen, Randolph Bourne, Louis Adamic, and Leonard Covello," *Socialism and Democracy* (Nov. 2008): 34-38.

[50] Leonard Covello, "Language as a Factor in Integration and Assimilation: The Role of the Language Teacher in a School-Community Program," *Modern Language Journal* (Feb. 1939): 330.

[51] Johanek and Puckett, *Leonard Covello and the Making of Benjamin Franklin High School* 109–226. What made possible the founding of a high school with such an advanced mission was the influence of two prominent progressive political leaders, both whom lived in East Harlem: Vito Marcantonio, the Congressman from the district for fourteen years between 1932 and 1950, and Fiorello La Guardia, who had been elected mayor in 1933, had represented the district in Congress from 1922 to 1932, and lived there until 1943.

[52] Until after World War II, New York City's academic high schools were segregated by sex. Although this was the practice of that time, Covello seemed oblivious to girl students and their outlook and needs. The title of *The Social Background of the Italo-American School Child* is, in fact, inaccurate because it almost exclusively discusses boys.

[53] Covello, "Community Centered School," CC: B19, F13/19 (Citizenship).

[54] Meyer, "Italian Harlem: America's Most Italian Little Italy," *The Italians of New York: Five Centuries of Struggle and Achievement* 57–68, ed. Philip Cannistraro (Milan: Mondadori, 1999); Covello, "Neighborhood Growth" 127. Covello was the first Italian American high school principal in the New York City public school system.

[55] Leonard Covello, "A Community Centered School and the Problem of Housing," *Educational Forum* (Jan. 1943): 93–133.

[56] Leonard Covello," "The Responsibility of the Community," *The Italian Community and Its Language in the United States* 372–74; Leonard Covello, "A Community-Centered School and the Problem of Housing," *Educational Forum* (Jan. 1943): 133–43.

[57] "The Jew and Trans-National America," qtd. in Bourne, "A War Diary," qtd. in Vaughan, *Randolph Bourne and the Politics of Cultural Radicalism* (Lawrence, KS: UP of Kansas, 1997) 124, 134.

[58] Covello, "Community Centered School," CC: B19, F13/19 (Citizenship). In *The Social Background of the Italo-American School Child,* Covello defined assimilation as, "the adjustment of the immigrants and their children to the American culture" (410).

[59] The results of Benjamin Franklin's ethos did not guarantee ideal intergroup relations. See Meyer, "When Sinatra Came to Italian Harlem: The 1945 'Race Riot' at Benjamin Franklin High School," *Are Italians White?: How Race Is Made in America,* ed. Jennifer Guglielmo and Salvatore Salerno (New York: Routledge, 2003) 161–76.

[60] Meyer, "Cultural Pluralist Response to Americanization" 19–51.

The Dog Catches His Tail: A Critical Reflection on the Value of an Italian American Identity in Personal Development

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Abstract: The method of Narrative Psychology is used to explore how the fragments of personal history we experience affect our overall psychological development that shapes our sense of identity. Theories of identity development are discussed focusing on racial and ethnic identity development as reflected in the experience of Italian Americans. This is an essential first step in coming to understand how a positive self identity comes to be formed in the individual that includes acknowledgment of the influence as well as importance of racial and ethnic identity within that structure.

Becoming Italian American

There were five DeMarco children — descendents of Marco Polo, or so I was told. The oldest, my *Zia* Nancy, or Titsie as we call her, would regale my generation with stories from the family saga with mother chiming in to add an embellishment or two. What was rather odd is that we did not hear the most illustratively Italian of these tales until we were young adults. At first, the stories were standard childhood reminiscences about going to school, friends in their Westside of Manhattan neighborhood, with no particular ethnic slant. The sensibility in the family was that we should leave the quaint ethnic origins behind and become Americans — no hyphens. This meant English only and all the romantic foolishness from the past was kept at a distance. So except for the lasagna at Thanksgiving or the occasional *va fa Napoli* (pronounced "a fa na ba la") when Nona spilled something in the kitchen, my brother and I were not especially aware of our Italian heritage. There was a sense of an immigrant past, but it was amorphous. My father's family did not provide any background either because by the time we came along my paternal older cousins were well assimilated. Nona DeMarco did try to tell us stories about her upbringing in Italy, stories about characters like "Cheech, Chacub, and Nazzicaca" the nemeses of her

youth, but everyone would laugh off her recollections as a fancy of aging, so we kids never took this seriously. It was only much later that I realized that these were real names of real people: Chic, Jacob and Nebuchadnezzar.

It was not until college in a course called "The Italian-American Experience" with Professor Frank Cavaioli that I received the proverbial wake up call! I had no idea that I had so much for which to be proud. The Renaissance, John Cabot, *parmigiano-reggiano,* Puccini, and, oh yes, Sophia and Marcello. It was an awe-inspiring moment to suddenly understand my personal connection to a dazzling cultural past that was part of my heritage. So, I began to ask Titsie about our family as an *Italian* family.

The most exciting of these stories were the ones about the pilgrimages to the annual feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel held at the church of the same name in East Harlem. My youngest uncle was a sickly child and each year in the sweltering heat of July in New York, Nona would drag him and one of the older children with her to make the journey from West End Avenue at 69th Street to the church on 115th Street off First Avenue to pray for uncle's recovery. This was quite a trek in the 1930s via trolley and subway and foot. When the stories were first told, I did not really take them all that seriously. People walking barefoot from Brooklyn? Two-hundred pound candles? Wax carvings representing ailing body parts? Exciting, yes; truthful, please!

As part of my professional work, I have come to actively nurture my Italian consciousness while studying Americans of Italian descent. Despite my initial incredulity, I discovered through my research that all these seemingly absurd details were precise. There it is in *The New York Times* right down to the waxen hearts and kidneys. The candles were left at the church as thank-offerings; and every story mentions people walking bare footed from their homes to the church. In 1933, the story about the feast is just a scant paragraph describing how pilgrims journeyed to East Harlem to attend mass and seek cures, to seek miracles. By 1936, the story, with a larger by-line, expands to include greater detail and even pictures. Now the purpose of the feast is elucidated. The "Madonna of Miracles" is extolled as the benefactor "to whom supplicants appeal for relief from illness and infirmities" ("Little Italy"). Through time a simple, and somewhat primitive, religious feast became what we know today in Italian communities from Sydney to Sacramento as the *festa.* Today you are not likely to see waxen body organs, but the candles persist as does the *giglio* to honor the patron saint of each particular feast. In a similar fashion to the way Americans of Italian descent have assimilated, there tends to be a more generic atmosphere at each *festa.* If you do not go to mass or do not see the procession of the towering *giglio* as it wends its way from the church through the local streets, you would have no

idea whether you were at an Italian festival or a commonplace street fair. They all seem to have the same vendors with the same bundles of socks. The sizzling sausage, onions, and peppers that was once newsworthy for their uniqueness is now a staple side by side with the gyros and pad Thai. At Our Lady of Mount Carmel, the *giglio* is nowhere to be seen because there is a separate Dance of the *Giglio* Festival held in September even though Our Lady's feast day is July 10th. This is because the dancing *giglio* guys are booked in July.[1]

The matter of assimilation among Italian Americans has been explored since at least the 1960s. While the question of whether or not Italian Americans, or any hyphenated Americans can or have fully assimilated is a debatable one. At the same time there has been a general cultural assimilation, acceptance if you will, for things Italian. Armani and Prada can be found in any cookie-cutter mall or on eBay. Where once you had to mail order for genuine semolina pasta from Italy, now multiple brands are available in every supermarket with the imprimatur of the Italian government, DOP, Degree of Protection, *Denominazione d'Origine Protetta.* Other grocery items that were once abhorrent to American tastes are now touted for their health benefits. Just add some garlic and red table wine to live *per cent'anni,* for a hundred years. I have to laugh at the thought of someone needing to go on the "Mediterranean" diet. Unfortunately, this melding of cultures has also spawned Domino's and Pizza Hut. It has a crust and sauce and cheese, but it is not *a pizz'.* This can happen because as in my own family, the names and associations are Italian, but the mindset is American. We reach for the past, the way you reach for the anisette. It is nice to have the bottle on the table, but the espresso is fine without it and the double mocha skim decaf latte does not need it.

The loss of ethnic identity is most profound in the next generation of the family. My children and my nephew are even further removed from an Italian past. The lasagna at Thanksgiving was long ago replaced by wild mushroom soup. Their next generation Italian grandmothers do not even speak Italian, while the other *nonas* are now *bubbe* and *omah.* The structure of American life created separations too so that interaction with any family members who maintain the traditions of an Italian heritage is limited. It was paradoxical when my nephew was debating college majors that one of the choices was Italian. How did that happen? Could there be a genetic marker? Even though he chose history, it remains that my fourth generation nephew has a better command of the Italian language than anyone in the second or third generations.

Then when my nephew moved to East Harlem just a few blocks from

that legendary Church, all of my personal memories flooded back. It started with the address. When I heard "227 East 116th Street," it sounded familiar. Why? Despite having worked at and attended Columbia University at West 116th Street, I cannot say that I ever walked the length of 116th broken up as it is by Morningside Park. Why was a number on the Eastside familiar to me? And then I recalled and checked the reference. Leonard Covello, the educator and community activist, had lived at 229 East116th Street right next door to Vito Marcantonio, the congressman and labor leader. LaGuardia Corsi House that honors East Harlem's most famous son is at 307 East 116th.

In my research about educational attainment among Americans of Italian descent, I often cite Covello. Somewhere in the ferreting out of information about him, I must have seen the address, perhaps even a picture of the building, where, incidentally, there is no plaque to acknowledge this historical landmark. What an irony this seemed. My nephew who knew virtually nothing about the Italian side of his heritage was living in the midst of the buildings where the raising of an Italian ethnic consciousness practically began. I made it my responsibility to sort out this blunder. First there was the article I passed along about the Dance of the *Giglio* Festival — he had a great time. Then there were the casual conversations about some of the more colorful relatives in our family tree — he could not get over seeing cousin Moochie's bar in *The French Connection.* Oh, and what about the breaded zucchini flowers cooked gently in olive oil — he thought they were delicious.

Ethnicity as a Source of Identity

My family experience is not unique and to a developmental psychologist, this reminiscence of *storge,* familial affection, leads one to the matter of whether ethnic identity is a valued or needed component of personal identity development. As noted, fine espresso is just as good, if not better, without the anisette. While it is generally accepted that the individual must develop a sense of personal identity as a prolegomenon to the trajectory of overall individual development (see Erik Erikson; James Marcia, 1980; and Alan S. Waterman), the specifics of what leads to this development in the context of race and ethnicity is still not clear when looking at specific ethnic subgroups. Erik Erikson established identity as the psychosocial accomplishment of adolescence, and, although Henri Tajfel and John Turner argued that identity development as filtered through a social group identity perspective can have negative effects if that group is devalued in the majority culture, later research does not support this assertion. In general, the effort to link the level of negative societal regard toward any specific ethnic group with aspects of the individual's internalized self-evaluation for traits

such as self-esteem are not supported (Twenge and Crocker 371). A difficulty in counseling and educational settings, for example, is the widely held, yet false, belief that encountering racial or cultural insensitivity leads to a lowered sense of self-esteem. There are various levels of difficulty with this premise. An exploration of the current research programs and the problems within research designs indicates that much of the work in this area is cross-sectional rather than longitudinal, and, late adolescence is the focus rather than early to middle adolescence (French, Seidman, Allen, and Aber 1). Indeed, a special issue of the *Journal of Counseling Psychology* was published in 2007 citing "the need for a scholarly dialogue among leading researchers to help clarify . . . issues and provide guidance to a new generation of multicultural researchers" (Ponterotto and Mallinckrodt 219). There is additionally the failure to parse ethnicity so that distinctions are made among them, so that one understands that the category White is a broad one that encompasses divergent experiences. The variables have proven to be much more complex that first imagined. In my own work, I have cited the negative effects of societal structures as they interact with ethnic variables; specifically the impact of the American Roman Catholic Church in the lives of Italian Americans (Chirico 525), but I have not looked at whether there are benefits to identity development of having a specific internalized Italian American identity. The matter becomes more convoluted when the literature is thoroughly examined because different ethnic/racial groups seem to respond differently to the perceived majority culture. Whether having defining racial and ethnic identities is a benefit to the process of actualization is central in identity research as the negative connotations regarding maintaining one's ethnic mores has dissipated. The concept that assimilation precludes maintaining ethnic ties is out of date.

The two major competing theories that attempt to explain how ethnicity and identity interact are Social Identity Theory and Multicultural Theory. Social Identity Theory argues that as the individual comes to identify more strongly with his own group, the less favorably the individual comes to view other groups (Tajfel and Turner 94). In social psychology this phenomenon has been studied under the rubrics of us/them or the in-group/out-group experience. These studies generally indicate that being among the in-group creates an unfavorable attitude or prejudice toward anyone outside the group. Researchers have used myriad in-group/out-group contrivances ranging from serious issues such as White vs. Black racial divisions to those that may at first seem trivial (Divine 5; Dudley and Mulvey 143).

Yet, the racial barrier breaks down for example when the seemingly banal categories change such as is the case with fanship in sports. Race is

not the divisive element between the Seattle Seahawks and New England Patriots fan. To the Seattle fan, the Patriots fan is not just different, she is the enemy and she is a greater enemy depending on whether "my" team wins or loses (Wann and Grieve 531). In the Social Identity Theory having a strong Italian American identity would interfere with a person's ability to assimilate or achieve in ways that are accepted in the out-group culture but seen as negative within Italian American culture and personal failures heighten the sense of differentiation. On a mundane level this is a way to understand the ignominy one is made to feel when you proudly tell your family that you tried and enjoyed Pizza Hut. More importantly, it accounts for the unwillingness of an individual to make an attempt at something where there is a personal history of "losing." The difficulty is when the aversion becomes so strong that it prevents the individual from exploring the mainstream culture that may limit personal development and achievement. This becomes a way to explain why a young person brought up with condemnation of the out-group limits interacting with it and taking advantage of what the out-group culture has to offer. It is not uncommon, for example, to meet individuals living in ethnic neighborhoods who would never dream of living anywhere else, or why these ethnic enclaves are recreated when retirement communities elsewhere are constructed. One sees in the latter a similar pattern to ones found in initial immigration patterns to the United States. Just as Italian immigrants of the early twentieth century found their way to a Little Italy in New York or San Francisco, second- and third-generation Italian Americans found their way to Coral Cables or Venice, Florida. The Italian American Club of Venice, for example, hosts a major *festa* each February. When you look at the photographs of the *festa* it should come as no surprise that the sausage and peppers booth is right where it should be next to "Tony's Gyros."[2] The attachment to the "old neighborhood" is so strong that changes in community demographics do not alter the positive feeling of the person toward the neighborhood (Greif 27).

In contrast, Multicultural Theory argues that having strong in-group identification and by implication a secure sense of ethnic identity allows the individual to display greater tolerance for the out-group (Berry 11; Helms 153). There is no need here to berate the out-group; it is seen as merely different, not objectionable. In this model having a strong Italian American identity allows a person to explore alternative ways to assimilate or achieve from those particular to the in-group because these would not be seen as repellant or being at odds with Italian American culture per se. One can then accept being Italian American as part of a personal identity that includes other di-

mensions as opposed to claiming to be solely Italian American on the basis of what the in-group deems acceptable. This individual is able to live outside the "old neighborhood" and not feel that doing so threatens personal identity; be Italian American and be part of mainstream society simultaneously. This perspective validates the developmental theory of Erikson who argues that this confidence of personal identity first achieved during adolescence through early young adulthood is necessary to furthering identity development through adulthood. In Erikson's psychosocial system, the positive resolution of each stage of development is marked by the acquisition of a particular ego virtue or ego strength that is necessary for the individual to move into the subsequent stage. The ego strength that culminates the identity formation stage of adolescence is fidelity and is defined as "the ability to sustain loyalties freely pledged in spite of the inevitable contradictions of the value systems" (Erikson 125). Fidelity gives individuals the wherewithal to become or remain friends with those whose values and beliefs differ from their own. Given the security of personal beliefs in these individuals, there is no perceived threat from those ideas that are at variance, so moving freely beyond the in-group becomes possible. The fear associated with teenagers associating with friends who may be "bad influences" is common among parents. The fear is not unjustified given that the adolescent has yet to complete the process of identity formation through the requisite identity crisis, but the fear can just as readily create a wariness of the out-group as described in Social Identity Theory.

The Amish and Hasidic communities illustrate the strategy that separation will preserve community ideals and attitudes. In American society at large, it is exceedingly difficult to keep young people away from cultural influences that caregivers may deem inappropriate or detrimental. When the adolescent is not able to work through the identity crisis, one unwanted outcome is what Marcia describes as identity foreclosure. In this case, adolescents fail to work through the identity crisis and instead assume the values and beliefs of others in their sphere of influence (Marcia 551). Rather than forging their own path, these young people follow the direction set by others. When this happens, further development is stifled and the consequences for later developmental crises are dire. With respect to present discussion, there is a further pulling back from outside influences that might upend a shaky sense of self and leading to the nonthreatening choice of remaining within the in-group.

Jean Phinney, using Erikson and Marcia as her foundation, developed a stage model for ethnic identity development combining the ideas of exploration and commitment (Phinney 143).

> Exploration represents the extent to which adolescents seek out the content (language, cultural practices, beliefs) of their ethnic heritage as well as the significance of that ethnic information for their personal identity. Commitment embodies how strongly an adolescent embraces and values ethnicity as a part of personal identity. (Wakefield and Hudley 148)

The path of ethnic identity follows the one theorized by Erikson for ego identity that includes a search that can ultimately lead to identity achievement which in this model means ethnic identity achievement. While there is some support for a developmental stage model of ethnic identity, it has mostly been used to study the "major" minorities. So again the all-embracing category is "White" rather than using individual European sub-groups.

A reason that the debate between Social Identity Theory and Multicultural Theory continues is because neither succeeds as a universal model; and because much depends on which ethnic/racial groups are being evaluated. This is especially true for the attitudes displayed when only breaking down the groups as "White" versus those that are "non-White." Considering yourself non-White engenders different attitudes than when you see yourself as White (Phinney 143). Therein lies the conundrum for Italian Americans as they are being discussed and evaluated in the social sciences: Are we to be seen as White or non-White? As stated above, little research has been done to explore the subgroups for the category White as it applies to European ancestry. It is typical in research that all are considered as one. Yet, anyone living in a multiethnic environment understands that Italian Americans are different from Greek Americans who are different from Irish Americans, and so on. It makes as little sense to lump all Blacks together, yet this is done too although to a lesser extent and with a broader literature against presenting a single classification. As K. Anthony Appiah has written, " If we follow the badge of color from "African" to "Negro" to "Colored Race" to "Black" to Afro-American" to "African-American" (and this ignores such fascinating detours as the route by way of "Afro-Saxon"), we are thus tracing the history of not only a signifier, a label, but also of the history of its effects" (68). The effects of color are widely examined, but the effects specific to ethnic identity in Blacks or Whites is rarely the focus. A distinction is made between the two and it is acknowledged that both are important in the developing adolescent. Racial identity is a socially constructed phenomenon "defined largely by physical differences" whereas ethnic identity is determined through "self-identified affiliation" (Wakefield and Hudley 148). The former is predetermined for you largely based on how you look while the latter is a choice of your making. While there is certainly an interaction between race and eth-

nicity, race is more evidently predetermined because if you are Black or White, others will make immediate judgments on seeing the color of your skin. Although attitudes towards ethnic groups are also preconceptions, ethnicity is not readily apparent, so self-identification is required. Since ethnic identity derives from familial rather than societal influences, a person of mixed ethnicity, say Irish and Italian, will literally choose whether she will identity as Irish, Italian or both. The prejudices encountered depend on that stated identification.

It is this aspect of development that explains why my, in my own family, we did not actively follow Italian American folkways since many of the stereotypic ones were purposely withheld including speaking Italian. Given what is known about how a person comes to develop a personal identity it is clear that where the expression of ethnicity is diminished within the family, young people will end up using other means such as the families of friends or media sources like films, television shows or music videos for cues to establish ethnic identity. This is one reason why either Michael Corleone or Tony Soprano become role models. It is equally clear that the models need not be of the same ethnicity as the young person which accounts for the various "wannabe'" types. When figures from popular culture become the models, racial boundaries are crossed too. Thus accounting for White kids emulating rappers in addition to Black kids trying on the "wise guy" role.

The Value of an Italian American Identity

There is still a missing element in this analysis. Neither Social Identity Theory nor Multicultural Theory offers an explanation for why a person comes to devalue his ethnic group of origin. One response to establishing an ethnic identity is through insulating oneself from the out-group, a second alternative is developing a security in ethnic identity that leaves one free to mingle with the out-group. Neither approach addresses the question: Why do some people choose to disassociate themselves from being considered Italian American? Generally, when a person manifests self-hatred for aspects of personal identity, this is seen as the result of oppression from the outside. Hence the two groups for which there is a literature about externally motivated self-hatred are Blacks and Jews (Wester, Vogel, Meifen, and McLain provide an example among Blacks; and, Rosenwasser provides an example among Jews). In coming to understand how ethnic identity contributes to the development of overall identity, one must evaluate the reasons for distancing oneself from personal ethnicity in this context where there is no history of systematic oppression from the external sphere. Here,

instead the in-group is the negative, oppressive force. A possible explanation for self-hatred in the Italian American community is the deeper held belief that being Italian American is akin to being non-White and hence a greater barrier to assimilation is presented. Certainly, Sicilian immigrants were regularly treated as non-white when they first arrived in the United States. The public record indicates that at least 29 Sicilian immigrants were executed by southern lynch mobs in the late nineteenth into early twentieth centuries (Webb 45). While the story and lynching, in 1915, of the unjustly accused Leo Frank has generated multiple books, scholarly articles, films, a made-for-television movie and two Broadway productions including a musical, relatively little attention has been given the lynching of Italians including the most notorious case in New Orleans where 11 Italian immigrants were lynched.[3]

A positive intermingling of Blacks and Italian immigrants can be seen in the rise of jazz as musical form. Given their sense of being among the outsiders, it is not surprising to see a smattering of Italian names among early jazz artists especially in New Orleans which is usually acknowledged as the cradle of jazz. New Orleans has had a significant Italian subculture since before the Civil War. The sons of Sicilian immigrants, Nick LaRocca, and Tony Sbarbaro, for example played in the Original Dixie Land Band (ODJB) that is credited with the first commercial jazz recording. As Carney notes, "Not the most technically proficient white band, nor the most original, the ODJB nevertheless brought New Orleans jazz music to an audience heretofore foreign to this style of music: white, urban, college kids" (308).

The controversy of White or non-White definitions has not been resolved by the Italian American community at large, but this is true for numerous issues that come to effect a sense of group cohesion. The conflict surrounding the way Italian American should be written demonstrates the basic disagreements that need to be resolved.[4] The tensions that arise surrounding ethnic identity in the aggregate reflect upon development of the individual.

My observation is that just as the adolescent must first come to terms with personal identity before moving through adulthood, the Italian American community must establish a sense of group identity before it can have a fully embodied voice in American culture at large that goes beyond the frivolous. I do not assume that there will be solidarity in this identity; yet, there must be a concordat on matters of mutual interest. Nor is identity formation a swift developmental process as it can stretch for decades. As American culture changes in an often grimly ethnicized post 9/11 world, how can the Italian American community grow and at the same time main-

tain a voice across social, economic, and political domains if it remains unsophisticated? This is a dilemma that challenges any attempt to understand ethnic and racial identity in general as there are now different stakes involved. In the immediacy of September 11th, there was a sense that those events would create a unified country but instead it is no longer "us" and "them;" it has become "us," "them," and *them.* It is as though a third prong has been added to Social Identity Theory so there is now and in-group, an out-group and an abhorrent group. It may be that the in-group offers a greater appeal than ever since it can now serve not only as insulation against change, but protection from personal harm.

It is within this context that the social sciences must now maneuver. As I peruse the current psychology literature, what I see in addition to ever-increasing specialization is a shift away from the grand issues even within a specialized field. It may have been an error to assume that there is a universal theory of identity formation, but it is equally disheartening to assume that even if matters of race, ethnicity, racial identity and ethnic identity are socially constructed that there are no unifying principles whatsoever. In support of Erikson, for example, it has been found that exploring racial and ethnic identity roles is part of the normative process of identity formation (Quintana, "Development" 27). It is often disconcerting for parents when emerging teenagers go through this needed role-playing stage, but it is vital that this process occurs or the consequence is one of several negative identity outcomes. It is therefore necessary to see the importance of Fred Gardaphè's *From Wiseguys to Wise Men* in this regard so that we understand in order to eventually be a "wise man," one must first experiment with being a "wiseguy." Instead of using what is known about identity experimentation to foster development, there is tendency to concede to the pressures of cultural relativism and accept the experimentation as the final product. The concern should not be the process, but who the young person will emulate during the process. As numerous studies have concluded, in order for parental values to be internalized, "First, children must perceive the values their parents endorse" (Knafo and Schwartz 440). There are no guarantees that parental values will be preferred, but if there are no clearly defined racial or ethnic roles in the teenager's environment that teenager must look to other sources and the media is happy to provide ones that are usually linked to consumer spending.

So, in returning to the question of whether Italian Americans are seen as White or non-White, it should be clear that identifying with either group serves no purpose without exploring the salience of identification to individual development. In every group, the members are at different planes

of experience, but there must be acknowledgement that one does not simply stop changing and growing. I would argue that the remarkable interest in ethnic group nostalgia stems from the insecurities associated with the fear of moving beyond the present and change, perhaps actualize. The White versus non-White question inevitably frames the approach to formulating hypotheses and engaging in the needed research.

Where we stand as Italian Americans as a subject pool within psychology is in the shadow of the representative groups for Whites and non-Whites, that is, where research is driven with the view that northern European Protestants are White and African Americans are non-White. The research never works because the scene has *chioscuro* lighting, so the details are just beyond reach. There is a better understanding of the consequences related to negative experiences, but comparatively little that tells us about what sustains successful development. This question needs to be addressed taking into account the variables of race, ethnicity, and religion simultaneously. Where we choose to go will depend upon whether or not Italian American researchers can come to terms with the marginalized place of Italian Americans as a subject pool. This requires overcoming three faulty ideas. The first is that Italian Americans are a sub-group not worth individualized study because Italians are White and share the same social constructions of identity as all other White groups. A second is the worry that the aspects studied only serve to perpetuate stereotypes about Italian American, so looking at Italian American kids who adopt the wise guy persona may further encourage group stereotypes. A third has to do with the self-hatred within ethnic communities, so that studying Italian Americans means admitting that we are not part of the majority culture — that we are different. Yet, coming to understand the development of ethnic identity in Italian Americans is critical because when all is said:

> One of the clearest findings from research on the development of ethnic and racial identity confirms that ethnic identity has a positive relationship with self-esteem for adolescents from various racial and ethnic backgrounds. (Wakefield and Hudley 150)

I know that my personal family story is not tangibly different from other Italian families who once called East Harlem home, or who, like my family, saw it as the center of Italian life in New York. It is hard to imagine that as late as the 1950s, the Italian population in these few square blocks still numbered in excess of fifty thousand while now there are only a thou-

sand or so left who tick off Italian heritage on the national census. The tenements welcomed newer immigrants in our places while we grabbed up bits of land in Queens, or Long Island, or New Jersey to grow some tomatoes or a fig tree while we barbeque hot dogs, next to the sausage and peppers. Given how remote this chapter in the family narrative was to me, it is therefore unexpected for it all to feel so familiar, so authentic. What pleasure it has given me to now be the connection to the family's lost past for my nephew. The tales have a new life in a new generation that can embrace them without any of the caveats that my generation had to endure about our ethnicity. My nephew speaks Italian, has studied classical Italian literature, and can make a creditable spaghetti Bolognese. What joy to go to the *festa* with my family and renew the spiritual bond by joining into the community again — knowing that even though we were away for so long, we are always welcomed.

In sum, what I argue is that there is a reason for the hyphens of ethnicity that my family once disparaged. The fragments of personal history that remain of what my family was before it became an "American" family add a bit of color to the national tapestry making it that much more beguiling for everyone. More critical is, that from the perspective of psychological development, the need to fully appreciate that how a positive identity comes to be formed in the individual requires understanding the place of racial and ethnic identity within that structure. In doing so, it is also essential in understanding that race and ethnicity are bound up together in ways not easily discerned. There is mounting evidence that race as a variable is no longer paramount. As Quintana has stated, "Instead, there appears to be no single racial ideology that provides adaptive advantages over other ideologies in all contexts — clearly, different ecological contexts require different racial identity ideologies and orientations" ("Racial" 259). This being the case, others including the American Anthropological Association, propose that race be excised as a category. In its report describing how data collection should be carried out for the 2010 United States Census, the Association recommends:

> the elimination of the term "race" . . . during the planning for the 2010 Census. During the past 50 years, "race" has been scientifically proven to not be a real, natural phenomenon. More specific, social categories such as "ethnicity" or "ethnic group" are more salient for scientific purposes and have fewer of the negative, racist connotations for which the concept of race was developed. (par. 40)

This makes critical coming to terms with how ethnicity is discussed, measured, and studied as psychologists and others try to formulate theories about furthering our understanding of personal identity and the status of ethnic identity. This is necessary in order to determine how ethnic identity contributes to the positive development of personal identity. In a heterogeneous society like the United States, ethnicity can no longer be viewed as exclusively a demographic or political controversy. Nor can differences in ethnicity be undervalued as citizens are misguidedly encouraged to assimilate into the American melting pot. If there is to be a fusion of cultures that can coexist in a way that serves each group and the country as a whole, then the needed hyphens of ethnicity must be part of the mix. It seems we are finally recognizing that personal identity is in part defined by ethnicity as it comes to us through our in-group and through the judgment of the out-group, making it one more defining element that must be considered. I grant that this view is influenced by the fact that I must admit that "Italian American" is not what I am — it is who I am to the core.

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[1] For further reading about the Italian *festa* and the history of the *giglio* see Bell; Robert Orsi; and Stephanie Trudeau.

[2] For photographs of the Italian festival sponsored by the Italian Club of Venice, Florida, go to their website.

[3] Leo Frank was finally pardoned in 1986 by the Georgia State Board of Pardons and Paroles, who did not concede his innocence merely that the state did not live up to its promise to protect Frank while in custody. No such pardons were ever given Italian immigrants. For an account of the most notorious of these cases, see Tom Smith.

[4] Anthony Julian Tamburri has written extensively about the use of the hyphen and suggests instead using a slash instead (Italian/American) thereby "closing the ideological gap" created when the hyphen physically separates the Italian from the American.

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Re-interpreting Italian-American Politics: The Role of Ethnicity*

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Abstract: Does Italian-American "ethnic politics" exist at all? In other words, How do Italian-American politicians get themselves elected? To what extent do they try to influence the Italian-American electorate to vote on the basis of their ethnic identity? In order to answer these questions I approach Ethnic Politics within the context of alternative competing models: Local Politics, where the vote is acquired through patronage and clientelism; Issue Politics, where the vote is traded in the global market of opinions and policy preferences; and Party Politics, which encourages voters to align on the basis of partisan cleavages. Based on a series of in-depth interviews with New York State legislators of Italian descent, the study concludes that, although they may have subjective sensibilities that make them more or less receptive to the ethnic factor, Italian-American politicians tend to consider their options pragmatically — their primary goal being not that of fostering ethnic identity per se, but rather the more mundane one of gaining and consolidating power.

They say, "All politics in New York is ethnic politics," and I subscribe to it. . . . That crosses all party lines.
— Senator Serphin Maltese (1988–2008)

They are Republicans, we are Democrats. Whether you're Irish, Jewish or Italian makes no difference. It's party politics.
— Senator George Onorato (1983-2010)

Italian Americans have assimilated, they have matured, and so they don't vote as a block.
— Senator Frank Padavan (1973-2010)

You have to adapt. Each ethnic community is different, each has its own distinct needs, each family has its own distinct needs. And you have got to address them all, you cannot just address some and not the others.
— Senator Joseph Addabbo, Jr. (2008-present)

Does Italian-American "Ethnic Politics" Exist at All?

"Italian-American politics" is a deserted research field in the US — let alone in Italy. In particular, studies in political science are rare, usually outdated, and seldom appear in mainstream academic journals.[1] One reason for this may lie in the common perception that American citizens of Italian descent (a population of 16 million)[2] do not vote as an "ethnic block." Data gathered by NORC (National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago) show that their loyalties are split along party lines and that they are divided on social issues.[3] Because their vote is not deliverable as a block, Italian Americans are often deemed irrelevant, both as a collective political actor and as an object of political analysis.

The most common interpretations of this phenomenon come from two opposing fields, *traditionalists* and *modernists.* The former assume that Italian Americans share values and interests that could be better represented if they formed an electoral coalition and voted into office candidates "of their own breed." Confronting the fact that Italian Americans voters do not seem to behave this way, they lament their waning ethnic identity as the cause of their declining political power. But rather than promoting serious studies of whether, to what extent, and why this may be the case, traditionalists content themselves with articulating a bipartisan, a-political rhetoric of ethnic pride that downplays internal group differences in the wishful attempt to revive the long dead Italian-American voting block.

Modernists see the same phenomenon from the opposite angle. They assume that Italian Americans have assimilated and therefore have no incentive to vote "as Italian Americans." Individual interests, policy preferences, and party loyalties naturally prevail over ethnic identity, splitting the group at the ballot box. Modernists also see assimilation as a fact of life that does not need further study or explanation, but what is a nightmare for the traditionalists to them is an indication of the maturity of the Italian-American community, a sign indeed of its passage into modernity.

Yet these contrasting visions have more in common than it first appears: they both focus on voting behavior as if it were the very essence of politics and a dependent variable of socio-cultural evolution. On this assumption, the process of assimilation causes the declining influence of the ethnic factor among Italian-American voters, and this slowly drives the group into political irrelevance; eventually any form of Italian-American ethnic politics worthy of investigation disappears.[4] Things, however, would not appear to be so simple. We have indeed no conclusive evidence that ethnicity has no influence on the Italian-American vote. On the contrary, in several cases one can observe that the larger the population of Italian descent in a district, the more

likely it is that the elected officials are of Italian descent. Although statistics is no explanation, the correlation is at least worth noting.[5]

But things become even more interesting if we abandon the bottom-up, society-centered theory on voting behavior, and look at our problem from a politics-centered, top-down perspective. I would submit that, however Italian Americans vote, the patterns are less due to the deterministic influence of socio-cultural factors than to the creative influence of the politicians who canvass their vote.[6] Politics, in other words, can be seen as a supply-dominated market in which the options available to voters are manipulated by parties and candidates according to their perceived utility. Successful politicians, of course, do take into account voters' preferences and attitudes, but they also mold them to fit their own strategies and resources. "When we say that the voters 'choose' their representatives," wrote Italian political scientist Gaetano Mosca over a century ago, "we are using a language that is very inexact. The truth is that the representative has himself elected by voters."[7] Following Mosca, the research questions I therefore propose to address in this essay are: How do Italian-American politicians get themselves elected? To what extent do they pursue an "ethnic politics" strategy in order to acquire and maintain their constituents' support? Why do some of them do so while others do not? What other strategies compete with ethnic politics as means of vote mobilization and under what circumstances are they preferred by the candidates?

Ethnic Politics in Context

In order to answer the above questions we need to define "ethnic politics" vis-à-vis other basic types of politics. To this end, we shall briefly turn to classic political science theories for inspiration. According to a widely shared interpretation, political support may be of two types: *instrumental* (based on a rational calculation of gains and losses) and *affective* (rooted in emotional feelings and beliefs).[8] Proceeding in part from this assumption, decades of electoral studies have identified two broad typologies of voting behavior: one links the voters' choice to the candidates' ability to represent their interests, however defined; and the other sees voting behavior as originating from a stable sense of collective identification or "belonging." The first typology is explained by the economic or exchange theory of politics. It refers to situations in which the individual trades his or her vote for immediate material benefits, entering in a particularistic, patron-client relationship with a candidate (*exchange vote*), as well as cases in which return on the vote is conceptualized in terms of some general collective policy benefit which the voter will enjoy along with others who

share the same interests or, broadly speaking, the same opinions and positions (*issue vote*). The second typology views voting behavior as the product of a psychological attachment to a political entity and to the *weltanschauung* that it represents. Only one well-known case is normally considered here, namely that of party identification, whereby voters go to the polls not so much to choose between alternative candidates or policies, but rather to confirm their partisan loyalty. This type of attitude is found in specific subcultures, commonly defined in terms of classes and broad social strata, and has been dubbed the *belonging vote.*[9]

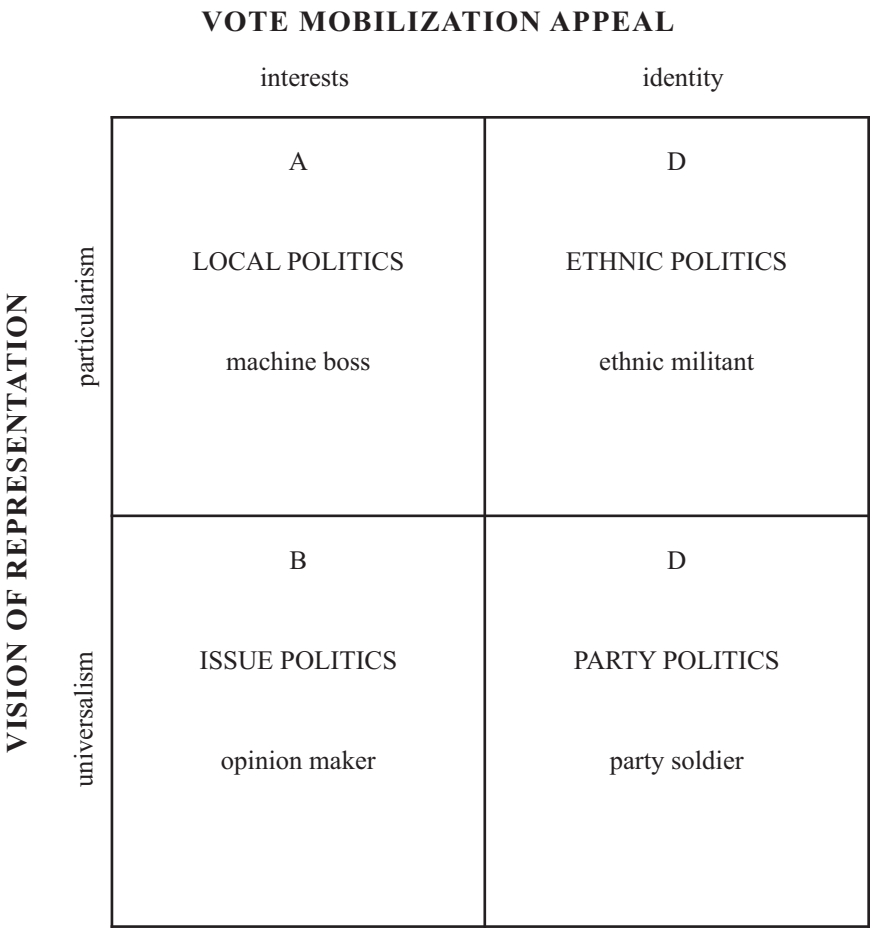
As it is readily apparent, in this tripartite typology there is little room for the "ethnic vote" *per se* — i.e., a vote cast on the basis of shared ethnic identity. Ethnic voting behavior may only emerge here from residual cases in which ethnic identity is absorbed into durable party identifications (as with the black vote, traditionally seen as *belonging* to the Democratic Party), or when ethnic groups temporarily align with candidates or parties that articulate issues meaningful to them. In short, the existence of a peculiarly "ethnic" approach to voting and politics is simply overlooked.

This gap may be filled by turning to the classic theory of representation that distinguishes between representation as "acting for" and as "standing for." The first type, which is compatible with the economic interpretation of politics, postulates that in order to create a representative nexus, an *action* of the representative in the interests of the represented is required. The second type of representation implies instead that the representative possesses specific *qualities* that are capable of producing a sense of symbolic identification on the part of the represented. The common example used to illustrate this case is that of "sociological" representation: the reflection within a representative body of the socio-demographic characteristics of a community such as race, ethnicity, or gender.[10] It is with reference to this concept of representation that a candidate can try to mobilize the *ethnic vote* as a specific type of behavior whereby ethnics vote for "their own people" regardless of other interests, opinions, or party loyalties.

In light of the foregoing, let us now switch from a worm's eye view (voting behavior) to a bird's eye view (strategies of voter mobilization) and identify two dimensions that describe how politicians may construct their constituency in order to gain its political support. On the one hand, there is the *appeal* they use to mobilize the vote: do they target the individual interests of the rational voter or do they appeal to collective, affective identifications? On the other hand, there is the *vision* of representation they articulate: do they frame their message in particularistic terms or do they adopt a political discourse couched in the language of universals? The interplay of these two

dimensions gives birth to a political space that can be divided into four quadrants, each representing a different model of politics and politicians.

Four Models of Politics and Politicians



In quadrant A (Local Politics), a mobilization appeal directed to voters' individual interests combines with a particularistic vision of representation. Here politicians present themselves as champions in the art of delivering the pork to their constituents who, on the other hand, are ready to trade their votes for favors and jobs, grants and contracts. This type of demands can be disaggregated into very small units and can be met by distributing patronage as widely as possible. Ideally everyone should be ac-

commodated, provided that sufficient resources can be generated. This is the realm of what is sometimes called the "exchange vote" — but because this type of exchange typically takes place at the district level, where networks of personal relationships of a clientelist nature are born and flourish, the model of politics associated with it might be safely labeled *Local Politics.* This is the province of Machine Politicians, the "bosses."

In quadrant B (Issue Politics) electoral mobilization still targets the voters' individual interests, but the political discourse articulates a broader vision. Politicians here appeal to the "issue vote": they frame their message in a more universal language, one that appeals to the voters' positions about economic and social policies (e.g., small government vs. welfare rights, pro-life vs. pro-choice). Here, too, a political exchange takes place, but this happens less in the local market of immediate personal interests, than in the global market of opinions and values. More than anything else, politicians who play the game of *Issue Politics* act as opinion makers.

In quadrant C (Party Politics) we have politicians who articulate a universalistic vision of representation and direct their mobilization efforts towards collective identities. They target classes or very broad social strata (working classes vs. upper classes, haves vs. have-nots) and encourage voters to align on the basis of a partisan divide rooted into socio-economic cleavages. What support they get depends on their ability to reinforce their voters' sense of identification with and belonging to a party-political community: we identify these diehards as Party Soldiers.

Finally, the type of politics outlined in quadrant D (Ethnic Politics) still targets collective identities, but these are defined as particular groups rather than wide social entities. Here too politicians relate to voters by underlining a sense of belonging that is affective and psychological, but the game they play is the polar opposite of party politics. The kind of loyalty they crave is rooted less in partisanship and class solidarity than in genetics: voters are urged to overlook their socio-economic status, policy preferences, and party affiliation and vote "one of their own" into office regardless of other considerations. The representative nexus thus is sociological in content and symbolic in nature: even before they *do* anything for their constituents, representatives are assumed to be such by virtue of their *being like* them. This is the core assumption of *Ethnic Politics,* the game played by what I shall call Ethnic Militants.

These typologies may of course combine to some extent as different motivations contribute to determining voting behavior and politicians may (and in some cases must) consider a mixed strategy in order to maximize their electoral support. In any given case, however, one is the variable that

better explains a specific system of relations between candidates and voters. In the study that follows, based on in-depth interviews with New York State legislators of Italian descent, I shall apply the above analytical framework to outline different types of Italian-American politics and politicians.

Ethnicity and the Rise of Italian-American Politics

Historically in the US, when an ethnic group first enters the political arena, ethnic identification comes quite naturally as the glue that holds it together at the polls. At an early stage, however, newcomers participate only as voters since the political market still offers no candidates of their own breed to be elected to office. Their vote may be delivered as a block thanks to a sort of "proto-politicians" — community leaders who act as ethnic brokers ensuring their fellows' support to politicians of a different ethnicity. Sooner or later, however, some ethnic brokers grow dissatisfied with their role as they realize that their control on the ethnic vote might help them make a transition from brokers to politicians in their own right. Through our interviews, we have seen this happening in the 1950s in Astoria, an area of Queens County where Italian immigrants had grown particularly numerous over the years.

As in most of New York City, the Democrats were the district's main political force. The regular party club was controlled by the Irish: Frank McGlynn, Sr. had long been the Astoria "boss" and his son was the local assemblyman. Then in the early 1950s, an intra-party rivalry erupted when Ralph DeMarco, an Italian district leader and an ethnic broker working for McGlynn, requested that one of his men be allowed to run for office, but to no avail. Senator George Onorato, who has been representing Astoria for almost three decades, was in those days a young aide to DeMarco. Here is how he tells the story:

> Ralph DeMarco formed the Taminent Democratic Club with a fellow called James LoPiccolo, who was an attorney. They started the club because . . . I must tell you . . . there was a little friction with the Irish. . . . One day DeMarco went to the head of the club Frank McGlynn and recommended LoPiccolo for a local elective position, assemblyman or city councilor. . . . He received a very uncut response: "Ralph," McGlynn said, "we're not ready for a *ginny* to be in an elected position. I'll get him a job with the Sanitation Department." "Sanitation?" Ralph answered. "To pick up garbage? As an attorney? You ought to be ashamed of yourself that you even suggested something like that." So they left the club and they formed their own, a little storefront on the 31st Street. . . .

Since the clash was largely expressed in ethnic terms, there is little wonder that the Italians were the first to be recruited in the new political organization:

> Nicky Ferraro[11] lived right next door and when he graduated Ralph told him, "Look Nicky, it would do you a lot of good to join a political club, it could help you out in your career . . . and if you can, get some of those fellows you're hanging out with because we need some young blood in the club." So Nick got myself involved, and my other three brothers, then the Gasparri boys (they were five people) and we brought in about 15 to 20 young boys to the club. And we started making a move. . . .

The first move of those insurgent Italians was taking control of the local party organization. Then they mounted an all-around challenge to the Irish and, within a short period of time, they were able to assert their control in most elected positions.

> At that time being an Italian . . . there [were people] who never expected that you could do anything; they had been in power for so long that they thought they were invincible. But we ended up taking over the leadership . . . and became the recognized club in the district.
>
> Then we offered a truce to [the Irish], because when Frank McGlynn, Jr. became the assemblyman, we invited him to come and speak at our club as the elected official. But he refused. So the following time his term was up, we invited a fellow named Jules Sabbatino to run for the job; he ran, and we won the seat. And later on Nicky Ferraro . . . ran for the Senate and won.

What took place in Astoria in the 1950s was a textbook example of ethnic-based élite circulation. It certainly favored the political rise of a whole network of Italian Americans from Queens who reached the highest positions in the city, the state, and in Washington.[12] The question, however, is to what extent did the emerging Italian politicians in Astoria behave as "ethnic" politicians? This is not an idle question because DeMarco and his fellows were not an ethnic faction operating through its own ethnic club; they were grassroots party members who got control of the regular party organization in their district. Italians, on the other hand, were numerous but not predominant in Astoria and the ethnic composition of the district, as in most of Queens, was subject to constant and rapid changes.[13] Indeed, as recounted by Peter Vallone, Sr., after winning his battle with the Irish, DeMarco "went on to become a legend as one of the most powerful Democratic district leaders in the city"

due to his ability to represent first "the rising Italian and later Greek power in the District."[14] A former ethnic broker turned party boss, DeMarco knew how to play the ethnic card, but he did so within an ampler framework dominated by two competing models: local politics and party politics. This emerges even more clearly from the experience of Senator Onorato, DeMarco's former lieutenant and political heir, to which we now turn.

Ethnicity between a Rock and a Hard Place

George Onorato, born in 1933, has been representing Astoria in the Senate since 1983. He joined the Taminent insurgents in the early 1950s, when he was a bricklayer and a young unionist, and became a disciplined party soldier and a close aide to Ralph DeMarco. He then rose to become the president of the Taminent Cub and a key figure in Astoria politics. He worked hard in the campaigns to elect Nick Ferraro and then Tony Gazzara to the Senate, and when Gazzara was named Chairman of the Liquor Authority by Governor Cuomo, Onorato succeeded him in the Senate. Since then, he run mostly unopposed in his overwhelmingly Democratic district until 2010, when he retired.

Electoral figures suggest an interesting pattern in Onorato's political career: he got much more than the Italian vote. While the Italian American presence in Astoria declined steadily during his tenure, descending to less than 9 percent in 2000 (almost 28,000 people), the Senator has regularly been elected with 70, 80, and even 90 percent of the vote (40,000 votes on average).[15] This is not to say that ethnicity does not matter for Onorato. He is a proud member of the Italian-American community and has been the president of the Italian-American legislative caucus. His *Italianess* comes up forcefully in relation to the broad issue of ethnic pride:

> Of course we want to keep our traditions alive just like all the others do, we don't want anybody to forget the contributions we've made in this country . . . we want to take credit for that . . . we don't want anybody discredit us or even deny that Christopher Columbus discovered America or say that he brought slaves from Africa. . . .

However, he has a clear understanding that ethnic enclosure can be very politically very damaging. That, after all, was the reason why Astoria's Irish lost to the Italians in the 1950s: "They had forgotten that they went through the same things when they came here, when the middle-class, well-to-do Anglo-Saxons looked down to them and gave them a hard time."

Onorato and his Italian comrades would not repeat the same mistake.

They have skillfully adapted to the profound ethnic changes that affected Astoria over the years, with many affluent Italians and Greeks moving out and being replaced by larger and poorer communities of Hispanics and Blacks. Their strategy is one of ethnic blending rather than differentiation:

> The city of New York is a mixture. We're so diversified, we've got everybody here. We do have a melting pot, except that they did not melt together as they wanted them to, they're in the pot, but they're all separated — you know, like *past' e fazule*[16] . . . everything is on the side, you got to put them in a blender to get them to mix.

Onorato's "ethnic blender" was the Taminent Club — a local machine capable of reaching all segments of his diversified district. This is the opposite of ethnic politics, if by this expression we mean a strategy primarily directed to mobilizing the vote of one's own group. Asked about the relevance of the Italian-American vote and the role of the Federation of Italian American Organizations of Queens (established in the early 1970s by his predecessor, Gazzara,) his answer was an articulated illustration of available alternatives to ethnic politics:

> Well, I have got more than the Italian Americans. . . . At the beginning, yes, probably there were more Italians than any other ethnic group that helped me get elected. But the Federation wasn't so important. Because it was pretty diversified geographically, they weren't all concentrated here in Astoria. Sure they helped me go out with petitions. . . . That was always the difficult part. . . .

Then, at this very moment, Onorato switched subjects and began talking about the Taminent Democratic Club, explaining why it worked better than the Federation for his purposes. It was a structured organization, its people knew all of their neighbors personally, and would deal with everyone's demands, regardless of their ethnicity:

> . . . That's why we [the Taminent] always had district captains. And Ralph told us, when we went to get a petition signed, to ask if there were any problems in the neighborhood that need help, you know, a pothole in the street, the traffic lights that don't work right, street lights that are out, or somebody who is looking for a job . . . and at that time we would say "come to the club" . . . Ralph was getting people jobs because he was the deputy borough president, and then he became the as-

> sistant sanitation commissioner, so he made a lot of inroads helping people get jobs. . . . He loved his job and he spent four nights a week at the club to see people, and I started helping him out screening them, you know, taking names and addresses. . . .

Thus DeMarco was at the center of a large web of patronage distribution. This, much more than the ethnicity of so many Taminent members, was the "efficient secret" inherited by politicians like Onorato: to identify your constituency in particularistic terms, as the "the people of Astoria" — where "the people" indicates less a collective aggregate than an array of individuals and families each of whom has demands that should be individually satisfied.

But Taminent is not a mere patronage machine. Its effectiveness as an "ethnic blender" depends only in part on its capacity to accommodate constituents' demands irrespective of ethnicity. It also depends on its capacity to command a sense of collective belonging, which is much more universalistic in character: a mixture of partisan pride and social-class solidarity that, again, cuts across ethnic boundaries. This is clearly apparent in the way Onorato recalls an episode from the autumn of 2000 when Italian-American Senator Guy Velella, a veteran legislator and the powerful Chairman of the Bronx Republican Party, came under investigation for bribery and corruption. The investigation, which took off during the election campaign, threatened Velella's prospect for reelection and tilted the balance in favor of his Democratic challenger Lorraine C. Koppell. Days before the election, in a last-minute rush to minimize the damage, the Republicans mass-mailed a flyer urging voters to "Tell Lorraine Koppell and her friends we won't stand for their anti-Italian plots." The flyer, printed in red, white, and green over the image of an Italian flag, implored Italian American New Yorkers to "keep one of our own in the State Senate." According to the flyer, it was printed and distributed by the New York Republican State Committee.

This extreme attempt to play the card of ethnic politics was soon slammed by prominent Italian-American politicians including Governor Mario Cuomo, City Council Speaker Peter Vallone, Sr., and Senator George Onorato among others. "To suggest to Italian-Americans that they should vote just on the basis of a name is to disrespect Italian-Americans, and that I resent," Cuomo said at a news conference on the steps of City Hall.[17] When asked to elaborate on the episode, Onorato explained:

> Look at the record. Number one, he [Senator Velella] was under investigation. Number two, he was a Republican. We are Democrats. Whether

> you're Irish, Jewish, or Italian makes no difference. They had control of the Senate and we wanted to get control of the Senate. That's what we are in the game for. It's party politics. So why would we be backing a Republican?

What is then the difference — I asked — between an (Italian American) Democrat and an (Italian American) Republican? The Senator took no notice of the terms in parentheses and replied:

> It's philosophy, the agenda. The Republican Party is basically the party of the business community and the wealthy. Take a look at them. They represent mostly upstate, affluent, white communities. The city of New York is a mixture. We're so diversified, we've got everybody here. [. . .] And they are mostly poor. So, compared to the Republicans, we represent most of the people who need help.

Here Onorato's rhetoric is clearly that of a party soldier: he defines his constituency in universalistic terms as, politically, the "Astoria Democrats" and socially, "those who need help" — where the latter expression is meant to indicate not an array of individuals but a broad social-class stratum whose opposite is "the business community and the wealthy."

Depending on how one looks at him, Onorato can be seen primarily as a party soldier or a local politician. But he could hardly be seen as an ethnic militant: he does not construct his constituency as the "Astoria Italians," he overlooks ethnicity as a tool to mobilize the vote, and sees no use in, or rather despises, the cross-party appeal that ethnic politics brings with it. His strength rests in a combination of a "politics of interests" based on a highly inclusive patronage system that neutralizes ethnic divisions, and a "politics of identity" that separates friends from foes along party lines, throughout the ethnic spectrum. Onorato clearly perceives that this is what kept him in office for 25 years, allowing him to develop a symbiotic relation to his predominantly Democratic, conservative-leaning, working-class constituency despite its continually shifting ethnic composition. Taken between the rock of local politics and the hard place of party politics, in his political discourse ethnicity is effectively neutralized as a political force. But there are cases in which Italian-American politicians perceive their options in a completely different way and act to implement opposite strategies, as we shall now see.

Ethnic Politics Unraveled

A favorite proverb of Senator Serphin Maltese's is "All politics in New York is ethnic politics." But Maltese seems at first to be a very unlikely ethnic politician. As a co-founder and later the Executive Secretary and President of the New York Conservative Party, his political upbringing was couched in the language of universals, dominated by a conservatives vs. liberals rhetoric that sounds distant from any ethnic political discourse. Maltese would not make a typical party soldier either. At odds with the liberal establishment of New York's "Rockefeller Republicans" in the 1960s and 1970s, he won his seat in the late 1980s as a Conservative-Republican and joined the GOP only years later. Although he did eventually become the Chairman of the Queens Republicans in the mid 1990s, the weakness of that party in such a heavily Democratic borough would discourage playing the card of party identification to mobilize the vote.

The two other strategies would seem to suit Maltese better: that of issue politics to which, coming from a small "opinion party," he was naturally inclined; and that of local politics, in which he excelled thanks to the conspicuous patronage resources he controlled as a senior member of the Senate Republican majority. Maltese did indeed pursue both these strategies, but he subordinated them to the primacy of ethnic politics — an approach that he, unlikely as it may seem, actually learned to master like few others.

One of the main reasons why Maltese concentrated much of his efforts on ethnic politics seems to be that it provided him with a base for an alternative "politics of identity" in a situation in which party identification just would not work. In our conversation, the Senator made the radical opposition between ethnic and party politics very clear. The greatest challenge of his life has indeed been not only to get Italian Americans off the Democratic line, but first and foremost to change the rationale of their voting behavior from party to ethnic identification. In his own words:

> Traditionally, the Italians were Democrats, because the immigrants, when they came over, had experiences similar to mine — they didn't see the Republicans. The Republican Party was recognized as the party of money, of wealth, the party of the rich, not of the working man who toiled with his hands . . . so they identified with the Democratic Party. Then many of them became disillusioned with the liberal policies of the Democratic Party . . . but you've got to go and get them! . . . You've got to make them aware of the fact that you are running, and that you are Italian-American. This is what Alfonse [D'Amato] did in the past — this is what I was able to do.

The reference to US Senator Alfonse D'Amato (1981–1999) as a model ethnic politician is particularly telling since Maltese and the Conservatives were among the key players in D'Amato's successful primary bid against "liberal Republican" incumbent Jacob Javits in 1980. And D'Amato, like Maltese, often resorted to the rhetoric of ethnic identity to compensate for the weakness of the Republican Party in New York as well as for his own weakness within it:[18]

> When Alfonse ran, that crossed all party lines. When he took on Senator Jacob Javits he virtually had no support [in the Republican Party], none. [Since] he went to Syracuse University, we would travel by plane upstate and at the airport we would be met by an alumnus of Syracuse, a Conservative party member, and an Italian American. Whether they had their own group or belonged to the Sons of Italy . . . whatever they were, those were the people that supported him. They weren't interested, in the main, in his general positions; they were interested in the fact that he was an Italian American, that he seemed a compassionate individual, and that he was somebody who could make us proud. That was what they were interested in.
>
> The same with me. . . .

Here, we come to the heart of the ethnic-politics game: Maltese is proud to emphasize that he, an Italian-American Conservative-Republican, has been elected and re-elected for two decades in a district that was heavily Italian and overwhelmingly Democratic:

> When I ran in 1988 my district was half Italian, and the fact is that the majority of the Italian Americans — who were Democrats — supported me.
>
> You know, the Democrats are just used to going down the line... But there are still some Italian Americans who will give the benefit of the doubt to someone who is Italian American . . . Italian Americans, when they are motivated, and it's usually by an individual, do come forward. . . .[19]

Who then were the people who kept Maltese in office for two decades? Electoral data suggest that Italian Americans may have played a crucial role here. In the early 1990s, when they still made up almost half of the residents of his district, Maltese was elected by over 40,000 votes on average at each election. By the 2000s, when the proportion of Italians had decreased significantly, Maltese was a powerful incumbent who ran mostly unopposed[20]; and

because in non-competitive elections voter participation reaches the lowest levels, the Senator needed fewer votes to be elected. Even a decreasing Italian population was still numerous enough to produce the bulk of his electoral support (28,000 votes on average.) This was at least how the Senator perceived his situation. And, since with dwindling numbers each vote counts, his ethnic machine grew more organized. In the passage that follows, Maltese describes the pivotal role of the ethnic brokers and the organizations that helped him reach the Italian Americans of his district, including a substantial number of foreign born, Italian-speaking residents (15,000 people spoke Italian at home and almost 9,000 were born in Italy).

> In the district the percentage of Italian Americans went down. When I first ran it was over 50 percent; they estimate now that it's only about 30 percent. The largest group is Hispanics now. So I can tell you that I would not have been able to be a senator for twenty years without the support of Cav. Peter Cardella and Tony DiPiazza. These were the people who came forward.
>
> Peter Cardella came up with the original idea of senior centers; he formed the Ridgewood Senior Center that ultimately became the Cav. Cardella Senior Center. One thing he did through the senior center was organize, so that you had Italian Americans who identified themselves as Italian Americans. And the center itself ended up [being the core of this activity]. You know, ethnic groups tend to gravitate towards their own . . . and the Italian Americans would go to the Cardella Center, no matter how far they lived. And Peter would mobilize them . . . let's face it, since I don't speak Italian, I had a handicap. Cavaliere Cardella would reach out to the groups.[21]

The other broker, whom Maltese holds in high regard, Tony DiPiazza, controlled a different type of organization, the *Federazione Italo-Americana Di Brooklyn E Queens.* The activities of the *Federazione* included a series of somewhat aggressive identity-building initiatives, ranging from suing a local community board for anti-Italian bias when it tried to prevent an Italian street fair,[22] to organizing a pro-war rally at the outset of the Iraq invasion in 2003 "to show our gratitude toward America for what it has done for Italy."[23] The Senator regularly participated in or supported these initiatives and was constantly in the forefront to help the Federazione in all possible ways, including numerous state grants. The Federazione reciprocated by fundraising and campaigning for him at election time.[24]

But forging an ethnic-political identity was not the sole purpose of these

organizations. They also acted as intermediaries between the Senator and his Italian constituency taking care of more immediate, material interests:

> The Federazione was an absolutely indispensable group because it helped with citizenship, it helped with landlord-tenant problems, it helped in some cases with minor criminal matters. And by virtue of Cav. Cardella and DiPiazza I was able to reach into the Italian community. Let me tell you — 'til the day I left office I don't think there was a week that either Cav. Cardella or Cav. DiPiazza didn't call me on behalf of somebody, in most cases an Italian American, who needed some help. And I helped them. So they were better than all the mail, all the publicity I got as a senator in reaching out to the community, primarily the Italian-American community.

As it is clearly apparent, community leaders such as Cardella and DiPiazza performed for Maltese much the same functional role played by Ralph DeMarco and his fellows in Astoria: building a collective identity and distributing patronage. But the very significant difference is that they acted through ethnic-based organizations rather than a regular party machine. Thus instead of working as an "ethnic blender," as the Taminent Democratic Club did, the Federazione Italo-Americana and the Cardella Senior Center emphasized Maltese's "ethnicity first" approach, helping him to consolidate a support base made "in most cases" of Italian Americans. Local politics, in other words, can be used to reinforce ethnic politics — although this comes at the cost of reducing the potentially broader scope of patronage and clientelism.

This is not to say that Serphin Maltese overlooked the need to represent other ethnic groups. As a matter of fact, he proudly recollects:

> I was an outreach person... in my efforts in the party I had brought in German Americans, Chinese Americans, Asian Americans. . . . I brought in the Hispanics, and I was the first one to bring Filipinos into the party, and Koreans. . . .

This reveals an attempt to make ethnicity a general principle of vote mobilization, not limited to the Italian Americans. And, to compensate for the intrinsic difficulty of trying to rally ethnic groups different from his own, Maltese resorted to a peculiar interpretation of issue politics — promoting conservative policies and values that he felt suited the Italians best, but would also appeal to a wider range of ethnic subcultures:

> I think that the policies of Conservatives and Republicans . . . the traditional family value policies . . . I think Italian Americans are much more comfortable voting for a conservative Republican . . . and you don't have to be a down the line, rock solid conservative. . . . And I think that when you say traditional family policies you are talking about the Italians, but you are also talking about the Hispanics, and some of the Indians and Pakistani. . . . Alfonse did it and won statewide, and he didn't hide his views, he said he was pro-life, he was for traditional marriage and he ran and won in a state that has almost two million more Democrats than Republicans . . . and yet he was elected and re-elected . . . so, you could do it. . . .

Again referencing Alfonse D'Amato's electoral strategy points to the core of the problem: a candidate who needs to mobilize the cross-party vote to win an election may find it instrumental to resort to a "politics of identity" rooted in ethnic particularism, while balancing it with a "politics of interests" that appeals to conservative opinions that are shared across ethnic boundaries. And it does no harm, of course, if the whole mixture is reinforced by an efficient system of patronage (as taught again by Al D'Amato, who famously defined himself "Senator Pothole").[25] This is definitely what Maltese himself perceived as the secret of his success: the ability to play three different types of politics — ethnic, issue, and local — in different combinations, but with the ethnic element at the helm.

This mix however, has its weaknesses, as demonstrated by how Maltese was eventually defeated in 2008 — most interestingly, by an Italian-American challenger, Joe Addabbo, Jr. Indeed, if ethnic politics was Maltese's strongest card, its success was predicated on two sets of conditions: Italian Americans must remain sufficiently numerous, united and mobilized, while the other ethnic groups should stay numerically less relevant, disunited, and relatively de-mobilized. If a candidate emerged that could split the Italian-American vote *and* mobilize most of the other groups against the incumbent, Maltese would be at risk. To accomplish the first task, of course, the challenger would have to be an Italian — but on what ground could an Italian rally the other ethnics against an Italian incumbent? Certainly not by playing ethnic politics. But what about that most powerful alternative to ethnic mobilization — namely, party identification? Maltese-the-ethnic-politician might stay in power until the race remained fundamentally de-politicized, but he could be beaten by a challenger capable of politicizing the competition along party lines and exploit the cross-ethnic force of partisanship. Indeed, in the 2008 race, all of the potentially weak factors of Maltese's long-suc-

cessful strategy amazingly aligned against him, and we now conclusively turn to this telling story.

Ethnic Politics Defeated

Cracks in Serphin Maltese's power structure were already visible in 2006, when the Senator was re-elected by only about 900 votes against challenger Albert Baldeo, a Democrat who ran without the full backing of the party organization. A Guyanese with a relatively pale complexion, Baldeo was said by the Maltese front to have exploited his vowel-ending name to mislead Italian voters about his ethnicity. Be that as it may, the fact that a veteran incumbent was able to collect only about 18.000 votes and ended up virtually even with his challenger signaled that his long standing reign in Queens was declining.[26] Maltese himself recognizes that he was losing touch with his ethnically-changing district:

> In 2006 I was challenged by a very strenuous candidate who spent a lot of money. And that race indicated that the district was changing, there were many Bangladesh, Indian, Pakistani, Guyanese, as well as many South Asian, and others, and — *as hard as I tried — I didn't have the same rapport with them* that I had had with many of the people whom I had represented over the years. A lot of them were new residents. . . .

That race also put an end to the informal non-aggression pact that had allowed Maltese to run unopposed for many years. Sensing his weakness, the Democrats targeted him for defeat (along with two other aging Republicans, incidentally both Italian)[27] in a massive effort to overthrow the two-seat Republican majority in the Senate. The race in those districts became highly politicized and millions of dollars were spent. Clearly aiming to split Maltese's ethnic base, the Democrats picked an Italian-American candidate to run against him: Joseph Addabbo, Jr., a longstanding, popular city councilman from Ozone Park–Howard Beach, a heavily Italian area that overlaps substantially with Maltese's senatorial district.

Addabbo had several advantages. First was name recognition, which he owed to his late father, a diehard Democrat and a very popular local personality who had represented Queens in Congress for a quarter century (1960–1986). Known as an insuperable provider for his constituents, when he died, a number of public projects were named after him, including a park, a bridge, a senior center, an elementary school, a social security building, and a family health center. Addabbo, Jr., also had a strong local base in his district. During the 1990s he made sure he was regarded as a com-

munity leader in his own right, not just as the son of a popular congressman. He worked his way up in his neighborhood's civic organization, and became actively involved in Community Board 10. In 1997 he first ran for city council and, although he lost, that race definitely made him a viable candidate. After winning his first council election in 2001, he carefully established his reputation both in his immediate constituency and at the city level. In 2004 he ascended to the Chairmanship of the Social Services and Labor Committee, a position in which he distinguished himself as a defender of workers' rights. The support of the trade unions has been crucial for his campaigns since. Finally, Addabbo, Jr. — like his father — was a party insider. His definition of the Democratic Party follows the classical opposition between party and ethnic identification that we have seen with his colleague Onorato: "I always thought that the Democratic Party is the party of the working-class people, regardless of your ethnic background, though we certainly know that Italian Americans are of that category, hard working people." He has long served as a local Democratic committeeman and a board member of the South Queens Democratic Club. If in 2001 he still had to fight to persuade the Queens organization that he was the right man for the city council job, by 2008 the entire State Democratic leadership had no doubt about him being the best choice to challenge Maltese in a crucial senatorial race.[28]

Addabbo, Jr., in sum, is both a local and party politician, but he is not an ethnic militant. He does enjoy the support of a substantial portion of the Italian Americans in his district but, running in a heavily Italian area, he had often confronted Italian candidates in the past — a situation in which the ethnic appeal loses much of its political salience.[29] His mere presence on the ballot in 2008 split the Italian vote, and he recognizes that the issue was "most prominent" since "Italian Americans had to make a choice" between him and Maltese and many felt "torn." But he would have no regrets, given his highly pragmatic approach. On the one hand, he explains, Italians were no longer an organized presence in the area, and thus less and less amenable to political mobilization. In the 1960s and 1970s, several organizations existed that supported his father electorally, but "unfortunately they're not around anymore." On the other hand, the district had experienced profound ethnic transformation. In the 1980s, it was the scene of violent racial clashes between blacks and whites (including Italians).[30] By the time Addabbo, Jr. ran successfully for the city council in the early 2000s, ethnic violence had subsided but the neighborhood — though still home to a substantial Italian population — had been flooded by waves of new immigrants. The political career of Addabbo, Jr. thus depended less

on the Italian vote than on his capacity to adapt to a multi-ethnic dimension. This capacity he says he inherited from his father:

> Back in the early 1960s my father's district was probably 70 percent Italian, German, Irish . . . white Caucasian. Somewhere in the 1980s, around 1982 or so, it changed to roughly 68 percent African-American or minority in general. And my father was faced with a very difficult decision to make — either you stay running or you retire. He loved what he did, he loved his work, helping people, so he stayed in . . . and a lot of people thought, "How could he, a white person, represent a district that is now 70 percent minority?" But then he won two subsequent elections and was running for a third one when he passed. . . . You have to adapt! In Queens our ethnic shifts happen so frequently and so drastically that if you don't adapt to change as an elected official you suffer.

"Adaptation" here clearly refers to the capacity not to remain trapped in one's own ethnic circle but indeed to be able to go beyond it. For Addabbo this meant abandoning ethnic politics in favor of other strategies of electoral mobilization, most notably local politics. This seems to be the key of Addabbo's analysis of why Maltese lost to him in 2008:

> To an extent, I saw that suffering in Senator Maltese. I don't think he adapted well. I think he unfortunately stayed in a very close circuit, a very small circle, without taking advantage of the position he was in, in helping other parts of the district. We have a growing Latino population, we have a growing Polish population, certainly we have a growing South Asian population, and I think these growing ethnic segments of the district had not been attended to. And certainly I would not have gone so far in office without attending to all parts of the district. I think you have to. You have to adapt. Each community is different, each has its own distinct needs, each family has its own distinct needs. And you have got to address them all, you cannot just address some and not the others.

Interestingly, this analysis also fits Maltese's own perception of why he lost: Addabbo was better able to adapt to the ethnic changes that had affected the district because indeed his message was less ethnic and more local. In Maltese's words:

> Politics is not only ethnic, but local. In the old days on the Lower East Side, ethnic politics was local politics, if you were Italian you lived in

> certain area, if you were Polish you lived somewhere else, if you were Jewish there were other areas. Now we are diversified; there still are ethnic areas, but that's changing. People move more, and more frequently. I guess they don't feel the need for that uniformity and those close relationships that we had in the 1930s and 1940s and even into the 1950s.
>
> Thus local politics becomes more important than ethnic politics, you become aware of the local issues that concern people. In my Senate career, by virtue of my seniority and the fact that I was into the leadership, I was able to bring a lot of local money into the area. I funded over 220 groups, and I was the lead sponsor of more than 200 laws — they call them the Maltese Laws.
>
> But that wasn't enough, because he [Addabbo] had represented the area of Howard Beach, Ozone Park and South Ozone Park, and in various areas where I had to get votes he was well-known, in some cases better known than I was. . . .

But politics in 2008 was not only local, but party politics. First, because unseating Maltese was crucial for the Democrats to win the majority in the Senate, the race was transformed into a fierce party battle. Second, an unexpected phenomenon — the Obama factor — brought to the polls a mass of new voters, most of whom were recent non-white immigrants, precisely those minorities with whom Maltese did not have a satisfying "rapport." Third, and most importantly, Maltese's traditional cross-party appeal would not resonate well in a situation in which a peculiar presidential race had revived the old party alignment of minorities to the Democrats. So Joe Addabbo, the party soldier who would not run as an Italian American, rode into office on the coattails of the first African-American president. Here, too, Maltese's analysis seems largely correct:

> I think many of the people who voted, did so without an awareness of who he [Addabbo] was and who I was. I am told that in the 2008 election in my district there were 25,000 more people who voted than in the 2006 race. And mine was the worst republican district of any Republican Senator, I was obviously being re-elected over and over again by Democrats. . . .
>
> But all these new people who were moving in, South Asian and others, I went to the temples, I went to their meetings and their groups, but the difficulty was: he was a Democrat, running in a Democrat landslide year. He got his own votes by virtue of his name, but he also got all the

other votes of the Democrats in a district that was close to 70 percent Democrat. In some communities it was just impossible to overcome the Obama landslide, to have the traditional Democrats do what they always did: they would look for my name on the ballot and vote for me! But in this case they went straight down the line. Obama took 80 percent of the vote in those districts, and I lost.

Conclusions: Understanding Italian-American Politics

This essay started with an apparently simple question: Does Italian-American "ethnic politics" exist at all? As long as we search for the answer by looking at voting behavior *per se,* there are reasons to be skeptical that the Italian-American vote could ever be delivered as a single, united block, as the traditionalists dream. A fourth senator in our Queens interviews, whom I have only mentioned in passing up to now, exposed this modernist skepticism quite frankly. Frank Padavan, born in 1934, is a Republican-Conservative senator since 1973 in a district with a constantly declining Italian population; as he told me during our conversation:

Italian Americans have assimilated, they have matured, and so they don't vote as a block. They vote as people who are interested in what they think at that moment in time is the best thing for themselves, their family, and their country. And that has nothing to do with the race or ethnic background of the person they're voting for. So that maturity is, I think, the answer to your question. It is a positive thing. As we mentioned earlier, all politics is local. . . .

In some minority communities ethnicity is key. You are not going to win an office in certain parts of New York unless you are a member of the prevalent minority who lives there. That's a fact, generally speaking. But not in my district. Here the largest increase in immigrant population are Chinese, Koreans, South Asians, Indians, Pakistani, and Sikhs. The only problem that comes up from time to time is that in some communities individuals do not tend to assimilate, and that is sometimes viewed in a very negative way by other people. But that is true of all the immigrant families that came here. I mean, if you tried to separate my grandfather from his vineyard in the backyard in Brooklyn, he would come after you with a clamp! But generally speaking, these problems are worked out. And, as each generation moves forward, those problems become fewer and fewer. As children of any background move forward — as it happened with the Italians — they become more mainstream.

However, things are a little more complex than the modernists assume. I have argued here that the answer to our main question may lie less in voters' attitudes than in how Italian-American political élites structure their political market. Italian-American "ethnic politics" does exist, but it is only one of the options available to, and chosen by, Italian-American politicians. Being primarily interested in gaining or maintaining power, they implement the strategies they deem fit for this purpose, although they do have personal inclinations and subjective sensibilities that lead them to be more or less receptive to the ethnic factor.

Let us briefly summarize our findings. At the beginning, ethnic identity was key for New York's Italian Americans and their vote was traded as a block by ethnic brokers working for politicians of different ethnicities, mainly Democrats. Then some of these brokers tried to transform their control of the Italian-American vote into their own political weapon. Ralph DeMarco shrewdly engineered an ethnic upsurge among the Astoria Democrats that led to the defeat of the incumbent Irish leadership and the rise of "Italian power" in the district. But then he reverted to an all-inclusive, particularistic strategy of local patronage, while exploiting Astoria's entrenched Democratic subculture to reinforce cross-ethnic support for his Taminent Club. Similarly, George Onorato speaks his ethnic pride at formal Italian-American community gatherings and would use any help he could get from the Federation of Italian American Organizations of Queens; but he knows only too well that the local machine he inherited from DeMarco is more appropriate when an "ethnic blender" is needed to keep power in a multi-ethnic district. Furthermore, he would not hesitate to advocate a split in the Italian-American community when party politics is at stake — as when he joined other Italian Democratic leaders against the Republican attempt to mobilize the "ethnic vote" behind disgraced Senator Guy Velella. The same with Joe Addabbo, Jr. who bet the future of his political career on his capacity to split the Italian vote that had kept incumbent Senator Maltese in office for two decades. Pragmatism, flexibility, and adaptability are the keywords of his success, but circumstances also count. Indeed Addabbo's victory was helped by the extraordinary Democratic revival of 2008, as well as by the peculiar party alignment of ethnic minority voters that paradoxically decided the fate of that Italian vs. Italian senatorial race in Queens.

All the Italian-American politicians I have been talking to during my interviews for the Oral History archive, for instance — a couple of dozens by now — seem to have a clear understanding of what they could get from an ethnic approach, and they do make some use of it, rhetorically at least,

when they interact with their fellow ethnics; most of them seem convinced, however, that an all-round ethnic-political strategy would be of limited use for them to get elected. Their winning cards apparently consist of a peculiar combination of local-based particularism and party-based universalism. It is interesting to note that all of the above are Democrats, while the sole real "ethnic militant" in our sample is a conservative Republican, Serf Maltese, whose role model, Alfonse D'Amato, is also a conservative Republican. In light of the common perception that the ethnic vote is a traditional Democratic weapon in America, this finding is indeed striking. A classical macro-sociological explanation for this phenomenon would argue that, while undergoing upward social and economic mobility, Italian Americans have shifted their loyalty quite naturally from the Democrats to the Republicans. Without denying all the merits of an explanation that proceeds from a society-centered approach, I would suggest a different reading, one more consistent with the politics-centered, top-down approach utilized here. Italian-American Republicans in New York operate in a state and a city that has a preponderant presence of registered Democratic voters. Their only chance to be elected — as the cases of Serf Maltese, Al D'Amato and Rudy Giuliani, among others, demonstrate — is to be elected by Democrats. Because Republicans have controlled the State Senate for a number of years, and often the governorship and the New York City mayoralty as well, they have had the resources to play the game of Local Politics. And because registered Democratic voters are not necessarily liberal, some of them have been able to succeed by articulating conservative issues. So much for their interest-based politics.

But what about identity-based politics? Because affective attachment to the GOP would hardly work in the political environment they are in, the alternative strategy of Ethnic Politics must come quite naturally to their minds — especially in the State of New York, which has one of the highest concentrations of Italian-American residents in the US. Thus, to the extent that these politicians perceive some form of identity politics to be an important component of their vote mobilization strategy, they may develop a vested interest in constructing their constituency in ethnic terms and in transforming the race into a non-political, non-party competition where their Italian-American identity may provide the affective, symbolic attachment they need. This is why Italian-American Republicans in New York, whenever the ethnic composition of their districts allows it, will be naturally more inclined than the Democrats to a depoliticized, highly personalized and ethnic-based competition.

Be that as it may, our point conclusively stated is that the responsibility

for having or not having an Italian-American "ethnic politics" lies less in the individual motivations of the voters and the social fortunes of assimilation, than in the perceptions, resources, and strategies of the Italian-American political elites. These are the people to watch if we are to understand the evolving role of ethnicity in Italian-American politics.

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* This study is based on a series of in-depth interviews carried out for the Oral History Archive project that I direct at the John D. Calandra Italian American Institute (Queens College, CUNY). The project includes interviews with all New York State legislators of Italian descent who were in office during the first decade of the 2000s, 22 senators and 33 assemblypersons. For the purpose of this essay, I rely on conversations with senators from Queens County who were in office between 2006 and 2009: two Democrats (George Onorato and Joseph Addabbo, Jr.) and two Republicans (Serphin Maltese and Frank Padavan).

[1] A simple search for the term "Italian-American" throughout 20 major political science journals returned 61 articles of which only 11 were of some significance for the study of Italian/American politics, the most recent dating back to 1990.

[2] For 2000 Census data, see American FactFinder (www.census.gov).

[3] According to the NORC study, "Italian Americans are evenly split among the three political parties: 35 percent Republican; 32 percent Democrat; and 33 percent Independent; 89 percent would vote for a woman president; 55 percent are pro-choice; and more than 60 percent think the government should spend more on health, education and the poor" (www.niaf.org/research/contribution.asp).

[4] In the realm of mainstream political science, the straightforward relationship between assimilation and voting behavior was articulated by R. Dahl with regard to the Italian Americans of New Haven in the 1940s and 1950s. His conclusions were later challenged by Wolfinger and Parenti. See Robert A. Dahl, *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1961); Raymond E. Wolfinger, "The Development and Persistence of Ethnic Voting," *The American Political Science Review* 59.4 (Dec. 1965); and Michael Parenti, "Ethnic Politics and the Persistence of Ethnic Identification," *The American Political Science Review* 61.3 (Sept. 1967). Since then, very little research has been done on Italian Americans by political scientists, both in the US and in Italy.

[5] In the 62-member New York State Senate elected in 2006, for instance, out of 17 senators of Italian descent, nine were from districts where the Italian-American population is above average (over 50,000 people). See my "The Black Hole: Italian-American Studies and Political Science" presented at the First Annual Conference of the John D. Calandra Italian American Institute, Queens College/CUNY (New York, April 24–26, 2008). The existence of a similar trend at the national level is highlighted in Carmine Pizzirusso, Itala Pellizzoli, and Vincenzo Miglione, "Italian-American Representation in the United States Congress," paper presented at the 2009 Annual conference of the American Italian Historical Association [hereonafter AIHA] (Baton

Rouge, Oct. 30–Nov. 1, 2009). The correlation between a high percentage of Italian Americans in a district and the likelyhood that the national elected officials be of Italian descent has been conclusively demonstrated by Rodrigo Praino through a sophisticated statistical model in his "Do Italian/Americans Vote for Italian/Americans? Testing the 'Symbolic Rewards Hypothesis' in the U.S. House of Representatives," paper presented at the 2010 AIHA Annual conference (New York, Nov. 11–13, 2010). A pionieristic effort in this direction had been made by Jerome Krase, "The Missed Step: Italian Americans and Brooklyn Politics," *Italians and Irish in America,* ed. by Francis X. Femminella (Staten Island, New York: AIHA, 1983) 187–98.

[6] I base this claim on Giovanni Sartori's critique of the Lipset-Rokkan causal relation between societal cleavages and party formation. According to Sartori, it was not social divisions that encouraged the birth of parties, but it is the parties that gave visibility and political identity to a particular structure of social divisions (see Giovanni Sartori, "From Sociology of Politics to Political Sociology," *Politics and the Social Sciences,* ed. Seymour M. Lipset [New York: Oxford UP, 1969]). I submit that skillful political entrepreneurs and office seekers do the same in order to steer voters' behavior towards politically favorable outcomes. Playing with the "ethnic cleavage" to create the motivational bases for the "ethnic vote" is a perfect example of such activity.

[7] Gaetano Mosca, *Teorica dei governi e governo parlamentare* (1883), in *Scritti Politici,* ed. Giorgio Sola (UTET: Torino, 1982) 1: 474–78.

[8] For this classical distinction, see David Easton, *Systems Analysis of Political Life* (New York: Wiley, 1965) 268, 272–73.

[9] Most American political scientists distinguish between party-centered, candidate-centered, and issue-oriented politics, while others have emphasized the difference between the electoral behavior of "independents," that based on party identification, and that explained by the economic or exchange theory of politics. See for instance Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957); Angus Campbell, Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller, and Donald E. Stokes, *The American Voter* (New York: Wiley, 1960); Norman H. Nie, Sidney Verba, and John R. Petrocick, *The Changing American Voter* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1976). The distinction between exchange vote, issue vote, and belonging vote was first made by Italian political scientists Arturo Parisi and Gianfranco Pasquino, "Relazioni partiti-elettori e tipi di voto," *Continuità e mutamento elettorale in Italia,* ed. Parisi and Pasquino (Bologna: il Mulino, 1977).

[10] See the classic study on representation by Hannah F. Pitkin, *The Concept of Representation* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1967) esp. Ch. 4.

[11] Nick Ferraro, who later became a New York state senator, district attorney, and a judge, was the older cousin of Geraldine Ferraro, the first woman and the first Italian American to run for the Office of US Vice President.

[12] Among them were New York State Senators Nick Ferraro, Tony Gazzara, and George Onorato, New York City Council Speaker Peter Vallone, Sr., New York State Governor Mario Cuomo, and Congresswoman Geraldine Ferraro. Note that on a broader scale the early 1950s marked the rise of the Italians in New York politics, when Carmine DeSapio became the first Italian-American leader of Tammany Hall and Vin-

cent Impellitteri became Mayor in an election where all candidates were Italian. See Salvatore J. LaGumina, *The Impellitteri Years* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1992). See also Jerome Krase and Charles LaCerra, *Ethnicity and Machine Politics: The Madison Club of Brooklyn* (Washington, DC: UP of America, 1992).

[13] According to the 2000 Census, residents of Italian ancestry in George Onorato's district were 8.4% of the population, followed by Irish (5.5%), German (3.5%), Polish (2.7%), Russian (2.3%), and Greek (2.0%).

[14] Peter F. Vallone, Sr., *Learning to Govern: My Life in New York Politics, From Hell Gate to City Hall* (New York: Richard Altschuler, 2005) 32–33. Vallone, who was later to become the Speaker of the City Council, had been an eye-witness to those events. His father was a member of McGlynn's club and then joined DeMarco's, and he gives a short but vivid account of DeMarco's coup in the Astoria Democratic Party, which he describes as based on "a largely ethnic rivalry."

[15] Data collected from the US Census Bureau (www.census.gov) and the New York State Board of Elections (www.elections.state.ny.us).

[16] "*Past' e fazule*" is Southern Italian dialect form for "*pasta e fagioli*" [pasta and beans], an inexpensive though hearty traditional working-class meal.

[17] Lisa L. Colangelo, "Ex-Gov Hits 'Italian' Flyer. Cuomo resents GOP mailer touting Velella for his roots," *Daily News* 6 Nov. 2000.

[18] D'Amato's autobiography gives several telling illustrations of his use of ethnic politics. See Alfonse D'Amato, *Power, Pasta & Politics* (New York: Hyperion, 1995).

[19] To be even clearer, when I objected that I doubted *he* would vote for a Democrat just because his or her ethnic background, the Senator laughed, and replied: "Well . . . *I wouldn't*! But the people. . . ."

[20] Maltese ran unopposed on the basis of an unwritten deal he struck with late Thomas Manton, the legendary boss of the Queens Democratic Party. Manton, whom Maltese still praises for his overall conservative orientation, had beaten him in 1984 in the Congressional race for the 7th Congressional District of New York, the seat that had been Geraldine Ferraro's.

[21] According to a *New York Times* profile, when Maltese strode through the crowd at the Peter Cardella Senior Citizens Center he resembled "a shepherd corralling a weary but loyal flock." See Trymaine Lee, "Republican Lawmaker in a Heavily Democratic District Is Atop Election Hit List," *The New York Times* 25 Apr. 2008.

[22] See Bernard Stamler, "Bad Blood Once Again Over Italian-American Festival," *The New York Times* 10 Aug. 1997.

[23] See Riccardo Chioni, "'Long live the war!' 'Anti-pacifist' demonstrations in Forest Park, Queens," *America Oggi* 6 Apr. 2003.

[24] For further details, see my paper "Delivering Italian-American Pork: Political Representation, Pork-Barrel Spending and the Italian-American Community in New York," presented at the 41st Annual Conference of the American Italian Historical Association (New Haven, CT, 6–8 Nov. 2008).

[25] In his autobiography *Power, Pasta & Politics* (op. cit.), D'Amato proudly accepts this definition, which was originally intended as an insult.

[26] Maltese got 17,940 votes and won re-election by 894 votes over Baledo. Data:

New York Board of Elections (www.elections.state.ny.us).

[27] These were Frank Padavan in Queens (reelected) and Caesar Trunzo in Long Island (defeated).

[28] In 2001, Addabbo won the Democratic primary with no official endorsment. See Scott Shifrel, "Airing Out the Ozone Race. 4 Dems vie for shot at Council," *The Daily News* 6 Sept. 2001. In 2008 he was said to have been personally recruited by Gov. Eliot Spitzer, who was raising "millions of dollars" in the effort "to end 40 years of Republican dominance of the Senate." See Trymaine Lee, "Republican Lawmaker in a Heavily Democratic District Is Atop Election Hit List," *The New York Times 25* Apr. 2008.

[29] He challenged Alfonse Stabile in 1997, John Seminerio in the Democratic primaries of 2001, Joanne Ariola (Stabile's former chief of staff) in the 2001 general election, and finally Maltese in 2008.

[30] In December 1986, Howard Beach gained national attention when three African-American men were assaulted by local teenagers, resulting in one death. Director Spike Lee alludes to this episode in his movie *Do the Right Thing.*

Index

Contributors

William Boelhower, Robert Thomas and Rita Wetta Adams Professor of Atlantic and Ethnic Studies at Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, and co-editor of the Routledge journal *Atlantic Studies,* has recently published, edited, or translated the following: Lucien Goldmann's *Lukacs and Heidegger, Towards a New Philosophy* (Routledge Classics, 2010); editor, with Introduction, of *New Orleans in the Atlantic World. Between Land and Sea* (Routledge, 2010); co-editor, *Working Sites: Text, Territory and Cultural Capital* (VU Press, 2004); co-editor, *Sites of Ethnicity, Europe and America* (Heidelberg: Universitatsverlag C. Winter, 2004); co-editor, *Public Space, Private Lives: Race, Gender, Class, and Citizenship in New York 1890–1929* (Amsterdam: VU Press, 2004); translation of Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from Cultural Writings,* editors Geoffrey Nowell-Smith and David Forgacs (Harvard UP, 1985, 1992). He has also recently published several essays on the rise of the new Atlantic Studies as an emerging cultural paradigm.

Ottorino Cappelli teaches Political Science and Comparative Politics at the University of Naples L'Orientale and is currently Visiting Scholar at the John D. Calandra Italian American Institute (Queens College, CUNY). He co-directs the Oral History Archive, a project based on in-depth videotaped interviews with all the legislators of Italian descent in the State of New York.

Donna Chirico is Associate Professor of Psychology and Chair of the Department of Behavioral Sciences at York College, CUNY. Her field research is Ladakh, India, studying moral and spiritual development constitutes the foundation for her research program exploring the nature of imagination as it relates to psychological development. The objective of this work is to understand the function of esoteric or transcendent imagination in personal development, attainment of valued goals, and well-being. In a secondary project, Dr. Chirico looks at identity psychology as this relates to personal experience in Americans of Italian decent. Matters of personal identity formation are being explored to achieve a better understanding of how ethnic identity contributes to psychological development of the self.

Fred Gardaphè is Distinguished Professor of English and Italian American

Studies at Queens College, CUNY. For ten years, he directed the American Studies and Italian American Studies Programs at the State University of New York at Stony Brook. He is Associate Editor of *Fra Noi,* an Italian American monthly newspaper, editor of the Series in Italian American Studies at State University of New York Press, and co-founding-co-editor of *Voices in Italian Americana,* a literary journal and cultural review. He is past president of MELUS (2003–2006) and the American Italian Historical Association (1996–2000). His edited books include *New Chicago Stories, Italian American Ways* and *From the Margin: Writings in Italian Americana.* He has written two one-act plays "Vinegar and Oil," produced by the Italian/American Theatre Company in 1987, and "Imported from Italy," produced by Zebra Crossing Theater in 1991. His study, *Italian Signs, American Streets: The Evolution of Italian American Narrative,* is based on his dissertation that won the Fondazione Giovanni Agnelli/Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs award for 1993 dissertations and was published by Duke University Press in 1996; it was named an Outstanding Academic Book for 1996 by Choice. He has also published *Dagoes Read: Tradition and the Italian/American Writer, Moustache Pete is Dead!: Italian/American Oral Tradition Preserved in Print, Leaving Little Italy: Essaying Italian American Studies,* and *From Wiseguys to Wise Men: Masculinities and the Italian American Gangster.*

Djelal Kadir is the Edwin Erle Sparks Professor of Comparative Literature at Pennsylvania State University. He is the Founding President of the International American Studies Association and former Editor of the international quarterly *World Literature Today.* He is the co-editor of *Literary Cultures of Latin America: A Comparative History,* 3 vols. (Oxford UP, 2004); *Longman Anthology of World Literature,* 6 vols. (2003; 2009) and *Other Modernisms in An Age of Globalization* (Heidelberg: Universitaetsverlag C. Winter, 2002). His authored books include *Columbus and the Ends of the Earth: Europe's Prophetic Rhetoric as Conquering Ideology* (U of California P, 1992); *The Other Writing: Postcolonial Essays in Latin America's Writing Culture* (Purdue UP, 1993); and *Questing Fictions: Latin America's Family Romance* (U of Minnesota P, 1987). His latest book is *Memos from the Besieged City: Lifelines for Cultural Sustainability* (Stanford UP, 2010). Co-editor of *The Routledge Companion to World Literature* (2011), he is co-authoring the four-volume *Literature: A World History,* a project of The Stockholm Collegium of World Literary History.

Jerome Krase is Emeritus and Murray Koppleman Professor at Brooklyn College, CUNY. Recent published works include *Ethnic Landscapes in an Urban World* (2007), *Italian Americans Before Mass Migration* (2007), "See-

ing Ethnic Succession in Little and Big Italy," *Encountering Urban Places* (2007), *Scrivere e Riscrivere: Leggere e Rileggere il testo della citta via imagine* (2008), *Visualisation du changement urbain* (2007), "A Visual Approach to Multiculturalism" (2009), and "Visualizing Glocalization in Global Cities" (2009). He is a founding member of the American Italian Coalition of Organizations (1978) and its Vice President (1988–92). He was Director of the Brooklyn College Center for Italian-American Studies (1975–84) and twice served as President of the American Italian Historical Association President (1993–97). In 2005, he received the Monsignor Gino Baroni Award from Italian Americana. His mother's family (Cangelosi and Trentecosta) left Sicily in 1892.

Stefano Luconi teaches US history at the University of Padua and specializes in Italian immigration to the United States. His books include *From Paesani to White Ethnics: The Italian Experience in Philadelphia* (Albany: SUNY P, 2001), *The Italian-American Vote in Providence, Rhode Island, 1916–1948* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2004), *L'immigrazione negli Stati Uniti* (with Matteo Pretelli; Bologna: Il Mulino, 2008), *La questione razziale negli Stati Uniti dalla Ricostruzione a Barack Obama* (Padua: Cleup, 2008), and *Guardando il mondo da un grattacielo* (with Danilo Catania and Gianfranco Zucca; Viterbo: Sette Città, 2010).

Martino Marazzi is Assistant Professor of Italian Literature at the Università degli Studi, Milan, Italy, and has been a Fellow of the Italian Academy for Advanced Studies at Columbia University. He has widely written on literary and cultural relations between Italy and the United States, editing various works by Italian American writers (L.D. Ventura, A. Giovannitti, M. Fiaschetti, E. Bartoletti). He has published studies on modern and contemporary Italian literature (from Cavour and *Pinocchio* to Calvino), and on Dante criticism. His most recent book is *A occhi aperti. Letteratura dell'emigrazione e mito americano* (FrancoAngeli: Milan 2011). He is the author of two books of fiction: *La fine del Purgatorio* and *Filogenesi* (Sedizioni: Milan, 2008 and 2010).

Gerald Meyer is a Professor Emeritus of Hostos Community College, CUNY, who continues to teach part time at the college. He is the author of *Vito Macantonio: Radical Politician, 1902–1956* and co-edited, with Philip Cannistraro, *The Lost World of Italian American Radicalism.* He has also authored over fifty articles and reviews on a wide range of topics. He is on the editorial boards of *Science & Society* and *Socialism and Democracy.*

Francesca Canadé Sautman is Professor of French, Medieval and Renaissance Studies and Women's Studies at Hunter College and The Graduate Center of CUNY. She is the author of *La Religion du Quotidien: Rites et croyances populaires de la fin du Moyen Age* (1995), and the co-editor of *Same-Sex Love and Desire Among Women in the Middle Ages,* with Pamela Sheingorn (2001) and *Telling Tales: Medieval Narratives and the Folk Tradition,* with Diana Conchado and Giuseppe di Scipio (1998). In the field of Italian American studies, she has published and given papers on the representation of race and gender in film, on reclaiming the histories of Italian American women, and on Italian American artists in New York. She is currently writing on the artist Vincent Canadé (1879–1961) and his milieu, and on Italian American women in visual culture and media from 1910 to the late 1950s.

Anthony Julian Tamburri is Dean of the John D. Calandra Italian American Institute (Queens College, CUNY) and Professor of Italian and Comparative Literature. He holds a PhD from the University of California, Berkeley. He is co-director of Bordighera Press, and is past president of the American Italian Historical Association and of the American Association of Teachers of Italian. His more recent books include *Italian/American Short Films & Music Videos* (2002), *Narrare altrove: diverse segnalature letterarie* (2007), *Una semiotica dell'etnicità* (2010), and *Revisiting Italian Americana: Specificities and Generalities on Literature and Film* (forthcoming). He is also the executive producer of *Italics, The Italian American TV Magazine.*

Robert Viscusi has published *Astoria: A Novel* (Guernica, 1995; American Book Award, 1996; Italian translation, Avagliano, 2003), *An Oration upon the Most Recent Death of Christopher Columbus* (longpoem; *VIA* FOLIOS, 1993; Italian translation, Ravello, 2006), *A New Geography of Time* (poems; Guernica, 2004), *Buried Caesars, and Other Secrets of Italian American Writing* (critical history; SUNY P, 2006; Premio Giuseppe Acerbi, 2008), and numerous essays on American literature and culture that have appeared in many journals and volumes. He has written on Anglo-Italian literary relations, many essays, and a book, *Max Beerbohm, or the Dandy Dante: Rereading with Mirrors* (The Johns Hopkins UP, 1986). His present project is an epic poem entitled "Ellis Island," currently appearing in parts. A handmade limited edition of its first four books (there are fifty-two books in all) has been designed and produced by the poet Nora Almeida. These four books have been translated into Italian and published in a bilingual edition by abrigliasciolta (Varese, 2010). One can read random sonnets (a vast number of them) based upon the whole text at the website *ellisislandpoem.com*

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8:30 am • Registration and Coffee

9:00 am • Opening Remarks

Welcome: James Staros, Dean, College of Arts and Sciences, Stony Brook University
Greetings: Hon. Francesco Taló, Consul General of Italy
Introductory Remarks: Mario Mignone, Director, Center for Italian Studies, Stony Brook University
About the First FIAC Conference: Peter Carravetta, Alfonse M. D'Amato Professor, Stony Brook University

9:30 am to 11:30 am • The View From Inside the Fold

Chair: Mary Jo Bona, Stony Brook University

From Private to Public: An Italian/American Socio-Cultural Trajectory
Anthony J. Tamburri, John D. Calandra Italian American Institute, CUNY/Queens College

Commedia della Morte: Theories of Life and Death in Italian American Culture
Fred L. Gardaphé, John D. Calandra Italian American Institute, CUNY/Queens College

The Dimensions of Italian American Writing
William Boelhower, Louisiana State University

11:30 am to 1:00 pm • The View From Ethnography and the Social Sciences

Chair: Joseph Sciorra, John D. Calandra Italian American Institute, CUNY/Queens College

Interpreting the Italian Look, or What Looks Italian?
Jerome Krase, Emeritus, CUNY/Brooklyn College

The Dog Catches Its Tail: A Critical Reflection on the Value of an Italian American Identity in Personal Development
Donna Chirico, CUNY/York College

1:00 pm to 2:30 pm • Lunch

2:30 pm to 4:30 pm • The View From Italy

Chair: Mario Mignone, Stony Brook University

Studi sull'emigrazione versus studi italoamericani: aspetti teorici e metodologici
Sebastiano Martelli, University of Salerno

Questioning the Traditionalism of Italian American Literature
Martino Marazzi, University of Milan

Politics in Italian America: A Deserted Research Field
Ottorino Cappelli, University of Naples "L'Orientale"

4:30 pm to 6:00 pm • The View From History

Chair: Stan Pugliese, Hofstra University

Whiteness and Ethnicity in Italian American Historiography
Stefano Luconi, University of Rome "Tor Vergata"

Theorizing Italian American History: The Quest for a Historiographical Paradigm
Gerald Meyer, Emeritus, CUNY/Hostos Community College

6:00 pm to 6:45 pm • Refreshments

7:00 pm • Keynote Lecture

The Ice Margin

Robert Viscusi, CUNY/Brooklyn College

PROGRAM OF THE DAY

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 4, 2008

John D. Calandra Italian American Institute

8:30 am • Coffee

9:00 am • Opening Remarks

Welcome: James Muyskens, President, CUNY/Queens College
Greetings: Frank Cannata, Past President, UNICO National
Introductory Remarks: Anthony J. Tamburri, Dean, John D. Calandra Italian American Institute, CUNY/Queens College

9:30 am to 11:00 am • The View From Film and Cultural Studies

Chair: David Aliano, College of Mount Saint Vincent

What Is Italian American Criticism? The Obama Answer
Ben Lawton, Purdue University

The Future of Italian American Film Studies
Robert Casillo, University of Miami

11:00 am to 1:00 pm • The View From Outside the Fold

Chair: Rowan Phillips, Stony Brook University

Cultures in the United States, 1968-2008
Renate Holub, University of California, Berkeley

Via the Margin of the Poetic
Djelal Kadir, Pennsylvania State University

Gendered Bilingualism
Gustavo Pérez-Firmat, Columbia University

1:00 pm to 2:30 pm • Lunch

2:30 pm to 4:00 pm • The View From Women, Race, and Identity Studies

Chair: Giancarlo Lombardi, CUNY/College of Staten Island

Women, Ethnicity, and Assimilation
Josephine Gattuso Hendin, New York University

The (Dis)Comfort Zone: Gender and Race Reinvent Italian America
Francesca Canadé Sautman, CUNY/Hunter College and The Graduate Center

4:00 pm to 6:00 pm • The View From Interpretation Theory

Chair: Paolo Giordano, University of Central Florida

Inside Out. Reading as an Italian American, or For a Hermeneutics of Removes
Pellegrino D'Acierno, Hofstra University

I Don't Exist, Therefore…I Am. Declassifying Italian American Studies
Donato Santeramo, Queen's University

On the Hermeneutics of Hybridity
Peter Carravetta, Stony Brook University

6:00 pm to 6:30 pm • General Discussion and Concluding Remarks

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