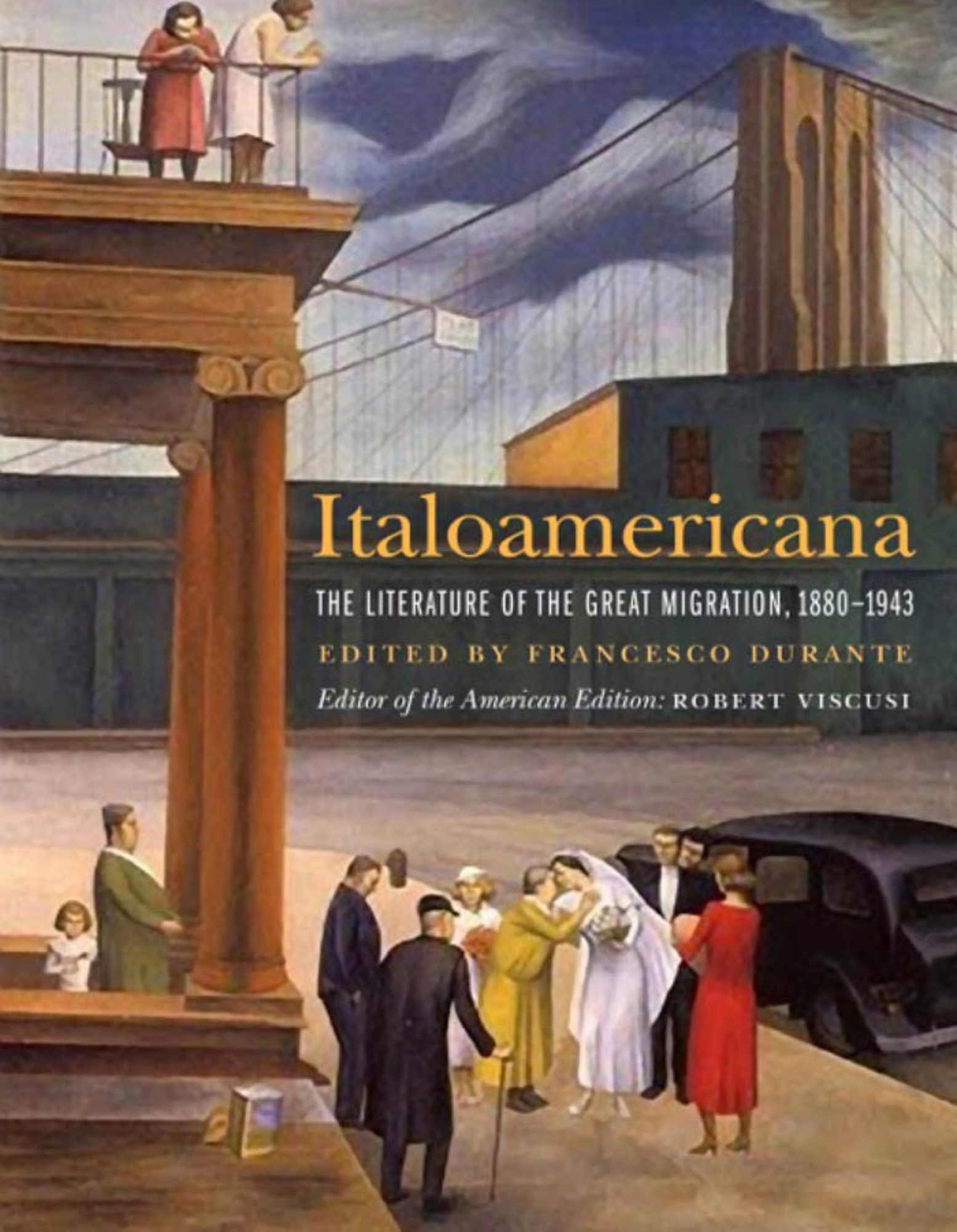

Italoamericana

THE LITERATURE OF THE GREAT MIGRATION, 1880–1943

EDITED BY FRANCESCO DURANTE

Editor of the American Edition: ROBERT VISCUSI

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The Literature of the Great Migration, 1880–1943

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Preface

This volume is dedicated to the period of the Great Emigration of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and therefore to the experience of the Little Italies, the Italian ghettoes of America that were its first and most glaring outcome. This volume follows upon my exploration, begun four years ago, of the first literary traces left by the Italians in the United States[1] and completes what might be considered its most important—and probably its least known—phase. Indeed, this period includes the main body of the literary works springing directly from America's Little Italies. Literary people in Italy systematically ignored—if not openly condemned—this production, calling it anachronistic, amateurish, and unbearably "wild." But these works represent the site where the emigrants' native culture was contaminated by American culture, even if at a generally popular or only partially cultured level. The result is an unforeseeably new universe. These works also represent a moment of passage or, to put it in a better way, the necessary link between the experience of the fathers who came to America armed only with their cultural baggage from home, and that of their children who, merely a generation or two later, would recount their moving saga directly in English.

The period examined here goes from 1880, the conventional date of the beginning of the transoceanic Great Emigration, to that traumatic and definitive divide, World War II. During the 1940s, the experience of the first immigrant generation came to a close precisely because of the political alignments imposed by the war. By then this generation's writers had given their best. Their contribution is the

1. Francesco Durante, *Italoamericana: storia della letteratura degli italiani negli Stati Uniti* (Milan: Mondadori, 2001).

subject of the present work. Admittedly, it is true that even after the end of World War II, the country's Little Italies continued to exist a few decades more and to support a rather substantial publishing activity in Italian. But from the point of view of the present work, such activity—particularly its more explicitly literary expressions—appears as so many already-consumed fossils: that is, a sort of residual arcadia made for the most part of an overflowing of dilettantish poetry tending to celebrate itself within a circle of pathetic coteries and academies located on the American side of the ocean. Not only were these coteries totally separated from the beating heart of Italian and/or American culture, but neither were they any longer legitimated by the actual social condition of Italian Americans. Moreover, it is quite true that especially in the 1950s there were new migratory waves from Italy to the United States. They, too, produced some literature, albeit a much lesser amount with respect to the earlier period. Anyhow, nothing that revealed that trait of novelty or originality that had distinguished the emigration of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the best cases, such as that of Joseph Tusiani (born in 1924), the prevailing "ethnic" connotation of the Great Emigration has by now dissolved into a totally other dimension. Tusiani, "poet in four languages" (Italian, Latin, English, and the Gargano dialect), could in no way be confused with one of the writers of the old Little Italies, and even less with one of the dilettante poets of the new Italian American "underbrush." On the contrary, he has himself denounced the latter's relentless belatedness.

There has been an inability to distinguish between different phases of the immigrant story. Thus, we see a tendency to include in the same indistinct panorama of blunt mediocrity and of wishful thinking literary works that do not belong there, work that instead, represent a much more historically and artistically varied landscape. This careless confusion led Italian culture, for a long time following very authoritative opinions, such as those of Giuseppe Prezzolini and Emilio Cecchi between the 1940s and 1950s, to ignore the complexity and diversity of the Italian American spirit. So paltry did the literature of our emigrants appear that entire ranks of worthy scholars deemed it much more useful and "correct"—not to say interesting—to direct their attention to other, contiguous strands of research, like the African American and Jewish American ones. This picture of basic ignorance was due to the almost total absence of historical-critical studies and works of reference, as well as the extremely difficult and laborious process of finding the texts. One could truly say that until the 1980s nobody read them, either in Italy or in America. In fact, those few who did browse through these texts limited themselves to citing a few of them by hearsay and, in the process, repeated uncritically the few, inessential bits of information recorded by others. Usually, their inter-

est in this literature was an offshoot of doing research in other fields. Primarily social-historical research, one is tempted to say, was the only kind that one encountered when it came to emigration studies.

Today things have changed considerably. Scholarly research has advanced in surprising ways over the last twenty years. Generally speaking, it has followed a path aimed at reevaluating first of all the work of the first generation of Italian American writers in English, from John Fante to Mario Puzo. Reading these works has led scholars to study the cultural, if not specifically literary, background from which those works drew their life-blood. In the United States, renewed interest in these writers coincided with the opportunities given to scholars—they themselves of Italian American origin—to look back on their family roots with greater detachment and a more sophisticated critical approach. In Italy, on the other hand, this critical revival seems to have been triggered by the realization that our country had by now changed from one historically marked by emigration to one of immigration. This circumstance is undoubtedly "external," but it probably contributed considerably to a growing need for a deeper understanding of the newcomers—and also encouraged us to identify with them, but now without shame. In short, we were able to recall a time "when we were the Albanians," as the subtitle of a recent bestseller by Gian Antonio Stella has it.

The present volume, as we shall see, gathers together a large number of authors and covers almost all literary genres: from poetry and theater to memoirs, fiction, and a wide variety of social and political commentary. This is enough for me to say that the world of Italian America between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is indeed one of extraordinary wealth and complexity, enough, perhaps to make this anthology more than justified. And yet I am perfectly aware that it is "provisional," a sort of permanent workshop constantly open to new research and further discoveries. It fills dizzying gaps of knowledge with respect to most of the authors under consideration—their unknown biographies and at times their even more unknown publication records. It also proposes a historical ordering of the major currents in which the Italian American literary experience sought to organize itself. In short, the book looks forward to other scholarly research that will go even deeper into the libraries and archives that I have visited (some seventy of them between Italy and the United States). And—why not?—perhaps a new author or title will be miraculously discovered. There are still thousands of attics to pick through and perhaps in a few of them a surviving copy of some lost novel by Bernardino Ciambelli or the typescript of some play by Riccardo Cordiferro or an unfindable volume of some lost Italian American newspaper awaits us in silence. And these hopes might be channeled into an attempt to create an institute which

is still scandalously lacking in Italy: a real and true Museum and/or Archive of Emigration capable of reviving once and for all the epic of millions and millions of our expatriate fellow countrymen. No matter how short our memory, this undoubtedly remains the most significant fact of our entire history.

If this volume will help to consolidate a new sensibility in this field, it will mean that it has reached the most important goal its author set for himself.

NAPLES, FEBRUARY 2005

Postscript

In the earlier volume of *Italoamericana* I thanked many persons whose help was precious to me. For the sake of brevity, I will not mention them here again, but I should thank every one of them all the same. To this list I would like to add the names of Veronica Park, whose exquisite kindness I widely took advantage of in the rich Biblioteca di Magistero in Florence; and of Generoso Picone, who allowed me to read the extremely rare *I drammi dell'emigrazione* by Bernardino Ciambelli. I am also indebted to Patrizia Asproni for being a perfect host. I must also thank Angelo Agrippa, Mirella Armiero, and Natascia Festa for having helped me critically reread my manuscript.

To my father, Domenico Durante, who did not live to see this volume in print, but who was the happiest man in the world when he had the earlier one in his hands, I owe everything that a man can owe to the person who made him a man.

Acknowledgments

The American edition of *Italoamericana* has had many friends and many translators.

Generous donors have made this edition possible: Laura Baudo Sillerman, Anthony and Margo Viscusi, James Periconi, Robert and Nancy Viscusi, Anthony and Maria Tamburri, John and Jean Nonna, William Tonielli and Lisa A. Mansourian, Mr. and Mrs. Joseph R. Perella, John Leopoldo Fiorilla, Thomas DePietro, The National Italian American Foundation, Judith Rosenthal, Lucio A. Noto, Irene and Joseph Neglia, Mary E. Caponegro, William Arnone, Stephen Boatti, B. Amore, Santina Spadaro, Fred Gardaphe, Frederick P. Schaffer, Bernice Riccio, Robert Oppedisano, Carl J. Morelli, Richard L. Mattiaccio Esq., Mrs. Lucille Maffia, Marcella Luiso, Josephine G. Hendin, Daniel M. Healy, Tom Ferraro, Hon. David S. Ferriero, Louise Del Juidice, Harriet Cooper, Mary Jo Bona, Victor A. Basile, Lisa M. Vaia, Peter Carravetta, Carol and Charles Rampino, and Anonymous (2) and several anonymous donors.

Rather than assign this work to a single translator, or even a small team, we decided to assure it some tonal variety that would be the moral, if not the precise philological, equivalent of the original text. Italian American writing in English has become a mature vineyard, and we had many competent translators of poetry, prose, and dramatic text from whom we could choose.

Franca and Bill Boelhower translated the long introductions to the five parts of the book. The headnotes to the selections were all translated by Irene Mitchell Musillo. The footnotes were translated by Steven Belluscio. Translators of prose included George De Stefano, Gil Fagiani, Paolo Giordano, Mark Pietralunga, Martha King, and Giulia Prestia. Translators of poetry included Luigi Bonaffini,

Michael Palma, Maria Enrico, Peter Carravetta, Emanuel di Pasquale, Chiara Mazzucchelli, Peter Covino, Pasquale Verdicchio, and Robert Viscusi. Translators of plays included Laura Ruberto, Martha King and Emelise Aleandri. Richard Mattiaccio, in turn, helped us with the Neapolitan dialect, wherever it occurred, whether in texts or in paratextual matter; Chiara Mazzucchelli did the same with Sicilian expressions. The American editors and most of the translators have been members of the Italian American Writers Association or of the Italian American Studies Association. These groups have fostered the discursive community that has made Italian American writing a professional concern.

Coordinating the work of so many translators has often been too much for the editors, but we have been ably assisted by two excellent people. At the Calandra Institute, Rosaria Musco organized the initial correspondence and set up our arrangements with translators during the first two years. Suklima Roy at Brooklyn College became the de facto project coordinator during these last two years. Without her patience, calm, hard work, and unfailing intelligence, this ship might have run aground many times over.

As this American edition is the product of a true collaboration of many people involved, from the fundraisers and subsequent contributors to the numerous translators/scholars mentioned above, it is, at the same time, the beneficiary of other scholarly and creative works we have consulted along the way. That said, we wish also to include in our heartfelt gratitude and appreciation the many scholars whose work has also assisted us in making this edition useful to readers of English. The list would be interminable, and so we list those people whose pages, in this regard, we actually turned at one point or another during the past four years: Emelise Aleandri, Rose Basile Green, Mary Jo Bona, Philip V. Cannistraro, Donna Gabaccia, Fred Gardaphe, Josephine Gattuso Hendin, Matthew Frye Jacobson, Martino Marazzi, Sebastiano Martelli, Jerry Meyer, James Periconi, Nunzio Pernicone, John Paul Russo, Joseph Sciorra, and Rudolph Vecoli.

In the years that have elapsed since the publication of this work in Italy, several important texts have come to light, several new works have been published. The distinguished collector and bibliographer James J. Periconi graciously undertook the task of bringing the (already very full) bibliography up to date with the state of the field. We are grateful to him and to all who have made this a truly communal contribution.

Robert Viscusi
Anthony Julian Tamburri

Introduction to the American Edition

Robert Viscusi

If you do not remember who assassinated the king of Italy or who carved the great stone figure of Abraham Lincoln in Washington, there is no need to feel bad. You are not alone. Even Italian Americans do not always know the names of these Italian immigrants—*italoamericani*—who did notable things. Such deeds belong to a period that lies in darkness. The dawn of legible memory for the English-speaking people who now call themselves Italian Americans mostly begins around the time they abandoned the Italian language as their primary means of verbal expression. Though the communities of *italoamericani* that began to proliferate and grow in the United States after 1880 were to become large, even massive, much of what they did, as well as almost all of what they said or wrote, has disappeared from view, along with the knowledge of the many Italian languages ("dialects") they used. They were a huge population. Many millions arrived between 1880 and 1924, when immigration was shut down. Many returned to Italy. But at least five million remained. They swelled the U.S. population, which in 1880 was a little over 50 million; by 1924, it was 114 million. Italians alone accounted for more than 8 percent of that increase. New York City was the second most populous Italian city in the world, after Naples, itself the second largest city in Europe. All these immigrants spoke some variety of Italian when they arrived, and most went on doing so for the rest of their lives. They read and wrote newspaper articles, poetry, plays, novels, essays, histories, and all in Italian. They supported a vast production in every branch of literature. If you can name five of their writers, consider yourself an expert.

What happened? How did all this come to be forgotten? This is a chapter in imperialist history.

The Colony

Nowadays, when we speak of *italoamericani,* those who came from Italy during this period, we speak of their world as an immigrant culture. This was not how *italoamericani* thought of it during the years before the Second World War. They had learned to look at the world through Italian eyes. Italy saw itself as an expanding empire, and Italian America saw itself as a *colony*, one of Italy's many colonies. It was a particular sort of colony, to be sure: not a discrete territorial entity but instead a series of encampments of Italian labor and entrepôts for Italian goods, urban ghettos and work camps in the countryside, linked among themselves and to the homeland by ties of language, history, politics, religion, culture, family, and, above all, material interest. During this entire period, the Kingdom of Italy expressed the glories of bourgeois culture by carrying the banner of national/imperial ambition for Italians throughout the world, a performance that rose to its dizziest heights during the 1930s and led to Italy's catastrophic military alliance with Germany and Japan on September 27, 1940. After Italy declared war on the United States on December 11, 1941, the ties that had joined Italian Americans to Italy and to one another began to unravel, and the nature of the colonial complex began to change rapidly. In the long string of diplomatic misadventures that blot the pages of Italian history, there is nothing to equal this one for blind folly. Some of the results are familiar. Italy, a rising industrial nation, was flattened by the Americans and the English. After the war ended, Italy became, and remains to this day, an American protectorate, where U.S. Air Force F-16s patrol the skies daily and the American embassy in Rome houses a detachment of four hundred U.S. Marines. Other results are less familiar. Mussolini's declaration was not only a folly but also a betrayal, profound and unforgivable, of the *italoamericani*. The dictator had cultivated them for nearly two decades. Support for his Fascist dream was widespread in the colonia.[1] He had seduced the Italians in America. Now he abandoned them to their fate. The day after he declared war, the American government announced that all Italian immigrants who had not yet taken citizenship (at least 700,000) had to register as enemy aliens. Some even ended in concentration camps. In the Italian neighborhoods, signs went up: "Don't speak the enemy's language. Speak American."[2]

1. See Philip V. Cannistraro, *Blackshirts in Little Italy: Italian Americans and Fascism 1921–29*, VIA Folios 17 (West Lafayette, Ind.: Bordighera, 1999).

2. Lawrence Di Stasi, ed., "How World War II Iced Italian American Culture," in *La Storia Segreta: A Secret History of Italian American Evacuation and Internment During World War II* (Berkeley: Heyday Books, 2001), 307.

No wonder, then, that entire generations of Italian Americans have never learned how to read the pages of their own literary history. Most Italian Americans, by 1941, felt entirely committed to the country where their children had been born. Mussolini had expected many of them to come to Italy and fight by the side of the Fascists, just as many *italoamericani* had returned to Italy during the First World War to fight and die in the struggle with Austria. No such exodus occurred this time. Younger Italian Americans already had been speaking English for at least a generation, thanks to public schools and libraries. By now, even their immigrant parents and grandparents, though many of them had been proud of Mussolini's achievements in Italy, had grown effectively more attached to their own achievements in the United States, and they no longer cared to go back. Instead, they worried about speaking Italian in public, or even at home; many, perhaps most, of them closed off the future of the language by no longer teaching it to their own children and grandchildren. Their colonial literature entered a period where it would become mostly incomprehensible to Italian Americans.

This book is an anthology of writings by Italians in the United States, works published during the years 1880 to 1943. It presents, translated into idiomatic modern English, the writings of many of the leading novelists, poets, journalists, memoirists, and essayists of the great period of Italian colonial writing in the United States. Not only does it present these writers in English, but it also presents them through the eyes of an accomplished Italian writer, editor, and scholar who has read them with enthusiasm and an extraordinary taste for what they have to offer. Francesco Durante, editorial director of the *Corriere del Mezzogiorno* in Naples and author of many books, translator of American novelists from John Fante to Bret Easton Ellis, allows Americans to see Italoamerica as an Italian sees it. And not just any Italian, but one with habits of mind and action that uniquely equip him to interpret these texts for American readers—a journalist, a literary scholar, an Americanist.

An Italian Eye

Durante understands the historical situation of the immigrants. He is Italian enough that he does not share the immigrants' defensiveness about their identity. More than once, he reprints pieces that display racist themes that moved many immigrants, or accounts of systematic exploitation of women, or early and continuing evidence of Italian criminal activity. Indeed, Durante allows us to read this history without the burden of the usual abject narrative that creeps into accounts of Italian migration to the United States, especially when Italian Americans write those accounts. All Americans, not only Italian Americans, come to

this history with a lot of baggage: Ellis Island, exploitation, racism, sexism, war, prejudice, and social dysfunction of every kind, from insanity to organized crime. Durante knows all this, shows all this, has a genuine sympathy with the distress and displacement of the immigrants, but he doesn't carry it as a weight of his own. This gives his picture a surprising clarity and emotional balance. Italian Americans in particular have had the habit of weighting their histories with resentment—or, as Giuseppe Prezzolini memorably called it, touchiness[3]—an irritability arising from memories of exclusion in Italy and more memories of exclusion in the United States. Justifiable as such feelings may seem, they do cloud the retrospect with strong feelings and strong words. Durante is admirably free of this defect. He is also, perhaps even more admirably, free of another hypersensitive response: the impatience and shame that bourgeois Italians like himself often display when dealing with Italian immigrants to the United States. What, then, *does* Italoamerica look like when seen through the eyes of this particularly well-informed and open-minded Italian?

For one thing, it is a land of newspapers. Hundreds, all over the United States. Dailies in the largest cities, weeklies and monthlies elsewhere. Durante, himself a journalist of the first rank, is well equipped to appreciate newspapers as cultural protagonists. In a colony, they have especially large roles to play. The political scientist Benedict Anderson has said that newspapers are the workshop where a nationalist consciousness is built. Newspapers allow for the creation of what Anderson calls an "imagined community."[4] The imagined community where the *italoamericani* lived was very much Italy—not just national Italy, either, but a transnational Italy that was something new. An event in Buenos Aires might have resonances in Washington, Toronto, London, and Milan. All these places belonged to the migration circuit.[5] Many of our writers had visited all these cities in their travels. Wherever they were living in the United States, from San Francisco to Boston, many immigrants saw things with a global eye that they would have been far less likely to develop had they remained nestled in the towns and cities where they had been born—places where they would have expected to die, joining their ancestors who had entered and left the world, often as not, in the same bedrooms, if not always in precisely the same beds. In thus acquiring a certain transnational sensibility, they became, paradoxically, more Italian than they could have become in Italy. There,

3. Giuseppe Prezzolini, "Perché gli italoamericani sono permalosi," in *I trapiantati* (Milan: Longanesi, 1963), 449–457.

4. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

5. See Donna Gabaccia, *Italy's Many Diasporas* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

these immigrants had spoken local languages, and their knowledge had been mostly local knowledge. The trip across the ocean had changed the shape of their physical and mental habitations. They were now in touch with many diverse ideas of who they were. They also began to speak a much more variegated language. The Italoamerican newspapers were generally not written in dialect, but in Italian. It was not always very idiomatic national Italian, though it was still closer to the national language than to anything else. Reading the stories and poems these newspapers also published, one can see that the immigrants were living in an intense contact zone, where not only national Italian and English were spoken, but also many Italic languages, from Ladin to Palermitano. In this zone, *italoamericani* often came to speak mixtures of Italian languages rarely heard before or since.

Italian speech and newspapers lost their hold on Italians after World War II, when the young no longer spoke Italian and their elders made less noise and spectacle about it than they had customarily done in the years before the war. Durante's anthology gives us access to the newspapers that *italoamericani* perused for three generations. Here we read how they thought and argued about national and international politics—democratic, fascist, socialist, anarchist. Here we read the poems and novels and plays that reflected their concerns as a transplanted people. Durante understands the day-by-day quality of historical process. His introductions to the sections and his headnotes to the selections in this anthology usher us into the world of the *italoamericani* in its historical, economic, and interpersonal intricacies in a way that few if any American or Italian American scholars have been able to match or even to imagine. The texture of a bygone world is the first thing to disappear. Durante's ability to bring this texture back to life is itself an excellent reason to read this book.

A Literature

Durante conveys the energy not just of the moment but also of a thriving colonial literature. Its energy emerges from continuous interaction with other cultures and other languages. Durante presents, early in this volume, Ferdinando Fontana's story "Shine? . . . Shine!," which dramatizes a fact about American life that startled the immigrants: the *italoamericani* find themselves in the company of African Americans who are often their social superiors. This new relationship runs counter to the unconscious but deeply held prejudices of the *italoamericani*, and their writers make the most of the internal conflicts that result. The story revolves around their sudden awareness of a fresh otherness, something that transfixes their attention, a colonial moment familiar in accounts of Europeans' experiences on other continents. The coordinates have shifted. Not far behind Fontana,

Durante gives us Gino Carlo Speranza, who makes a blunt equivalence between the situations of blacks and of Italian immigrants when he adapts as a title the notorious question posed by the leading African American intellectual W. E. B. Du Bois, "How Does It Feel to Be a Problem?" This upheaval of expectations is a frequent experience. In this literature the would-be colonizing Italian often finds himself startled when he falls to the rank of the colonized "dago." Colonial conflicts challenge not only the ethnic beliefs of the *italoamericani* but their moral categories as well. They encounter an incomprehensible bind after the introduction of prohibition in 1918. Wine is a staple element in their diet, as well as in the Catholic liturgy. It is easy for *italoamericani* to see this new restriction as an act of massive hypocrisy. Al Capone, the most notorious Italian gangster of the 1920s, presents himself turning one set of Puritan ideals against another, defending his bootlegging in the moral tone of an American bureaucrat: "Public Service Is My Motto."

Migration produces a system of broken links and vivid contrasts in the colony. Italoamerican literature brings us close to the interior experience of immigrants, finding in the general disarray many unexpected excitements to exploit. It thrives, for example, on tales of sexual irregularities that flourish when spouses and lovers are separated by distance and inadvertence. Narratives of bartered daughters, white slavery, runaway brides, and avenging husbands take place in the shadows of ships along the edges of Manhattan piers or in the overcrowded tenements of Five Points. Then there is the druglike effect that migration produces in simple people from simple places suddenly exposed to the radiant allure of American wealth. Love stories blossom in the Italian language, but, improbably enough, on snowy sidewalks seen against backdrops of Vanderbilt mansions. American life, with its glittering promises, raises levels of temptation and anxiety to sometimes unbearable heights.

Do these colonial writings in fact constitute a literature? At the minimum, they constitute the origins of a literature. They speak words in a context where new meanings are continually springing into life. Thus we find a heavy traffic in linguistic interference, for example, in Riccardo Cordiferro's poem "Il 'Polisso Italo-Americano' ": "*sanamagogna*" for "son of a gun," "*tiffe e loffere*" for "thieves and loafers," "*Blakenda*" for "Black Hand," and so on. These anglicisms bring into the Italian language the linguistic upheaval of the New York street. It is as if Italians were snaking through an alley crowded with people from all the countries of Europe and the Americas, and we can hear worlds colliding in the chaos of words. Indeed, the promiscuous heterogeneity of life in these overpopulated places gives to this literature, for all its focus on intensely inhabited towns in the old world and

urban villages in the new, a cosmopolitan texture. It applies and adapts to new situations a wide range of literary intelligence. In the fiction of Bernardino Ciambelli, for example, a narrative of sexual abuse and immigrant helplessness does not receive the journalist pathos and sociological objectivization that one finds, say, in the accounts of Jacob Riis; instead, Ciambelli employs the rhetorical and poetic machinery, the historical and operatic narrative rituals, that endow the characters and their destinies with subjective intensity and dramatic dignity. Their names alone are suggestive: in the selection here entitled "The Victim," we meet Vittoria Ruiz, the designated sacrifice; Napoleone Ghirendini, the white slaver; and Rinaldo Ruiz, the roué. These migrants are not just the playthings of fate, but they also struggle to make their destinies, even against overwhelming forces. It makes perfect sense that both Durante and his colleague Martino Marazzi call Ciambelli the "Homer of the migration."

Perhaps the strongest argument that these works have a collective identity as a literature comes from their specific attention to the nature of the Italian colony in America, a place like no other. To see this colony in action calls for a little imagining, or else a lot of old photographs. At the outset, one can imagine streets all mud giving way to cobbles, sidewalks mostly wood giving way to slate. In offices and saloons, plenty of spittoons. Outside, a rattle of carriages and four-in-hands and hackney cabs, broughams and buckboards and horse-drawn omnibuses mingling with the chug and thunder of steam locomotives, sometimes drawing freight into town, sometimes screaming along the elevated rails above newly cobbled streets. The background often showed the transitional disarray of townscapes in a Western, a not entirely adventitious similarity. This was a period of rapid change, when new things and new people were appearing every day, and yesterday's ways and themes were rapidly acquiring the golden aura of the glorious past. During the 1880s and 1890s, when Buffalo Bill Cody was shaping the eternal myth of the Old West, Carlo Barsotti, the founding editor of *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, was inventing the Italian *colonia* in the pages of his daily paper, and he was constructing the eternal altar of Italian New York, with a marble and granite column monumentalizing Cristoforo Colombo just at the point where Broadway meets Central Park. Colombo was even older than the Old West. *Italoamericani* during this period continually evoked the notion, almost the hallucination, of their privilege—that they were settling a wild country, and that they were doing so by right, as descendants of this "first European."

The pictures belong to a familiar cinematic vocabulary. There were swells in high collars and diamond stickpins, sitting at the dais at club dinners. Outside, there was shooting in the streets. It was easy to find women whose virtue was

under continuous challenge. There was a steady river of hardworking people wearing soiled aprons; there were men in rumpled suits giving speeches to strikers. There were labor contractors, con men, outright thieves, white slavers. The poor, unimaginably destitute, lived under the harsh Darwinian laws of the labor market.

All of this background is described in many works by Italian travelers—Dario Papa, Ferdinando Fontana, Camillo Cianfarra. Cianfarra creates a character, a colonial intellectual named Savini, who guides the Italian visitor in New York. In a memorable passage, he explains the immigrants' destiny. They leave Italy, he says, with the firm intention "to return to their homeland where they will again embrace the wife, pay off the mortgage, and resume the primitive life." It does not work out that way:

> With this mirage before them, they have said goodbye to their wives and children. They have seen the last peaks of their mountains disappear from the horizon. They have faced the dangers of the sea, the horrors of the unknown. And they are here [in New York], within reach of those who will drag them off to the sulfur mines of South Carolina, where one works in water up to the knees, or to plow the fields of Alabama where there are laws that can still force a worker to labor against his will. And from mining centers in Pennsylvania, from the desolate places of Arizona, from the pampas of New Mexico, from the rocks of Colorado, from all the furthest points of the U.S., their savings flow here, to these banks, in order to be saved without interest or to be transmitted at whatever rate the banker finds agreeable.
>
> And often one of these banks suddenly closes its doors, and from all over the American Union comes a single scream, a harrowing scream, however impotent, that tells you of the nameless deprivations, of the thousand tricks by which a dollar was taken by the rapacious hand of a contractor and "bosso," in order for it then to disappear into the pockets of a monster that spends it in some remote part of the globe.

America's challenge was not only Darwinian, but it was also revolutionary. This was a country with egalitarian ideals in race and gender and politics. Italy was mostly innocent of such ideals. The Italians had a hard time accepting the American context—its democratic innovations, its stunning hypocrisies. Capone was not the last gangster to challenge the moral smugness of the Americans. His descendants, real and imagined, down to Joe Colombo and Vito Corleone, belong to the myth of Italian Americans as gunslingers like Jesse James and Billy the Kid.

Their violence, their opposition to the forces of law, sometimes seems to be a form of political resistance, other times just a collateral effect of the expansionist violence that was the real engine of the Wild West.

If that famous theme presented the myth of capitalist triumph as it appeared in the lands of the New World, the anarchist and socialist movements were the armies of resistance to this closing of the frontier and enclosure of the continent.

Intellectuals, Including the Man Who Shot the King of Italy

The Wild West included, alongside its familiar mining camps and cowboys, small Italian newspapers and determined Italian strikers. Politics were often radical in out-of-the-way places. For example, Paterson, New Jersey, was the center of anarchist activity in the United States, activity so determined that it made a permanent mark in Italy. When, in 1898, Umberto I of Italy awarded the rank of Great Cross Cavalier of the Military Order of Savoy to General Bava Beccaris as a reward for shooting down and killing as many as four hundred demonstrators (the reported numbers vary) during a bread strike in Milan, the response among leftists was universal in the Italian world. Gaetano Bresci, an immigrant silk worker in Paterson and a follower of Errico Malatesta, traveled to Italy. After the Royal Regatta at Monza on July 29, Bresci approached the royal carriage and killed the king with two shots to the head.

A large section of this volume, Part IV, is devoted to the extreme political groups that flourished in this period—"anarchists, socialists, fascists." It is clear when reading the writings of political activists that, whether they were nationalists or internationalists, their thinking grew out of the issues that consumed the thinking of intellectuals in Italy throughout this long period. Even when socialists and communists and labor organizers were deeply involved in labor issues in American mines and factories, they were still mindful of conditions in Italy, of deep structural injustices in Italian society, of bitter and fruitless struggles for survival there. Many had been radicalized before they arrived in the United States, and conditions there affirmed what they had already come to believe; others were embittered for the first time by their monumental disappointment with the America they found.

The temper of this political discourse is so filled with rage and confusion that it calls for some historical perspective. Italy, whether in the peninsula or in the colonies, was massively engaged in the struggle to become a full-fledged European country, one whose economic and military institutions could stand comparison with those of England and France and Austria. The struggle had begun after the fall of Napoleon (1814) and gathered force during the Risorgimento (1821–1861).

After the successful political unification of Italy in 1861 began the real work of nationalizing a country that had itself for centuries been a collection of imperial provinces and disconnected kingdoms. Old rivalries, new wounds, and the sheer weight of the task led to ceaseless turmoil. A great distance separated the Risorgimento's ambitions from its achievements. Many Italians lived in a miasma of disappointment and resentment. These feelings, this political temper, followed them to the New World.

When *italoamericani* wrote about Italy, some expressed admiration and longing for the feathered helmets and the crested arches, and there was a brisk trade in songs of hopeless longing for the mothers and sweethearts left behind. But in the newspapers, as well as in the novels that generally appeared first as newspaper serials, one also met a bracing realism about life in Italy, and about the life being lived deep inside the veins and arteries of the Italian labor empire, where so many of the immigrants found themselves, lured in by promises of riches, kept in by contractors who stole their wages and by company towns where the cost of food and rent always outpaced the wages, so that the factories and mines became effectively debtors' prisons. The women were constantly in danger. Often they were the victims of bosses. They worked long hours in bad conditions. Even more often, they were simply the victims of men, brutal lovers and husbands, adventurers and pimps. It is remarkable, reading the narratives in this anthology, how much bitterness one encounters, how often and how readily these immigrants connected Italy with a hard life.

The anarchists and socialists saw these feelings as perfectly just responses to a world whose inequities they understood theoretically, practically, and dramatically. The leaders of these movements lived aloud. They spoke their minds. They acted on their convictions. They traveled ceaselessly, marching in protests, speaking for strikers, starting newspapers. They practiced free love. Men like Carlo Tresca and women like Virgilia D'Andrea mounted unflinching and unbending opposition to the imperialist wars and industrialist exploitation that were naturalized facts of life for the mass of Americans and Europeans in their time. From his desk in the office of his journal *Il Martello*, Tresca took on all the *prominenti* of the Italian colony, from Carlo Barsotti to Generoso Pope, never hesitating to call them indelible names and to match them threat for threat. He would show up at the Casa Italiana of Columbia University, where the Italian department was controlled by Fascist supporters, and break up their meetings, sometimes shouting, other times using his fists. Tresca was effective enough as a gadfly that Mussolini was always trying to extinguish him, finally exerting all his influence to see that the anarchist editor was shot down in the winter of 1943, on the sidewalk of

Sixteenth Street and Fifth Avenue in New York City, right outside the offices of *Il Martello*.

The Fascists, too, did not hide their feelings. They wrote startling poems on the glories of the Duce, sometimes affecting Latin epigrams and often accepting the notion of an identity between this leader and the military *imperatori* of ancient Rome. Rosa Zagnoni Marinoni, a regular contributor to the pro-Fascist journal *Il Carroccio*, published there an English-language poem entitled "To Mussolini, the Immortal," which opens with these stirring lines:

> There is the lure of the jungle in your eyes.
> Eagle wings have swept your pensive brow.
> You have the untamed majesty of lions
> Who scorn to follow, but unconscious reign.

These troublesome sentiments suggest the emotional appeal that Fascism had for many Italians and Italian Americans. The sense of eternal humiliation that drove the Risorgimento and that arose again after the Treaty of Versailles gave point to the Fascist saying that lies behind this poem: "*Meglio un giorno da leone che cento da pecora*" (Better one day as a lion than a hundred as a sheep). Fascist dreams of glory depended more on such emotional appeals than upon any appeal to reason. While millions of Italian Americans were susceptible to these allures, most of their radical activists were not. The anarchists and socialists were not often united, but in their opposition to Fascism, they were as one. All these groups, whatever their orientation, shared a dramatic style of politics, a taste for violent rhetoric and for loud parades and disturbances.

A Futurist Theater

Political activists mostly haunted the offices of the dozens of newspapers and printing houses they used in their struggle. Another entire wing of *scrittori italo-americani* spent a good deal of their time in cafes, where they met and wrote, where they acted and sang their portraits of *la vita coloniale*.

A large section of this volume is devoted to the colonial theater. The theme is enormous. It touches the Italian opera, a vast subject in itself; it touches the most successful of all the literary journals published in Italian in the United States, *La Follia di New York*, where one found a great deal of satire and parody and, above all, the theatrical caricatures produced by Enrico Caruso. Italoamerican theater included the heroic puppet plays of the *pupi siciliani*, where Rinaldo and Orlando crossed swords with the paladins of Saladin; the theater included melodramas of

honor and revenge complete with moustachioed villains and outraged husbands brandishing pistols; it included police-blotter thrillers with murderers, plotters, panders and, especially, heroic detectives. There were divas and songwriters, one of whom was the grandfather of the filmmaker Francis Ford Coppola. This suggestive fact implies that immigrant cafes and theaters were the incubators of the great achievements of Italian American cinema and theater in the past forty years. Nothing, except perhaps the *prosciutti* and *provoloni* hanging over the counters in the Italian grocery stores, gives a sharper taste of the vivacity that characterized the Italian confrontation with the New World.

In Durante's account, this brio was above all Neapolitan. The lively and even chaotic revues of Neapolitan theater, its *macchiette*, became the prototypes for a new form, the *macchietta coloniale*. "The *macchietta* is a typical product of Neapolitan theater," Durante writes. "It was a 'total' show including singing, reciting, pantomime, and quick costume changes. Not by chance was it well liked by the futurists." The *macchietta* was, at its heart, an impersonation. The actor incarnated a comic type. He would sing, recite poetry, improvise a monologue. It was a loose form, and anything could happen. It was well suited to the drama of colonial life, where everyday events often included startling novelties like the telephone or the florid pretenses of local politicians. The *macchietisti* improvised powerful comedy and pathos on such themes. The colonial vaudevilles touch a lot of themes we do not hear much about anymore. *Macchietisti* were especially hard on the *prominenti*, the colonial big shots who draped themselves with sashes and medals on holidays and marched in parades—generals and admirals on holidays, but undertakers and butchers the rest of the time.

The *macchietisti* make it clear that Futurism, as a practical response to social changes, was an aesthetic program that, without the benefit of a label, had flourished in the colonies for decades, long before Filippo Tommaso Marinetti coined its bourgeois Italian form in 1909, in his manifestoes condemning the old and elevating the new, praising speed, violence, youth, and destruction. The Futurist theater of colonial life did not need to evoke these qualities as if they were essences or demons, because these were the very weather of days and nights in New York. Protagonists, not ideals.

Italoamericana itself owes a lot to the *macchietta coloniale*. This anthology is not an encyclopedia of life in the *colonia*, though the introductory essays and headnotes provide a panoramic array of biographical, historical, political, and literary information. It is rather a series of rapid takes—stories, poems, editorials, manifestos, brief plays, chapters of novels—that give the reader the sense of an entire world. Fast cuts of a long-ago future, originating everywhere in the United

States from Boston to California, from New Orleans to Minnesota. Durante's work belongs to that genre of modernist anthology that was pioneered in Italy by Elio Vittorini with his *Americana* in 1941, a book that aimed to introduce Italian readers to the whole range of American fiction. It did not quite accomplish that, but it succeeded in bringing genuine American experiments in free speech into the classical studios of Rome and Venice. Americanists like Vittorini and Pavese owed something to the Futurists, but even more to their own hatred of Fascism. America became for these literary intellectuals a new version of what it had been to the immigrants: the future, not as designed by bourgeois theorists and artists in Milan and Paris, but rather the future as it was being lived by ordinary people, many of them Italians, escaping from the oldness of old Europe and crossing the ocean to land in a laboratory of new expressions and new freedoms. This is a place where speed and violence are not Futurist slogans but simply the music of daily life. Francesco Durante belongs to this tradition of Americanists.

Americans, Including the Man Who Carved the Statue of Abraham Lincoln

Getulio Piccirilli was one of a family of seven sculptors who came to New York from Massa Carrara. They lived and worked on East 142nd Street in the Bronx, and they carved the marble for brand-name American sculptors who worked in clay: John Quincy Adams Ward, Augustus Saint-Gaudens, Daniel Chester French. French made a maquette in clay of the statue of Abraham Lincoln, and then commissioned Getulio Piccirilli, who both carved, and supervised the carving of, the twenty-eight blocks of Georgia marble that make up the statue that looks out over the Capitol Mall.[6] The Piccirilli signature, like invisible ink under a heat lamp, has only now begun to attract attention. Likewise, Francesco Durante's enterprise endows many signatures with a new legibility.

Durante has contributed not only to Italian American literature, but to the Americanist strain in Italian literature as well. Readers of Italian letters will remember the story of a thirty-year-old Sicilian who has lived in northern Italy and has not seen his mother in fifteen years. Now he is returning to visit her in the small mountain town where he was born. On the boat train to Messina, he eats some bread and cheese. The other passengers have nothing to eat except oranges. A small Sicilian man, watching this northerner eating, takes out a small orange and consumes it rapidly.

6. Josef Vincent Lombardo, *Attilio Picirilli, The Life of an American Sculptor* (New York: Pitman, 1944), 292.

"A Sicilian never eats in the morning," he said suddenly. "Are you an American?" he added.

He spoke with desperation, yet gently. . . . He spoke the last three words excitedly, in a strident tense voice, as if it were somehow essential to the peace of his soul to know if I were American.

I observed this, and said: "Yes, I am American. For the last fifteen years."[7]

This is the voice of the narrator in Elio Vittorini's *Conversazione in Sicilia*, a novel published and censored in 1941. In that same year, Vittorini published the anthology that opened American literature to Italian readers, *Americana*. It was also censored, though both books were republished the following year.

Why did Vittorini's narrator call himself an American? Vittorini, too, had left Sicily at fifteen and moved as far north as he could get. He had begun adult life as a supporter of Fascism when it was hard to distinguish from Socialism, but by the mid-1930s, he was turning to Communism and at the same time to Americanism as well. What did America mean to Vittorini and to the many writers, among them Cesare Pavese and Italo Calvino, who followed similar paths? America was a reminder that there was a place where the poor might eat and the silent might speak. A great novelty of *Americana* is Vittorini's notion that Italian literature has something important to learn from American writing. Vittorini's *Conversazione in Sicilia* visibly exploits the clean lines of Ernest Hemingway's prose, a stylistic choice that amounted to an act of political resistance in an age of overblown Fascist rhetoric, allowing Vittorini to represent the brutal poverty of Sicily under the Fascists with a prose that was just as economical as the diet of the Sicilians, who often ate but once a day, and poorly—often nothing but the small oranges grown on their own trees.

Durante's *Italoamericana* takes a similarly radical stance, positing that Italians of the 2000s have something important to learn from the writings of *italoamericani* in the age of migration. In this respect, his work keeps company with Martino Marazzi's *Misteri di Little Italy* (2001) and Gian Antionio Stella's *L'orda: Quando gli albanesi eravamo noi* (2002) (*The Horde: When the Albanians Were Us*). For these writers, Italy's emigrant past is a large and unexplored, even suppressed, fund of experience and expression, very much to be considered now that Italy has become a place where people go to settle, rather than a place they leave. In short, the writ-

7. Elio Vittorini, *In Sicily*, trans. Wilfrid David (New York: New Directions, 1949); first published as *Conversazione in Sicilia* (Milano: Bompiani, 1941), 24–25.

ings of Italian immigrants in 1905 New York suddenly had important things to say to Milan in 2005.

Masses of strangers speaking strange languages to strange gods strike fear along the comfortable streets of home. Many Italians find it hard to see past that fear. But emigrant Italians inspired similar reactions in New Orleans and New Bedford a century ago. Today it is Bengalis and Somalis who produce these feelings in Mestre and Ostia. Durante's anthology is an introduction to the underworld of feeling that lives among these unwelcome foreigners. At the close of this anthology, Durante gives us Edward Corsi, a great immigrant success story, who came to America in 1907 at the age of ten, became a lawyer when he grew up, and was appointed Commissioner of Immigration at Ellis Island in 1931. In his English-language memoir of life as an official of Ellis Island, Corsi describes the experience of an immigrant named Nathan Cohen, whom the immigration bureaucrats did not know how to handle. Cohen had come to the United States from Russia by way of Argentina and Brazil. While in America, he had started a business that later failed; his wife then ran off with another man, and Cohen lost his mind. Brazil would not take him back, nor would Argentina. After almost a decade of shuttling this man back and forth among nations that refused to admit him, it was finally discovered that Cohen had once joined the Knights of Pythias in Jacksonville, Florida, and that organization accordingly now assumed his care, placing him in a home for the insane in Green Farms, Connecticut, where he later died. The persistent turbulence of his lostness is a central element in his story as Corsi tells it. This turbulence, in one or another of its many forms, has never failed to assault immigrants when they first step ashore on Ellis Island in New York Bay or on Lampedusa in the Mediterranean, halfway between Sicily and Africa.

In *Son of Italy*, Pascal D'Angelo describes his boyhood as a shepherd in Abruzzo in terms that would have made sense to Theocritus or Vergil. His entry into American life features the capital universe of labor gangs building the mechanical utopia of elevated trains and chain-drive motor transports. The whole arrangement deeply unsettled the sensibilities of a young Italian male who had grown up in the company of sheep and goats on mountainsides. The central figures of such narratives are Futurist subjects. They feel themselves the sites of abrupt shifts, swift updrafts, sudden falls.

Their destiny has become a universal possibility. This is the subtext of *Italoamericana*: the whole anthology recalls a century of displacement and universal loss, and it serves to remind Italians, whether in Denver or in Turin, of who they once were and who they might yet again be.

This new effect continues to grow. It has been pouring into Italy now for thirty or forty years, changing the complexions of classrooms in the Veneto and raising continual challenges along that country's many borders—Malta in the Mediterranean between Spain and Italy, Lecce on the Adriatic opposite Montenegro, Varese in the foothills of the Swiss Alps.

In the Italian American corner of the future, the literature of the Italian migration has suffered two cruel blows of chance. Many of its works first appeared in newspapers that are now yellowing and crumbling in attics and libraries. Even works that were published in more durable forms have fallen into darkness. Most Italians are not interested in reading these texts, and most Italian Americans are not capable of doing so. *Italoamericana*, in this American edition, opens these works to all who can read English, and we firmly hope that those readers will want more, that they will seek to read further texts of Arturo Giovannitti and Emanuel Carnevali; that they will want to see translated more of Riccardo Cordiferro, more of Severina Magni, all of Bernardino Ciambelli. Earlier, I said that if you can name "five of their writers," consider yourself an expert. So here you are already an expert. And that is just for starters. In Durante's anthology, many voices long silenced will be heard and will again have names. In this edition, many Americans, Italian or not, will know their names, and for the first time.

Italoamericana

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PART I

Chronicle of the Great Exodus

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Introduction

Around 1880 the Italian immigration to North America—which up to that point had grown at a relatively modest, if constant, rate[1]—sharply increased. A human flood, mostly from the south of Italy but also from the north-central region (most typically, Lucchesia), started inundating the United States. Villages and small towns from the rural districts of the Apennines, Abruzzo, Calabria, and Sicily gradually emptied out. The numbers are impressive: about 5 million Italians had departed in the course of roughly forty years, until in the early 1920s the United States promulgated more restrictive immigration laws. From the beginning the rate had been high. A statistical survey of the decade 1876–1887 made by the University of Genoa supplies an astonishing picture. In this decade from the Lucanian territory of Lagonegro—the homeland of renowned musicians from Viggiano and Corleto—26,917 people, or a quarter of the total population (an average of 2,243.08 persons per year) emigrated; from the district of Sala Consilina, Salerno, 22,241 people—a little less than one-third of the total (1,853.42 per year); from the territory of Potenza, Basilicata, 27,992 people, or one-fifth of the total (2,332.67 per year).[2] In 1896, for the first time, "the three migratory flows from Austria-Hungary, Italy, and Russia outstripped the volume of arrivals from the United Kingdom, Germany, and Scandinavia."[3]

1. For this kind of "prologue" to the mass immigration, with particular reference to southern Italy, and for those more interested in immigration to the United States, see especially the first chapters of De Clementi 1999 as well as the same author's contribution ("*La grande migrazione*") in Bevilacqua, De Clementi, and Franzina 2001.

2. Del Vecchio 1892.

3. Schlesinger 1980, 100.

The historical investigation of this phenomenon, its causes, and its effects on people's lives in Italy has produced a very rich bibliography, which the reader may consult for further information. This present introduction will not repeat a well-known story that has been fully updated and expounded in works such as Emilio Franzina's *Gli italiani al nuovo mondo* (1994) and the important *Storia dell'emigrazione italiana* (2001), edited by Franzina, Piero Bevilacqua, and Andreina De Clementi. Instead, it will deal with the Italian American literary corpus and its major writers thematically. But before beginning, I will provide the reader with material that, even if not strictly "literary," will hopefully sum up some of the most important aspects linked to this protracted period of mass emigration. Let me repeat, this material is Italian American, namely, produced in the United States or directly connected with the migratory experience itself. This choice implies the exclusion of a significant—and sometimes astonishing—number of documents written by travelers, scholars, polemicists, and literati who confronted this experience from a strictly Italian perspective. An exception has been made in the case of Ferdinandino Fontana's harsh testimonial because this author worked as a journalist in New York, for however short a time.

This opening selection covers a forty-year span, ranging from the early 1880s to the early 1920s. During this period there were several attempts by the American authorities to restrict immigration, such as the cautious introduction of various literacy tests that legislators attempted to toughen as early as 1880. (In 1893, President Cleveland vetoed the harshest of these tests.) They were followed by other measures in the late 1910s: for example, the Espionage Act of 1917 aimed at blocking the influx of dangerous revolutionaries who were subsequently expelled from the country. The crucial phase of restriction initiatives began in March 1919, when the Republican nativist Albert Johnson was appointed chair of the House Committee on Immigration. He enthusiastically sponsored the antiradical movement during the "months of hysteria" of late 1919–early 1920 and advocated a drastic revision of the 1921 measures, which allotted immigration quotas to the various nationalities based on the 1910 census. Due to this revision of the law, arrivals to the United States were severely reduced. Each group was allowed 2 percent of the quota assigned it according to the census of 1890, when the ratio between the old and the new immigration was still largely in favor of the former. In this way the Italian quota dropped from 42,000 to 4,000 persons; the Polish quota from 31,000 to 6,000; the Greek from 3,000 to 100; and so on. The debate over the Johnson Bill was propped up by a huge tide of opinion, which ranged from the Ku Klux Klan to Samuel Gompers's American Federation of Labor. It was extensive and exhaustive and settled for a temporary solution that accepted

various amendments to the original text. President Coolidge signed the bill into law in May 1924.[4]

The texts presented in this section are chronologically ordered so as to offer a diachronic view of the phenomenon of immigration and to highlight its most conspicuous aspects, like the exploitation of the so-called unskilled workers who represented the great mass of the Italian labor force. Rejected by Gompers's syndicalist representatives, they ended up being sucked into the famous *padrone* system, the iniquitous manpower brokerage network which in those years represented one of the most substantial sources of capital accumulation for an enterprising class of nouveaux riches. However, these notorious colonial *prominenti* (the local business and political elite) were able to fulfill an essential function of intraethnic binding, as several thoroughly Americanized authors recognized at the beginning of the century. The passage here included from Rocco Corresca's exceptional autobiographical narrative recounts a harsh experience of marginality and testifies to the complex and multifaceted theme of work.

This section also deals with another important theme: the American reaction to the new and hardly welcomed immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe (Italians, Greeks, Slavs, Jews, and so on). From the start these immigrants heavily disturbed and aroused suspicion in the Anglo-Saxon population, owing especially to the shameless exhibition of their miserable condition—an exhibition that also impressed visiting Italian travelers. As Giuseppe Sormani, who traveled to the United States in the late 1880s, wrote, with an alarming tendency to generalize: "It is painful to admit—but these pages are not meant to flatter any *amor proprio*—that, while in the other colonies the neighborhood slums represent the exception, they are the rule among the Italians." In this same observer's view, the immigrants could be subdivided into a number of significant categories, all rather disturbing. For example, "those whom laziness has thrown unto the road to perdition and have therefore an account to square with the law," or "those who have tried every possible way to get by without toiling and were not able to reach their goal; the slothful who act as (itinerant) lovers of the musical or singing art, and finally—the most numerous—the have-nots who are attracted to the mirage of a possible change of condition."[5]

This is the point of view of a journalist from Milan interested primarily in the emblems of American modernity. No wonder then that on several occasions at-

4. For all of this subject matter, it remains essential to consult the classic Higham 1971, in particular the last chapter, "Closing the Gates."

5. The cited passages are treated in Sormani 1888, 19.

tempts were made to restrict immigration legally and, in particular, to discipline it by de facto excluding the unwelcome elements (among them the Italians) as thoroughly as possible. Furthermore, serious manifestations of racism against Italians occurred in many parts of the country, culminating in frequent, terrible outbursts of violence. The most sensational of them took place in New Orleans in 1891. Eleven Sicilians, members of a thriving community that held a veritable monopoly over the fruit and vegetable markets, had been charged with the killing of the city's vice sheriff, a man named Hennessy. On the verge of being acquitted—some fully, others for lack of evidence—they were removed by force from the jail where they were still detained. They were then lynched by an enraged crowd, incited and protected by an ad hoc committee. This was the most serious episode of lynching in American history.[6] Curiously, this and other equally grave incidents—like the other major lynching of five Italians in Tallulah, Alabama, in 1899—received remarkably little attention in the literature of the period. The more so if we consider that this literature was thoroughly seduced by the pathetic almost ad nauseam.[7] There was a louder echo of such events in the newspapers. The excerpt included here was written by Luigi Roversi and is an example of a polemical exchange that, it must be said, was rather sedate and dignified.

Anti-Italian prejudice was based on the radical difference between the new intimidating aliens and the dominant Anglo-Saxon model. Soon such prejudice embraced the idea that a potential criminal was hiding behind every Italian immigrant. In a *Life* cartoon of 1911, the abominable "Wop" was still portrayed with

6. For the history of this episode and the political consequences it provoked—from the withdrawal of the Italian ambassador in Washington to requests for compensation to the widespread fear that the Italian navy intended to strike the American coasts, which were not yet protected by an adequate means of defense—see Gambino 1978 and Rimanelli-Postman 1992. On the theme of the lynching of Italians in the United States, examined case by case, see Salvetti 2003.

7. Exemplary of the coldness with which jurist Augusto Pierantoni took up this question is a ponderous essay appearing in two installments. In "Italia Coloniale" (1904), he preoccupies himself by way of preliminaries with finding a legal foundation for lynching as a rudimentary form of popular justice before ultimately denying such conditions in the New Orleans episode, asserting that "on the contrary, it had the character of the violation of the individual rights written in the federal and state constitutions. . . . In the embryonic life of the colony, lynching is the justice or the defense of the honest against delinquency; in constituted societies, it is an atrocious, barbarous deed that assumes the nature of conjoined offenses. The murder, the violence against the prison guards, the usurpation of sovereign power, and the massacre are the qualifications of the tragedy of 14 March. To have called it a 'lynching' was a deplorable abuse of words" (Pierantoni 1904, 447). Analogous opinions were expressed by the same author elsewhere in the American press (see Pierantoni 1903).

negroid features and polishing an American's shoes. The cartoon was accompanied by the following quatrain:

> A pound of spaghett' and a red-a bandan'
> A stilet' and a corduroy suit;
> Add garlic wat make for him stronga da mus'
> And a talent for black-a da boot![8]

Such words as "Wop," "Macaroni," "Guinea," and "Dago" suggest that the range of derogatory epithets aimed at the Italians was quite broad. "Wop" in particular was derived from the Neapolitan "*guappo*." "Guinea" and "Dago" have more uncertain etymons: the latter term could be generically extended to the entire mass of "Latinos." For this reason it has been taken as a corruption for the Spanish "Diego," which was also the name of Christopher Columbus's son. Eugenio Camillo Branchi, however, has suggested a more imaginative and particularly significant origin:

> It is thought to be the Italian pronunciation of the English phrase "They go!" In this way, the officials at Ellis Island indicated the departure of the thousands and thousands of Italians who arrived every week—real human herds in all their misery and filth. In itself the epithet is not offensive, but as is always the case, it is the tune that makes the music.[9]

The belief became widespread that it was Italians who brought to America the dark menace of the mafia and the camorra. This was also due to the popular opinion that the Italian newcomers were wild, rowdy, hot-tempered, and easily driven to commit crimes of passion. These beliefs persisted despite the facts: Italian American newspapers pointed out that the rate of criminality among Italians in America was actually lower and less alarming than that of other groups, especially the

8. La Gumina 1973.

9. Branchi 1927, 113n. It is well known that nicknames of this sort were given to all immigrants: the Irish, for example, were "micks" and "paddies," the Chinese "chinks," the Jews "kikes," and so on. According to the optimistic vision of Lord, Trenor, and Barrows 1905, 227, the extreme variety of immigration was a guarantee against the rooting of as strong a prejudice as that experienced by one group: "While there are many races of immigrants in America, they may be greeted with prejudice, but it cannot be as bitterly shown and cannot continue as long as it would if there were only two elements concerned." On anti-Italian prejudice in America, see also the lively reconstruction of Stella 2002.

Irish. The people's obsession with the "Mano Nera" or Black Hand was given full attention in the American newspapers and soon in the cinema as well, but with an inverse effect. At a time when the Italian rackets were not yet organized but thrived on episodic and disconnected adventures, many criminals (for example, racketeers and extortionists) took advantage of the opportunity to sign their anonymous threats with the terrifying symbol of the "Black Hand." This intriguing theme no doubt inspired the Italian colony's collective imagination and was indeed treated in several novels and theatrical productions. But the smartest members of the community clearly believed that it was all just a pretense. For example, in his play *Il martire del dovere ovvero Giuseppe Petrosino* (see Part II) the novelist Bernardino Ciambelli has a certain Don Raffaele, the head of a prostitution ring, remark:

> Listen here. What we could do is kidnap a beautiful girl and put her up in our boarding-school. Then we could write a threatening letter to her parents stating this: Unless you send us $1,000 or $2,000, you will not see your daughter again. Her parents will think that it's the Black Hand and not us. A husband wants to abandon his wife and write a nice letter full of threats, and he can tell his wife, "I have to run away or else they'll bump me off." A banker is not able to return his clients' money and wants to justify his flight; he spreads it around that he is being threatened by the Black Hand and he's forced to close down his business. A shopkeeper wants to go bankrupt and when they ask him to account for the money, he says, "I had to give it to the Black Hand." Do you understand now what this terrible syndicate, which frightens so many people and makes the police work so hard, is all about?

On the other hand, the qualitative leap occurred exactly when Giuseppe Petrosino, head of the New York Italian police squad, was murdered. The year was 1909, and the death of the Italian American detective in Palermo, Sicily, disclosed for the first time the existence of a transatlantic criminal connection. In this way, broad sectors of American public opinion were confirmed in their belief that the Italian government was lax or even quite willing to let disreputable people emigrate to America. But this is still small stuff in comparison with what would happen in the 1920s when Prohibition coincided with the drying-up of the traditional source of profit deriving from the importation and management of new labor, thanks to the drastic imposition of the immigration quota law. Possibly, the effects of this new situation led to a diversification of energies that were then invested in

organized delinquency.[10] And with the passing of time mythical figures such as Al Capone and Lucky Luciano rivaled other famous "imported" gangsters such as Dutch Schulz (Arthur Simon Flegenheimer), the son of German Jews, and the Polish Jew Meyer Lansky (Maier Suchowljansky).

The rise of an Italian American underworld was favored by extremely harsh socioeconomic conditions aggravated by the added burden of ethnic prejudice. All in all, the Italians at some point would have had to learn to "defend" themselves. That is to say, they would have to find within their own community the strength to oppose the injustices to which they were exposed. Even today, Italian Americans are still sensitive to their being associated with the underworld. One could argue that their struggle to combat negative stereotypes dates back to the 1870s: stereotypes are slightly toned down by America's current obsession with the politically correct but are still sensationally fertile in the field of popular entertainment. Suffice it to mention two recent television productions, both of them created by Italian Americans: the series *The Sopranos* and the reality show *Growing Up Gotti*, whose protagonist is Victoria, the daughter of the famous "godfather." Indeed, Italian Americans blame the American milieu for much of the birth and growth of the Italian rackets.[11] Not by chance, in the mid-1920s the Italian American scholar John Horace Mariano invited his readers to make a leap forward and overcome an old ungrounded prejudice:

> Let us dismiss from our minds once and for all time, then, the erroneous idea that our Italian immigrants are inherently criminal and fill our jails. . . . It is not our Italian immigrants who present a problem but it is their children. . . . For while the Italian immigrant is not found in proportion to his numbers in our disciplinary institutions, his children are met there in overwhelming numbers.[12]

Obviously, this kind of observation works from the notion of an America that forces its immigrants to become criminal almost in self-defense. In any case, not they but their children born and raised in America present the real problem. We

10. On this theme, see, among others, the acute observations of Dore 1964.

11. Very significant, and to the point, is Schiavo 1962, in which the author, for a long time the leading authority on the history of Italian American immigration to the United States, reveals his insights on the Mafia problem, tackling the issue with historical precision. He does not neglect, for example, to stress "how Mussolini smashed the Mafia and the Allies tried to revive it" and also mentions "America's heritage of violence and corruption."

12. Mariano 1925, 127.

have here another aspect of a thesis of justification, not without some validity, which also surfaces in the form of a passionate plea in the excerpt from Gino Carlo Speranza. A second-generation Italian American, he was one of the most respected scholars of the problem of the new immigrant in the early 1920s.

On the other hand, it would be a remarkable omission to forget the influence of the mafia on the American imagination, particularly in the realm of cinema. This influence precedes the Warner Brothers' memorable trilogy: Mervyn LeRoy's *Little Caesar* (1930), with Edward G. Robinson and Douglas Fairbanks Jr.; William Wellman's *The Public Enemy* (1931), with James Cagney; and Howard Hawks's *Scarface* (1932), with Paul Muni. The last of these movies is clearly based on the life of Al Capone, who was in the news at the time. Certainly the most famous Italian American gangster, Al Capone—his attitude, his language, and his "style"—represents the wicked archetype of Italian American culture. In the course of Italian American literary history, novels such as Mario Puzo's *The Godfather* (1969) will thoroughly—and frequently—rework this inevitable theme, using that same attitude, language, and style as an oblique and disturbing source of "authorship." For this reason this section includes a short but significant interview with Al Capone: a "character" and "phenomenon" that was capable of capturing America's attention far more than any other personage coming out of the Little Italies of the early 1890s.

These ethnic enclaves gradually sprang up in practically every city in America, especially in the big cities of the East but also in cities such as Chicago and San Francisco. By the second decade of the twentieth century, New York was already the most densely populated "Italian" city after Naples. Such cities were in a certain sense extraterritorial spaces where the newly arrived immigrants found the world they had left behind almost fully recreated in the New World. They might have lived their entire lives speaking their own dialects, reading Italian newspapers, attending Italian shows, and eating Italian food without ever coming into contact with American reality, not even in their workplaces, since they were recruited by Italian bosses and assigned to Italian work crews. (This is what the great mass of first-generation Italian Americans actually did.) The labor unions and the anarchist and socialist political organizations—such as the IWW (International Workers of the World)—were prominent among those who tried to alter such conditions, but with little success. There was a strong need to provide Italian workers with a sense of class consciousness that would deter them from working for cheap wages, thereby inflaming those who had already been a part of the work force for a long time. This consciousness could only be achieved outside the reassuring womb of the colony, with its rites of ranting and stale *italianità*. Such rites were actually

presided over by those members of the social and cultural elite who often owned the newspapers and of course had every interest in maintaining the status quo. See here the welcome address of one of the most famous among them, Carlo Barsotti, who printed it in the first number of *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*. In 1893, the tragic events of Aigues Mortes represented another terrible outburst of anti-Italian violence that occurred in France and ended with the slaughter of dozens of workers from Piemonte, Italy. Consequently, as the *Progresso* testified, the community leaders—the local business and political elite—were ready to "justify the behavior of these wretched people, who, unaware of the harm they are doing and the risk they are running, are willing to replace those who cling to the extreme resource of the strike in order to avoid being knocked off in the struggle for life."[13]

The problem of Americanization, however, started to be felt also outside the political-syndicalist perspective. After the first phase of the Great Immigration, the immigrants began to settle down in substantial numbers. This phase affected the so-called birds of passage: those who stayed in the New World for limited periods of time and returned home almost every year; or those who underwent indescribable sacrifices for a relatively short length of time, with the idea of eventually returning to Italy and living comfortably there for the rest of their life. Very likely, they were also heading for bitter disappointment. It now became necessary to obtain citizenship in order to convince oneself that he or she was American and to resolve the cultural and practical contradictions that life suspended between two worlds entailed.[14] This important theme conceals specific consequences such as military service, a problem that emerged dramatically for Italian immigrants with the outbreak of World War I. And it also led to typical generational ruptures between the parents from Italy and their children who were either born or grew up in America.

Already at the beginning of the century, Bonaventura Piscopo, the parish priest of the Church of the Most Precious Blood, was able to report to Senner, the Com-

13. This was expressed by Protasio Neri of Hallowell, Maine, in a long letter published in the New York paper *Cristoforo Colombo* on September 21, 1893. It is worth remembering that this newspaper leaned left and was particularly militant and polemical on social issues. In 1894, for example, it led a bitter campaign against the abuses of the *padrone* system.

14. An example is the experience of a young Comasco destined to become a great coin collector, Solone Ambrosoli, who in the pathetic verses of *Partendo da New York* (*Leaving New York*, 187), bids farewell to one reality: the "fatal America, / Land of dreams and sorrow" that failed to fulfill the poet's wishes: "And I too hoped the rosy / American hope, / Irresistible charm / to the great human crowd, / And I too experienced the hardships, / the hunger and the torment, / And I will never forget them."

missioner of Immigration of the Port of New York, that "all the Italian priests during Mass, at Sunday school, and in the confessional, are obliged to use English if they have any hope of being understood by the second generation."[15]

An excerpt from *Gli americani nella vita moderna osservati da un italiano* (The Americans in Modern Life as Observed by an Italian) by Alberto Pecorini, an atypical figure of a "colonial" polemicist, deals specifically with the difficult relationship between fathers and children. As we shall see, the theme of Americanization will indeed be viewed with suspicion by the cleverest of the nationalist journalists of the colony, Agostino De Biasi (see Part IV). And through him, Americanization will also be viewed skeptically by Italian American fascists, leading Italian consulate officers to adopt an ambiguous stance. This issue was perhaps the one that most intensely preoccupied the immigrants. The problem might be viewed differently according to the historical moment and the generational factor, the already-mentioned dissimilarities between Italian fathers and their American children. Italian identity always asserts itself when Americanization, more or less forced, is contested. This is borne out in the lucid observations of an important intellectual like Alberto Tarchiani, who is represented here by an article, written in the fateful year of 1915, that belongs to his little-known Italian American "prehistory." On the other hand, the theme of Americanization will be revived through repeated appeals to moderation addressed to the American authorities.

In 1919, for example, when confronted with the Wilson solution for the Fiume question, the Protestant minister Henry Charles Sartorio remarked that the Italians of America were right to feel betrayed, to the point of considering appeals to naturalization as no longer appropriate. According to Sartorio, the Italian American immigrant

> is still strongly patriotic with respect to his country of origin and has not yet learned to appreciate and love America. He feels that the decisions taken by the head of this nation have done an injustice to the land he loves and he strongly resents it. So many people are surprised that President Wilson, in the course of the debate on European affairs, has taken a position that is bound to exasperate millions of American inhabitants of Italian, Polish, and other origins. If the matter had been given more attention, they might have been ready to transform themselves into loyal American citizens.

And, in any case:

15. Cited in Lord, Trenor, and Barrows 1905, 242.

> Americanization must be a slow, psychological process. In no way can it be forced. Every time a new center for Americanization has been opened in an Italian quarter, there has been the same reaction that occurs when a Catholic mission is opened in a Protestant quarter with the aim to convert the heretics, or vice versa. As a result, everybody is on his guard.[16]

In 1925 the Johnson Bill sealed the fate of the "historical" immigration to the United States. The Italian American intellectual Matteo Teresi still tried passionately to defeat the restrictions applied to Italian immigration. He upheld the reasons for Americanization as the purchase "of new, diverse, and characteristic values: the engrafting of the Italic offshoot onto the great trunk of American life." He argued that "the best school of Americanism is economic justice, the honest working of free institutions, and friendly respect for the races gathered here so as to enrich with new elements the life of this still young and rapidly developing nation." Finally, he launched an accusation: those who declare that the Italians are "unassimilable" want the American "elders"—that is to say, those already settled here generations ago—to maintain "political dominance" over the newcomers, deemed "bothersome competitors."[17]

The famous and tragic affair of the anarchists Sacco and Vanzetti, a real milestone in Italian American history, can in some way contribute to this picture. It is, in fact, coincident to this important trial that America began nationwide to reflect on the theme of multiethnicity, against a judiciary malfeasance clearly rooted in ethnic prejudice. The Sacco and Vanzetti case split the history of Italian Americans in two. After that trial it would never be the same again.

16. Sartorio 1919. Presumed a descendant of Emanuele Sartorio, a Sicilian exile who taught at a Mazzinian folk school in New York, Enrico (or Henry Charles) Sartorio was a very active Protestant pastor in Boston. An instructor at Harvard, he wrote numerous articles in newspapers and journals, as well as the books *Social and Religious Life of Italians in America* (Boston, 1918) and *Americani d'oggigiorno* (Americans Today; Bologna, 1920), the latter noteworthy because it painted a more thorough picture of America than that found in sensationalistic Italian travel books. On Enrico Sartorio, see also Martellone 1975, and Massara 1976, 117–118.

17. Teresi 1925, from the preface and the chapter titled "Discussioni utili" ("Useful Discussions," 217–240) from the book *Con la patria nel cuore* (With My Country in My Heart), a collection of articles on highly diverse topics (there is even an article called "In Defense of Prostitution: Contributed to the Campaign against Venereal Disease") published in several Italian American newspapers. Born 1875 in Alia (Palermo), Teresi came to the United States in 1907. Having earned a law degree, he became a bank associate in Rochester, New York. Among his writings, the pamphlet *L'ultima menzogna religiosa–La Democrazia Cristiana* (The Latest Religious Lie–Christian Democracy, 1910), *Il sogno di un emigrato* (Dream of an Immigrant, 1932), and *Canto dei figli d'Italia* (Song for the Children of Italy) for music are of interest. See Schiavo 1966–67.

The travel literature of the late 1800s and early 1900s abounds in descriptions of Little Italy. First and foremost, obviously, is the historical Mulberry Bend in lower Manhattan, close to the mythical, dangerous Five Points also made famous by Martin Scorsese's movie *Gangs of New York*. In effect, many American journalists and writers used this area as the site for their investigations.[18] When American muckraking journalism was in vogue, for example, Jacob Riis (himself an adoptive American of Danish origins) published his enlightening report in which he disclosed to his readers *How the Other Half Lives*. This book (1890) is now considered a classic of the genre. There were also those who did not limit themselves to studying the situation in America and sought to trace the entire immigrant trajectory, from their place of departure to their point of arrival. Thus, Broughton Brandenburg, the author of the sensational book *Imported Americans* (1903), tells "the story of the experience of an American in disguise and his wife" who in this way had been able to "study at close range the problem of immigration" on the ships, in Sicily, and in Naples. This book matches Francis Edward Clark's *Our Italian Fellow Citizens in Their Old Homes and Their New* (1919), where he acknowledges "a native politeness about the unspoiled Italian, however poor he may be, that is very charming." At the same time, he spotted some stigmata of irreconcilable difference, like "the habit of promiscuous spitting everywhere, and on all occasions," directly connected with (indeed, induced by) "the filth of Italy."[19] Neither should one forget the richly documented *The Italian Emigration of Our Times,* also published in 1919, by the Harvard sociologist Robert E. Foerster, or the older study *The Italian in America* by Eliot Lord, John D. Trenor, and Samuel J. Barrows (1905). This volume was part of a series devoted to each migratory wave and, as the authors explained, it was prompted by America's urgent need to solve the immigrant problem by making the newcomers conform to its standards.

To these friendly voices one must add those of the large number of Protestant missionaries who worked in the Italian colonies, like Anna C. Ruddy, author of the important *The Heart of the Stranger: A Story of Little Italy* (1908) or William Edwards Davenport, a peculiar poet, benefactor, and author since the 1890s of the enthusiastic, Whitmanian, and almost mystic *The Beggar-Man of Brooklyn Heights and Other Chants from the Italian Settlement*. However, alongside the goodwill of the many who tried to understand, there was a whole literature that expressed a popular stance in favor of an immediate restriction of immigration—a story that more than a century later is now being repeated, and this time in Italy.

18. The most complete survey of Italian testimonials on the subject is offered by Massara 1976.
19. Clark 1919, 97, 109.

The spectacle of Little Italy, picturesque and blood curdling at the same time, is presented here from the New York perspective of Ferdinando Fontana and from the Bostonian perspective of Gaetano Conte, a Protestant minister in the famous Italian quarter of the North End. Those fabled streets—in New York, Boston, and many other cities—and those same people will be the main protagonists of the "colonial" literature, which will be discussed more fully in the course of this book.

Translated by Franca and Bill Boelhower

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To the Readers

Carlo Barsotti

Bagni di San Giuliano (today, San Giuliano Terme, Lucca), Italy, January 4, 1850–Coytesville, New Jersey, March 30, 1927

Carlo Barsotti was the torment and delight of a host of polemical editors, who accused him of every kind of nefariousness, among other things, of having made money managing suspicious small hotels and of having cheated the trustees of Little Italy, resulting in the bankruptcy (1897) of their bank. Yet, despite troubled private affairs and passionate colonial[1] diatribes, Carlo Barsotti (whose name will recur often in this book) was the founder of the daily *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, which among the Italian American newspapers in New York was the most long-lived and widely circulated. In 1928, the newspaper passed to Generoso Pope, who made it the pillar of support for Fascism until 1942. By 1980, it had completed a century of life, in an unbroken editorial succession composed of Piero Pirri Ardizzone (*Giornale di Siciliaii*); of Carlo Caracciolo (*Espresso*); of the *Società Pubblicità Editoriale;* and of the vice president of the Chase Manhattan Bank, Dominick Scaglione. It ceased publication in 1988. *Il Progresso Italo-Americano* therefore followed the whole trajectory of the great Italian emigration to the United States. Published here is the editorial of December 13 with which Barsotti announced the birth of the newspaper, in that prophetic year of 1880, which historically and chronologically signaled the formidable beginning of the great Italian exodus.

1. Throughout this volume, Durante uses the noun *colony* and its inflections to describe the Italian American communities in the United States.

DAB; DBI.

Establishing a daily newspaper in New York, in a language that is unknown to the vast majority of the population that boasts the most advanced and influential journalism in the entire world is a bold undertaking and fraught with difficulty.

Throughout the United States, where thousands of Italians are scattered, a daily newspaper written in our beautiful language does not exist. We have a few weeklies and biweeklies; one, perhaps, considered becoming a daily but has not succeeded until now.

There have been several attempts, including a recent one, and due to the large and numerous obstacles, they became fewer.

In these efforts, in trials undertaken by others, we became convinced that an Italian daily newspaper, in an appropriate size, with ample space for the most diverse content, when done with conscience, attention, and love, is something useful, necessary, and that surely must survive.

Therefore, convinced that the Italians of New York and the United States enthusiastically desire a newspaper in their own language which will excite and disseminate that culture and can better educate our character and foster our prosperity, today we found *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*. Having seriously provided for the required work to be done with care and diligence, accurately reporting on our dear homeland far away, and closely following the daily events of this adoptive land that hosts us, we believe, and this will be our most cherished reward, that *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, in its scope, content, and elegance in print will not blush when compared with the periodicals of other sister colonies.

We have entrusted the editorial office to a young man[2] who is serious, practical, culturally well-rounded, and who over the last four years has completed his exams in journalism and Italian literature with honors, and who finding himself for some time in New York studied—on behalf of the premier newspapers in Rome and Naples—the conditions of Italians in the United States and the moral and physical state of this supreme and flourishing republic.

Every newspaper receives its sentence and its sanction from the way in which it is received by the public. Given this first assay, we maintain the firm belief that Italians will remember our work with fondness.

2. Adolfo Rossi.

We have founded a printing plant exclusively for the newspaper, which we will support through considerable effort and sacrifice, not for profit but to respond to a need our compatriots deeply feel.

So then if Italians, having read this first issue, believe that *Il Progresso Italo-Americano* serves to raise the national prestige and to refute the defamation with which detractors have tried to degrade our name, they will feel a duty to lend prompt and effective support which is essential to assure a beautiful, long, and happy life for *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*.

What if unfortunately this does not happen; who will be to blame?

It is best not to think about it. With the confidence that comes from purity of intentions and certainty that the road to travel will traverse friendly territory, we courageously approach the task without boring readers with plans delivered in bombastic language; facts, not idle chatter, are required, *res non verba*.[3]

Il Progresso Italo-Americano places itself among the noble ranks of the free press, independent of any party, which features *The Herald* at the top, and the debate will be held first and foremost by gentlemen, because when debate is a chivalrous battle of ideas, it becomes a true victory.

Onwards!

3. Deeds, not words.

Shine? . . . Shine?

Ferdinando Fontana

Milan, Italy, January 1, 1850–Lugano, Switzerland, May 10, 1919

The testimony of Ferdinando Fontana, who in 1881–82, with his colleague Dario Papa, made a journey through the United States from New York to San Francisco, offers firsthand documentation of the epoch of the great Italian emigration. Above all, it strongly presents the way the phenomenon of America was perceived in Italy. Still permeated with the spirit of the Risorgimento and therefore with nationalistic pride, the Italians viewed America with a mixture of surprise, frustration, and disdain, though in their country the great social questions had also come to the fore. In respect to these, however, Fontana was very sensitive. Born poor, interrupting his studies to dedicate himself to more humble trades before finding solid work in the theater and in newspapers, he stayed close to social circles (actually, "Il Socialismo" is the name of one of his most notable small poems), to the extent that, involved in the insurrection in Milan in 1898, he had to flee to Switzerland.

Fontana is an outstanding figure in the events of the second Milanese antibourgeois artistic movement *scapigliatura*. He was a poet; a librettist of operettas and operas (even of Puccini's early operas *Le Villi* [The fairies], 1883, and *Edgar,* 1889); a dramatist in literary Italian and Milanese dialect; and a journalist and travel writer. In this last category, he produced such books as *Un briciolo di mezzaluna* (A Fragment of the Crescent); *Montecarlo; Tra gli Arabi* (Among the Arabs); *New-York* (1884, jointly with Dario Papa); and a collection of *Viaggi* (Travels) in two volumes, published in Milan in 1893.

Prominently portrayed in *New-York* is the spectacle of the degradation and misery of Italian immigrants, from the Battery to the streets of the city. The mock-

ery, the prejudices, and the hostility they underwent are other themes Fontana faces with vehemence: "Understandably, a part of the fault derives from the motherland, which left that mass of peasants brutalized, while the other part derives from America, which let the proprietors of those hovels earn formidable incomes, keeping the factories in the condition of primitive caves" (Prezzolini). A further element, very much in evidence here: educated travelers like Fontana were carriers of Risorgimento ideology. They had inflated notions of Italy's social and cultural heritage, notions that made it very difficult for them to look directly at the actual work Italian immigrants were able to do in the United States. There is also space, however, for hope, according to Fontana, for encouraging the spirit of adaptation and enterprise, through which many have achieved enviable results. During his visit to New York, Fontana became friends with Adolfo Rossi and Carlo Barsotti, described in the book, as well as a contributor to the *Progresso Italo-Americano.*

ESSENTIAL BIBLIOGRAPHY

DBI; Prezzolini 1963, 417–423.

New-York, January 23, 1882

In my last letter I wrote to you: "New-York has given me not a few disappointments; I'm doing OK and I shine shoes at my place . . . for some reasons that would be too long to enumerate."

Now in your dear letter, which I got today, you ask me insistently about those reasons. You write, "I well know that the shoeshine men in New-York are all or almost all Italians, and so I can guess those reasons; but it also seems that you overstate out of delicacy (or considerateness), not wanting to imagine before you, in an act so humble as shining shoes, any of our compatriots. After all, there are Italian shoeshines in Italy, too, and as far as I know when you were over there, didn't you use to shine shoes with your esteemed hands?"

And you argue well. . . . But what do you want me to tell you? I witnessed a scene here so repellent that, since my first days here and from then on, I was not ever able to overcome that "exaggerated delicacy" for which you reproach me.

That scene gave me a lot to think about. It was a duet that reawakened in me an entire symphony of pity and bitterness. I cannot resist the temptation to repeat it to you in minute detail.

There were two men at a street corner, one kneeling at the feet of the other. The one standing belonged to one of the races less fit for noble and great concepts, more insensitive, in fact, to any growth in civil progress; he belonged to that race that, for a long time was considered even unworthy of the adjective "human," and therefore despised and sold under the name of a type of wood, and kept enslaved by the right of incontestable supremacy on the part of those stronger.

To raise that race, to free it from its abject condition—in which it lived in these countries, in which it still lives elsewhere—it took and it takes special and very powerful interests, leaps of sublime pity stirred in the breast of its very bosses by the sight of its agonies; it took rivers of blood, and enormous sacrifices of welfare and of money.

But not even today can that race say that it is really redeemed in the United States. Politically it is, civilly, no. One must admit that it showed so little will power in taking the trouble for its own rehabilitation; it revealed itself so tepid in the desire to profit from its political liberty, won at such a high price, to put itself on equal footing with its liberators on the path of civilization and human dignity; through deeds it proclaimed itself so inept and apathetic to flattery and to the more living of the arts and sciences, that, even now, its most ardent defenders (and we are such) cannot hope for its complete redemption from the slow work of centuries.

For the time being, content to let them vote and sit on the benches of the assemblies, the "Yankees" refuse to offer individuals of that race access into their own homes, or rather they admit them only as domestic servants. The more liberal Yankees, faced with the bitterest reproaches, would endure the great pain of sitting at a hotel's table d'hôte, at which, among the fellow diners, sat a person of that race; but the more liberal of the Yankees, having once achieved that great act of rebellion against the prejudices of their own compatriots, once seated at the table, would rather cut out their tongues than say a word to that person.

That race does not ignore the scorn in which it is held, but rather has put up with it for a long time and with almost no resistance. A blend of childishness and fierceness, it manages by laughing, showing two big rows of those legendary milk-white teeth, in the midst of the scorn that surrounds it. Rather than taste that disparagement, with that apathy that distinguishes it, it closes in on itself and now is almost glad about the scorn it has suffered, exactly because that scorn offers the better opportunity to make a life completely apart from it. It enjoys its own segregation and sees with a clear eye the disparagement that

strengthens it, stoic in poverty and grossly noisy if a few dollars are jingling in its pockets.

You have already understood that the man who was standing was a black person.

The man who was kneeling at his feet belonged to the most elect race of humanity; or rather, he belonged to the flower of the flower of this elect race. Its forefathers had dominated the world a good three times, so much so that it could call itself three times sacred and meritorious among men. Its brothers, still today—despite centuries and centuries of martyrs, of aggression, of suspect attacks on their vitality, of internal discord (instigated and rekindled by the most passionate nature, by the pitiless misfortune that embitters the best and at times makes them mad, and by tyrants, who turned those discords to their infamous advantage); in spite of bitterness without end, in short, the siblings of that kneeling man, today still, I say, in a few years of freedom, showed that they had taken such steps on the path of modern civilization as to arouse the envy of their neighbors.

Memories of having conquered the ancient world with the valor of its armies, the Middle Ages with the lure of religion, recent times with the sweet fragrance of the arts and the brilliance of the sciences, the siblings of that man kneeling at the feet of a black person had inspired in modern peoples, with the reconquest of 1859, the political idea of nationalities that Germany thereafter pursued; and, when that idea had been affirmed on battlefields, the siblings of that man now kneeling at the feet of a black man, were forced to assert it now, in making peace.

In the veins of that man—kneeling at the feet of an individual representative of the barbarous indifference to every inducement of civilization—coursed blood more noble, purer, more generous and precious than any other human being can boast. Perhaps one of his ancestors had subjugated a province of Gaul or Spain; perhaps one had worn the cardinal's purple robes, perhaps one had modeled statues or painted pictures now admired in museums by thousands of people who have come to see them from the most remote parts of the earth, as if drawn by an irresistible urge. Perhaps an ancestor of that man now kneeling shamefully before a black man, had dissolved, with his warm melodies, the ice of crudity in the hearts of the Thracians and the Germans, perhaps that same man would have known, through an instinct almost traditional, how to judge the beauty of a rhythm or a work of art better than any rich Yankee.

Well then, this man, this representative of the flower of the human race, of blood historically called noble, this Italian (you already understood that's who

I meant) was shining the shoes of that representative of race that until recently had been enslaved, and still scorned, ever resistant to any civilized refinement, inferior—perhaps!

And that fellow, this representative of the lowest race, this black man—triumphantly blissful, was firmly, even despotically, placing his huge right foot on the shoeshine's box. With his broad chest thrust forward, his whole being assuming a pose of excessive haughtiness and dressed in fake high style, his boisterous mouth in a broad grin that showed off to the eyes of passersby two close-packed rows of milk-white teeth pressing on a fat Havana cigar, that black man was there, his neck taut, his pitch-black face in the air, triumphant, blowing stinking puffs of smoke, twirling a cane made of a rare wood ornamented with gold, his right hand covered by a yellow glove, of a paradoxical yellow!

And it seemed that that black man cried out from every pore to that "noble Latin blood" that was bent down before him:

"Grandson of Julius Caesar and Marco Polo; cousin of the blessed Angelico; seed of Dante Alighieri; kin of Raphael, Domenichino and Michelangelo; descendant of Giordano Bruno; brother of Garibaldi and Cavour; polish, polish well, my shoe leather! My shoes, me John, the black man, who loves best about the white man's civilization—its alcoholic drinks! Me, who boasts among my ancestors (and not very distant ones) the flower of cannibals! Me, blood brother of the Zulus! Me, who, when I was still a child, they used to whip me until I was bloody and brand me with a red-hot iron, so that I would have dared to prefer suicide or revolt, even at the cost of death, to such shame! Me, lover of tattooing, which, according to a certain Humboldt, is the emblem of an uncouth nature. Polish! Polish! Shine! Shine!

"Down, at my feet! In the filth and the mud! Shamed in the sight of everyone! You also are scorned, most noble Latin blood, just like me (that I don't give a damn about, however); indeed, at this moment, even more than me! Polish! Polish! And that breath of your mouth, with which they say your forefathers warmed and planted in barbarous breasts the germs of civilization, you use it now in order to blow on the leather of my boots, unsurpassable method for making them rival the sparkle of the black diamond! Ah, you boast of belonging to a people that, in every age, has lavished splendors of every kind on the entire world? Well, today lavish splendors on my shoes! It will not be precisely the same thing, but at least you will be able to say that you've kept your traditions. "Ah, did your kin gloriously handle swords and pastorals, and paint-brushes, and chisels, and lutes, and instruments of science

and commerce? Ah, the hands of your siblings, still living, were they gloriously bloodstained from smashing chains and building barricades and reconstructing a new civilization? Well, we will see if you also can earn yourself immortal fame equal to theirs, sublimely wielding the brush or mixing the colors—divine art—of the American patina!"

Ah, from that day, when in the streets of New York those numerous compatriots of mine assail me almost every twenty steps I take with the characteristic cry, "Shine? Shine?" ("*Splendori? Splendori?*" from antonomastic force of habit, or better, "*Lucidare? Lucidare*?") I run away saddened. It seems to me that I would join the Negroes in disdaining them, if I let them shine my shoes; that I would add another insult and putdown to the many that are hurled at them, and that, as their brother in nationality, I must refrain from doing so out of genuine, and not exaggerated delicacy.

And that's why I shine shoes with my own dear hands, without feeling bad about it. I dare say, indeed, that this somewhat gymnastic exercise I do when I've just gotten out of bed in the morning is good for my health. Even more: I would recommend it to these health-minded types who, having just woken up, take up weight lifting, exercise bicycles, or parallel bars, all methods evidently much more expensive than mine.

And, while I shine my shoes in the morning, how many fond memories fill my daydreams! Memories of boarding school, when, in thirty minutes, you had to jump out of bed, wash up, get dressed, clean up completely, to make the bed and to retrieve some apple or some sweets you've been given by your mother and hidden under the pillows with all the care and secretiveness of a political prisoner, who hides the escape tools that he made with patience and tenacity.

But for now I will keep these memories for myself, and you will believe me.

Your most affectionate friend,
F. Fontana

Translated by George De Stefano

For Humanity

Luigi Roversi

Bologna, Italy, December 8, 1859–New York, New York, 1927

Luigi Roversi, who took a degree in law in Italy, was a lawyer and doctor of letters. He was a correspondent of the *Gazzetta* of Turin, of *L'Italia del Popolo* (The Italy of the People), and of *Il Risorgimento* (The Awakening); he also wrote literary pieces for *La Patria* (The Fatherland) of Bologna, submitting short stories and poems to the press. Through maternal descent, he was the nephew of Paolo Bovi Campeggi, an associate of Garibaldi's in New York.

Roversi emigrated to America and became subeditor of *Il Progresso Italo-Americano* and of *L'Araldo Italiano* (The Italian Herald). He was a correspondent from New York of various newspapers, among which, *Il Resto del Carlino* (The Change from a Carlino) and the *Illustrazione Italiana* (Italian Illustration); he was also the political and literary editor of *La Follia di New York* (The New York Madness) and editor of the *Stella d'Italia* (Star of Italy). Married to the Englishwoman Clara Nobbs, he enjoyed notable prestige among the first colonial journalists. In 1906, he was assigned the supervision of the section on the Italians in the United States at the Exposition of Milan, and in 1922 he was nominated Knight of the Crown. Between the end of the nineteenth century and the first years of the new century, he was the secretary and assistant to General Luigi Palma di Cesnola, director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. In 1898, he published a biographical profile of the general, *Luigi Palma di Cesnola and the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, and in 1901, *Ricordi canavesani* (Memories from Canavese), on Cesnola's voyage to Italy (Cesnola was born in Rivaroli Canavese, near Turin). He also published *Church and State in Italy* (1880) and *Essays on Italian Art* (1883).

Roversi was a lecturer for the Board of Education of New York on themes of civic education, literature, and art; a literary and drama critic; and a teacher at the people's university, promoted in New York by the Socialist Party. With his brother Domenico, he had been a pioneer of socialism in Emilia Romagna until the last years of the 1870s, in the circle of Camillo Prampolini, Giacomo Maffei, and others.

The text published here reproduces his speech at the mass meeting of protest promoted by the colonial press after the lynching of eleven Italians in New Orleans.

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Ladies and Gentlemen, Fellow Countrymen,

Although around me sounds and reverberates a loud, powerful, and sublime note of *italianità*; although, around me, the tricolor flag at half mast speaks of the fatherland in mourning, and therefore, of our heart in mourning; although at the invitation of the Italian press, the colony is reunited and comes together in diverse and opposing factions with admirable unanimity and moving harmony, whose lessons shouldn't be lost, I want to forget I am Italian!

I want to forget that an Italian, Christopher Columbus, was the prophet and discoverer of this land, the first and unique source of wealth, peace, liberty, and salvation. Above all, I want to forget our bitterest enemies and most tenacious opponents. I want to forget those legions of thousands upon thousands of Italian workers who, covered with sweat and often with blood, created the economic glory of North America, in the immense railroad network, the ostentatious Roman-style bridges, the canals, quarries, irrigation systems, wherever, in short, there was a need for arms of iron and shoulders of steel and not workers weakened by whiskey or depraved by vice.

I want to forget that Italians were among those who resolved the question of Alabama. Count Federico Sclopis[1]—supreme judge—helped America evade the horrors and disasters of war with England. Yes, to be more impartial, I want to forget everything, I want to forget all this, in order to not remember

1. Federico Sclopis di Salerano (1798–1878) was sent by Victor Emmanuel II to Geneva in 1871, where he was appointed president of the tribunal in the United States and was against Great Britain in the case of damages against USS *Alabama* during the Civil War.

that around you—men—I'm speaking as a man—in name and from the point of view of humanity.

And, as a man, I censure and condemn the authorities of New Orleans who, having kept in jail even those acquitted, under the hypocritical excuse of protecting them from vigilantes, handed them over to murderers like a flock of sheep to the slaughter. I censure and condemn the savage crowd responsible for the material crime, and the instigators, who still freely and calmly roam the streets of New Orleans. The latter are the more guilty and reprehensible. I censure and condemn the desecrators of dead bodies, who dragged them bloody against paving stones, hanged them on trees and lampposts, and made them obscene targets for shootings without the police intervening to stop these craven, vile acts.

I censure and condemn that part of the American press that calls the murdered murderers, rejoicing in the slaughter, as well as in the sanctimonious sermon. The inevitable correction of the law's deficiency only adds mockery to the crime, and denies the survivors' families the right to any compensation and from the Italian government any sort of reparation.

No, it is impossible to imagine a more profound moral perversion than that which the authorities and the press of New Orleans gave to us and to its citizenry. It's impossible! One could say that America's much-praised civilization is a colossal hypocrisy. One could say it is composed of a gang of ex-slave holders who, keeping one hand on the constitution, sarcastically clasp in the other the slave's whip. It is a menagerie of wild ferocious beasts who return to their savage state. It is a festering sore that oozes through the bandages and spreads out disgustingly in view of everyone.

One could say the law is a joke, public order mere nonsense, its social protection a trap. One could say the horrors of Russia are transplanted here, along with something that makes it worse. That while in Russia the torturer and executioner are but one person, the Czar, in America—or at least New Orleans—the executioners number in the thousands and thousands: lawyers, journalists, merchants, the so-called "*prominenti*," the rich bourgeoisie, well fed or on their way to becoming so.

No, it is impossible; and there are those who tremble at hearing the word *anarchist* and who, after the Haymarket Massacre in Chicago, seriously proposed to expel and incarcerate as many foreigners as possible in America who professed socialist ideas and aspirations!

Now what anarchy is worse than the one that rules in New Orleans? What greater danger and more shameful disgrace to the community and to public

order than that in New Orleans, where a part of the citizenry is made up of hangmen in general, and another part made up of passive, cowardly spectators? In truth I tell you that if the order of a conservative republic ought to be like the one that permitted and sanctioned the deeds of March 14, 1891, to that Republican order is preferable Anarchy with its dynamite or Autocracy with its permanent gallows. At least neither of these is hypocrisy, and one can see it for what it is.

And what are we to say of the moral pressures, to which the jurors who absolved the Sicilians must now submit? The sanctity of the oath doesn't protect them, nor does their common background, nor is their verdict a pure matter of conscience between them and God. Nothing of the sort. The Band of Brigands terrorizes New Orleans and has as a boss a murderous ex-judge. He torments them in a million ways, submits them to an odious inquisition. He would, if he could, bring back the rack and rope torture to coerce a false confession.

It is of no use, and in fact this morning, a dispatch from New Orleans announces that the foreman Seligman has declared that if he and his colleagues absolved the defendants, it was because the testimony of their accusers was insufficient, because there wasn't proof of guilt, because they considered them innocent, and that if he had to judge them again he would judge them as he already judged them the first time. Honor be to him, who in the middle of all that muck, all that bloody mess, in that swarm of scared and trembling rabbits, rises straight and upright like an ancient knight, defending his cause to the death, come what may.

Honor be to him; yet alas, in front of this foreigner who proclaims the innocence of the Italians, there is an Italian (as the same dispatch says) who approves of the massacre. Oh from our womb, should there really arise Judases, at this moment? Or should the hand of misfortune really burden us, when union, solidarity, and the need to forget are more than ever necessary? . . . Also this seems impossible; but at times the impossible is true, especially at times of agonizing trials, such as we are now subjected to.

But it doesn't matter: faith sustains us, tempers the curses on our lips, stops the feelings of disdain. There is faith that the illustrious representatives of Italian government in Washington and in Rome, as they were vigilant guardians of national honor in the first hour of catastrophe, will remain firm, resolute, and unyielding in their demand for reparations. Should they not do it, they would be traitors and would force the betrayed to disown the fatherland that these colonies—at a distance of 4,000 miles!—love with more

intensity and fervor than do their brothers across the ocean, pleased by its sun and sea, by its fascination, and by its poetry as of a living God! . . .

The fatherland! As Poland's sons in exile carried within themselves, almost a relic, a piece of their land, every Italian—coming to America—brought not a material symbol of Italy, but her sacred thought, her august image as mother and queen, the memory of her Calvaries and of her Easters, all of Italy!

And it is for this that here, taking leave of you and thanking you for indulging me with your attention, I want to return to being and feeling Italian. And as an Italian—as the least of the least—who in your language battles from the press gallery in this country of voluntary exile—I applaud the seriousness and dignity that you protest tonight in the name of Italy and your steadfast avowal that—from tonight on, in the name of Italy, in the name of our 11 slaughtered brothers from New Orleans, in the name of a blood bath that has reddened the white hair of old parents, wives, and orphans, in the name of the 11 ghosts that demand and impose on you to avenge and pacify—harmony and peace may stay with us forever!

Translated by Gil Fagiani

The Biography of a Bootblack

Rocco Corresca

Between 1902 and 1906, the weekly *The Independent*, directed by Hamilton Holt, published seventy-five autobiographies of ordinary people, mostly immigrants and anonymous workers in the most modest ranks—miners, cooks, washerwomen, drivers, and so forth. The issue of December 4, 1902, published "The Biography of a Bootblack," signed by one R. Corresca, The text reveals that the name was purely conventional. No further data of identification are available, aside from those furnished by the text.

A brief introductory note clarified that autobiographical information was presented to the reader. It reads:

> The story of Rocco Corresca is presented almost as he told it to a representative of *The Independent*. There are changes of language and some suppressions, but no change of meaning has been made. The ideas and statements of fact are all his, and, astonishing as it may seem to Americans, much of the experience is typical of thousands of Italians who come to this country penniless and make their fortunes, though beginning as low down in the scale as the narrator. Rocco is known to many people as "Joe." He claims that he has always been known as Rocco but that the name Corresca was given him when he went aboard the ship that brought him here. It was entered on the books. He has since kept it for official purposes and proposes to be known by it in the future. —Editor.

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Basile Green 1974, 34, 53; Stein-Taft 1971.

When I was a very small boy I lived in Italy in a large house with many other small boys, who were all dressed alike and were taken care of by nuns. It was a good place, situated on the side of the mountain, where grapes and melons and oranges and plums were growing. The nuns taught us our letters and how to pray and say the catechism, and we worked in the fields during the middle of the day. We always had enough to eat and good beds to sleep in at night, and sometimes there were feast days, when we marched about wearing flowers.

Those were good times and they lasted till I was nearly eight years of age. Then an old man came and said he was my grandfather. He showed some papers and cried over me and said that the money had come at last and now he could take me to his beautiful home. He seemed very glad to see me, and after they looked at his papers he took me away and we went to the big city—Naples. He kept talking about his beautiful house, but when we got there it was a dark cellar that he lived in and I did not like it at all. Very rich people were on the first floor. They had carriages and servants and music and plenty of good things to eat, but we were down below in the cellar and had nothing. There were four other boys in the cellar and the old man said they were all my brothers. All were larger than I and they beat me at first till one day Francisco said that they should not beat me any more, and then Paulo, who was the largest of all, fought him till Francisco drew a knife and gave him a cut. Then Paulo, too, got a knife and said that he would kill Francisco, but the old man knocked them both down with a stick and took their knives away and gave them beatings.

Each morning we boys all went out to beg and we begged all day near the churches and at night near the theatres, running to the carriages and opening the doors and then getting in the way of the people so that they had to give us money or walk over us. The old man often watched us, and at night he took all the money, except when we could hide something.

We played tricks on the people, for when we saw some coming that we thought were rich I began to cry and covered my face and stood on one foot, and the others gathered around me and said, "Don't cry! Don't cry!"

Then the ladies would stop and ask, "What is he crying about? What is the matter, little boy?"

Francisco or Paulo would answer, "He is very sad because his mother is dead and they have laid her in the grave."

Then the ladies would give me money, and the others would take most of it from me.

The old man told us to follow the Americans and the English people, as they were all rich, and if we annoyed them enough they would give us plenty of money. He taught us that if a young man was walking with a young woman he would always give us silver because he would be ashamed to let the young woman see him give us less. There was also a great church where sick people were cured by the saints, and when they came out they were so glad that they gave us money.

Begging was not bad in the summertime because we went all over the streets and there was plenty to see, and if we got much money we could spend some buying things to eat. The old man knew we did that. He used to feel us and smell us to see if we had eaten anything, and he often beat us for eating when we had not eaten.

Early in the morning we had breakfast of black bread rubbed over with garlic or with a herring to give it a flavor. The old man would eat the garlic or the herring himself, but he would rub our bread with it, which he said was as good. He told us that boys should not be greedy and that it was good to fast and that all the saints had fasted. He had a figure of a saint in one corner of the cellar and prayed night and morning that the saint would help him to get money. He made us pray, too, for he said that it was good luck to be religious.

We used to sleep on the floor, but often we could not sleep much because men came in very late at night and played cards with the old man. He sold them wine from a barrel that stood on one end of the table that was there, and if they drank much he won their money. One night he won so much that he was glad and promised the saint some candles for his altar in the church. But that was to get more money. Two nights after that the same men who had lost the money came back and said that they wanted to play again. They were very friendly and laughing, but they won all the money and the old man said they were cheating. So they beat him and went away. When he got up again he took a stick and knocked down the saint's figure and said that he would give no more candles.

I was with the old man for three years. I don't believe that he was my grandfather, though he must have known something about me because he had those papers.

It was very hard in the wintertime for we had no shoes and we shivered a great deal. The old man said that we were no good, that we were ruining him, that we did not bring in enough money. He told me that I was fat and that people would not give money to fat beggars. He beat me, too, because I didn't like to steal, as I had heard it was wrong.

"Ah!" said he, "that is what they taught you at that place, is it? To disobey your grandfather that fought with Garibaldi! That is a fine religion!"

The others all stole as well as begged, but I didn't like it and Francisco didn't like it either.

Then the old man said to me, "If you don't want to be a thief you can be a cripple. That is an easy life, and they make a great deal of money."

I was frightened then, and that night I heard him talking to one of the men that came to see him. He asked how much he would charge to make me a good cripple like those that crawl about the church. They had a dispute, but at last they agreed and the man said that I should be made so that people would shudder and give me plenty of money.

I was much frightened, but I did not make a sound and in the morning I went out to beg with Francisco. I said to him, "I am going to run away. I don't believe 'Tony is my grandfather. I don't believe that he fought for Garibaldi, and I don't want to be a cripple, no matter how much money the people may give."

"Where will you go?" Francisco asked me.

"I don't know," I said, "somewhere." He thought awhile and then he said, "I will go, too."

So we ran away out of the city and begged from the country people as we went along. We came to a village down by the sea and a long way from Naples and there we found some fishermen and they took us aboard their boat. We were with them five years, and though it was a very hard life we liked it well because there was always plenty to eat. Fish do not keep long and those that we did not sell we ate.

The chief fisherman, whose name was Ciguciano, had a daughter, Teresa, who was very beautiful, and though she was two years younger than I, she could cook and keep house quite well. She was a kind, good girl and he was a good man. When we told him about the old man who told us he was our grandfather, the fisherman said he was an old rascal who should be in prison for life. Teresa cried much when she heard that he was going to make me a cripple. Ciguciano said that all the old man had taught us was wrong—that it was bad to beg, to steal and to tell lies. He called in the priest, and the priest said the same thing and was very angry at the old man in Naples; he taught us to read and write in the evenings. He also taught us our duties to the church and said that the saints were good and would only help men to do good things, and that it was a wonder that lightning from heaven had not struck the old man dead when he knocked down the saint's figure.

We grew large and strong with the fisherman, and he told us that we were getting too big for him, that he could not afford to pay us the money that we were worth. He was a fine, honest man—one in a thousand.

Now and then I had heard things about America—that it was a far off country where everybody was rich and that Italians went there and made plenty of money, so that they could return to Italy and live in pleasure ever after. One day I met a young man who pulled out a handful of gold and told me he had made that in America in a few days.

I said I should like to go there, and he told me that if I went he would take care of me and see that I was safe. I told Francisco and he wanted to go, too. So we said good-bye to our good friends. Teresa cried and kissed us both, and the priest came and shook our hands and told us to be good men, and that no matter where we went God and his saints were always near us and that if we lived well we should all meet again in heaven. We cried, too, for it was our home, that place. Ciguciano gave us money and slapped us on the back and said that we should be great. But he felt bad, too, at seeing us go away after all that time.

The young man took us to a big ship and got us work away down where the fires are. We had to carry coal to the place where it could be thrown on the fires. Francisco and I were very sick from the great heat at first and lay on the coal for a long time, but they threw water on us and made us get up. We could not stand on our feet well, for everything was going around and we had no strength. We said that we wished we had stayed in Italy no matter how much gold there was in America. We could not eat for three days and could not do much work. Then we got better, and sometimes we went up above and looked about. There was no land anywhere, and we were much surprised. How could the people tell where to go when there was no land to steer by?

We were so long on the water that we began to think we should never get to America or that, perhaps, there was not any such place, but at last we saw land and came up to New York.

We were glad to get over without giving money, but I have heard since that we should have been paid for our work among the coal and that the young man who had sent us got money for it. We were all landed on an island and the bosses there said that Francisco and I must go back because we had not enough money, but a man named Bartolo came up and told them that we were brothers and he was our uncle and would take care of us. He brought two other men who swore that they knew us in Italy and that Bartolo was our uncle. I had never seen any of them before, but even then Bartolo might be my uncle, so I did not say anything. The bosses of the island let us go out with Bartolo after he had made the oath.

We came to Brooklyn to a wooden house on Adams Street that was full of Italians from Naples. Bartolo had a room on the third floor and there were fifteen men in the room, all boarding with Bartolo. He did the cooking on a stove in the

middle of the room and there were beds all around the sides, one bed above another. It was very hot in the room, but we were soon asleep, for we were very tired.

The next morning, early, Bartolo told us to go out and pick rags and get bottles. He gave us bags and hooks and showed us the ash barrels. On the streets where the fine houses are, the people are very careless and put out good things, like mattresses and umbrellas, clothes, hats and boots. We brought all these to Bartolo and he made them new again and sold them on the sidewalk; but mostly we brought rags and bones. The rags we had to wash in the back yard and then we hung them to dry on lines under the ceiling in our room. The bones we kept under the beds till Bartolo could find a man to buy them.

Most of the men in our room worked at digging the sewer. Bartolo got them the work and they paid him about one quarter of their wages. Then he charged them for board and he bought the clothes for them, too. So they got little money after all.

Bartolo was always saying that the rent of the room was so high that he could not make anything, but he was really making plenty. He was what they call a padrone and is now a very rich man. The men that were living with him had just come to the country and could not speak English. They had all been sent by the young man we met in Italy. Bartolo told us all that we must work for him, and that if we did not the police would come and put us in prison.

He gave us very little money, and our clothes were some of those that were found on the street. Still we had enough to eat and we had meat quite often, which we never had in Italy. Bartolo got it from the butcher—the meat that he could not sell to the other people—but it was quite good meat. Bartolo cooked it in the pan while we all sat on our beds in the evening. Then he cut it into small bits and passed the pan around, saying, "See what I do for you, and yet you are not glad. I am too kind a man, that is why I am so poor."

We were with Bartolo nearly a year, but some of our countrymen who had been in the place a long time said that Bartolo had no right to us and we could get work for a dollar and a half a day, which, when you make it lire (reckoned in the Italian currency) is very much. So we went away one day to Newark and got work on the street. Bartolo came after us and made a great noise, but the boss said that if he did not go away soon the police would have him. Then he went, saying that there was no justice in this country.

We paid a man five dollars each for getting us the work and we were with that boss for six months. He was Irish, but a good man and he gave us our money every Saturday night. We lived much better than with Bartolo, and when the work was done we each had nearly $200 saved. Plenty of the men spoke English and they taught us, and we taught them to read and write. That was at night, for we

had a lamp in our room, and there were only five other men who lived in that room with us.

We got up at half-past five o'clock every morning and made coffee on the stove and had a breakfast of bread and cheese, onions, garlic, and red herrings. We went to work at seven o'clock and in the middle of the day we had soup and bread in a place where we got it for two cents a plate. In the evenings we had a good dinner with meat of some kind and potatoes. We got from the butcher the meat that other people would not buy because they said it was old, but they don't know what is good. We paid four or five cents a pound for it and it was the best, though I have heard of people paying sixteen cents a pound.

When the Newark boss told us that there was no more work, Francisco and I talked about what we would do, and we went back to Brooklyn to a saloon near Hamilton Ferry, where we got a job cleaning it out and slept in a little room upstairs. There was a bootblack named Michael on the corner, and when I had time I helped him and learned the business. Francisco cooked the lunch in the saloon and he, too, worked for the bootblack and we were soon able to give the best shine.

Then we thought we would go into business and we got a basement on Hamilton Avenue, near the Ferry, and put four chairs in it. We paid $75 for the chairs and all the other things. We had tables and looking glasses there and curtains. We took the papers that had pictures in them and made the place high toned. Outside we had a big sign that said:

THE BEST SHINE FOR TEN CENTS

Men that did not want to pay ten cents could get a good shine for five cents, but it was not an oil shine. We had two boys helping us and paid each of them fifty cents a day. The rent of the place was $20 a month, so the expenses were very great, but we made money from the beginning. We slept in the basement, but got our meals in the saloon till we could put a stove in our place, and then Francisco cooked for us all. That would not do, though, because some of our customers said that they did not like to smell garlic and onions and red herrings. I thought that was strange, but we had to do what the customers said. So we got the woman who lived upstairs to give us our meals and paid her $1.50 a week each. She gave the boys soup in the middle of the day—five cents for two plates.

We remembered the priest, the friend of Ciguciano, and what he had said to us about religion, and as soon as we came to the country we began to go to the Italian church. The priest we found here was a good man, but he asked the people for money for the church. The Italians did not like to give because they said it looked like buying religion. The priest says it is different here from Italy because all the

churches there are what they call endowed, while here all they have is what the people give. Of course Francisco and I understand that, but the Italians who cannot read and write shake their hands and say that it is wrong for a priest to want money.

We had said that when we saved $1,000 each we would go back to Italy and buy a farm, but now that the time is coming we are so busy and making so much money that we think we will stay. We have opened another parlor near South Ferry, in New York. We have to pay $30 a month rent, but the business is very good. The boys in this place charge sixty cents a day because there is so much work.

At first we did not know much of this country, but by and by we learned. There are here plenty of Protestants who are heretics, but they have a religion, too. Many of the finest churches are Protestant, but they have no saints and no altars, which seems strange.

These people are without a king such as ours in Italy. It is what they call a Republic, as Garibaldi wanted, and every year in the fall the people vote. They wanted us to vote last fall, but we did not. A man came and said that he would get us made Americans for fifty cents and then we could get two dollars for our votes. I talked to some of our people, and they told me that we should have to put a paper in a box telling who we wanted to govern us.

I went with five men to the court, and when they asked me how long I had been in the country I told them two years. Afterward my countrymen said I was a fool and would never learn politics. "You should have said you were five years here and then we would swear to it," was what they told me.

There are two kinds of people that vote here, Republicans and Democrats. I went to a Republican meeting and the man said that the Republicans want a Republic and the Democrats are against it. He said that Democrats are for a king whose name is Bryan and who is an Irishman. There are some good Irishmen, but many of them insult Italians. They call us Dagoes. So I will be a Republican.

I like this country now, and I don't see why we should have a king. Garibaldi didn't want a king, and he was the greatest man that ever lived.

Francisco and I are to be Americans in three years. The court gave us papers and said we must wait and we must be able to read some things and tell who the ruler of the country is.

There are plenty of rich Italians here, men who a few years ago had nothing and now have so much money that they could not count all their dollars in a week. The richest ones go away from the other Italians and live with the Americans.

We have joined a club and have much pleasure in the evenings. The club has rooms down in Sackett Street and we meet many people and are learning new

things all the time. We were very ignorant when we came here, but now we have learned much.

On Sundays we get a horse and carriage from the grocer and go down to Coney Island. We go to the theatres often, and other evenings we go to the houses of our friends and play cards.

I am nineteen years of age now and have $700 saved. Francisco is twenty-one and has about $900. We shall open some more parlors soon. I know an Italian who was a bootblack ten years ago and now bosses bootblacks all over the city, who has so much money that if it was turned into gold it would weigh more than himself.

Francisco and I have a room to ourselves now and some people call us "swells." Ciguciano said that we should be great men. Francisco bought a gold watch with a gold chain as thick as his thumb. He is a very handsome fellow, and I think he likes a young lady that he met at a picnic out at Ridgewood.

I often think of Ciguciano and Teresa. He is a good man, one in a thousand, and she was very beautiful. May be I shall write to them about coming to this country.

BROOKLYN, N.Y.

(Originally in English)

Little Italy

Gaetano Conte

Sessa Aurunca (Caserta), Italy, April 10, 1859–Florence, Italy, August 26, 1917

Gaetano Conte was sent to school in Naples by his father, and in that city Gaetano came to know the Dutch count and missionary Oswald Papengouth. He converted to Protestantism. Because of this, his father Luigi put him out of the house, and Gaetano managed to earn a living working as a *precettore* (tutor). In 1882, he entered the Opera Metodista Episcopale, which was directed at that time by the American Leroy M. Vernon. The first place he was sent was the little town of Venosa in Basilicata, then to Naples (where he came in contact with Freemasonry), and then to Palermo, Rome, and Foggia. In 1893, he went to the United States and became pastor of the Italian Methodist Episcopal Church in Boston. He founded a workers' association named for George Washington, as well as a bilingual magazine. He returned to Italy in 1903 and was sent first to Palermo, then to Venice. In 1911, thanks to strong disagreements, he resigned from the Episcopal Church. He moved to Florence, where he tried to introduce Unitarian doctrine to Italy, also publishing a collection of booklets on this theme. He founded the Associazione Italiana dei Liberi Credenti (Italian Association of Free Believers) and the journal *La riforma italiana* (The Italian Reformation).

Dieci anni in America (Ten Years in America) is the title of a book in which Conte published his memories of a long pastorship among the Italians of the North End, the Little Italy of Boston. In 1893, he departed from Genoa with his five children "to educate them in a pure and Christian environment, and then, upon becoming adults, he would take them back to Italy, full of good will and trained for the struggle for the common good" (Conte 1903). His book represents one of the first

attempts to systematically organize the Italian American problem—eliminating verbose and vain schemes of patriotism and centering upon the concrete reality of problems—and he generally does not dwell on polemics. With an attitude typical of many Evangelical journalists, Conte, who in Boston had the opportunity to frequent intellectual circles at a high level, sought to understand the reasons behind those Americans most hostile to the immigration. "Often in Italy," he writes, "we judge America harshly, because it does not welcome our emigrants, and it creates societies to impede the immigration. We are right; we presume the impossible! Men love the things that conform to their dispositions. Now what conformity of ideas, of sentiments, of traditions, of habits ever exists between our emigrant and the American people?" (Conte 1903).

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[Little Italy.] That's what the Americans call the Italian quarter located to the North of the city, near the port.

This is the area where the memorable early days of the War of Independence unfolded, and also where, a good deal later, not a few notorious events occurred. Coming here to live, we inherited the bad reputation of the latter times, and the comparison between the glorious past and the poor present of this quarter certainly is not to our advantage.

The most notable monuments of historical interest are situated at the borders of our colony. From one side the Old North Church, from whose bell tower Paul Revere, with two lanterns, alerted the patriotic farmers of the nearby countryside that the English troops were advancing by sea, and from where they prepared the resistance. Next to it is the Copps Hill Cemetery, whence the English field batteries advanced on the insurgents at Bunker Hill. Here is the port famous for the "Boston Tea Party," here the celebrated Faneuil Hall, known as the cradle of liberty, here the little square where the first blood was spilled for Independence, and here the house of Paul Revere, now inhabited by poor Southern Italian farmers.

In this part of the city lived Adams, Hancock, Revere, Otis, and with them generations of heroes, who are more and more idealized in the popular mind, given both the distance from those times and the comparison with today's poor inhabitants.

Our emigrants live in wretched and unhealthy homes, in which the lack of room and light combine with the most sickening filth: three or four to a bed; six to

eight to a room. Only one of them has a family, the others stay as boarders, paying from 7 to 10 lire a month for the right to a place to sleep and wash. This agglomeration of people in such places is clearly harmful to health and morale. In all these hovels there is only a single lavatory, in the cellar or in the middle of narrow and dark stairways, from which in both cases, stench and germs spread like a bugle blast into the already unhealthy apartments. Then the rooms, being generally made of wood, host thousands of insects of many colors and shapes, such that sometimes only an axe or fire can get rid of them. To that, if one adds the lack of bathing facilities and the habit of failing to use them, the absence of a woman's touch, the type of work the emigrants do, the poverty and the consequent humiliation, one has an eloquent and disturbing picture of the life of our peasants here.

In 1895 a special commission established by the City Council reported that the living conditions in the North End constitute a "real threat to the public health."

The Twentieth Century Club, comprising individuals interested in economic and social issues, in 1897 undertook a study of the problem of living conditions of the poor, and in the following year published a report which, in speaking about our quarter, found "the homes to be dangerous to the lives of their inhabitants because they lacked repairs, running water, and drains, light and ventilation."

Prof. F. W. Chandler, a city architect, describes them thus: "Ceilings and walls broken down and dirty, dark cellars full of stagnant water, broken water pipes, rooms dark and crammed, cellars used as bedrooms, dark and narrow stairways, dark and humid lavatories, many for a long time, from cold or other reasons, rendered unsuitable, inadequate for the number of inhabitants and located where they shouldn't be; apartments lacking light and ventilation, houses in such ruin to be of constant threat to the lives of the tenants."

One of our women, a domestic servant, in fact, lived in a room only a little more than four meters square. In it there was the conjugal bed and the stove, and on the ground the pallet of her brother-in-law and a friend of his.

Now this state of affairs, awful to everyone, seems quite monstrous to the Americans, who rightfully give so much importance to their homes.

In fact Arnold Toynbee says in this regard that "It is not possible to exaggerate the importance of family life. What is freedom worth without it? What is public education worth without it? No nation can ensure its greatness if it is not founded on healthy family life. And it is not possible to have a healthy family in such an environment."

Regarding these hovels, Dr. E. R. L. Gould, in an article that appeared in one of the most authoritative newspapers, added that "The family reveals the character of society, and where the domestic influences beneficial to health, happiness, and

virtue cannot thrive, one must inevitably be prepared for deleterious social consequences. Intelligent people can modify the effects of a bad room, but the poor, weak-willed and heedless, endure all the effects."

In such houses, among such influences, live our emigrants, and their children are exposed there to every type of corruption.

Nor should one think that such dwellings come cheaply. They, according to the 1891 census, yield a 15 percent profit to their owners, which forces the generally poor tenants to cluster together, to squeeze together, I would say almost lie on top of each other.

In that same census it was verified that in two districts, occupied by Italians, there were 154 families that each occupied a single room and 459 that had an average of two persons per room. But these figures are well below the actual ones, since the census was taken during the daytime and it is the common practice of our emigrants to fill up empty spaces of the room in the evening, spreading mattresses on the floor at a late hour, when one presumes that the police will not make inspections.

And from 1891 on, the conditions have not at all improved, since on one hand the Board of Health has ordered the renovation of some thirty houses but on the other hand the number of old ones keeps dwindling, whether because of the growth in factories and shops or because of the arrival of new emigrants, so that the problem today has become more difficult than ever.

In 1895, in the sixth and eighth districts, where our people live, there was an overall total of 50,990 persons, and only five years later there were 59,363 inhabitants, of which 25,000 were Italians.

City statistics from 1891 to 1901 show that the population increased from 457,772 to 573,579, i.e., by 25.3 percent, while the number of dwellings grew only from 53,429 to 65,600, i.e. 22.8 percent.

But this increase has little to do with the North End, where the absolute lack of space (the area being almost entirely surrounded by the sea) makes the construction of new buildings impossible, while the population grows in inverse proportion, given the well-known fact that the poor have a greater number of children.

The Boston *Herald*, in a December 28 news article, reported that, in a house in Clinton inhabited by Italians, health department agents had found 85 males and five females sleeping in twenty-one rooms that had been divided into six apartments. Men, women, and children were all mixed together, without regard to sex or family. Not a window or a door was left ajar to refresh the air during the night.

And the police said that the conditions were worse during the previous summer, when a greater number of workers was employed to build a water tank nearby.

It is no wonder that in such a field death harvests a greater number of victims. In fact, while in the entire city the average annual death rate is 1 out of every 48 inhabitants, in our quarter it's one out of every 41, which if not excessive is certainly not too little. And the proposition stands out more clearly when one regards the statistics by district.[1]

Certainly the law does not permit such a state of affairs, and therefore those who are animated by a humanitarian spirit often have been roused, and still are roused, but till now with little success. The capitalists have found that that it is not profitable to build new houses at the costly terms now demanded by law as long as the old ones are still standing which, costing little, would create for them an untenable competition.

The Health Department, often reminded about the fulfillment of its duty, has taken refuge behind the shortcomings of the current laws. But public opinion, at this point strongly hostile to the present state of things, will force its hand to one and to the others, and the North End will be "ripped up" like its worthy Neapolitan emulator.

But when, by force of law and the commitment of the most willing, new workers' housing rises in more healthy locations, will the Italian immigrants be willing to leave the current neighborhood, which with its churches, banks, stores, so resembles their native villages? And those who were forced here by need or by municipal regulations, with the change of location would they change their habits and have a home, a house, a family? I little believe it. In New York our immigrants have gone from the lower part of the city, from "downtown" to "uptown," but they brought uptown the very habits of Mulberry Street.

As long as emigration is temporary and our peasant miserly, he will prefer to adapt as best he can and to save as much as possible. Certain reforms must come more from inside than from outside. Our émigrés will seek out better comforts and conditions only when, in stable housing, and dominated by the environment and prompted by their school-educated children, they feel more strongly the prodding of personal dignity, morally and financially uplifted by the needs of life more than by the rule of law.

But is all of Little Italy populated by peasants like these? Certainly not. Looking at the city one notices at a glance the crowding together of the various migrations

1. In 1900 the median of mortality was 1 per 39 inhabitants in District 6 (North End), 1 per 42 in District 5, 1 per 80 inhabitants in District 25, 1 per 72 inhabitants in District 24, 1 per 71 inhabitants in District 23, 1 per 69 inhabitants in District 20 (Annual Report of the Registry, Department of Boston, 1891). Here one must note that the longer numbers indicate the better neighborhoods, and vice versa.

that have lived in it, so that the oldest, to the degree they do venture out, move to the city's east side, while the new and poorer throng the North and the West. Thus among the citizenry one distinguishes the various layers of a civilization more or less densely American, depending on the greater or lesser age of the various generations of immigrants. One can say as much of any colony, in which the average observer sees the gradual infiltration of new ideas and customs into the old milieu.

Among our peasants, those who have lived here several years stand above the newly arrived by dint of experience and independence. The former already claim to speak English, having been able, for lack of anything better, to substitute Italian words for English ones having the same sound. Thus, instead of Everett, he will say: "via diretta" [straight road], and instead of Hanover Street, "la nuova stretta" [the new street]. One time, during the last presidential election, a good fellow asked what I thought about Michelino. I looked at him dumbfounded, racking my brain to recall if there had been some boy by that name, sick or ne'er-do-well, whom I perhaps forgotten to help out, but it was in vain. "How is it," he said, "that you do not know Michelino? Who are the papers and the public always talking about today if not him?" And, after a bit I finally understood that he meant to say McKinley!

And from this fellow on, there's an ascending scale of more civilized persons. There is the peddler and the retail fruit vendor (at one time a very lucrative monopoly for us that now is passing to the Greeks), and the artisan who knows nothing of art, because of the practice common here in the small firms of parceling out a job through use of machines, so that no one person by himself makes an entire object. So it goes for the manufacture of shoes, cheap jewelry, sweets, textiles, clothing and furniture: to get a piece of bread, our workers are forced to labor in these factories, where they find badly paid work.

There follows a better class of real workers who find employment in the custom tailor shops, or among the casters of statues and artistic ornaments, among mosaic workers, etc. And above them is a real phalanx of barbers, who in general don't give a bad image of themselves. In Italy many of them were more than barbers, and here they were forced to take up such work, generally considered servile. They constitute a good element, and through their continuous contact with the public, they are, of our people, the most Americanized. Through their work, the existing prejudice today against this type of labor little by little will be dispelled.

An American speaker of uncommon talent once was talking about immigration and, during his speech, with a smile that seemed to say "I've hit on something good," noted that the Italians were the *cleanest* people in the country. The audience received his statement with evident signs of incredulity and he then set out to prove his proposition. "Who in fact is it," he asked, "who shines our shoes?

Who digs our sewers? Who shaves our beards? Who clears our streets of rags and paper garbage? Who sharpens and cleans our knives? They all are Italians, unable to bear seeing humanity in filth."

But if, instead of being of ungenerous spirit, he had bothered to examine the facts better, he would have seen that often the bread, the fruits, the cakes, the clothes, the silks that he buys, music that he hears, the statues he admires in the museum, all this comes from the same people that he bitterly mocks. However, in his defense, one must acknowledge that few of our merchants, with the exception of the fruit vendors, do business with Americans, which does not take into account those who have changed their last names to English ones so that they won't be recognized as Italians. Most of our merchants instead sell Italian products at retail, which isn't much, unless to a business selling pasta and potatoes they add a banking office. There are however importers, generally Genoans, who establish respectable commercial firms.

Among those who have made their way outside our colony with great success, some make plaster reproductions of objets d'art and several are wine dealers or innkeepers; these latter ones, however, more than with Americans, strictly speaking, work with people of other nationalities who have been settled here for a while, to whom drunkenness and groups of tipsy hotel guests are of little concern. Among ours, four such institutions predominated on this decade's vice market: one of them failed because of excessive luxury, two were closed because of too much obvious immorality, and another has stayed in business through the protection of corrupt police.

But the ascending scale does not end here, and rises further to a solid nucleus of doctors, several lawyers, a few pharmacists and several clergymen, Catholics and Protestants, a city councilman and a member of the state legislature.

Nor is it much different in the Italian world of New York, where, in Manhattan alone, there are 2300 shoemakers, 1300 food vendors, 1500 tailors, 3000 barbershops, 500 butchers and bakers, 200 tobacconists and 600 fruit sellers.

Today, people like this, gathered in Boston's Italian quarter, with its three Catholic churches, recently also provided with schools, with approximately forty mutual aid societies, two musical bands, more than thirty so-called banks, constitute an Italian town of 25,000 inhabitants, all to itself, as if embedded in the great city, and therefore called "Little Italy." Many of the houses in our quarter are becoming the properties of Italians, and those that they already own are worth $2,325,800, according to the 1900 census.

Some of them were acquired with much sweat, when business was going well, especially the fruit and citrus trades. Others, alas, recall the suffering and the tears

of the poor peasants, taken advantage of by greedy vampires; others still resound with the idiotic laughter of drunken wretches and of the corrupt kisses of fallen women, others finally are the fruit of unheard of sacrifices of so much that is necessary to life, sacrifices made to the mere desire to accumulate cash. It is well that one at this point knows that whoever comes to this country can find bread and work, but fortune and riches no more—unless he prostitutes himself by trafficking in vice, or condemns himself to a miserable and abject life.

And here it is the place to speak of another shameful source of income to which not a few of our people condemn themselves, through the lust for money.

In the great markets of Boston, unfortunately places too close to the Italian quarter, those shopkeepers have the habit of depositing in some barrels, placed outside the door, the trash from their stores, waiting for the garbage trucks to come by and take away this often filthy and stinking stuff.

Today, whoever passes through those places in the early morning encounters a depressing and sickening scene. A number of women, Italian children and workers, still not having risen above the poverty level, go there to scrounge some vegetables or meat. And while one of our women passes with her treasure, glad to have resolved for yet another day the problem of her appetite, others nearby express the various feelings that the unpleasant scene arouses in them.

Here's the Irishman who, drunk and stinking from constantly chewing tobacco, smiles sarcastically and insults the poor wretched woman: Filthy Italian! There's the American who stops a moment, about to rebuke the poor woman, but then shrugs his shoulders, looks at his watch, and rushes away, and mutters, Italians! None of my concern. And there's the respectable Italian, the merchant, who has gotten rich here. He watches the scene, it pains him in his heart, but if at that moment someone asks him: Are you Italian? No, sir, he answers, and keeps going.

We recall an anecdote reported to us by an eyewitness. A poor woman reaches for a peach, when she sees in bottom of a barrel something useful. She bends down to reach it when a miserable coward grabs her by the feet and pushes her down headfirst. The scene attracts the attention and arouses the cruel hilarity of passersby. Street urchins throw big snowballs at the poor woman, while she, through the struggle to free herself, exposes her nakedness. Finally the barrel falls over and she manages to free herself.

But from this one must not infer that there is excessive poverty among our people here, as we will say more broadly later. We cannot form any idea of the collective life of our colony without spending some time studying the two other important manifestations of the character of our life: the press and the associations.

"Here in the United States there are a couple (only a couple) of Italian dailies, which, with unfurled sails, successfully negotiate the breakers of colonial journalism. There's also a couple (only a couple) of weeklies that are holding up well; there is also a monthly magazine (only one) that does well and does not defy logic or syntax. Other publications more or less Italian have been clinging to existence for some time, and the public puts up with them out of habit, as one does with flies when one can't chase them away. (This parenthesis is intended to let our readers know that we're not concerned with these still-living papers. We're talking about the many weekly, daily, or monthly publications, which, year after year, go from baptism to tomb, and on to resurrection, to then once again die out.)

"We collect these ephemeral ones that are born and die with an almost mathematical frequency, in the bosom of our larger and smaller colonies in the American Republic.

"During this year of grace that is reaching its sunset, some fifty new newspapers, all "dedicated to the interests of workers of our nationality in America," unexpectedly appeared, all bearing the by-now traditional slogan 'the only Italian newspaper of this state or this city.' "

Among the most salient or most significant names in their philology we have noticed "Eureka" (meaning, "I have found it") then "The Ass," "The Butterfly," "The Frog," that have been taken from the three popular newspaper of the same names that have had great success in Italy, followed by "The Eagle," "The Hippogriff," "The Lion," and another animal that I don't remember, perhaps "The Pig," then those of certain tools that lend themselves well to punishing men and donkeys, like "The Riding Crop," "The Lash," "The Curry-Comb," "The Whip," "The Vises," then those of stars and asteroids and meteors, like: "The Star," "The Comet," "The Planet," "The Earth," "The Lightning," "The Lightning Bolt," "The Thunder," then many, many names that cannot be categorized, because they come from all over the dictionary, in no particular order: "The Boot," "The Mask," "The Scimitar," "The Sabre Stroke," "The Bottle" and then "Satan," "Charon," "Cerberus," "Pluto," "Lucifer" and so forth. It's not right for us, nor useful for our readers' knowledge, to know under which auspices such waste-paper creatures rise up and come to life only to then die out for lack of nourishment.

We can assert, however, that since, in ninety out of every 100 cases, such enigmas of the press are the product of marital secrets between some university professors "unemployed and fresh from the mountains of Italy, and some big shot," of ample girth, who feels the irresistible need to release into the air a burden of self-laudatory adjectives that the writer blends into his line as he writes. Most of the time the marriage ends like this: the big shot, after a few issues of the new publica-

tion created with his money, gets accustomed to the laudatory adjectives and feels hurt in the pocketbook when he has to squeeze yet more funds out of it, so to put an end to it, he kicks out the professor. He who received the kicks tries to underhandedly scrounge some more money from the big shot, flees from his kicks, goes to a nearby city, starts another paper, and unloads a sewer of insults against his first patron—the one who kicked him out.

Et sic transit gloria mundi.

And so it goes as far as the number, the name and the origin of such weeklies, but what can one say about their substance? Not being able to live by their own virtue, one must add, they live entirely on gossip and worse, the so-called "paid ads" being the sole source of income beyond the few subscriptions gotten out of worthless people, who in that way buy for a dollar false compliments, or to persons who fear the appearance of "official notices" that would not redound to their glory. It certainly would be our good fortune if these papers, disseminators of fratricidal hatreds, would disappear once and for all.

From New York however, come three good daily newspapers, which, although lacking a defined political and social program, are good news sources, and besides keeping up the use of the language, they connect the colonies to each other and all of them to the motherland. The trade unions are all about mutual aid, some Catholic, others liberal: some flourishing, other stunted: some civilian, others military. They are gatherings of people, interested in mutual aid, but lacking a cause and a defining character. What pushes some to found associations is the ambition to be called President: others join them out of a mad desire to dress up like Italian military officers. With the same indifference they celebrate the 20th of September and the arrival of Monsignor Satolli, getting dressed for a funeral as for a picnic in the countryside.

In 1895 a parade was being held to commemorate the 20th of September. At a certain point some dissidents from a military society, accompanied by an usher, stopped the marching column and seized the association's banners. Right away a brawl erupted. To seize the flag by hand is an act of supreme treachery! Out come the swords, the general on horseback cries out ferociously, and one defends with one's life the honored emblem! And our good countrymen cry out, gesticulate, make noise, and after an hour of shameful din are surrounded by the police and led to prison, dressed as generals and colonels. It is painful to say it, but it's true. To the shame of the Italian colony and the fatherland, while the good and serious citizens keep to themselves, some, lacking education and seriousness, expect, in the name of equality, to leave behind their miserable poverty by putting it on display.

To watch them, predominant in the workers' associations, one would have to say that the distinctive characters of "Little Italy" are the internal struggles characteristic of the breed, the noisy verbosity of the ignorant, the facile enthusiasm for any worthwhile undertaking, so easily extinguished at the first sign of difficulties. One must say that fortunately such maladjusted meddlers are but a relative minority in comparison to the serious persons, to the large numbers of peace-loving peasants, strangers to these things, from which they flee. And where there is less of this element, in the associations, the group and its capital are greater. Only two or three mutual aid societies, as a matter of fact, can be said to be truly serious and worthy of consideration. In the past few years, however, a new element has come to better regulate this aspect of the colony's social life.

Two secret societies, the Foresters of America and the Knights of Pythias, have welcomed Italians and founded Italian courts or lodges. The importance of such a development is inestimable.

Such orders are governed by American supreme councils, under whose jurisdiction and vigilance the lodges must operate. An assigned delegate observes the work of the individual courts and acts as an arbitrator of the clashes that not infrequently break out. In my opinion, this is the first and most important step by the Americans towards the education of Italian workers.

The fact that the societies are secret strikes their fancy, and leads many to join: then interest keeps them there, as the courts have excellent revenue and are a first-rate social fund.

The duty, then, to debate according to parliamentary rules and to call one's adversary "brother," responds to one of the greatest needs of our workers, whose nature is poorly contained by the bonds of logic and good manners. But it is time now to leave "Little Italy" and to consider our emigrants from the economic, political, and moral point of view, as they were revealed to me in this decade.

Translated by George De Stefano

How It Feels to Represent a Problem

Gino Carlo Speranza

Bridgeport, Connecticut, 1872–New York, 1927

Gino Carlo Speranza, was the son of Carlo Leonardo, who emigrated to America with his wife in 1868 and became a professor at Yale and Columbia. After the age of twelve, Speranza spent nine years in his parents' birthplace, Verona, and then returned to America in 1895, where he completed his studies and undertook a legal career. From 1897, he was the legal advisor to the Italian Consulate in New York and a member of the Emigration Commission of the State of New York. As corresponding secretary of the Society for the Protection of Italian Immigrants, Speranza learned that native Americans, for all their concern to impress on the foreigner the importance of assimilation, very often provided very poor examples of what it is to be an American. The subtitle of this article by Speranza was "A Consideration of Certain Causes Which Prevent or Retard Assimilation." In 1906, on an assignment for the Italian government, he produced a study on the conditions of the emigrant workers in West Virginia, published in *Bolletino dell'emigrazione*. In 1915, after the outbreak of World War I, he went to Italy as a correspondent for the *New York Evening Post* and *Outlook*; in 1917, after the United States entered the war, he served as a volunteer at the American embassy to Rome, where he remained until 1919.

His intensive correspondence with newspapers and reviews, writing articles on immigration, dates from the first years of the twentieth century. In 1914, he wrote several stories for the *Atlantic Monthly*. He published a book, *Race or Nation* (1927), that was destined to provoke controversy in that it takes the position of the most radically conservative theory of assimilation that was being tested, departing from the much more mild and humanitarian positions in Catholic newspapers at

the beginning of the century. In a political-social climate profoundly marked by drastic restrictive measures in respect to immigration, Speranza, in *Race or Nation,* expressed strong doubts about the real possibilities of a rapprochement between Anglo-Saxons and Latins. He arrived at the conclusion that it was necessary to safeguard the WASP foundation of the nation and suggested further restrictions upon the immigration flux—a policy of dismantling the old "colonial" world: the abolition of the sectarian character of religious instruction; and aside from the issue of naturalization (for which he proposed a ten-year residency, instead of the prescribed five, to obtain citizenship), the abandonment of every loyalty bearing upon the country of origin in case of conflict with American interests. In 1941, edited by his wife Florence Colgate and introduced by Arthur Livingston, *The Diary of Gino Speranza* was published, in two volumes. A diary of his Italian sojourn between 1915 and 1919, it is interesting as much for the richness of its observations of a political-diplomatic character in the war period as for its singular example of a "voyage in Italy," following itineraries that were not the traditional ones.

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Peragallo 1949, 202–208.

The American nation seems to like to do some of its thinking aloud. Possibly this is true of other nations, but with this difference, that in the case of the American, the thinking aloud is not suppressed even when it deals with what may be termed the "country's guests." Older nations, perhaps because they lack the daring self-sufficiency of the young, prefer, in similar cases, to think in a whisper. All countries have problems to grapple with, economic, political, or social; but with America even the labor problem is popularly discussed as if its solution depended on that of the immigration problem.

Now, considering the large percentage of foreign-born in the population of the United States, it is a strange fact how few Americans ever consider how very unpleasant, to say the least, it must be to the foreigners living in their midst to be constantly looked upon either as a national problem or a national peril. And this trying situation is further strained by the tone in which the discussion is carried on, as if it applied to utter strangers miles and miles away, instead of to a large number of resident fellow citizens. Perhaps this attitude may be explained by the fact that to the vast majority of Americans "foreigner" is synonymous with the popular conception of the immigrant as a poor, ignorant, and uncouth stranger, seeking for better luck in a new land. But poverty and ignorance and uncouthness, even if

they exist as general characteristics of our immigrants, do not necessarily exclude intelligence and sensitiveness. Too often, let it be said, does the American of common schooling interpret differences from his own standards and habits of life, as necessarily signs of inferiority. Foreignness of features or of apparel is for him often the denial of brotherhood. Often, again, the fine brow and aquiline nose of the Latin will seem to the American to betoken a criminal type rather than the impress of a splendid racial struggle.

Then there is another large class of "plain Americans" who justify a trying discussion of the stranger within the gates by the self-satisfying plea that the foreigner should be so glad to be in the "land of the free" that he cannot mind hearing a few "unpleasant truths" about himself.

This is not an attempt to show that the tide of immigration does not carry with it an ebb of squalor and ignorance and undesirable elements. It is rather an endeavor to look at the problem, as it were, *from the inside*. For if America's salvation from this foreign invasion lies in her capacity to assimilate such foreign elements, the first step in the process must be a thorough knowledge of the element that should be absorbed.

Many imagine that the record and strength of the American democracy suffice of themselves to make the foreigner love the new land and engender in him a desire to serve it; that, in other words, assimilation is the natural tendency. Assimilation, however, is a dual process of forces interacting one upon the other. Economically, this country can act like a magnet in drawing the foreigner to these shores, but you cannot rely on its magnetic force to make the foreigner *an American*. To bring about assimilation the larger mass should not remain passive. It must attract, *actively attract*, the smaller foreign body.

It is with this in mind that I say that if my countrymen here keep apart, if they herd in great and menacing city colonies, if they do not learn your language, if they know little about your country, the fault is as much yours as theirs. And if you wish to reach us you will have to batter down some of the walls you have yourselves built up to keep us from you. What I wish to examine, then, is how and what Americans are contributing to the process of the assimilation of my countrymen who have come here to live among them.

I have before me a pamphlet which a well-known American society prints for distribution among arriving immigrants. On the title page is the motto: *A Welcome to Immigrants and Some Good Advice*. The pamphlet starts out by telling the arriving stranger that this publication is presented to him "by an American patriotic society, whose duty is to teach American principles"—a statement that must somewhat bewilder foreigners. Then it proceeds to advise him. In America, it tells

him, "You need not be rich to be happy and respected." "In other countries," it proceeds, "the people belong to the government. They are called subjects. They are under the power of some emperor, king, duke, or other ruler," which permits the belief that the patriotic author of this pamphlet is conversant mostly with medieval history. There are some surprising explanations of the Constitution, showing as wide a knowledge of American constitutional history as of that of modern Europe—but space forbids their quotation. "If the common people of other countries had faith in each other, there would be no czars, kaisers, and kings ruling them under the pretext of divine right." This is certainly a gem of historical exposition.

Then, in order to make the stranger feel comfortable, it tells him, "You must be honest and honorable, clean in your person, and decent in your talk." Which, of course, the benighted foreigner reads as a new decalogue. With characteristic modesty, the author reserves for the last praise of his country: "Ours," he says, "is the strongest government in the world, because it is the people's government." Then he loses all self-restraint in a patriotic enthusiasm. "We have more good land in cultivation than in all Europe. We have more coal, and oil, and iron, and copper, than can be found in all the countries of Europe. We can raise enough foodstuffs to feed all the rest of the world. We have more railroads and navigable rivers than can be found in the rest of the civilized world. We have more free schools than the rest of the world. . . . So great is the extent (of our country), so varied its resources, that its people are not dependent on the rest of the world for what they absolutely need. Can there be any better proof that this is the best country in the world? Yes, here is one better proof. Our laws are better and more justly carried out."

Of course, criticism by the stranger within your gates seems ungracious; but whenever it is attempted, it is suppressed by this common question: "If you don't like it, why don't you go back?" The answer is never given, but it exists. For the majority of us, this is our home and we have worked very hard for everything we have earned or won. And if we find matter for criticism, it is because nothing is perfect; and if we institute comparisons, it is because, having lived in two lands, we have more of the wherewithal for comparisons than those who have lived in only one country.

Then there is the American press. How is it aiding our assimilation? It would not be difficult to name those few newspapers in the United States that give space either as news or editorially, to nonsensational events or problems with which Europe is grappling. As regards Italy, there is such a dearth of information of vital importance that little, if anything, is known by the average American, of the economic or political progress of that country. Columns on Mussolini, half-page head-

lines on the Mafia, but never a word on the wonderful industrial development in northern Italy, never a notice of the financial policies that have brought Italian finances to a successful state!

What is the American press doing to help assimilate this "menacing" element in the Republic?

"Why is it," was asked of a prominent American journalist, "that you print news about Italians which you would not of other nationalities?"

"Well, it is this way," was the answer, "if we published them about the Irish or the Germans, we should be buried with letters of protest; the Italians do not seem to object."

It would be nearer the truth to say that they have learned the uselessness of objecting unless they can back up the objection by a "solid Italian vote."

One result of the unfriendliness of the popular American press is that it drives Italians to support a rather unwholesome Italian colonial press. Why should they read American papers that chronicle only the misdeeds of their compatriots? Better support a local press that, however poor and ofttimes dishonest, keeps up the courage of these expatriates by telling them what young Italy is bravely doing at home and abroad. But this colonial press widens the cleavage between the nations, puts new obstacles in the way of assimilation, and keeps up racial differences.

To feel that we are considered a problem is not calculated to make us sympathize with your efforts in our behalf, and those very efforts are, as a direct result, very likely to be misdirected. My countrymen in America, ignorant though many of them are, and little in touch with Americans, nevertheless feel keenly that they are looked upon by the masses as a problem. It is, in part, because of that feeling that they fail to take an interest in American life or to easily mix with the natives. And though it may seem far-fetched, I believe that the feeling that they are unwelcome begets in them a distrust of those defenses to life, liberty, and property which the new country is presumed to put at their disposal. They have no excess of confidence in your courts and it is not surprising, however lamentable, that the more hotheaded sometimes take the law into their own hands. You cannot expect the foreigner of the humbler class to judge beyond his experience—and his experience of American justice may be comprised in what he learns in some of the minor tribunals controlled by politicians, and in what he has heard of the unpunished lynchings of his countrymen in some parts of the new land. What appeal can the doctrine of state supremacy and federal noninterference make to him? Imagine what you would think of Italian justice if the American sailors in Venice, in resisting arrest by the constituted authorities, had been strung up to a telegraph pole by an infuriated Venetian mob, and the government at Rome had said, with

the utmost courtesy: "We are very sorry and greatly deplore it, but we can't interfere with the autonomy of the province of Venetia!"

I am aware that the question is often asked: If these people are sensitive about being discussed as a problem and a menace, why do they come here? It is a question asked every day in the guise of an argument, a final and crushing argument. But is it really an argument? Is it not rather a question susceptible of a very clear and responsive answer? They come because this is a new country and there is a great deal of room here, and because you invite them. If you really did not want them, you could keep them out, as you have done with the Chinese. . . .

It is true that, as a nationality, Italians have not forced recognition; though numerically strong, there is no such "Italian vote" as to interest politicians. They have founded no important institutions; they have no strong and well-administered societies as have the Germans and the Irish. They have no representative press, and well-organized movements among them for their own good are rare. Those who believe in assimilation may be thankful for all these things; for it could be held that it is harder to assimilate bodies or colonies well organized as foreign elements, than individuals held together in imperfect cohesion.

Yet the Italian in America as an individual is making good progress. In New York City, the individual holdings of Italians in savings banks is over $15 million; they have some 4,000 real estate holdings of the clear value of $20 million. About 10,000 stores in the city are owned by Italians at an estimated value of $7 million, and to this must be added about $7.5 million invested in wholesale business. The estimated material value of the property of the Italian colony in New York is over $60 million, a value much below that of the Italian colonies of St. Louis, San Francisco, Boston, and Chicago, but, a fair showing for the great "dumping ground" of America.

But the sympathetic observer will find the most remarkable progress on what may be called the spiritual side of the Italians among us. It is estimated that there are more than 50,000 Italian children in the public schools of New York City and adjacent cities where Italians are settled. Many an Italian laborer sends his son to Italy to "finish his education" and when he cannot afford this luxury of doubtful value, he gets him one of the *maestri* of Little Italy to perfect him in his native language. In higher education, you will find Italians winning honors in several of our colleges, universities, and professional schools. I know of one Italian who saves money barbering during the summer and on Sundays, to pay his way through Columbia University. I know of another who went through one of our best universities on money voluntarily advanced by a generous and farseeing professor. The money was repaid with interest and the boy is making a mark in the field of math-

ematics. I know of a third, the winner of a university scholarship, who paid his way by assisting in editing an Italian paper during spare hours; a fourth, who won the fellowship for the American School at Rome, and thus an American institution sent an Italian to perfect his special scholarship in Italy.

New York City now counts 115 Italian registered physicians, 63 pharmacists, 4 dentists, 21 lawyers, 15 public school teachers, 9 architects, 4 manufacturers of technical instruments, and 7 mechanical engineers. There are two Italian steamship lines with biweekly sailings, sixteen daily and weekly papers, and several private schools. Italians support several churches, one modest but very efficient hospital, one well-organized savings bank, and a chamber of commerce. They have presented three monuments to the municipality, one, the statue of Columbus, a valuable work of art. They are raising funds to build a school in Verdi's honor, under the auspices of the Children's Aid Society, and are planning to organize a trust company.

I have given the statistics for New York City because the Italian colony on Manhattan is less flourishing than those in other large American cities. So that what is hopeful for New York is even more promising in Philadelphia, St. Louis, and Boston. . . .

There is one more question that an Italian, speaking for his countrymen here, may urge upon Americans who are interested in the problem of assimilation. It is this: that you should make my countrymen love your country by making them see what is truly good and noble in it. Too many of them, far too many, know of America only what they learn from the corrupt politician, the boss, the *banchiere*, and the ofttimes rough policeman. I have been in certain labor camps in the South where my countrymen were forced to work under the surveillance of armed guards. I have spoken to some who had been bound to a mule and whipped to work like slaves. I have met others who bore the marks of brutal abuse committed by cruel bosses with the consent of their superiors. What conception of American liberty can these foreigners have?

This, then, is the duty upon those who represent what is good and enduring in Americanism—to teach these foreigners the truth about America. Remember these foreigners are essentially men and women like yourselves, whatever the superficial differences may be. This is the simple fact far too often forgotten—if not actually denied. And this must be the excuse if you discuss these people as a menace, pitching your discussion as if we were beyond hearing, and beneath feeling, and sometimes even as if beyond redemption.

Make us feel that America has good friends, intelligent, clear-sighted friends; friends that will not exploit us; friends that will not be interested merely because of

what Italy did in the past for all civilization, but friends that will extend to us the sympathy which is due from one man to another. You will thereby make us not merely fellow voters, but will prepare us for the supreme test of real assimilation—the wish to consider the adopted country as a new and dear fatherland.

FROM *THE SURVEY*, MAY 7, 1904

The Children of Emigrants

Alberto Pecorini

1881–1957

Alberto Pecorini was a journalist, one "of those misfits: adventurers, people of talent—now exploited, now blackmailers, eccentric and excited, now subversive, now nationalists, sometimes anarchists, sometimes semi-scholars, other times bankrupt; always ready to fight with the pen and perhaps with punches in defense of their ideals and of their persons, and attack the ideals and persons of others, in a tone rising many octaves above the level of their financial means and of the circulation of their periodicals" (Prezzolini). In New York, at the beginning of the twentieth century, Pecorini directed the newspaper *Il Cittadino* (The Citizen), which, after being sold to the businessman Joseph Personeni, was directed by Alberto Tarchiani from 1907 to 1917. In Italy, Pecorini, who had converted to Protestantism, belonged to the Montclair (New Jersey) Italian Evangelical Missionary Society. He wrote *Gli americani nella vita moderna osservati da un italiano* (The Americans in Modern Life, Observed by an Italian), issued by the publisher Treves in 1909. Prezzolini's judgment of the book was very favorable, especially in relation to the part regarding the Italian Americans, with whom the author manifests very little satisfaction, bringing out in particular the problem of the instruction of children. Later on, he published an interesting bilingual book, *La storia dell'America/The Story of America*, prepared for the Massachusetts Society of the Colonial Dames (Boston: Marshall Jones, 1920). Mrs. Barrett Wendell remarked in the "Introduction" that this book was designed to be "of real use to the community." Pecorini, whose *Grammatica Enciclopedica* (Encyclopedic Grammar, 1911) circulated in America in 1935, died in Argentina.

Prezzolini 1963, 237–242.

One of the most important aspects of Italian immigration in the United States is that it has become increasingly permanent in nature. Children of Italian parents attend public and parochial American schools throughout the United States, and are estimated at one hundred and fifty thousand, of which fifty thousand are in the City of New York alone.

The concentration of these immigrants in major cities is a direct result of their poverty and ignorance. How could one suggest that poor laborers without resources and knowledge of the country would risk going to places where there are few of their compatriots? To tell an immigrant that he would be paid a much higher wage in Kansas, Colorado, or California than he receives in New York is to no avail. He arrives with a longing in his heart for his homeland and dreams of returning there one day to live in peace. After two or three years, when he realizes that one can survive in America but cannot grow rich, he sends for his family members or returns to his homeland to get them. The few words of English that he has learned ensure his employment, and every step toward the west, every mile he moves away from New York represents more sorrow because the indefinite, vague, and impossible hope of returning to his homeland slips farther away. The concentration of Italians in large cities is, however, the root cause of all the evils that afflict our immigrants. The first among them is the immigrant's tendency to live a life unto himself in his surroundings, with little or no interest in studying the English language or learning about the country in which he lives. What need, in fact, does the immigrant have to learn English when he lives in the middle of a colony where he has an Italian boss, an Italian theater, an Italian newspaper, an Italian tavern, and an Italian church? In addition, he is content with his lot and has no aspirations to associate with Americans so that one day he may earn a living within the American system. This way of life could be considered to be a fine example of Italian patriotism, especially by those in Italy who do not understand the problem, but to someone who is intimately familiar with life in our colonies, all of this seems to be a painful consequence of ignorance, a primitive state of mind, and a lack of ambition. If this were patriotism, it would be long-lasting, and its effects would be seen in the second generation; as is the case with professionals, merchants, and rich families, the second generation is disastrously lost, not only with respect to citizenship but also to language and ideals.

The filthiest sections of Italian cities are reproduced in American cities, not because the immigrant loves his homeland, but simply because he is absolutely incapable of living in another environment at the time of his arrival. The typical Italian colony in a large U.S. city is comprised ninety percent of workers and their families, half of whom cannot read and write, and a third group represents the fluctuating population of newcomers who must depend on exploitative brokers or supervisors to earn a living. Ten percent is made up of professionals whose goal in most cases is to make as much money as soon as possible; small merchants who import specialties from their homeland for their customers and fellow countrymen; and bankers, shipping agents, and notary publics, more than half of whom are absolutely irresponsible and would lower themselves to any level to make money. They are, in short, a great mass of working and uneducated poor, exploited somewhat by all classes; and the so-called leaders, rather than taking charge of their social and moral guidance and the serious problems that plague them, are busy making money in any way possible and spending the rest of their time at parties and banquets. If the hunger for gold in Americans presents a sad spectacle, it is even more repugnant in Italians. Americans love money not in and of itself but rather for the pleasure of making it, so much so that after they have earned it they amuse themselves by giving it away. For Italians, with a few exceptions, the philanthropic spirit does not at all develop with wealth. They love money itself, and they breathlessly seek it at the cost of misery, failure, and the neglect of others; it is nauseating. Left to its own devices, the great mass of ignorant workers essentially creates a serious problem for the host nation and for itself. The forms of primitive and violent crime, the convention of personal revenge, and the traditions that govern the concept of honor—everything is in striking contrast to American civilization and therefore arouses a sense of distrust and repulsion towards Italians, which is especially evident in the higher classes of American society.

This negligence presents serious consequences for young newcomers and for children born in the United States. A boy arriving in America at the age of twelve or thirteen is sent by his parents to work rather than to school as the law dictates. All too often parents state the child's age falsely so that he is able to work in a factory; Italian children of about ten years of age or younger frequently work in New Jersey's glassworks. The boy begins to work at an age when the labor is still too difficult for him. He gives most of the money he has earned to his family, and with the little money that is left he learns to wander around the taverns and gambling houses. For the child born in America, or who has arrived from Italy as an infant, his father cannot avoid sending him to school. As happens quite often, the child is educated in a bright and clean environment with a better and more decent life,

while he is forced to live at home in a dirty and unhealthy environment which is at odds with the gracious and beautiful one at school. The child does not know anything about Italy other than the crude dialect spoken at home, the obscene words that he hears on the neighborhood streets, and the primitive methods and thoughts of his illiterate parents. He never sees an Italian book at home because no one knows how to read, he knows nothing about Italy because his father could not tell him anything, and he grows up intelligent and educated with a sense of revulsion for anything that has to do with Italy. When he is older, he Americanizes his name because he is ashamed of being Italian and, if he is inclined to do well, he moves to another neighborhood in the city and becomes an honest American worker.

Frequently, the lack of moral parental influence, through the ill-conceived notion of freedom as a result of ignorance and coarseness, completely abandons children to an environment that is better suited to create criminals than gentlemen. It is significant, for example, that among the Italian delinquents in New York City, the percentage of those who were born in America or who came here before fourteen years of age is much greater than those immigrants who arrived after the age of twenty-five. Italian delinquency, which alarms many Americans, is more a product of an Italian-American upbringing than of Italy, and it certainly will not decline until its causes have been addressed. As far as the ruling class is concerned, until now it has often profited, not through legitimate commerce or professional practice, but by exploiting the ignorance of the masses. There is no shortage of professionals and honest merchants, but the majority is content to advance within a semi-honest system, which unfortunately continues to thrive. The shipping agent and the banker are paid enormous prices for their services; the recruiter sends thousands of laborers to any dangerous job site to work as slaves or to die of poverty while he still receives his commission; the doctor sells imported medicine at outrageous prices; the lawyer, in taking advantage of his clients' ignorance, absorbs what little savings they have, and in cases brought by workers injured on the job, he ruthlessly negotiates with the industrial and railway companies and receives money from both sides; and the newspaper owner fills the newspaper with enticing and misleading notices while tempting the weaknesses of every rich profiteer. What if in the midst of such surroundings honest young people, who represent the future of the colonies, disdainfully rejected them? What if the Italians who knew how to read and write and who could not be exploited, instead of becoming the heart and soul of Italian-American life, were to establish subversive organizations in West Hoboken and Paterson where the spirit of healthy and moderate discontent has degenerated into an atrocious spirit of rebellion and deadly hatred? Two years ago in New York where there are nearly half a million Italians

and where fifty thousand Italian students attend school, a few idealists, headed by an Italian commissioner of the city public education committee, persuaded the school authorities to introduce the option of teaching the Italian language in those schools where at least a certain number of students had requested it. This was considered to be a great victory for the city's Italians. The prominent people in the community hosted a banquet in honor of the commissioner, they gave speeches praising their homeland, and naturally the government sent a medal; but when it came to the facts, not one of the hundred thousand Italian laborers asked that his child be taught the Italian language. At this rate, there will not be any traces of Italian immigration to the United States left in the future, except for a few dirty neighborhoods and an increase in crime and disorder.

It would be unfair, however, not to recognize the modest efforts thus far by a few who were motivated by more than money and felt a duty towards the oppressed. Many good works for the benefit of emigrants have been achieved under the direction of various religious groups.

There are currently more than two hundred Italian priests in the United States. While it is true that too many of them left their homeland under the weight of guilt, it is no less true that a considerable number use their positive influence to benefit the social condition of the masses. They have, admittedly, yet to learn that certain noisy celebrations and processions make our people seem to be a superstitious and inferior race to the Americans who have never seen Catholics of other nations do these things, but at least these priests speak our language and have proved themselves to be loyal patriots, since the difficulties of Italian politics do not exist in America. Almost all of the Protestant churches have missionaries and ministers among the Italians; there are about ninety scattered throughout the largest colonies. In many places, proper churches were built for them; and since the main purpose of these groups is to Americanize newcomers as quickly as possible, night schools teaching English are often attached to places of worship, and reading rooms have been opened nearby. Protestantism cannot, however, make the same progress among Italian immigrants that could be expected with other races, since Italians lack the individual, evolved conscience that Protestantism assumes. Nevertheless, it bestows a spirit of enterprise and momentum on the Italian Catholic church that only the United States seems capable of providing. A number of charities have been established in some of the more populated colonies. An Italian charitable institute in New York, mainly through the work of an Italian industrialist to whom Italians in the United States should show their utmost gratitude, has almost completed plans for the creation of a large Italian hospital.

The question of Italian colonial life in the United States is very complex and difficult. Those who have thoroughly studied it agree that it presents many difficulties since things have been allowed to take their own course for too long. In the United States there is the danger of producing a type of citizen within the Italian-American colonies who embodies the worst qualities of both races instead of the best ones. The ideal would be to guide Italian immigrants in a way that, while becoming citizens of their adoptive homeland, allows them to keep their distant homeland in their hearts and to educate their children to uphold the ideals of their heritage. In another chapter of this book discussing Italian-American trade, I have shown that Italian immigration to the United States fundamentally represents a commercial failure. It is important to ensure that it does not constitute a moral failure as well. Two main problems exist with respect to Italian immigration in the United States: one concerns the distribution of immigrants and the other concerns their protection and education.

The problem of the lack of concentration of Italians in the agricultural southern states, where they could eventually become landowners, has been studied by Baron Des Planches, the current Italian ambassador to Washington. After a long journey through the South, he summed up his conclusions in an interesting report: "Of course, while success is not always immediate, it does not elude those who work and persevere. . . . It seems to demonstrate that in terms of our agricultural emigration, which is fifty percent of total migration, it is advisable for them to go where they are needed rather than where they are considered unnecessary; where hands are in short supply rather than where they face competition from many others or they adapt to jobs that others disdain; where the climate reminds us of our own rather than where the winters are long and miserable; where they rediscover a morally and physically healthy life in the fields rather than where they cannot escape from base practices on the streets, or if they work in factories, where the pernicious air that one breathes alternates with the tempting and voracious stench of saloons and the noxious dankness of the "slums." It is very doubtful that directing immigrants to the agricultural South could displace the Italian neighborhoods of large cities, but it is not doubtful that it could prevent further overcrowding. Without intending to cast a shadow over the optimism of this illustrious man, we must not forget that there are enormous obstacles. Italians do not want to be isolated and will not go to the South without the most extensive guarantees of safety. If they are so poorly protected in the North, where they live in large numbers and where their homeland's governmental agencies are present in major cities, why would they go to the South where consular services are not only lacking, but one could assert that they do not exist at all? Moreover, we cannot forget that the in-

habitants of the south, who are accustomed to Negroes, do not pay comparable wages and treat workers as well as they are treated in the North. In many states the laws established to prevent Negroes from voting also prevent white immigrants from doing so, and even an American court was called to decide whether Italian children had the right to go to school with white American children instead of Negroes. While it is true that the cost of living is lower in the South and that those who persevere can prosper and one day own land, they are the exception, and in any case those who persevere can also prosper in the North. If the Italian government, which imports millions of tons of tobacco each year from the South, and the industries in northern Italy, which import millions of tons of raw cotton, were willing to boldly enter into colonization and have Italian hands produce the materials they need, then perhaps the influx of Italians to the South could be a success.

The second problem is one of protection. The Italian government has done something to protect the emigrant during the crossing and has subsidized protection agencies at the ports of arrival to protect him during his entry into America. But the protection ends here, even though it should not only continue as a protective mission, but should also broaden its scope and include an educational mission as well. This basically would serve to protect the immigrant from dishonest speculators while looking for work and to raise the moral level of the colonies to ensure a future generation of honest and industrious Italian workers. Initially, the Italian government attempted to open an employment agency in New York, which constitutes a significant step if only for the good intentions it has demonstrated. The agency, however, places a relatively small number of workers, while there are hundreds of Italian contractors in the United States who employ many more workers each year. It is difficult to remedy the situation. The failed student who reads and writes correctly, knows a little French, and has modest pretensions is not cut out for life in the United States. The labor issue regulates itself for the most part as the recent crisis demonstrated; the worker who needs an agency to find him a job in the United States is more often than not unsuitable to work in this country. It would be more important for the agency to concern itself with the inspection and supervision of contractors. The Italian immigrant always prefers to look for work through one of his fellow countrymen, even paying him a commission rather than going through a government office which would find him work for free. But if every contractor knew that the employment agency monitored him, and that he could not extort money or send an Italian immigrant to become a slave and die in West Virginia, Louisiana, or Florida without being sent to prison according to the country's laws, the situation would somewhat improve. If it were understood that no lawyer could profit from a worker's ignorance without the intervention and

protection of a government agency, we would no longer see Italians who have lost an eye, an arm, or a leg at work and receive only a few hundred dollars as compensation. In order to carry out the educational mission, it would be necessary to assemble a group of honest professionals. It would be an excellent initiative for the Italian government to create a number of scholarships at universities in Italy for intelligent young people who were educated in America. They could help immensely by serving as interpreters of the Italians' aspirations for the Americans, among which they live and are now part, if they knew something about the beauty, ideals, and history of Italy that they ignore. In most American universities where the Italian language is taught, why are the professors American? Is this not our field? Why do we want to chase after money if the Americans, who are more energetic and practical, continue to defeat us? But in the field of art and literature, which is our field, why should we not win?

If we could find a way to organize the Italian workers, using the most intelligent workers as representatives, the objections of the American workers' unions could be easily countered. In Boston, something similar has been attempted but the results will not be seen for some time. It is perhaps better to encourage the Italians to join American unions where they can exert their influence to benefit their fellow countrymen, rather than to organize exclusively Italian unions that lack the fundamental principles of democracy and order on which American unions are founded, and quickly degenerate into oligarchies.

For several years, in addition to poor country peasants from southern Italy and Sicily who arrive in the United States, there has been an influx of craftsmen from the cities, students who were unable to finish their studies and find work, as well as young people from well-off families who seek a larger and more profitable area for their businesses. The mission of Italian government officials in the United States should be to ensure that these immigrants are not lost to the great American masses, but that they become the future of a more beautiful and pure colonial life. In order for this mandate to be effectively carried out, the officials need to be carefully selected and the responsibility of protection must be fully placed in their hands. It is clear that a government official who is suited to be a consul in Turkey or China, where the authorities are terrified of him and where he only comes in contact with a small number of wealthy Italian travelers, may not be suited to be a consul in a large U.S. city where he does not inspire any fear and where there are tens of thousands of poor workers to protect, organize, and educate. For countries with large numbers of immigrants, the consular role requires special training that no school other than experience can provide. The Italian government should learn how to create properly a class of consular officials qualified to serve in

countries with large numbers of Italian immigrants, and it must give these officials ample resources to supervise the various initiatives aimed at the protection and education of emigrants. The Italian consul in the United States should be sufficiently aware of the environment, language, customs, and ideals of the American nation so that he is understood and respected by the most intelligent persons, and at the same time he should recognize the moral conditions and problems within the colonies so that he may become a vital force in guiding emigrants on their new path. . . .

Until now, we have not been on the right track and the miserable state of many colonies is due in no small part in this neglect. . . .

Under these circumstances, how can the Italian government know the real state of the colonies and their needs? And who will guide the Italian emigrants in the midst of so much neglect and disorganization?

Since the moral guidance and inspirational forces are lacking, immigrants can only look to criminal con-men who have neither the desire to work honestly nor the ability to practice any profession and who improvise as journalists. In weekly newspapers which live and die as quickly as mushrooms, they demonstrate their abilities by praising those who pay and blackmailing those who do not. The ten daily newspapers, which after many years of struggle for survival are now beginning to emerge from the dark shadow of semi-honesty, cannot yet lead life in the colonies, which need far more strength and independent action. And yet, how great, how beautiful is the mission that seems providentially entrusted to the Italians in the United States! The railroads built by poor Italian laborers; the tunnels, bridges, and roads wet from their sweat; the factories where they have largely made the triumph of American industry possible; the mines where many of them died and were ignored; the orange groves and vineyards in California and perhaps the fields in the west and south that will one day be tilled: all of these great and productive things in and of themselves are only temporary contributions to the economic greatness of the richest country in the world. The one great and true contribution that the children of Italy can offer the United States is an everlasting one: it is the sense of beauty, an ideal of life in which the Latin race excels and which the American people lack. Given their work, Italians do not produce what others can do equally well or even better, but the children from the land of the sun have in their blood an ideal, a heart that other people do not have. Poor and illiterate, even looking at the painting of a great artist, hearing the notes of a dear piece of music, lifting their eyes up to the blue of heaven or shifting their gaze to the depths of the countryside, contemplating the infinite ocean or the sun drawing to a close, witnessing a generous act, or listening to a love story their soul experiences

emotions, throbs, anguish, despair, passion, and dismay that are and will always be a mystery to Anglo-Saxons. If one day the United States produces great artists or poets, the blood of the poor children of Italy will run through their veins. . . . The American people of the future, with the purity and rigidity of the Puritans, the tenacity of the Germans, the happy optimism of the Irish, and the commercial skills of the Jews will not be complete without the artistic sentiment and the ideal inclinations of the Italic race, and it is every individual's duty to ensure that this contribution can be freely given and gratefully received and appreciated. This will create deep currents of sympathy between peoples which matter much more than treaties and perhaps even more than commerce. If this can be achieved through the elevation and purification of our colonies, then Italian immigration to the United States will not be a failure.

Translated by Giulia Prestia

Neither Foreigners nor Americans

Alberto Tarchiani

Rome, Italy, November 11, 1885–November 30, 1964

Between 1907 and the autumn of 1916, Alberto Tarchiani, one of the most esteemed among the exiles in the 1930s and 1940s, carried out his first profitable journalistic experience in New York, directing the weekly *Il Cittadino* (The Citizen). Administered by businessman Joseph Personeni and of modest means, though of a much higher quality than the average colonial newspaper, *Il Cittadino* published stories in series, such as Gogol's "Taras Bulba," and did not hesitate to enter into debate with the *Progresso* of Carlo Barsotti. It distinguished itself during the First World War for its democratic interventionism, which, among other things, translated into venting a harsh invective against Senator Lodge and the political nativists intent upon impeding the conscription of the children of Italian American citizens ("Un caso penoso" [A Painful Case], June 24, 1915). It also strongly attacked George McClellan, a professor of economics at Princeton, who lived in Venice and was a supporter of neutralism. Tarchiani asked for his expulsion from Italy ("Per l'espulsione di un protettore maldicente" [For the Expulsion from Italy of a Slanderous Protectionist], June 24, 1915). In this context, touching however upon questions of greater breadth, is Tarchiani's article "Neither Foreigners, nor Americans," published in *Il Cittadino* on December 9, 1915.

Repatriated to volunteer for the front, Tarchiani then became an editor at the *Corriere della Sera*. In 1926 he moved to France. In August 1929, he was among the organizers of the rescue of Carlo Rosselli, Emilio Lussu, and Fausto Nitti from their place of internal exile on the island of Lipari. In Paris, with Rosselli, he created *Giustizia e Libertà* (Justice and Liberty), then, with Randolfo Pacciardi, *La*

Giovane Italia (Young Italy). In the United States, where he returned in autumn 1940, he was the secretary general of the Mazzini Society, for which he founded, with Alberto Cianca, first, *Mazzini News,* then, *Nazioni Unite* (United Nations). He reentered Italy in summer 1943, with the Allies, and on April 22, 1944, he was named Minister of Public Works in the second government of Badoglio, whose seat was in Salerno. As Italian ambassador to Washington from 1945 to 1955, he applied himself to the cause of including Italy in the future Atlantic Alliance. Among his books, *Dieci anni tra Roma e Washington* (Ten Years Between Rome and Washington) (1955) describes his ambassadorial experiences.

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Our observations on the phenomena of dual citizenship[1] have provoked the usual chorus of protests and approvals. Of course as always happens when one presses on an open wound hidden under the bandages of oblivion and hypocrisy, the protests were much louder and more resounding than the approvals. We are used to it! . . . Initially, certain nationalists of dubious origin rose up to say that it was a crime to advise Italians to apply for American citizenship (which does not mean, one should note, becoming "Americanized"). Then there emerged, with the scimitar of loyalty, the mamelukes of artificial denationalization and re-nationalization. Between these two extremes there are those who are silent and they are the great majority of naturalized Italians who well know the reasons why and under what circumstances they "legally" renounced their citizenship of birth to acquire their adoptive one.

Random or bellowing nationalists and "Americanists," either out of ignorance, utility, or an instinctive and resolute aversion to the police, have not considered and understood a simple truth: Italians residing in the United States for years—whether naturalized or not—are no longer foreigners even if they are not yet (and nor will they ever be) Americans. They are political and moral hybrids who love their home country from far away and despise it up close, just as they do with their adoptive country. All foreigners despise America when they are there. They praise it when they return to their native country. Thus, for emigrants, Italy, especially the one that they have never seen (since most of them are only familiar with their "hometown" and Naples) is an earthly paradise. When they go there (out of their

1. The author refers to a series of articles on this subject that appeared in his newspaper and that addressed the issue of conscription in the Italian armed forces.