Building a New (Deal) Identity The Evolution of Italian-American Political Culture and Ideology, 1910–1940

Ryan J. Antonucci

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Building a New (Deal) Identity
The Evolution of Italian-American Political Culture and Ideology, 1910–1940

by

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Abstract

Italian Americans were a key constituency of the white-ethnic voting bloc that formed one of the main pillars of the New Deal coalition. However, few historians have looked at motives for the group’s allegiance beyond economic necessity and machine politics. This approach has falsely colored enthusiasm for the New Deal as a reflexive reaction to the Great Depression. “Building a New (Deal) Identity” argues that Italian Americans living in western Pennsylvania and eastern Ohio, from Pittsburgh through Cleveland, voted heavily for the New Deal during the 1930s because of their unique political reshaping during the preceding two decades. In this explanation, politicians such as Franklin Roosevelt harnessed a group already susceptible to a modern liberal ideology rather than persuaded Italian Americans to support them out of sheer economic desperation. This dissertation helps explain why the Democratic Party’s New Deal liberalism changed the American political paradigm for a generation. By tracing ideological roots to the previous decades, it becomes clear why that liberalism became part of the Italian-American identity as opposed to an aberration that disappeared with the resolution of the economic crisis.

Italian Americans created the foundation for accepting modern liberalism because they synthesized three major influences circulating in their community. American civic nationalism contributed ideas about democracy and personal rights. Radical leftists, including socialists and anarcho-syndicalists, convinced people of the need for unionization and concessions to workers. Finally, Italian Fascism showed the benefits of
an activist government willing to intervene in the economy to solve crises. Although these influences are well-documented in Italian-American historiography, historians have treated them as mutually exclusive trends. “Building a New (Deal) Identity” explains how each component impacted average people. Through each stage, Italian Americans purged the conflicting aspects of the influences to create a fusion that resembled modern American liberalism and was ripe for appropriation by the New Dealers.
# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................ iii

Abstract .............................................................................................................................. iv

Introduction ......................................................................................................................... 1

Chapter One - *Italian-American*: The Creation of a Hyphenated Identity
in Western Pennsylvania and Eastern Ohio ................................................................. 27

  The “Discovery” of Italian-American Communities and Their
  Public Sphere .................................................................................................................... 29

  The Parameters of the Public Sphere: The Italian-American Community
  of Western Pennsylvania and Eastern Ohio ................................................................. 39

  The Class and Regional Issue ....................................................................................... 69

  The Temporary Sphere ................................................................................................. 88

Chapter Two - Creating an Italian-American Civic Identity ........................................... 93

  A Clean Slate .................................................................................................................. 96

  Pressures for Citizenship ............................................................................................. 105

  The Americanizing Agents .......................................................................................... 116

  Civic Identity and the Influence of Italian Americanism ............................................. 142

  Conclusion ....................................................................................................................... 155

Chapter Three - Sacco and Vanzetti, Causes Célèbres: The Penetration
of Leftist Ideology .......................................................................................................... 157

  Remembrance and Radicalism ...................................................................................... 162

  The Spreading of Ideology ............................................................................................ 165

  Sacco and Vanzetti ........................................................................................................ 177
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Tours</td>
<td>..................................................................................................</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leftist Ideas</td>
<td>..................................................................................................</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Colony Arrested</td>
<td>......................................................................................</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Four - An Alternative Vision: Fascist Influence and Ideological Moderation</td>
<td>..................................................................................................</td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Philo-Fascist Community</td>
<td>..........................................................................................</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fascist Popularity</td>
<td>............................................................................................</td>
<td>241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fascist Diffusion, Bridges to the People</td>
<td>.....................................................................................</td>
<td>264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Mediated Fascism</td>
<td>.....................................................................................</td>
<td>276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderated Fascism</td>
<td>.....................................................................................</td>
<td>303</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Five - The Italian American Political Association and Grassroots Politics</td>
<td>..................................................................................................</td>
<td>309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italian-American Political Clubs</td>
<td>.........................................................................................</td>
<td>313</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Italian American Political Association</td>
<td>.....................................................................................</td>
<td>322</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Network of Political Clubs</td>
<td>......................................................................................</td>
<td>347</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridging the Ideological Divide</td>
<td>.....................................................................................</td>
<td>357</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Six - The Coalescence of the Coalition: Italian Americans Discover Democratic Allies</td>
<td>..................................................................................................</td>
<td>373</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Catalyst of the Great Depression</td>
<td>.....................................................................................</td>
<td>377</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Deal Realignment</td>
<td>.....................................................................................</td>
<td>391</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Deal Confluence</td>
<td>.....................................................................................</td>
<td>408</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Second New Deal</td>
<td>......................................................................................</td>
<td>437</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>..........................................................................................</td>
<td>450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>.......................................................................................</td>
<td>453</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

In July 1928, Angelo Di Renzo, the editor of Il Cittadino Italo-Americano, Youngstown, Ohio’s Italian-language newspaper, penned an opinion piece titled “The Problem of Unemployment.” Printed more than a year before the Wall Street stock market crash of 1929, during a supposed period of mass prosperity, Di Renzo outlined a political platform remarkably similar to the New Deal that would begin to unfold over four years later. Written in the context of the upcoming presidential election, the editor argued that the current American political parties had no answers to problems experienced by ordinary people. Socialist Norman Thomas had an agenda, but it was “not feasible.” The Democrats and their candidate, Al Smith, were silent about an economic proposal to address the employment problem, while the Republicans only repeated claims that they brought prosperity. Unfortunately, Di Renzo continued, “this famous Coolidgian prosperity, that is of the Nation and not of the people.”¹ Average working Americans did not benefit from the laissez-faire policies of the Calvin Coolidge administration, nor from record stock prices, and America’s political parties appeared unwilling or unable to address these concerns.

Di Renzo laid out several policy considerations to address a new mechanized economy that displaced workers. He began cautiously, first telling readers that a change in the political paradigm was a prerequisite to the adoption of his suggestions, or, in his words,

that “the resolution of the problem of unemployment depends mainly on the modification of part of the current legislative system.” A “class struggle” was not practical, and Americans instead needed “class collaboration.” This emphasis, he argued, would lessen unemployment and eliminate “krumiraggio,” the use of “scabs” or strikebreakers to undermine workers. Collaboration would extend economic benefits to all Americans; it would go beyond favoring only the trade unionists, a likely allusion to aiding the unskilled and semiskilled through industrial unionism rather than continuing organized labor’s favoritism toward the skilled craft workers. Di Renzo proposed new programs, including “one for pensions to the disabled and to the elderly,” which ideally would include all those over the age of sixty and some people between fifty and sixty, and another plan to cover “involuntary unemploymens.” To pay for the new programs, “the employers, the banks, and the trusts of any nature” would contribute alongside the workers. He called for laws to bar women from certain occupations, prohibit employing youth under eighteen, and shorten working hours. These efforts would open jobs for the un- and underemployed, while other measures designed “to stimulate production and commerce, encourage export, [and] promote public works” would supply additional opportunities. As Di Renzo concluded, “there is the path, but it takes courage to travel it. It is a matter of initiative, of will, and of sincerity. Sooner than socialism, this path would lead to the opening of a more equitable distribution of wealth.”

Di Renzo’s political evaluation begs the question of how he arrived at a platform that mirrored significant aspects of the New Deal over a year before the Wall Street crash.

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Similar to the Italian-American editor, Franklin Roosevelt and his “Brain Trust” concluded that the government needed to address mechanization, modern business, and the depression by restructuring the economy. The idea of class collaboration was at the heart of the National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933, which established a massive public works program and sought to balance capital and labor through the National Recovery Administration (NRA). After the Supreme Court struck down the NRA in 1935, Roosevelt’s government responded with targeted legislation that delivered much of what Di Renzo sought. Government regulation of some businesses continued, such as with the Public Utility Holding Company Act and the Guffey-Snyder Coal Act of 1935, replaced in 1937 by the Guffey-Vinson Coal Act. The National Labor Relations Act of 1935 protected and encouraged industrial unionism, thereby lessening opportunities for strikebreaking. Pensions for the elderly and unemployment insurance became a reality with the Social Security Act of 1935. Di Renzo’s call for a shorter workweek and the end of child labor became provisions in the 1938 Fair Labor Standards Act. Most Italian-American political desires, as expressed by Di Renzo, became a reality under Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal. This raises the question of ideological origins: How and why did Italian Americans become New Dealers before the New Deal existed?

At the heart of this project is the inquiry of why Italian Americans responded enthusiastically to the New Deal and became part of its coalition. There is a common assertion among historians that Italian Americans – whether noted individually or as part of the larger group of “white ethnics,” those new immigrants and their children originating
from southern and eastern Europe – became a core constituency in the New Deal coalition.³ Nationally, Italian Americans affirmed their faith in Franklin Roosevelt’s governance by returning the president to office by wide margins: 88 percent in 1936 and 75 percent in 1940.⁴ This project seeks to understand the foundations for this electoral support. It is less concerned with what happened, the statistical shift of Italian Americans into the Democratic Party, and more with why that realignment took place.

“Building a New (Deal) Identity” argues that Italian Americans living in western Pennsylvania and eastern Ohio, from Pittsburgh through Cleveland, voted heavily for the New Deal during the 1930s because of their unique political reshaping during the preceding two decades. Studying the roots of ideological acceptance of the New Deal is necessary to understand its longevity. If the New Deal coalition and paradigm lasted into the 1960s or 1970s, as many scholars contend, it was built on a solid foundation.⁵ Acceptance of Roosevelt’s work was not a knee-jerk reaction to a crisis; if it had been, then political adherence would have collapsed once those stimuli dissipated. As Lizabeth Cohen argued in Making a New Deal, “working-class Americans underwent a gradual shift in attitudes

and behavior over the intervening decade and a half as a result of a wide range of social and cultural experiences.”\textsuperscript{6} Italian-American ideological beliefs developed over several years before the New Deal. In this explanation, politicians such as Franklin Roosevelt harnessed a group already susceptible to a modern liberal ideology rather than persuaded Italian Americans to support them out of sheer economic desperation. By tracing ideological roots to the previous decades, this dissertation helps explain why the Democratic Party’s New Deal liberalism changed the American political paradigm for a generation rather than operated as a temporary aberration that disappeared with the resolution of the economic crisis.

Italian Americans created the foundation for accepting modern American liberalism because they synthesized three major influences circulating in their community. Through their public sphere organized around their ethnicity, they merged their beliefs about civic nationalism, leftism, and Fascism to inform their politics.\textsuperscript{7} American civic nationalism contributed concepts about democracy and personal rights. Radical leftists, including socialists and anarcho-syndicalists, convinced people of the need for unionization and concessions to workers. Finally, Italian Fascism showed the benefits of an activist government willing to intervene in the economy to solve crises. Although these influences are historiographically well-documented, scholars have treated them as mutually exclusive trends. “Building a New (Deal) Identity” explains how each impacted

\textsuperscript{6} Cohen, \textit{Making a New Deal}, 5.

\textsuperscript{7} Leftism is used within this project as a catchall term for the various left-wing movements that informed the Italian-American community. These were primarily types of anarcho-syndicalism and socialism. Their commonality, and importance for this project, is that their core economic beliefs favored addressing working-class grievances through collective methods.
average people. Through every stage of adoption, Italian Americans purged the conflicting aspects of the influences to create a fusion that resembled modern American liberalism. In this assessment, neither the Wall Street crash of 1929 nor the advent of the New Deal prompted a fundamental ideological change. The events of the early 1930s only confirmed and sharpened beliefs that had been percolating for a decade. Developments within the Italian-American community before Franklin Roosevelt’s election primed the constituency for appropriation by the New Dealers.

“Building a New (Deal) Identity” synthesizes historiographical trends to argue this new interpretation. The problem with the histories of civic nationalism, leftism, and Fascism is that they are analyzed independently or viewed as constantly in conflict with one another. This project instead merges different parts of Italian-American historiography. Scholars have too often limited their treatment of politics within the Italian-American community. Some documented the Americanizing influences on immigrants. Others noted the prevalence of radical-leftist ideology, or they sought to understand the popularity of Fascism within the community. While these are helpful steps in understanding Italian-American politics, the approaches artificially imply single impetuses of political influence. They suggest that one could not be Americanized and see benefits in parts of leftist ideology. They infer that people who listened and found value in the words of leftist radicals, such as Carlo Tresca, could not have found any parts of Fascism acceptable. In actuality, all of these ideas circulating within the Italian-American community served as influences for domestic politics. Regular people routinely heard multiple positions, even if historians have interpreted them as the antitheses of each other. Consider, for example, an anonymous letter to the editor published in the *Pittsburgh Press* in 1927. The author, “an
American of Italian parentage,” admitted that he or she “frequently visit[ed] Fascist and anti-fascist meetings” in the area.\(^8\) While the core members of the groups differed on their views of radicalism and events in Italy, most other people, like the anonymous writer, mingled within both circles, accepting, rejecting, and synthesizing ideas from all sides.

This is the story about the large, moderate center, or what might be called the *influenced*, not the *adherents*. Most people were not doctrinaires, nor were they politically apathetic. Their political lives existed somewhere in the middle. As the exiled anti-Fascist Gaetano Salvemini observed during the 1930s, ten percent of people were anti-Fascist, while “out-and-out Italian-American Fascists constitute[d] no more than 5 percent of the Italian population.”\(^9\) His observations were not that different from those presented by Count Ignazio Thaon di Revel, head of the Fascist League of North America, who claimed in 1926 “that 10% of Italian Americans were ‘eager advocates’ of Fascism.”\(^10\) Many were favorable or open to Benito Mussolini and his system, but they were not particularly devout.\(^11\) The majority of Italian Americans did not prepare daily for the advent of Fascism in the United States, nor did they visit leftist groups multiple times a week to discuss anarcho-syndicalism, socialism, or communism and plot revolution. Instead, they talked politics weekly. They were familiar with, but not experts of, the ideologies circulating around them. In this context, the adage ‘Mussolini made the trains run on time’ becomes

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intelligible. Most had a superficial understanding of Fascism (and the various forms of leftism, for that matter). They knew the general themes and ideas, but they were not political scientists. Occasional news and discussion created a mass of influenced people, not ideologues bound to particular doctrines, ideas, and arguments. This project seeks to understand the large, moderate middle of Italian Americans.

Location is important. “Building a New (Deal) Identity” studies Italian Americans residing in western Pennsylvania and eastern Ohio, a geographic area covering a wide range of communities to tell a more extensive political history of a people. This range includes the metropolises of Cleveland and Pittsburgh, two of the most significant urban centers in the United States at the time, along with the cities and towns throughout the region that formed an interconnected web of Italian-American communities, a detail further explained in chapter one. More specifically, this includes the following areas of Italian-American settlement: greater Cleveland, moving south to Akron; Youngstown, Ohio, and the Mahoning Valley, including towns to the east across the Pennsylvania state line; the southwest corner of Pennsylvania east to the Allegheny Mountains, which includes greater Pittsburgh, smaller industrial cities along the Beaver, Monongahela, Allegheny, and Ohio Rivers, and various coal mining towns and crossroads, mainly due east and south of the metropolis; and, some smaller Ohio mining towns west of Pittsburgh along the Ohio River. Numerous ethnic newspapers served this area, sometimes with overlapping coverage.

Importantly, population concentrations were not large enough for residents to operate in a political vacuum. Part of this project’s argument relies on the notion of an Italian-American public sphere, the concept that ideology originated from conversations and debates in ethnic organizations, Italian-language newspapers, and everyday encounters
with friends and neighbors. The sheer number of people in New York City, which contained about a quarter of foreign-born Italians living in the United States, along with its status as an arrival port, allowed the opportunity for competing public spheres for the ideological fringes.\textsuperscript{12} For example, in late 1926 and early 1927, rumors about the possible arrival of the anti-Fascist Colonel Ricciotti Garibaldi, grandson of Italian hero Giuseppe Garibaldi, in New York animated the Fascist and anti-Fascists in the city.\textsuperscript{13} The high concentration of people allowed those at the fringes to operate within circles of like-minded people. Certainly, radicals existed in western Pennsylvania and eastern Ohio; however, the lower physical concentration of people forced most to engage with diverse others, which created a moderating influence.

“Building a New (Deal) Identity” tells the story of how the Italian Americans became New Deal Democrats from their perspective, so this project relies heavily on their sources of information, especially ethnic newspapers, along with oral histories that interpret events and life experiences. The following chapters document not what historians might have found noteworthy about the period but what Italian Americans were discussing. Searching the long arc of American political development, numerous scholars have drawn parallels between earlier eras and the New Deal, usually by describing Progressives as bequeathing an ideological foundation on which the New Dealers built.\textsuperscript{14} There is certainly

validity to this, especially since Franklin Roosevelt modeled himself as a progressive during his final years in the Woodrow Wilson administration while he sought higher political office.\textsuperscript{15} Italian Americans had different influences. An occasional reference appeared, such as a 1921 article in Cleveland’s \textit{La Voce del Popolo Italiano} suggesting that the city needed more civic works in the model offered by its early-twentieth-century mayor, Tom L. Johnson, but these were few and far between.\textsuperscript{16} When Italian Americans looked toward new leadership after the Wall Street stock market crash of 1929, they specifically had Benito Mussolini, not Johnson, Theodore Roosevelt, or some other progressive, in mind.

Since this project is about creating an ideology, historical facts are less important than what people perceived as truths at the time. The Fascist “third-way” economic experiment of corporatism was not a success; it existed more on paper than in practice. However, those living in the United States absorbed the propaganda that appeared in their ethnic press and through transmission organizations such as the Italian consulates and fraternal societies. Whether Mussolini actually made the trains run on time is irrelevant. Italian Americans came to believe that Fascist methods worked and offered examples worthy of replication. The same is true for interviews used in this project. As Alessandro Portelli argued, oral history offers a method to understand the personal meaning of events

\textsuperscript{15} Roger Daniels, \textit{Franklin D. Roosevelt: Road to the New Deal, 1882–1939} (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 42–43.
\textsuperscript{16} “Fiddleing [sic] to No Purpose,” \textit{La Voce del Popolo Italiano} (Cleveland, OH), 12 February 1921, 2.
Beliefs are seldom the result of rigorous intellectual research; instead, they derive from perceived truths, life experiences, and everyday interactions. In an oral interview about his early life and nativism in Youngstown, Ohio, Nicola Criscione described an event in which Italian-American railroad workers were recalled to the yard because of a train wreck, a situation that kept them from voting after their shift on election day. As Criscione explained, there was no wreck. It appeared to be a ruse to keep people from the polls. The validity of this story is unknown, and it likely will never be known; the importance lies in the fact that Criscione and others believed that the entrenched local power structure sought to keep people like themselves from participating in American democracy. Such beliefs can be more potent than absolute truth in forming worldviews and ideologies.

Although this project analyzes political behavior, the political culture and ideology of Italian Americans, it does not use typical political science methodology related to quantitative methods. “Building a New (Deal) Identity” documents people’s thoughts rather than final vote counts. As Criscione’s example shows, local factors could provide false or artificial vote tallies, a subject described in chapter six. Registration statistics can also mislead because this was a time of realignment. Some Republicans were New Dealers. The most famous example was Fiorello La Guardia, described in Pittsburgh’s *Unione* as “one of the foremost men in America, … as great an exponent of the ‘New Deal’ as exists

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18 Nicola Criscione, interview by William Jenkins, transcript, 8 May 1984, 14–15, Youngstown State University Oral History Program: Ku Klux Klan Project: Personal Experiences, O. H. 311, Maag Library, Youngstown State University, Youngstown, OH.
in America today.” La Guardia was no different from Democrat Ferdinand Pecora, famed for his investigation of Wall Street malpractice, in that both were “two self-same champions of the people” divided only by party name.19 Others, such as Charles J. Margiotti and Michael A. Musmanno in Pittsburgh, ran for office as Republicans before switching parties.20 As Unione stated in 1934 concerning realignment, “progressive Republicans, independent Republicans, and superficial Democrats will have to disappear.” They would be replaced by “the Democrat, believer in President Roosevelt’s active and farsighted policy and in his New Deal[,] and the Republican of the old guard loyal to high finance, protector of big business and defender of the millionaires and of the capitalists of all colors.”21 This process was uneven and dependent on local politics. Cleveland’s Little Italy returned its Republican city councilman, Alessandro “Sonny” DeMaioirbus, for two decades (elected in 1927, resigned 1947), even as the community increasingly voted Democratic in national elections.22 This project is foremost about affiliation with New Deal ideology, which, as Unione stated, became synonymous only later with the Democratic Party.

This shift was generational and a process. Many Italian Americans who show up in this work were under forty when the stock market crashed. Contemporary newspaper articles noted that the younger generations led political advancement by rejecting old ways,

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19 Al Tronzo, “Pecora Blunders!,” Unione (Pittsburgh, PA), 20 October 1933, 2.
21 “Posizioni Chiare,” Unione, 4 May 1934, 1.
shedding the jealousy and self-interest that harmed the collective community.\textsuperscript{23} It is unlikely that people in their sixties and seventies experienced a political awakening. Instead, those who came of age during the 1910s and 1920s experienced the intense influences of Americanization, leftism, and Fascism, and they synthesized these ideas into a new ideology.

Just as it took years to build their beliefs, it also took time to see the Democrats as their desired party. As the New Deal moved closer and closer to Italian-American ideology by the mid to late 1930s, the ethnic group became more attached to the Democratic Party and Roosevelt in particular. As Aliquippa, Pennsylvania, residents Bert Iacobucci and Ormond Montini explained from their experiences, Italian Americans first considered the Democratic Party during the late 1920s, but it took additional campaigns to consolidate the ethnicity under its umbrella.\textsuperscript{24} Party attachments and world views often remain with people for years, and partisan group realignments can occur over several election cycles.\textsuperscript{25} The process took two decades to unfold, but that slow development baked resiliency into the coalition so that it would last beyond a time of economic turmoil.


Keeping within the scope of the New Deal, this project documents economic beliefs. Ideology is complex, which is why a multidimensional graph, rather than a single linear spectrum, is the best means to document a person’s political positions. At a minimum, analysts can dissect views across the core areas of economics, society, and foreign policy. “Building a New (Deal) Identity” follows the paradigm created by Roosevelt and focuses on Italian-American beliefs concerning the economy and the role of the government in that sphere. Occasionally, this delves into social aspects, such as Prohibition and American nativism. It does not address cultural issues, such as obscenity and family values, that became prominent decades later when the New Deal generation reached old age. This project also leaves out views about foreign policy. One reason for the decline in Roosevelt’s vote between 1936 and 1940 was because Italian Americans broke with the president over a lack of support for Fascist Italy and a more hostile American foreign policy. In 1936, State Representative Frank J. Zappala of Pittsburgh defended Italian-American advocation for Italy’s war in Ethiopia with the analogy that a man could love his wife and still aid his parents; Italian Americans could support their motherland

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26 Cultural issues could have created new cleavages. For example, Unione contributor Al Tronzo, who later became a state house representative, supported the New Deal and its economic positions wholeheartedly. Nevertheless, he was moderate about some cultural issues. Tronzo was concerned about drug stores selling “smutty” books that ended up in the hands of young teenagers. He was against Comstock laws, and he even joked that he – at age 23 – read some of these sources and failed to be corrupted. However, he also believed that those under the age of 18 should not have been reading these books, and parents needed to shield their children from such influences. Fortunately for the New Dealers, these were not issues that rose to the forefront during the 1930s because they could have divided white ethnics much differently. See Al Tronzo, “The Pessoptimist,” Unione, 29 January 1932, 8.

and remain loyal and committed to the United States. \(^{28}\) Economic concerns suppressed their foreign policy considerations until the growing potential for a European conflict began to dominate the debate during the late 1930s. Foreign policy views peeled away some Italian-American voters, but that story is outside the purview of this project.

To support the argument that Italian Americans formed a New Deal-style ideology that the Democrats later appropriated, chapters one through five offer slices of political development before placing them in the context of Franklin Roosevelt’s election and governance in chapter six. The story is linear but interconnected. Built from an ethnic public sphere, Italian Americans combined civic nationalism, leftism, and Fascism into a new amalgamation at ethnic political clubs. The final chapter shows how the mediated synthesis manifested itself in American politics.

Chapter one rebuilds the Italian-American community and its public sphere as they existed in western Pennsylvania and eastern Ohio between the two world wars. Underpinning this section is the argument that this was a time of hyphenated identity. Before the First World War, many immigrants were Italians living in the United States. They resided in closed communities that experienced constant arrivals and departures, which perpetuated, rather than arrested, their Italian identity. Many intended to return to Italy, and they did not attempt to assimilate.

The Great War and American immigration restriction ended the prospect of a temporary sojourn in the United States. During the 1920s, those who remained with their

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American-born children became *Italian-Americans*, a hyphenated people that drew from both sources of identity. This ethnicity promoted group cohesion. The Italian-American identifier subdued regional markers, such as Sicilian, Neapolitan, Tuscan, and the like, that previously kept people separated. Likewise, the inability to escape their ethnicity soothed potential class divisions. The middle class and many elites still socialized with the wider heavily working-class Italian-American population.

As Italian Americans, they developed a semi-closed community. They increasingly interacted with other ethnicities and became more involved in mainstream American life. However, they still spent much of their time socializing within their own networks, including ethnic lodges and clubs, churches, and neighborhoods. They formed a public sphere for the creation of political ideology. It was within these physical places that people informally discussed ideas and found consensus. Their ethnic press supported this public sphere, and newspapers repeated and amplified ideas circulating within the community. They functioned as gatekeepers by interpreting the facts offered by the American press.

This public sphere was not permanent, which is why this is a generational story. As the next cohort continued the trend of assimilation, people ceased to be Italian Americans and became Americans of Italian heritage. The Second World War devastated the Italian-American press and forced most papers to close. Ethnic organizations continued but in a different form. As Richard Ponzio, born in 1938 Pittsburgh, expressed succinctly: “We’d sign up, but we never really participated as much as the old timers.”

Younger generations fled to the suburbs making everyday interactions with Italian-American neighbors and

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clubs less likely. The New Deal coalition formed at a particular point in the development of Italian-American identity.

Chapter two documents American civic nationalism, one of three core influences on Italian-American ideology and the foundation on which the subsequent two rested. Civic nationalism was the belief that Italian Americans had the opportunity to enter into the broader body politic as long as they adhered to fundamental American values such as equality for all citizens regardless of wealth or background, freedom of expression, and the duty to stay politically informed and engaged. Most Italian immigrants had an ambivalent view of the state upon their arrival in America because Italy lacked a history of mass democracy and participatory politics. By the late 1910s and early 1920s, various factors pushed those in the United States toward citizenship and new concepts concerning their relationship with the state. American nativism, as manifested by immigration restriction and Prohibition (which white ethnics viewed as a law targeting them and their ‘foreign’ behaviors), drove aliens to naturalize as protection. Potential rewards pulled them in the same direction. Citizenship meant not only protection from deportation and legal intimidation but also possible advancements in the workplace, the ability for wives and children in Italy to skirt immigration quotas, and for people to have a say in the American system of governance.

As immigrants increasingly underwent citizenship testing and their children experienced American education, the community moved toward civic nationalism and an appreciation for democratic government. At the turn of the twentieth century, enterprising political bosses built loyal bases of voters by pushing aliens through often lax citizenship requirements, which created numerous Americans on paper but not in mentality. The
Naturalization Act of 1906 introduced stricter, universal testing, necessitating an extensive knowledge of the American government. Local organizations, such as the Hiram House social settlement that served Cleveland’s “Big Italy,” taught American values to immigrants as part of their journey toward citizenship. These same entities – the settlement houses and public schools – educated their American-born children in the principles related to democracy and freedom.

This rising generation of Italian Americans came to value civic nationalism as interpreted through their community. They did not adopt the white, middle-class progressivism with its religious and paternalist undertones held by many local leaders who wanted to Americanize the foreigners. Italian Americans worked closely with nationality workers, such as Hiram House’s Frank Casper, an Italian immigrant. They adopted the basic tenets of Americanism related to civics, but they found inspiration for their economic values from other sources within their community.

Chapter three documents the second core influence, a leftist ideology that built upon American civic nationalism. In standard American history, the Red Scare that began during the First World War and extended into 1920 decimated radicalism and ushered in a decade of reactionary conservative politics. While the Red Scare drove the most overt manifestations of radicalism underground, the trial of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti offered a veil for continual diffusion of leftist ideas.

Cells of Galleanists, the violent anarchists who were the archetype of the radicals hunted during the Red Scare, existed throughout the region, but their ideas did not become popular. The Galleanists were doctrinaires and proponents of insurrectionary anarchism. While Italian Americans agreed with the Galleanists’ criticisms of capitalism, they could
not excuse the violence and anti-statism. Civic nationalism had taught them that government involvement could answer their problems, even if they were still leery of the state’s authority. Furthermore, the dangers of association with these radicals were too severe for most to commit.

The Sacco and Vanzetti trial offered a solution. The pair became causes célèbres because many projected themselves onto the radicals. The court convicted the two men for murder, not on evidence but because they were working-class immigrants who expressed a distaste of American capitalism. The Italian-American radical Carlo Tresca, who was associated with the Industrial Workers of the World and syndicalism, used the growing social movement to proselytize audiences. Tresca and associates scheduled fundraisers and informational meetings throughout the region. Locals justified attendance not because they listened to a radical talk but because they came out to support two wrongfully convicted men. The background of Sacco and Vanzetti allowed Tresca and others to discuss topics that derived from working-class and immigrant grievances. The audience departed the events convinced that they needed to hold the United States accountable for breaches of American values, such as freedom of speech and equality under the law, which reinforced civic nationalism. They also came away with the leftist belief that mass unionism was the only solution to their economic problems.

The third and final core influence was Fascism, the subject of chapter four. Similar to leftist ideology, Fascism disseminated across the community. Italian Americans were open to the new system because it reinforced their argument for civic nationalism at home. Italian success abroad blunted nativists’ assertions that new immigrants were inferior and unworthy of complete social and political equality. Fascism spread quickly through
“transmission belts,” organizations and individuals connected to Italy that dispersed the state’s propaganda.30

Misinformation colored Italian Americans’ understanding of Fascism. As Benito Mussolini tightened his control of the press and silenced opposition, those living in the United States received propaganda that appeared to them as fact. They believed the narrative that conservative elements were cast aside in favor of the syndicalist wing of the Fascist Party. The state increased economic intervention, first in currency manipulation and agriculture, and then in the lives of the working class and resultant corporatist state. Fascist accomplishments were minor in reality, but Italian Americans came to believe the propaganda that argued Fascism was a successful method to solve the problems of modern, industrial society.

People discarded areas in which Fascism clashed with American civic values, and they adopted parts that presented solutions to leftist grievances. Italian Americans never accepted the totalitarian aspects related to the freedoms of speech, debate, and press because they were antithetical to the previously described core influences. Instead, they embraced the economic measures of Fascism that appeared as evolutions of leftist ideas. Corporatism, which organized workers and employers into bargaining units, offered a type of mass unionism protected and empowered by the state. The success of Italian interventionism created a favorable disposition to massive public works projects, government economic meddling, a more powerful executive leader, and a willingness to

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30 Transmission belts was the term used by Salvemini. See Salvemini, Italian Fascist Activities in the United States.
provide legal concessions and social safety nets to workers. Fascism informed Italian-American ideology because it offered tested solutions to their problems.

Chapter five rebuilds a network of political clubs that proliferated throughout the region and helped moderate ideological influences and build consensus. Americanization efforts taught immigrants about civic nationalism and the ability to enact change through democratic means. Political clubs became the organizations by which to accomplish such goals. Spurred by a need to defend themselves against nativism, local communities organized political clubs to hold Italian-American voters together as a bloc to have a voice in elections.

The Italian American Political Association of Youngstown, Ohio, was an example of a typical club. Members inaugurated their group in 1924 specifically to protect and defend their rights as American citizens. The Political Association acted as a mediator by hosting local politicians and their surrogates and then endorsing candidates across party lines. The organization spread its influence and sponsored outreach and open events. Notably, the club was not an instrument for a few men to grow a political machine as yearly elections rotated those in leadership positions. It was an overt example of the local public sphere at work. Celestino Petrarca, the publisher of the local newspaper *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, was involved throughout the years and granted ample column space to the group. Political news, such as printed decisions to endorse particular candidates, derived from the debates and discussions that took place within the Political Association. While chapter five uses the Youngstown group as a case study, political clubs proliferated throughout western Pennsylvania and eastern Ohio.
Ethnic solidarity bridged the ideological divide. Italian Americans sought unified voting blocs to have a strong voice in local politics. As mentioned earlier, most Italian Americans were not adherents of leftism or Fascism, but each influenced them to different extents. The need to present one opinion forced philo-Fascists and anti-Fascists under one roof and into the same debate. The Italian American Political Association of Youngstown included collaborators like Innocenzo Vagnozzi, whom his detractors described as a communist, and Carlo Caselli, editor of *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* and an apologist for Mussolini and Fascism. Vagnozzi, Caselli, and others fought one another and, in the process, moderated their opinions toward consensus.

Chapter six documents the results of these combined ideological currents and how the New Deal merged with Italian-American preferences. First, it addresses the issue of timing. Voter suppression was common during this period and hid many people’s true preferences. Joseph Costa worked as the foreman of a labor gang for Pittsburgh Railways, which operated almost six hundred miles of streetcar track between Pittsburgh and its interurban lines during the mid-1920s.31 According to his daughter, the family only became Democrats after Costa retired because, as she explained, “my dad was told he had to be Republican” by the company.32 The political clubs spoke against coercion, but an unknown multitude of people refused to express their true thoughts publicly because they needed their livelihoods. Furthermore, as the above 1934 *Unione* article illustrated, both political parties contained conservative and progressive elements. In many pre-New Deal political

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32 Maruccio, 14.
campaigns, politicians offered voters no alternative to conservative economic policies. Many Italian Americans refused to risk their jobs to support a candidate solely as a protest vote.

The Great Depression offered relief from undue influence but not a change in ideology. Mass unemployment and the depletion of local government resources lessened the hold that employers and political machine bosses exerted over voters. Criticism, however, remained constant. The same critique that Italian Americans made about Calvin Coolidge concerning his closeness with finance and industry carried over to Herbert Hoover. The Wall Street crash amplified but never changed the message. Roosevelt’s victory in 1932 brought reprieve but not optimism. Few foresaw the new president acting radically different than his predecessors.

The unfolding of the New Deal brought Italian Americans into the coalition. It fulfilled their hunger for political parity. The group had criticized American politics for blocking its potential ascent, therefore failing the basic tenets of American civic nationalism, such as equality of opportunity regardless of national origin, religion, and ethnicity. Commentators noted with pride that the Democratic Party under Roosevelt accepted them with open arms. The New Deal shattered norms about the place of government in the economy and people’s lives. For the better part of a decade, Italian Americans had been learning about the benefits of an activist government and strong leader as they existed in Fascist Italy. They clamored for public works projects that created jobs and improved the nation. They did not fear broadened executive power but instead embraced President Roosevelt and the National Industrial Recovery Act as domestic replicas of Mussolini and corporatism.
Italian Americans approached Fascism from the left, and their understanding of corporatism was not a business cartel system but a means by which the state addressed working-class grievances. Their critique a year into the Roosevelt administration was about not government overreach but the inability of the National Recovery Administration to deliver on aspects beneficial to working people. As the New Deal entered its second phase, Roosevelt delivered the unfulfilled promises made by the NIRA through a series of laws. The government continued to intercede in industries considered in the public’s interest, such as coal and power utilities. The National Labor Relations Act of 1935, through its newly empowered board, protected and encouraged industrial unionism. The Social Security Act granted old-age pensions and contained provisions for unemployment insurance. Finally, the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 gave workers a forty-hour workweek and minimum pay, thereby establishing a solid foundation from which unions could bargain for better wages and conditions. The second New Deal was a continuation of the promises initially offered by the NIRA and the first New Deal. Italian Americans embraced the new legislation.

In the end, Italian Americans realigned with the parties. The contrast between an activist New Deal philosophy and conservative Republican laissez-faire beliefs became too strong to ignore. Perhaps nowhere was this clearer than in the 1938 appeal offered by Michael A. Musmanno, a popular Alleghany County (Pittsburgh) politician and judge who later became an allied military governor in Italy, presided over the SS-*Einsatzgruppen* case as part of the Nuremberg Trials, and served on Pennsylvania’s Supreme Court.\(^\text{33}\) He began

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his legal career during the 1920s fighting for Italian-American miners and Sacco and Vanzetti. In 1928, Musmanno won election as a Republican to the Pennsylvania House of Representatives, which he held until resigning in 1931 to serve on the Allegheny County Court.34 His 1938 message to voters excoriated his previous party. As Musmanno explained, “I still recall the heart pangs I suffered as I stood on the floor of the House of Representatives in 1931, pleading that [the] Republican Legislature do something” to help the people. The economic downturn was akin to a war that Republicans refused to fight. Representative Musmanno “urged a program of public works … [but] what did that Republican Legislature do? It did nothing.” They had the opportunity to end sweatshops, provide living wages to workers, and reign in utilities, but they declined to act. Instead, “the Democratic Party eliminated all these evils.” The decision in 1938 was clear: “This election transcends all personalities. It is a clash between opposing theories of government. Shall we have a government that appreciates human needs and acts to supply them or shall we have a government that believes human suffering is not within its orbit of concern?” Musmanno urged Italian-American voters to select a straight Democratic ticket in 1938 as a message of support for Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal.35

In the end, Italian Americans built themselves a New Deal identity. Michael Musmanno was correct; the decision became a contest between opposing theories of government, a paradigm that held over the next generation. The New Deal put into action

35 “Judge Musmanno Endorses Democrats,” Unione, 28 October 1938, 1. To make sure that every reader clearly understood Musmanno’s appeal, the newspaper printed a translated copy in Italian the following week. See “Il Giudice Musmanno si dichiara per la intera Scheda Democratica,” Unione, 4 November 1938, 1–2.
a political philosophy based on ideas that had been circulating within the ethnic community for years. Italian-American enthusiasm was entirely justified. Franklin Roosevelt may have erected the New Deal, but he built it atop an ideological foundation already laid by Italian Americans.
Chapter One

*Italian-American*

The Creation of a Hyphenated Identity in Western Pennsylvania and Eastern Ohio

In 1919, Charles W. Coulter, a sociologist at Western Reserve University, published a short description of the local Italian-American community for the Cleveland Americanization Committee. He noted that the city contained both a “Big Italy” and a “Little Italy,” along with another six smaller areas that acted as ethnic enclaves. Within these neighborhoods, the Ohio-born, second-generation Italian American was “reared in what [was] practically an Italian colony, where the mother tongue [was] spoken, Italian traditions, ideals, and customs [were] perpetuated and a national solidarity [was] maintained.”¹

Coulter was correct that ethnic communities could perpetuate certain traditions, ideals, and customs, but his definition of “Italian colony” requires further explanation. In actuality, the enclaves were not groups of Italians picked up in Italy and deposited in select neighborhoods across American cities, thereby copying their culture and norms verbatim in a new land. Instead, they were *Italian-Americans*, a hyphenated identity, a group with Italian traditions, ideals, and customs modified for their new American environment.

¹ Charles W. Coulter, *The Italians of Cleveland* (Cleveland, OH: Cleveland Americanization Committee, 1919), 10.
This hyphenated ethnicity produced an Italian-American political ideology. In order to understand why most Italian Americans came to favor the New Deal and Franklin Roosevelt’s policies, it is first necessary to understand the parameters within which this group of white ethnics operated. Western Pennsylvania and eastern Ohio contained an interconnected web of communities that acted as a public sphere for ideas and information. This network was concurrently within and separated from mainstream America. National and local news from the outside entered, only to be digested, interpreted, and transmitted throughout the web to other Italian Americans. Overlapping newspapers served the region, while connections via road, rail, and streetcar carried people and their opinions between neighborhoods and towns. Immigrants and their children continued the dispersal through personal contacts with friends, neighbors, coworkers, and fellow ethnic organization members. Ideas, opinions, and – most importantly – ideology percolated up from these conversations to inform the Italian-American ethnic press. Within this circulation of ideas laid the roots for the New Deal’s Italian-American acceptance.

This hyphenated identity came at a particular time in Italian-American history. Although more secure in the American environment than when most arrived ten, twenty, or thirty years prior, the group had not yet entirely assimilated. Class divisions failed to override ethnicity as a primary identifier. Although the community increasingly produced professionals such as store owners, doctors, and lawyers, most of these people tied their fortunes to the predominantly working-class Italian-American clientele they served. The fact that many began life at the bottom of the social hierarchy before rising created interclass empathy. American nativism and discrimination suppressed Italian regional identities, and immigrants and their children increasingly thought of themselves as Italian.
Americans. This community and its public sphere were defined and formed by the 1920s, and the Great Depression acted as a solidifier, a moment of crisis that prompted reflection, as people found themselves with less work and more time to debate politics and ideas.

The hyphenated identity and the Italian-American public sphere were temporary creations. The Second World War ended the Italian-American press. After the conflict, people increasingly purchased homes in new suburbs, benefited from educational opportunities and white-collar jobs, and spent less time at ethnic societies. Some neighborhoods retained an older Italian-American core, but most within the rising, next generation became Americans of Italian ethnicity. They lost their hyphenated identity and its accompanying public sphere for ideas.

The “Discovery” of Italian-American Communities and Their Public Sphere

Charles W. Coulter and his contemporaries understood an aspect of immigrant life that took historians decades to document: ethnic communities existed in the United States with their own support structures, culture, and personal interactions. It was not until after the Second World War that historians treated immigrants and their children as subjects of inquiry, and these initial attempts were not without issues. The earliest works described the immigrant experience as universal and the newcomers as opposites to Americanism. It was not until the New Social History turn of the 1960s and 1970s that scholars produced case studies of specific ethnic groups that documented these various communities’ characteristics.

The United States has long been described as a nation of immigrants, but their full stories were absent from early-twentieth-century historical academic research. Prominent
figures such as Charles Beard and Arthur M. Schlesinger expanded the scope of acceptable scholarship to include fields beyond politics and government, but historians still lacked any notable immigration specialist before the 1920s. Social scientists, many of whom had an interest in the debate about Americanization and immigration restriction, produced the bulk of research.² Like Coulter, this group viewed immigrant communities as semi-closed spaces isolated by ethnicity. Settlement house pioneer Jane Addams described Italians, Jews, and Bohemians (Czechs) as ethnic “foreign colonies” residing in the Chicago neighborhoods surrounding Hull House.³ Other researchers believed that these enclaves perpetuated specific immigrant values, such as Italian ex-agricultural laborers spurring American-style family farms in favor of replicating, in American cities, the small, close-knit towns and villages that they had left.⁴ Social worker Grace Abbott expressed the most accurate assessment concerning the ethnic enclaves: “To many Americans the so-called foreign colonies in New York, Chicago, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, seem to be reproductions of Italy, Greece, Poland or Russia. But to the immigrant the street on which he lives is so unlike the one on which he lived at home, that he believes them to be thoroughly American. These foreign neighborhoods of ours are neither Italian, Greek, Polish or Russian, nor are they American.”⁵

³ Jane Addams, Twenty Years at Hull-House: With Autobiographical Notes, ed. Victoria Bissell Brown, Bedford Series in History and Culture (Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 1999), 82–83.
⁵ John Horace Mariano, The Italian Contribution to American Democracy (Boston, MA: Christopher Publishing House, 1921), 212.
Early immigration histories failed to consider these dual influences, or they offered a limited scope concerning hyphenated identity. For example, Marcus Lee Hansen’s *The Atlantic Migration* (1940) discussed European expulsive factors before the Civil War but did not document immigrant life in the United States.\(^6\) Hansen’s *The Immigrant in American History* (1940) addressed the other side of the issue. However, he still treated immigration as linear and universal, at one point arguing that for scholars within the immigration field, “settlement will be viewed as a continuous process from its beginnings in 1607 to its virtual close in 1914.”\(^7\) In *Boston’s Immigrants* (1941), Oscar Handlin argued that new Irish arrivals carved out their own, unique place in American society: “The development of Irish ideas created a further range of differences between themselves and all others in the city [of Boston] that stimulated and developed consciousness of group identity.”\(^8\) However, Handlin did not view the antebellum United States as a pluralistic nation, but one in which “newcomers entered smoothly into the flow of life about them … [or] remained a discordant element in the closely-knit society.”\(^9\) In this view of the immigrant experience, the process of assimilation was dichotomic; instead of being incorporated step-by-step into American society and culture, newcomers either became American or stayed foreign. The creation of popular, enduring ethnic organizations and

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\(^9\) Handlin, 154–55.
institutions separated and reaffirmed foreignness rather than aided assimilation. Handlin continued this line of explanation in *The Uprooted* (1951) by arguing the universality of the immigrant experience. The shock of transplanting roots to a new land created a feeling of alienation, one in which “men faced the enormous compulsion of working out new relationships, new meanings to their lives” without the help “of institutions and social patterns which formerly guided their actions.”

John Higham’s *Strangers in the Land* (1955) reaffirmed Handlin’s paradigm by noting how nativism, defined by “anti-Catholic, anti-radical, and Anglo-Saxon traditions,” created a system that either accepted people as Americans or condemned them as foreigners. Scholars like Hansen, Handlin, and Higham expanded the field of immigration history. However, by describing immigrants as only operating within a paradigm of either total assimilation or complete foreignness, these historians unintentionally slighted the processes that created a transitional, hyphenated ethnic identity.

Historians challenged this interpretation during the New Social History turn of the 1960s and 1970s. Coinciding with a call from the 1969 Organization of American Historians conference to discuss ethnicity beyond the yardstick of assimilation, case studies of specific ethnic groups proliferated along with the view of identity formation as an ongoing process dependent on each community’s specific background and influences. It became clear to historians that Grace Abbott’s description was correct; these were not

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10 Handlin, 155–77.
Italian – or Jewish, or Greek, or Polish – colonies, nor were they American. These ethnic enclaves melded two cultures into something new and created unique hyphenated identities that required singular studies. Immigrant religion was an overt example. The German, Irish, and Italian Catholics that worshiped at the turn of the twentieth century were interchangeable foreigners to native-born Americans, especially those nativists described by Higham. However, as Rudolph J. Vecoli, Silvano M. Tomasi, and Robert A. Orsi later explained, these ethnicities were often in conflict because they expressed religion differently. Many Italian immigrants distrusted the Catholic hierarchy because it was exploitive in southern Italy. They wanted the freedom to practice their own form of Catholicism, complete with saint veneration and festivals. These conflicts led to the creation of ethnic parishes that served “as a compromise between the demands of immediate assimilation and the resistance of immigrants to abandon their traditional religiosity.”

In this sense, ethnic groups formed subcommunities within larger populations, necessitating the need for case studies. As Handlin concluded at one point in *The Uprooted*, “if the immigrants were to achieve the adjustment to their new environment, it had to be within the confines of the ghettos the environment created.” Vecoli went further in his

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16 Handlin, *The Uprooted*, 151.
1964 article “Contadini in Chicago: A Critique of The Uprooted.” He cautioned historians against Handlin’s generalization of the immigrant experience and argued for more emphasis on individual community study. Italian immigrants in Chicago replicated much of their previous society within numerous Little Italies, which influenced not only religion but also settlement patterns, employment, and the development of ethnic organizations. Documenting the Italian-American experience necessitated the study of individual communities since the process of assimilation occurred within a network of relationships connected via churches, newspapers, work, and personal contacts.

This approach prompted numerous case studies to fill the gap about Italian-American communities in cities and towns across the United States. Humbert S. Nelli’s Italians in Chicago continued Vecoli’s insistence that Italians in the Illinois metropolis formed unique communities. Others followed suit by rebuilding late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century enclaves and their attributes in New York City, Boston, Philadelphia, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, St. Louis, and Providence. While some, such as Josef Barton’s...

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Cleveland study, Peasants and Strangers: Italians, Rumanians, and Slovaks in an American City, and John Bodnar, Roger Simon, and Michael P. Weber’s Lives of Their Own: Blacks, Italians, and Poles in Pittsburgh, used comparative approaches, these works still asserted uniqueness for each nationality group’s experience.²¹ Commonalities in employment patterns, housing, and social life created semi-insular populations of Italian Americans.

By rebuilding communities comprised of Italian immigrants and their children, these studies suggested that assimilation was an ongoing process rather than an immediate shift from foreigner to American. This concept is fundamental for understanding Italian-American history because most Italian migrants to the United States initially identified themselves by village or region rather than the Italian state, a phenomenon known as campanilismo (a reference to those within earshot of the local church bell tower, and thus considered community). Scholars rejected Handlin’s dichotomic terms to explain the ethnic experience in the United States. More accurately, assimilation occurred in a series of stages in which individuals and communities progressed from Sicilian, Neapolitan, Abruzzese, and other regional identities to Italian American and, eventually, to nondescript American of Italian origin.²² As Stefano Luconi argued in From Paesani to White Ethnic, 

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a book-length study about acculturation and assimilation, Italian-American ethnicity “in Philadelphia was the product of a continuous process of redefinition.” Since ethnicity is a cultural construct, individual membership within the group is highly malleable because criteria for inclusion and exclusion can change over time. The formation of ethnicity “occurs within a dialectic situation[,] in which] both interaction with others and labelling from the outside contribute to the subjective and voluntary process of self-identification on behalf of the group.” Their self-identity was a journey that took most from the parochialism of the early 1900s to a national “Italian” marker by the Second World War. New attributes of the ethnic community, such as the use of standard Italian for newspapers, the adoption of Columbus Day as a celebration of nationality, and the consolidation of ethnic societies under the Order of the Sons of Italy and other federations, aided the shift from regionalism to a broader Italian-American identity.

This process was visible to Italian Americans living through it. As their press contended in 1932, a rising American-born generation competed with older Italian immigrants in ethnic organizations. Regional tensions remained to some extent, but future progress in America meant adopting the new views from Italy, where people now thought of themselves as one Italian nation. As Paul Del Rosso reminisced years later, when he and his friends sought to revive a defunct Trafford, Pennsylvania, ethnic club during the

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23 Luconi, From Paesani to White Ethnics, 2.
24 Luconi, 3.
25 Luconi, 149–51.
1930s, they did not limit membership to one region as had happened in years past. As he explained succinctly, when “you’re Italian, you’re Italian. I don’t care what part of Italy you come from.”

The shift from regionalism to an Italian-American identity is an example of an “imagined community.” As Benedict Anderson explained in his landmark book: “It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.” During the time between the world wars, most Italian immigrants and their children living in the United States came to self-identify as part of this imagined nation that was, as Grace Abbott explained earlier, both part of and separate from mainstream America. Few would ever personally interact, but their commonalities in experience, culture, and institutions shaped them into a unified ethnic group. By creating this unique identity, Italian Americans reinforced the importance of interpersonal connections with other members of their ethnicity, further strengthening their community and its institutions.

These contacts and institutions created a public sphere for the circulation of political ideology. As Jürgen Habermas theorized in The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere, as Western states changed from absolute monarchy to democratic, parliamentary representation, political decision-making shifted from a small group of court

31 Robert H. Wiebe, Who We Are: A History of Popular Nationalism (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 96. This identity was also the new immigrants’ response to seeking a place within the American racial hierarchy.
advisors to a larger, bourgeois body politic. The public sphere developed as a forum for ideas. Literate masses debated ideology within salons, coffeehouses, and various societies. Newspapers complemented the forum by circulating the opinions created within these spaces. In turn, readers absorbed ideas from the periodicals, which then prompted further discussion and debate.\textsuperscript{32}

The Italian-American public sphere, as documented in this work, builds from refined versions of this theory. Although Habermas was initially vague concerning the public sphere’s size and membership, he and others clarified the parameters.\textsuperscript{33} When discussing the European Union’s consolidation, the theorist admitted that far from creating one mass forum for European opinion, “the political public sphere is fragmented into national units.”\textsuperscript{34} Habermas and his followers asserted a post-structural concept of a counter sphere. Different groups can create their own forums for discussion and ideology creation, competing with the larger, mainstream public sphere that is sometimes exclusionary for specific populations.\textsuperscript{35} These include sub-spheres based on ethnic and racial divisions for


\textsuperscript{33} As he noted at one point, “however much the Tischgesellschaften [table societies], salons, and coffee houses may have differed in the size and composition of their publics, the style of their proceedings, the climate of their debates, and their topical orientations, they all organized discussion among private people that tended to be ongoing.” See Habermas, 36.


groups like Jews and African Americans.\textsuperscript{36} Whether defined as a public sphere, counter sphere, or competing sphere, Italian Americans during the early twentieth century fit the model of a group building an ideology around areas of interaction. These debate locations were not the bourgeois salons and coffeehouses described by Habermas; instead, ethnic society halls, festivals, and compatriots’ dining room tables served the same function. Furthermore, ethnic newspapers understood their purpose within this model; as one admitted in 1925, its goal was to be “the mouthpiece of the masses [and] … a communicative means between people.”\textsuperscript{37} Local Italian-language papers further self-segregated this public sphere. Within this unique community, a political ideology favorable to the New Deal developed and flourished.

\textbf{The Parameters of the Public Sphere}

\textbf{The Italian-American Community of Western Pennsylvania and Eastern Ohio}

People’s engagement with information and opinions provided by community texts and social contacts shaped Italian-American political ideology. Opinion formation relied on two poles with information passing between them, each complementing, clarifying, and building from the other. The first pole consisted of community information dispersers. The ethnic media, especially Italian-language newspapers, were the most prominent, but oral addresses and lectures were also part of this group. The second pole consisted of sites of


interaction and discussion, which for the Italian-American community meant any place where political opinions would have been shared and debated, such as in ethnic halls. It was a cyclical exchange; media provided facts for ordinary people to debate, and these mass conversations inspired newspaper coverage. The use of the Italian language played a gatekeeping function. Bilingualism allowed for the creation of a specific public sphere that was closed to other populations. In order to evaluate how a unique ideology percolated within the Italian-American community of western Pennsylvania and eastern Ohio, it is first necessary to describe the region’s interconnectedness, including its people’s movements and socialization patterns, the range of its press, and some typical ethnic organizations.

This project is deliberately a case study of a region rather than a city because an overlapping hinterland of smaller municipalities and towns connected the metropolises of Cleveland and Pittsburgh. Many lived in coal mining communities that supplied both cities’ industries, while others worked as pick and shovel laborers, creating and maintaining the rail and road networks that connected these places. These were people who had left family and traveled thousands of miles from Europe seeking employment, so they had few qualms about relocating to another town in the region for work. Miners moved from town to town as jobs became available. Others left the profession permanently and found employment

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38 This project takes a broad view of the nature of “political.” It did not matter if conversations mentioned political parties or programs. Discussions about subjects like ethnic discrimination or perceived exploitation in the workplace inherently became political when those lived experiences were shared with others and informed a person’s ideological beliefs.

in growing industries, such as in the Jones and Laughlin steel mill in Aliquippa, Pennsylvania.\(^{40}\) Professionals were also transient, such as Father Americo Ciampichini, who was the pastor at churches in Cleveland, Youngstown, and Lorain, Ohio, at various times during the 1920s and 1930s.\(^{41}\) When necessary, people were mobile, with many staying temporarily in one city before settling in another, such as going from Pittsburgh to Warren, Ohio, Cleveland to Vandergrift, Pennsylvania, Erie, Pennsylvania to New Castle, Pennsylvania, and Ravenna, Ohio, to Warren.\(^{42}\)

Transportation networks encouraged this movement and created a vast network of socialization throughout the region. From 1900 until the 1920s, interurban railroads facilitated excursions to visit and interact with nearby clusters of Italian Americans. In 1907 and 1908, the completion of tracks in the Youngstown area connected the Cleveland

\(^{40}\) John Ross, Fred Ross, Tony Ross, and Mary Ross, interview by Cathy Cerrone, transcript, 20 June 1996, 4, 1996.0191, Detre Library and Archives, Senator John Heinz History Center, Pittsburgh, PA. It is likely that immigrants followed migration chains to particular places and then spread across a region as jobs became available. See Ryan Rudnicki, “Patterns of Italian Immigrant Settlement,” in *Italian Immigrants in Rural and Small Town America: Essays from the Fourteenth Annual Conference of the American Italian Historical Association*, ed. Rudolph J. Vecoli (New York, NY: American Italian Historical Association, 1987), 14–16.


and Pittsburgh networks. Although passenger service was not quick by later standards, the interurban streetcars still made day trips to nearby cities possible. The thirty-four-mile journey between Cleveland and Akron, for example, took one hour and fifty minutes, and a limited express service reduced the time to under an hour and a half. The completed network connected many locations that periodically arise in this work, including Cleveland, Akron, and Youngstown, Ohio, and Pittsburgh, New Castle, and Greensburg, Pennsylvania. However, while the interurbans linked western Pennsylvania to eastern Ohio, the network did not extend into eastern Pennsylvania. The Allegheny Mountains, distance, and lack of population in mid-Pennsylvania made connecting Pittsburgh to Philadelphia unfeasible and impractical. A glance at the Pittsburgh Press’s Italian Societies section attests to the scale of regional travel. In late December 1917, the middle of winter during wartime, Pittsburgh had notable Italian-American visitors from Wheeling, West Virginia, Youngstown, Ohio, and the Pennsylvania towns of Indiana, Vandergrift, Uniontown, Kittanning, Leechburg, New Castle, Altoona, Greensburg, Reading, Donora, Canonsburg, Aliquippa, Monongahela, and Johnstown. Excursions were not limited to the affluent, and many young Italian-American miners in places like Westmoreland County traveled into Pittsburgh (in neighboring Alleghany County) when they had free time.

44 Hilton and Due, 93, 96.
45 Hilton and Due, 256–57, 292.
46 “Italian Societies,” Pittsburgh Press (Pittsburgh, PA), 30 December 1917, 49.
The proliferation of automobiles during the 1920s complemented this network and allowed Italian Americans to sustain and broaden their movement in the region. For example, the Lega Toscana’s Filodrammatica, an amateur Italian-American theater troupe based in Pittsburgh, regularly performed in the nearby communities of New Castle, Monessen, New Kensington, and Washington.48 Ethnic clubs could socialize with others, such as in 1930 when the entire membership of New Castle’s Rinascente lodge traveled twenty miles by automobile to attend the inauguration of a new branch in Farrell, Pennsylvania.49 A young Henry Mancini made a car trip with his father in 1935 from West Aliquippa to Loew’s Penn Theater in Pittsburgh, where he saw his first “talkie,” Cecil B. De Mille’s The Crusades, which sparked his career choice as a film composer.50 Streetcars and later automobiles encouraged Italian Americans’ movement throughout the region and kept individuals and communities in contact.

Italian Americans thought of themselves as inhabitants of this region of the United States. In a 1933 letter to the Italian ambassador, the leaders of the Italian Sons and Daughters of America (ISDA), a Pennsylvania-based umbrella organization for mutual aid societies, requested elevating the vice-consulate of Pittsburgh to a full consulate. They included numerous reasons as justification. The distance between western Pennsylvania and the existent consulate in Philadelphia, some three to four hundred miles, justified a second Pennsylvania consul. The Pittsburgh area had grown substantially over the previous

twenty years, and “today the Western part of Pennsylvania is completely independent from the Eastern part, … not only as [a] center of culture and of industry, but also in politics.” The area of influence extended beyond the commonwealth as Pittsburgh was the “center also of very important Districts of the neighboring States, Ohio and West Virginia,” which contained many Italian residents.\(^{51}\) Considering that the distance separating Pittsburgh and Cleveland was less than half of the amount between Pittsburgh and Philadelphia, it was logical that those residing in western Pennsylvania felt more connected to compatriots in Ohio and West Virginia than in the eastern part of their state.

An interconnected region meant community interaction. Given the area’s size, not all western Pennsylvania and eastern Ohio residents associated with each other personally; instead, their communities overlapped. Circles of friends and acquaintances extended between ethnic neighborhoods and towns, and they formed layered webs of relationships. News, feelings, opinions, and beliefs spread across these entangled connections and built the foundation for a shared ideology. The sites of this interaction were important.

The neighborhood, in this case, the ethnic enclave or immigrant “ghetto,” was the first location of these interactions. Cleveland contained seven of these by the late 1920s. Big Italy, the area between Woodland and Orange Avenues stretching from East Ninth Street to East Fortieth Street, was the largest. A second notable neighborhood, Little Italy, existed to the west around the intersection of Mayfield and Murray Hill Roads.\(^{52}\) The latter

\(^{51}\) Italian Sons and Daughters of America to Royal Italian Ambassador Augusto Rosso, letter, 19 March 1933, box 2, folder 30, Order Italian Sons and Daughters of America Records, 1932–1962, MSS 724, Detre Library and Archives, Senator John Heinz History Center, Pittsburgh, PA.

\(^{52}\) David D. Van Tassel and John J. Grabowski, eds., The Encyclopedia of Cleveland History (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987), 559.
was exceptionally homogeneous. According to the 1911 Dillingham Commission, this section contained ninety-eight families, with ninety-seven headed by an Italian-American father of foreign or American birth.\(^{53}\) Pittsburgh hosted notable enclaves in the Strip and Lower Hill Districts, adjacent to downtown, and in East Liberty and Bloomfield to the west.\(^{54}\) One past resident of Larimer, a neighborhood adjacent to East Liberty, claimed that during his youth in the 1930s and 1940s, the area must have been 95 percent Italian American because it took until he was a teenager to realize that people without Italian ethnicity existed.\(^{55}\) Other Italian-American sections, ranging from a street to an entire neighborhood, flourished in cities and towns throughout the region. Henry Mancini claimed that his neighborhood of West Aliquippa “was at least 90 percent Italian,” with a few Slovak, Croatian, and Jewish families mixed in.\(^{56}\) In Beyer, Pennsylvania, there was a road colloquially called “macaroni street” because of its inhabitants.\(^{57}\) A similar pattern developed in Trafford, Pennsylvania, where de facto segregation created a section for more affluent Irish- and German-American tradesmen and separate streets for Italian-, Polish-,
and Serbian-American residences.\textsuperscript{58} Others remembered towns, such as Hillsville, Walston, Heilwood, and Apollo, Pennsylvania, containing large numbers of Italian Americans or the clustering of ethnicities.\textsuperscript{59}

It is irrelevant whether Italian Americans actually predominated in specific neighborhoods and towns; the importance is that people believed these communities existed.\textsuperscript{60} As David R. Roediger explained in \textit{Working Toward Whiteness}, “statistical proofs that new immigrant areas of cities were polyglot are fully compatible with the possibility that groups within them still \textit{imagined themselves} as living in an Italian (or Jewish or Greek) quarter, neighborhood, or even ghetto.”\textsuperscript{61} The physical enclave was often multiethnic, and sometimes even multiracial, but most day-to-day contact occurred within nationality groups. These were generally tight-knit neighborhoods where Italian Americans

\textsuperscript{58} Del Rosso, interview, 16–17.
\textsuperscript{60} This is not to argue that enclaves were nonexistent outside the major cities. For example, in the company town of Aliquippa, community developers created Plan 11 as a neighborhood restricted to Italian-American residents. See Kenneth Casebeer, \textit{“Aliquippa: The Company Town and Contested Power in the Construction of Law,”} \textit{Buffalo Law Review} 43, no. 3 (Winter 1995): 631–32.
visited each other for informal conversations over coffee, wine, cards, or bocce.\textsuperscript{62} These interactions colored their perceptions of community and identity.

Churches reinforced Italian Americanness. During this period, the Catholic Church served predominantly as a marker of identity rather than a place to learn a new-Americanized style of Catholicism. After arrival in the United States, many Italian immigrants shunned the Catholic Church. Anticlericalism ran deep in Italy, and they did not appreciate Irish-Catholic control of the institution’s hierarchy in the United States. Men often immigrated alone, especially during the earlier years of Italian migration, and they were not inclined to attend mass without the rest of their families. There was a change after Pope Leo XIII allowed the establishment of ethnic churches, which proliferated to hundreds of Italian-American parishes by the end of the First World War. Rather than convince parishioners to favor domestic American Catholicism, the ethnic parishes instead perpetuated old-country rituals and cultures, including festivals to various saints.\textsuperscript{63} Congregants attended the obligatory baptisms and weddings, but Sunday mass was optional.\textsuperscript{64} In the case of St. Peter’s in Pittsburgh, for example, it was common for Italian Americans that lived across the city to convene at the church for more significant events

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like marriages and funerals, thereby providing them with a broader sense of community. Stories of Irish-American priests refusing to baptize Italian-American children deepened this connection to their ethnic churches and reinforced identity.

Formal religion likely had little ideological sway on Italian Americans outside the fact that church attendance and festivals created a sense of community with others. Some anticlericalism remained with the immigrant population. One Pittsburgh resident remembered a grandfather asking the local priest, “are you going to put shoes on their feet?,” reflecting the belief that the Church hierarchy took without giving much back to the community. Those in one company town felt betrayed by their local priest because he told workers not to strike and appreciate the money that the employers gave them. Rather than supporting the needs of his flock, they believed that the pastor “was in cahoots with the company.” One Italian-American barber admitted to skipping mass because he worked long hours and felt that his free time was better spent having dinner with family.

Before the era of unionization and the forty-hour workweek, most would have agreed with

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65 Lawrence S. Lagattuta, interview by Cathy Cerrone, transcript, 8 June 1995, 8, 1999.0114, Detre Library and Archives, Senator John Heinz History Center, Pittsburgh, PA.


these sentiments. Although religious, many Italian Americans refused to look toward the American Catholic Church establishment to interpret morality.

Ethnic societies further strengthened community identity. While some disagreement exists concerning emigrants’ familiarity with these organizations in Italy, associations certainly proliferated once immigrants became established in the United States. Early arrivals organized mutual aid societies by their origin, usually a village or region. The associations provided social networks beyond family for transitioning to life in the United States. These groups grew in tandem with Italian immigration until they reached two to three thousand in number in 1915. If Chicago serves as an example of the evolution of the Italian-American mutual aid society for this region, then the interwar decades formed a critical consolidation period. While overall membership growth stagnated, likely due to immigration restriction, independent associations increasingly gave way to those operating under a national organization, such as the Sons of Italy. Consolidation, in turn, reinforced an Italian-American, rather than regional, self-identity.

Membership growth may have plateaued, but the interwar period created stability for many of these organizations, even with the advent of the Great Depression. A 1941 Jewish Community Relations Council of Pittsburgh report concerning various nationalities

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70 Vecoli, “Contadini in Chicago,” 412–13; Nelli, Italians in Chicago, 157, 170. While Vecoli noted that these organizations were common in Italy and therefore transplanted to the United States, Nelli asserted that mutual aid societies were concentrated in northern Italy and drew membership from the middle classes. The typical working-class, southern-Italian immigrant likely had little experience with such organizations before arrival in the United States.

71 Mangione and Morreale, La Storia, 139; Bodnar, Simon, and Weber, Lives of Their Own, 80; Barton, Peasants and Strangers, 59–61.

72 Mangione and Morreale, La Storia, 139.

73 Nelli, Italians in Chicago, 238–39.
in western Pennsylvania implied that Italian-American organizations were too numerous to list. It ultimately concluded that “there is hardly an Italian who is not a member of at least one of the many fraternal and other organizations,” a point backed up by some personal recollections of this period. The Sons of Italy claimed over fifty lodges in Ohio in 1925, including seventeen in Cleveland and twelve in Youngstown and the surrounding communities. A 1932 banquet honoring the ex-Grand Venerable Dr. Giovanni A. Barricelli brought representatives from most of these lodges, forty-six in total, together for the event. The Pittsburgh-oriented Italian Sons and Daughters of America noted with pride in 1933 that the organization recently opened a fifty-sixth lodge, which far surpassed its enrollment goal of forty-seven. This period created a sense of permanence as societies built or remodeled halls. For example, in 1935, the Ohio State Lodge of the Sons of Italy

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75 Santucci, interview, 8; Elizabeth Maruccio, interview by Nicholas P. Ciotola, transcript, 20 August 1998, 12–13, 1999.0239, Detre Library and Archives, Senator John Heinz History Center, Pittsburgh, PA.

76 “Order Sons of Italy Grand Lodge of Ohio: 1915 May XXIV 1925: Educational Number” (booklet, Cleveland, OH, n.d.), 32, box 3, folder 22, Little Italy Historical Museum Records and Photographs, MS 5353, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, OH.

77 “Banchetto in Onore Del Grande Venerabile Onorario a Vita Cav. Uff. Dott. G. A. Barricelli” (program, Hotel Statler, Cleveland, OH, 13 November 1932), box 3, folder 22, Little Italy Historical Museum Records and Photographs, MS 5353, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, OH.

78 “Reading, Pa. Celebrera la Festa di Dicembre con la iniziazione di quattro nuove logge,” Unione (Pittsburgh, PA), 1 December 1933, 4.

dedicated a new 75,000 dollar building in Cleveland with a crowd of 15,000 in attendance, a clear sign that ethnic clubs continued to thrive even during the Great Depression.  

Many ethnic organizations throughout the region were quite large, and gatherings brought hundreds, if not thousands, of people into contact with one another. Youngstown’s Napoleone Colaianni lodge claimed “300 active members” in 1926, which translated to “800 and more affiliated members” by 1928. Its crosstown rival, the Duca degli Abruzzi society, was similarly large. Pittsburgh’s Ateleta club contained over 200 members that were described as “all very active.” Events hosted by a state grand lodge, such as the above 1935 example in Cleveland, or a consortium of local societies could attract thousands of members and their families. A 1928 Sons of Italy picnic hosted by the Cleveland and Akron lodges drew 10,000 people, including many from Youngstown, Lorain, Ashtabula, and Alliance, in 2,300 automobiles to Orchard Park. A few weeks

80 Beatrice Franks, “15,000 Hail Ambassador as Sons of Italy Open Hall,” Cleveland Plain Dealer, 3 June 1935, 1, 5.
82 A. Di Renzo, “La Celebrazione del Xmo Anniversario della Loggia N. Colaianni, No. 858, O.F.D.I.,” Il Cittadino Italo-Americano, 28 July 1928, 1. The exact meaning of affiliated members is not clear, but it may have referred to members and their wives and minor children. These people were not members for death benefit purposes but would have attended open functions, such as picnics, parades, and large celebrations.
83 “Interessi Sociali,” Il Cittadino Italo-Americano, 21 August 1926, 1; Carlo Caselli, “Magnanimita’ Sociale,” Il Cittadino Italo-Americano, 25 January 1930, 3; “La Societa’ Duca degli Abruzzi,” Il Cittadino Italo-Americano, 13 September 1930, 1. It is likely that these societies were similar in size. The 1926 article discussed benefit payments and finances using a theoretical two hundred and fifty enrollees. The 1930 articles mention five hundred and eight hundred members, but the composition was not clear.
later, a tenth-anniversary celebration for Youngstown’s Napoleone Colaianni lodge brought approximately 20,000 people to Idora Park, the local amusement park and dance hall. The event included Barricelli and other leaders from the Sons of Italy state Grand Council, an inter-lodge baseball game between Akron’s Dante Alighieri and Cleveland’s Operaia, a musical concert, speeches by local notables, including one by Innocenzo Vagnozzi about “the rights and needs of Italo-American citizens,” and a fireworks display that included representations of the American and Italian flags, politicians Al Smith and Herbert Hoover, and Niagara Falls.86

Ethnic societies and their meeting places served as sites for conversation and debate. According to Romeo Franchini, the founder of the traveling Filodrammatica group mentioned previously, he and other Lega Toscana mutual aid society members created the troupe because “not everybody want[ed] to go to the club to go and discuss politics and play cards.”87 However, Franchini and the Filodrammatica group comprised only a fraction of Lega Toscana, twenty-five to thirty people, maybe a tenth of the total membership.88 The norm for the vast majority of society members was to use the ethnic hall to socialize informally. In fact, Lega Toscana traced its roots to that purpose. Before its creation, the

86 “Il successo strepitoso della Festa della Loggia Napoleone Colaianni all’Idora Park,” Il Cittadino Italo-Americano, 4 August 1928, 1. The article only slightly exaggerated the attendance, which it claimed came from the local English-language papers. The Vindicator estimated a crowd of 18,000. See “18,000 Share Italian Day,” Youngstown Vindicator (Youngstown, OH), 30 July 1928, 13.
87 Franchini, interview, 22.
88 Franchini, 33; Peter L. DiRicco, interview by Laura Baccelli, transcript, 14 April 1976, 17, box 2, folder 6, Ethnic Fraternal Organizations Oral History Project Collection, 1975–1976, AIS.1976.25, Archives & Special Collections, University of Pittsburgh. DiRicco claimed Lega Toscana had three hundred members, which increased to over five hundred once women were allowed to join. This peak was immediately after the Second World War.
founders had visited each other’s homes to fraternize. The organization formalized these relationships and provided a meeting place. Italian Americans found comfort in Lega Toscana and similar groups where they played games like cards, morra, and bocce, often accompanied by glasses of wine. When passing the time in these places, members shared ideas, news, and opinions.

In an editorial from *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* about politics, the writer described their ethnic tendencies with a joke: “one Italian, a great laborer; two Italians, thirteen kids; three Italians, twenty-seven opinions.” This argumentative nature of his people frustrated the author. These attributes, however, worked well for the formation of a public sphere. Italian Americans’ ability to hold diverse opinions and views, argue about them, and remain civil with each other, ensured a robust community debate. They enjoyed quarreling with friends and family. According to Everett Pesci, the Blairsville, Pennsylvania, mutual aid society attended by his father and grandfather had packed and raucous meetings in which people “argue[d] like hell.” However, members never took disagreements personally.

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92 Lucchino and Lucchino, interview, 5; Tom (Gaetano) Camarda, interview by Cathy Cerrone, transcript, 10 February 1995, 18, 1997.0061, Detre Library and Archives, Senator John Heinz History Center, Pittsburgh, PA.
when he attended in his youth, likely just before the Second World War: “they’d get into a hot argument which seemed there was no resolution, the sergeant at arms would jump up and he’d go ‘uno, due, tre, salute the [bandiera],’ everybody would jump up and salute the [American] flag and that was the end of the argument. You went on to a new subject.” Pittsburgh’s Ateleta club also had a policy that encouraged free speech and debate. Numerous politicians sought a platform around election season, and the society allowed a few minutes of floor time to address the membership. However, the group did not endorse any candidate and refused to allow partisan comments from the assembly. Instead, after the meetings, people discussed the speeches among themselves and shared opinions. Ethnic societies reinforced community and offered physical places in which the public sphere could operate.

Ethnic businesses and work patterns complemented mutual aid societies as interaction sites. Language barriers and ethnic affinity fashioned loyal Italian-American clientele and created trust between the small business operators and the patrons that they served. For example, in one Italian-American-owned store in Indiana County, Pennsylvania, coal miners were free to describe their employers as “SOBs” and talk about shared hardships. In Aliquippa, the initial organizing drive for Italian-American steelworkers during the early 1930s happened in compatriot-owned barbershops and a pool

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93 Pesci, interview, 15.
94 Lucente, interview, 8 October 1998, 11.
96 Babyak, interview, 16–17.
hall. These provided safe spaces to converse and sign-up members as information flowed around the neighborhood.\textsuperscript{97} Ethnic businesses filled the role of the ethnic hall in areas that lacked enough people to fund a specific building, such as in Beyer, Pennsylvania, where a barbershop and pool hall served as places to socialize.\textsuperscript{98} Italian-American contractors tended to employ compatriots.\textsuperscript{99} American businesses used Italian-American labor recruiters and “straw bosses” – padrone-type figures that operated as bilingual low-level managers for American employers to find and control immigrant workers – as part of their operations.\textsuperscript{100} These factors kept many within Italian-American circles in the workplace.

Language served a vital role in the creation of the Italian-American community and public sphere. As Nancy C. Carnevale stated in \textit{A New Language, a New World}, “first-generation Italian immigrants spoke a creolized dialect that consisted of a fusion and elaboration of standard Italian, Italian dialects, English, and Italianized English words.”\textsuperscript{101} Through this Italian-American language, immigrants carved out and maintained a new identity within the United States.\textsuperscript{102} Language, therefore, served to unify Italian Americans

\textsuperscript{97} Joe Di Ciero, interview by unknown, transcript, 20 November 1978, 5–6, box 2, folder 46, Beaver Valley Labor History Society Collection, 1909–1981, AIS.1981.08, Archives & Special Collections, University of Pittsburgh.
\textsuperscript{98} Marcoline, interview, 37–38.
\textsuperscript{99} Massaro, interview, 6.
\textsuperscript{101} Nancy C. Carnevale, \textit{A New Language, A New World: Italian Immigrants in the United States, 1890–1945} (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 11.
\textsuperscript{102} Carnevale, 11–14.
while providing a gatekeeping function for the creation of ideology. Since Italian immigrants and their children conversed in a language foreign to native-born Americans, members of the ethnic community self-isolated themselves. The use of this language reinforced hyphenated identity and held people within the Italian-American public sphere in a way that others found difficult to break into or overcome. For example, when steelworkers initially sought to unionize in Aliquippa, language proved a barrier for potential allies. Outsider Andy Lopata sought to enroll men from the local Italian-American clubs and neighborhood, but it was difficult to break the ice because he did not speak their language. Instead, it took men like Joe Di Ciero to talk to Italian Americans in their own tongue to bring this group into the union.

The continued use of Italian kept many of the second generation within the community and public sphere. Language maintenance occurred for identity and practical reasons. As Carnevale explained concerning New York City, domestic and foreign agents sought to spread the use of standard Italian. Community leaders believed that its continuation aided and sustained the shift from regionalism to a unified Italian-American people. Fascist representatives promoted language to strengthen Italy’s connection with the American-born population. It was part of a more comprehensive cultural campaign to

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103 Andy Lopata, interview by unknown, transcript, 2 July 1979, 14, box 2, folder 51, Beaver Valley Labor History Society Collection, 1909–1981, AIS.1981.08, Archives & Special Collections, University of Pittsburgh. Lopata’s exact ethnicity was unclear in the transcript, but he was probably a Slovak American based on the interviewer’s questioning. See Lopata, 10.
104 Di Ciero, interview, 17.
use soft power to influence American foreign policy. Although derived from two different impetuses, both used language as a means of identity formation.

Western Pennsylvania and eastern Ohio were no exceptions to these pressures. Pittsburgh’s *Unione* carried appeals from New York’s Casa Italiana about studying the language, including news of a short, illustrated periodical for use in high school and extension classes. The editor of Youngstown’s *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, Carlo Caselli, addressed the issue of identity in 1930. The local community had made significant progress in growing a professional class of citizens, and it appeared that “every Italian family boasts the educated man: The doctor, the lawyer, the engineer, the accountant and the administrative employee.” This advancement also elucidated “the absolute ignorance of his own language,” which, fortunately, the establishment of Italian evening classes began to correct. There was great enthusiasm by community leaders for formal language acquisition, including a movement to have Italian recognized as a foreign language option within public schools. The editor’s commitment went beyond rhetoric. He taught Italian at Youngstown’s East High School and South High School. When the latter ended its

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108 Carlo Caselli, “Progresso Coloniale,” *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, 23 August 1930, 1. Caselli’s exact phrase was “l’assoluta ignoranza del proprio idioma.” His use of the word *idioma* (idiom) to refer to language was specific to express a feeling of language as intertwined with identity, ethnicity, and Italian culture.
program in early 1932, probably as a cost-cutting measure because of the Great Depression, Caselli volunteered to teach free Italian lessons every Wednesday evening from seven to nine o’clock.\footnote{“Dante Club Meets,” Il Cittadino Italo-Americano, 30 January 1932, 4.} Pittsburgh started its Italian-language pilot program at Westinghouse High School before expanding to seven other locations. When the school board decided to add evening classes to the schedule, total enrollment doubled to eight hundred students.\footnote{“Un appello agli Italiani,” Unione, 22 May 1936, 2; Rev. S. Migliore, “La Battaglia per la Nostra Lingua,” Unione, 28 August 1936, 3.}

Other language programs existed through religious institutions, such as Pittsburgh’s St. Peter’s, or via ethnic lodges, including Youngstown’s Napoleone Colaianni and Pittsburgh’s Lega Toscana.\footnote{Andrew Bianco, interview by Cathy Cerrone, transcript, 11 August 1994, 16–18, 1995.0341, Detre Library and Archives, Senator John Heinz History Center, Pittsburgh, PA; Baccelli, interview, 32; “La Scuola,” Il Cittadino Italo-Americano, 15 September 1928, 1; “Per una Scuola Italiana,” Il Cittadino Italo-Americano, 22 September 1928, 4; DiRicco, interview, 10–11; Bianco, interview, 19; Ferrari, interview, 1 December 1998, 3; Pesci, interview, 17; DiRicco, interview, 16; Angelo Dozzi, interview by Nicholas P. Ciotola, transcript, 21 August 1998, 17, box 1, folder 1, Beneficial Society of North Italy Oral History Collection, 1928–1998, MSS 597, Detre Library and Archives, Senator John Heinz History Center, Pittsburgh, PA; Josephine DeSimone, interview by Cathy Cerrone, transcript, 4 August 1994, 2, 1994.0263, Detre Library and Archives, Senator John Heinz History Center, Pittsburgh, PA.}

While Caselli and others pushed Italian for purposes of pride and identity, the majority of Italian Americans learned the language out of practicality. People spoke Italian in the streets and the ethnic halls.\footnote{Baccelli, interview, 10–11.} Some organizations continued to hold meetings and record minutes in Italian even after the inclusion of younger, American-born members.\footnote{Baccelli, interview, 10–11.}

The children and grandchildren of Italian immigrants found it necessary to learn the
language – either in full, in part, or in dialect – to converse with family and relatives.\(^{116}\)

The families of grocers and shopkeepers that operated in ethnic enclaves found the ability to speak some Italian necessary to serve older patrons.\(^{117}\) As one Catholic priest noted, before the Second World War, they read the gospels and sermons in both languages.\(^{118}\) The continuation of the Italian language assisted in holding the second and third generations within the larger ethnic community and Italian-American public sphere, even as assimilation increased during the interwar period.

The ethnic press was the textual aspect of the Italian-American public sphere. Newspapers that catered to these people existed throughout the region and underlaid


\(^{117}\) Lucente, interview, 8 October 1998, 21–22.

\(^{118}\) Mastrangelo, interview, 30.
intellectual conversation. They guided readers. Some published information was unique to the communities and could not have been gained elsewhere, such as news about Italy and local ethnic events, but the press also served an interpretational function. Ethnic newspapers engaged with stories printed by other sources, including English-language periodicals. They directed readers to important information or corrected perceived misinterpretations of events and ideas. In these cases, they were supplementary and added editorial to the news gained elsewhere. These sources included information and concerns derived from the public, the newspapers’ readers, thus providing a symbiotic relationship.

Contrary to popular perceptions, illiteracy within the Italian-American community was likely much lower than believed at the time. American nativists, led by Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, had long sought to use the ability to read as a barrier for immigration. A literacy test nearly passed multiple times – 1903, 1907, 1913, and 1915 – before being codified as law via a Congressional veto override in 1917. The new restriction required immigrants to read a passage in their native language, but the statute also allowed exceptions for those fleeing religious persecution and members of an admissible alien’s immediate family. The law was late coming. The 1901 Italian census was the last to have found that the majority of Italian women were illiterate. The Italian state made some advances in education during the late 1800s and early 1900s, which benefited young adults,

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the group most likely to have sought opportunity abroad. By 1904, the government required all municipalities with over four thousand inhabitants to provide compulsory fifth- and sixth-year primary school classes.\textsuperscript{122} This action did not eliminate illiteracy, but rates indeed fell. In southern Italy, the origin for most Italian-American immigrants, illiteracy rates in 1871 averaged over 80 percent. In 1911, rates had fallen, and they stood at a high of 69.6 percent in Calabria and a low of 53.7 percent in Campania, with most other areas around 60 percent.\textsuperscript{123} Furthermore, chain migration aided higher education rates in towns that sent large numbers of residents abroad. Remittances stimulated small villages’ economies, which encouraged the building of more schools. Emigrants returned with cautionary tales about the negative impact of illiteracy, while the Italian government sought to increase education as insurance against American Congressional efforts to restrict immigration through literacy provisions.\textsuperscript{124} The ability to read and write was imperative for those who wished to remain in contact with family once they left the village.

Italian-American illiteracy in the United States also declined. According to a survey conducted by Cleveland’s Alta House settlement in 1901, the majority (around 56 percent) of people living on Mayfield Road, which laid in the heart of Little Italy and was almost entirely Italian American (241 out of 253 residents), were able to read and write.\textsuperscript{125} In

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\item \textsuperscript{122} Clark, 202.
\item \textsuperscript{123} Clark, 43.
\item \textsuperscript{124} Carnevale, \textit{A New Language, A New World}, 25.
\item \textsuperscript{125} Alta House Social Settlement, “Report, 1900–1902,” report (Cleveland, OH, n.d.), appendix chart, box 2, folder 12, Little Italy Historical Museum Records and Photographs, MS 5353, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, OH. The chart refers to this as Mayfield Street rather than Mayfield Road. This was likely an error as road, not street, was used on the accompanying map. The language parameters for this literacy rate were not stated. However, the report noted on page 22 that the Alta House library sought Italian books because “we feel it very desirable that the children should be
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subsequent years, the United States Census noted that the number of illiterate arrivals from all nationalities fell precipitously from around 23 percent in 1900–1914, to 10 percent in 1915–1919, and to under 3 percent for the 1920s.\textsuperscript{126} In light of these declining numbers, the Italian-American press was probably accurate when it reported in 1924 that only 13.1 percent of foreign-born Americans were illiterate, according to the latest census figures.\textsuperscript{127} In this context, the story told by one woman about her father illustrates the dissonance between immigrant occupations and education for those living in the region. Although her father, a Calabrian farmer who arrived in the United States in 1899, worked for some time as a lowly municipal street sweeper for Pittsburgh, he was still literate and taught his daughter Italian.\textsuperscript{128} The exact extent of reading and writing abilities could be debated, but a significant portion of the Italian-American population was likely able to understand the elementary articles within the ethnic press by 1920.\textsuperscript{129} This group then spread the information to illiterate family members, neighbors, and friends in conversations.

Italian-American media flourished in ethnic enclaves throughout the United States. In 1919, they numbered well over one hundred daily, weekly, and monthly newspapers and magazines.\textsuperscript{130} In 1940, this figure remained relatively unchanged at 129 Italian-American

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128 DeSimone, interview, 1, 3–4.
129 Many of these papers also included some English-language articles by the 1920s and 1930s.
\end{flushright}
newspapers.\textsuperscript{131} There was widespread availability. In 1919 Cleveland, Italian Americans had access to at least seven ethnic newspapers: four from New York City, including \textit{Il Progresso Italo-Americano}, \textit{Il Bollettino della Sera}, and \textit{L’Araldo Italiano}, Philadelphia’s \textit{Giornale d’Italia}, and the two local papers, \textit{La Voce del Popolo Italiano} and \textit{La Stampa}. Founded in 1903 by manager and editor Olindo G. Melaragno, \textit{La Voce del Popolo Italiano} was the most important for the community, with a circulation of 15,000 in Cleveland and “30,000 throughout the Middle States.”\textsuperscript{132} Five newspapers and two magazines were available to Pittsburghers, including prominently \textit{Unione} and \textit{La Trinacria}.\textsuperscript{133} Smaller cities and towns had their Italian-language papers. Youngstown’s \textit{Il Cittadino Italo-Americano} ran from 1902 to 1938.\textsuperscript{134} \textit{Il Patriota} of Indiana, Pennsylvania, existed from 1914 to 1955.\textsuperscript{135} \textit{La Stella d’Italia} served Greensburg, Pennsylvania, from 1907 until it consolidated with \textit{La Trinacria} in 1924.\textsuperscript{136} \textit{Sentinel Press} reestablished a Greensburg-based

\textsuperscript{133} Bodnar, Simon, and Weber, \textit{Lives of Their Own}, 81.
paper around 1933.\textsuperscript{137} Canton and Steubenville, Ohio, had \textit{Voce della Verità} and \textit{Messaggero}, respectively, and Erie, Pennsylvania, was the home of \textit{Gazzetta}.\textsuperscript{138}

Newspapers served surrounding communities, which created an overlapping web of media. In 1922, Youngstown’s \textit{Il Cittadino Italo-Americano} had representatives in Bridgeville and Delmont, which were in the Pittsburgh area, and in Wellsville, along the Ohio River.\textsuperscript{139} Readers from diverse places sent occasionally printed comments, and these attest to the wide range of circulation. One March 1925 example included messages from the following places: the nearby cities of Niles and Warren, Ohio, and Farrell, Pennsylvania; Bellaire, Ohio, which was around ninety miles to the south; Cleveland and neighboring Lorain; and, Verona, a town a few miles up the Allegheny River from Pittsburgh.\textsuperscript{140} In July 1925, \textit{Il Cittadino Italo-Americano} absorbed \textit{La Gazzetta di New Castle}, an ethnic paper printed in the namesake city across the Ohio state line, further consolidating its reach into western Pennsylvania.\textsuperscript{141} Beyond locally published sources, more prominent newspapers served and included the region. Philadelphia’s \textit{Il Popolo Italiano} – founded in 1935 after New York businessman Generoso Pope bought out the


city’s previous paper, *L’Opinione* – carried a section about western Pennsylvania written by F. Di Girolamo from his downtown Pittsburgh office on Smithfield Street.\(^{142}\)

Circulation rates were high for communities populated heavily by the working class, which had less disposable income. Cleveland’s *La Voce del Popolo Italiano* claimed a 30,000-copy circulation in 1922. Pittsburgh’s *La Trinacria* had around half that number of subscribers (14,000) the same year.\(^{143}\) The papers from Canton (*Voce della Verità*) and Youngstown (*Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*) each had a circulation of at least 7,000.\(^{144}\) Greensburg’s *La Stella d’Italia* distributed between 7,000 and 10,000 copies before it consolidated with *La Trinacria*.\(^{145}\) The reported circulation numbers told only part of the story. They understated diffusion because these sources often passed from hand to hand with multiple people utilizing the same physical newspaper.

In some cases, particularly during the early years of the twentieth century, literate Italian Americans read stories aloud to illiterate friends and family. Libraries, especially those located in neighborhoods with high immigrant populations, carried copies of ethnic newspapers.\(^{146}\) *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* was an official organ for the Ohio Sons of Italy, and *Unione* had sections catering to the Pennsylvania-based Italian Sons and


Daughters of America and the Sons of Columbus. Some ethnic societies bought subscriptions for the benefit of their members. The desire for these sources was significant enough that when the women of Youngstown’s Casa Savoia lodge learned in 1928 that they would no longer receive complimentary copies of *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, they voted unanimously to purchase a subscription for the group. During the depths of the Great Depression in 1932, members of Loggia Nazionale Armando V. Diaz passed a resolution to buy a fifteen-copies-per-week subscription to the paper. The desire for ethnic newspapers was a common recollection about this period for those interviewed decades later. Ed Paraggio, a late arrival to the United States in 1938, described a generational difference. Born in 1922, he was reluctant to read ethnic newspapers, but the older people in the community sought these sources. Others remembered the availability of these publications and parents and grandparents reading New York City’s *Il Progresso* and the local papers, including *Unione* and *Il Patriota*.

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151 Ferrari, interview, 1 December 1998, 11; Lucente, interview, 8 October 1998, 20; Babyak, interview, 33; Pesci, interview, 33; Rezzolla, interview, 40–42; Maruccio, interview, 14; Ralph Cenname, interview by Paul M. Stefano, transcript, 14 January 1999, 5, 2002.0072, Detre Library and Archives, Senator John Heinz History Center, Pittsburgh, PA.
Italian Americans did not limit their news consumption to the foreign-language press. Marco Mastrangelo, who arrived in the Pittsburgh area in 1929, began reading *Il Progresso*, but another man advised him to read English-language papers in addition to help his transition to America.152 As *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* noted humorously in 1930, Ralph Vitullo, who was then president of the local Italian American Political Association, and other past paperboys donned old aprons – this time for charity – to hawk the ethnic weekly and the *Youngstown Vindicator*, one of the prominent English-language locals for the city.153 The ethnic press, however, played an outsized role in the community.

When comparing the two, it is best to think of American dailies, such as the *Youngstown Vindicator*, the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, and the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, as sources of information while the ethnic papers supplied opinions and interpretations. They noted inconsistencies in the mainstream press, such as when *Unione* pointed out columnist Arthur Brisbane’s paradoxical view of Fascist Italy. The famed newsman called the Italian government “the most tyrannical in the civilized world,” only to write a week later about Benito Mussolini performing miracles to improve the nation.154 Other articles documented cases of inaccuracy.155 When a *Plain Dealer* editorial misnamed the Italian Foreign Minister, a contributor asserted in *La Voce del Popolo Italiano* that such mistakes were common since he “could fill pages with the gratuitous [assertions] and incongruities of this

well-posted editor, but, what is the use, we could not make him any wiser.” The Plain Dealer’s rival, the Cleveland Press, did not escape scrutiny as Il Cittadino Italo-Americano informed readers in 1930 that the newspaper printed “tall tales” related to Italian Fascism and implied not to take them at face value. Locally, Il Cittadino dismissed rumors printed in the Vindicator about a secret conspiracy orchestrated by the “Black Hand.” The paper replied that such an organization did not exist, and criminality was not bound to one particular ethnicity. The ethnic press asserted its role as the more trusted news source for the Italian-American community by noting inconsistencies and possible inaccuracies.

Local ethnic newspapers played an additional gatekeeping function. They periodically referenced stories from mainstream media sources and national Italian-American publications. Since the local ethnic press had built trust within the community, its approval of external reporting added weight to those opinions. This was especially pertinent when English-language papers published reports dealing with critical Italian-American issues or confirmed their beliefs. These references included Arthur Brisbane’s welcoming of Italian-American contributions in the United States and a New York World article about a Yale professor’s research presenting the Nordic race’s superiority as a myth. Other local articles pointed to works in popular publications, such as Agostino de

156 G. A. B., “The ‘exact’ knowledges of the Editor of the ‘Plain Dealer,’” La Voce del Popolo Italiano (Cleveland, OH), 3 Jan 1920, 1. Given his position in the community, G. A. B. was likely G. A. Barricelli.
Biasi’s *Il Carroccio*, or interest-based journals, like the humorous *La Follia di New York*. Occasionally these referrals to other publications were political. For example, *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* directed readers to Edward Corsi’s Herbert Hoover article in *Atlantica*, a prominent Italian-American literary magazine published in New York, which the newspaper billed as an honest assessment of the president halfway through his term.

The Italian-American community of western Pennsylvania and eastern Ohio fit the qualifications of a public sphere. Transportation networks weaved together neighborhoods and towns while participants mingled and conversed in various private homes and social clubs. Italian-language newspapers provided topics and opinions for debate and diffusion. An Italian-American ideology developed in this milieu.

**The Class and Regional Issue**

Political divisions in history have often been the result of geography and social class. While these differences existed within the immigrant population, they were secondary because the Italian-American experience encouraged an overriding group identification based on ethnicity. Emphasis on Italian Americanness arrested the development of class divisions and soothed region of origin tensions within the community and public sphere during the interwar period. Most immigrants and their children failed to create stable, lasting class identifications that could have overridden ethnicity before the

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Second World War. Skilled and unskilled blue-collar laborers were subject to barriers – weather, economic downturns, discrimination – outside of their control. Those with white-collar occupations were in a precarious situation since attorneys, doctors, and grocers depended on working-class Italian-American clientele and therefore sank and rose with them. Discrimination caused disparate groups of people to band together. As nativists targeted all arrivals without considering their region of origin, those who previously classified themselves as Sicilian, Calabrian, Tuscan American, or one of the other countless regional or local identities increasingly viewed themselves defensively as Italian Americans.

Most Italian immigrants arrived in the United States destined for blue-collar employment. In Cleveland, for example, only about one-tenth of Italians entered nonmanual occupations upon arrival. The majority of the population understood and empathized with the lower classes because they were either working-class themselves, had previously performed manual labor, or had family, friends, and neighbors in such occupations. The literate street sweeper mentioned previously received a promotion during his career. He took care of the horses at the Pittsburgh city stables, and he later worked at the municipal automobile garages where he checked inventory. Others advanced from pick and shovel labor to plumbing, coal mining to masonry, and general labor to contracting and food wholesale. Advancement to better paying and more stable jobs never erased the experience of starting at the bottom of the occupational ladder.

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162 Barton, Peasants and Strangers, 144–45.
163 DeSimone, interview, 3.
164 Bianco, interview, 7; Aldo Ferrato, interview by Cathy Cerrone, transcript, 30 November 1995, 11, 1999.0068, Detre Library and Archives, Senator John Heinz History Center, Pittsburgh, PA; Bernice DiNardo and Giarrusso, interview by Cathy
Besides empathy derived from personal experiences, continued close contact between those at the bottom of the socioeconomic hierarchy and those who rose within it further muted possible divisions. For example, Louis Colussy initially found employment as a carpenter making mine carts for coal companies. Around 1910, he founded Colussy Brothers, a contracting company in Bridgeville, a few miles southwest of Pittsburgh, to build houses. However, even with his growing affluence – his sons opened a Chevrolet dealership in 1917 – the Colussy family still hosted boarders. As one son explained: “We had about 8 or 10 at the table in the evenings. In fact, we always had boarders. We had 2 or 3 boarders always in the house, at least.” Hosting others within the household created surrogate families and bridged class differences between the financially stable, sometimes petite-bourgeois hosts and the working-class lodgers.

Boarding or lodging with other Italian-American families was a common occurrence. In 1911, the Dillingham Commission reported that out of the southern Italian families studied in Cleveland, a third hosted boarders at the time of the survey. The percentage rose to half for those who had resided in the United States for less than a decade. By comparison, only two out of thirty-one households headed by a native-born white American of native-born parentage had outsiders living with them. A similar rate likely existed in Pittsburgh around the same time because 38 percent of sampled Italian-American households had boarders in 1900, averaging an additional 4.4 people per

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*Cerrone, transcript, 10 November 1994, 2–4, 1995.0334, Detre Library and Archives, Senator John Heinz History Center, Pittsburgh, PA; Camarda, interview, 7.*

165 Colussy and Colussy, interview, 1–8.
166 Colussy and Colussy, 8.
168 Immigration Commission (Dillingham Commission), 553.
169 Immigration Commission (Dillingham Commission), 552.
Those in the mining communities throughout the region were not exempt from taking in lodgers because housing was scarce. One man claimed that his mother took care of some eighteen men, coal miners working the fields around Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania, a job that she continued, albeit with smaller numbers, after the family moved to another mining town around 1909.

Assimilation and the end of mass migration to the United States should have meant a rapid termination of boarding practices during the First World War; however, the system continued. As Donna Gabaccia noted in her study of New York City, the rates of households with boarders in 1925 were comparable to those from 1905, which suggested that boarding had become socially acceptable. Particular circumstances favored the system’s persistence. Family separation caused some working men to revert to lodging for practical reasons, such as when the wife and American-born daughter of one Pittsburgh resident returned to Italy before the First World War. After the sinking of the Lusitania, they decided not to return until the end of the conflict. The man boarded until he died during the Spanish Flu pandemic in 1918. Although immigration restrictions slowed the flood of newcomers during the 1920s, those who managed to come to the United States still needed places to live and turned to the boarding system. Angelo Dozzi’s father acquired citizenship to bring his teenage son to America in 1928. When the elder Dozzi, a lodger himself, could not work because the coal mines went on strike, he sent his son to board

172 Maloney, interview, 10–12, 14.
173 Gabaccia, *From Sicily to Elizabeth Street*, 80–83.
with a relative in Pittsburgh. Similarly, Joseph Sodini, who was born in Pittsburgh and returned to Italy as a child, migrated back to the city in 1928. After arrival, he boarded at a woman’s house alongside his brothers. Domestic movement also sustained boarding practices. When Joe Di Ciero left New Castle, Pennsylvania, in 1923 for work in Aliquippa, some thirty miles to the south, he boarded because he had no family in the city. Another noted that his sister kept boarders through the Great Depression, which helped some financial hardship. Before the New Deal, it seemed that most Italian Americans were boarders at one time, had hosted lodgers in the past, or at the very least knew a family member or close relative that had. By bringing people of different career levels and

175 Dozzi, interview, 3, 8–9.
177 Di Ciero, interview, 2.
178 Mastrangelo, Mastrangelo, and DeVito, interview, 10.
sometimes regions literally under one roof, Italian Americans arrested some of the worst
effects of possible class conflict within the community.

Many people faced a precarious economic existence in the United States, even
during a booming national economy. As *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* stated in 1925, “life
today in America has become difficult and unsolvable.” When asked about their conditions,
people responded that they were merely getting by. Under the surface, they harbored many
grievances. The community faced discrimination evident in the revived Ku Klux Klan and
new Prohibition laws. Italian Americans suffered financially and were unable to support
their families. Taxes on property and wages exacerbated the high costs of coal, electricity,
water, transportation, and bread.\textsuperscript{180} Average people did not feel that 1920s American
prosperity created class advancement or economic stability.

Miners in the bituminous coal region, which concentrated around Pittsburgh and
stretched south and west into Ohio and West Virginia, faced adverse conditions. In many
areas, Italian Americans were one of the dominant ethnicities in the industry. In 1907, they
accounted for almost fifteen percent of the workforce in the Pennsylvania fields, the third
most populous group.\textsuperscript{181} In certain districts, they were overrepresented. In Indiana County,
east of Pittsburgh, “Italian” was the second most common ethnicity of miners after

\textsuperscript{180} “Come Si Va?,” *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, 8 August 1925, 1.
\textsuperscript{181} Immigration Commission (Dillingham Commission), “Immigrants in Industries: Part
1: Bituminous Coal Mining,” Volume 1, Reports of the Immigration Commission, 61st
Congress, 2nd Session, Senate Document Number 633 (Washington, DC: Government
Printing Office, 1911), 225, https://books.google.com/books?id=pRM_AQAAAMAAJ&lpg. Italians were also the third
largest ethnic group in 1908 West Virginia, surpassed only by native-born whites and
African Americans. See page 223.
“American” in 1919. They suffered proportionately to their numbers. Herbert Hoover, a mining engineer and the secretary of commerce before becoming president, described bituminous coal as one of the least efficient industries in the United States during the 1920s. At the heart of the problem was overcapacity. The First World War had encouraged the opening of new mines, and the postwar consumer economy relied on new fuel sources, such as natural gas and petroleum. Mine operators cut wages and introduced more mechanization, but these solutions hurt workers rather than fixed overproduction. Wages declined even as the American economy boomed during the mid to late 1920s. Weekly pay was not guaranteed. The average bituminous coal miner spent one-third of the year idle. Employers often compensated for the weight of the coal produced rather than for the time invested in mining it. If miners struck an inferior vein, then they were simply out of luck and not paid. These conditions prompted some Italian-American coal miners to seek work in other industries, such as steel.

The shift to other blue-collar occupations did not necessarily improve financial security and bring class advancement before the Great Depression. Although the First World War created job opportunities when increased factory output led to a tighter labor market, the years immediately after the conflict experienced a sharp downturn, a short

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185 Hawley, “Secretary Hoover and the Bituminous Coal Problem,” 250.
186 Furgiuele, interview, 21–22.
187 Montini, interview, 2; Iacobucci, interview, 5 December 1979, 2.
economic revival, and finally a major recession. Weeks after the 1918 armistice, the American government canceled war contracts, which caused reverberations across heavy industry and forced steel mills to run at less than two-thirds capacity.\textsuperscript{188} Immediate postwar consumer spending revived production in 1919, but not without contributing to massive inflation that hurt workers and prompted strikes in steel and coal. Rapid inflation quickly cooled economic expansion, and the American economy experienced a downturn, the Recession of 1920–1921.\textsuperscript{189} For Italian-American workers, this meant layoffs and pay cuts, such as a 1921 announcement in \textit{La Voce del Popolo Italiano} that the Cleveland Railway Company planned a twenty percent wage reduction for 1500 workers.\textsuperscript{190}

People in the construction industry fared poorly. Even during the good economic years after 1921, factors outside of a worker’s control limited his advancement. The arrival of cold weather halted cement pouring, bricklaying, and the construction of gas lines. When work ceased, these Italian-American men often found themselves employed temporarily in the coal mines or living with nearby family members waiting for the work to pick up in the spring.\textsuperscript{191} Others, who might have been skilled, still floated between construction jobs as work became available.\textsuperscript{192} The American housing market began to contract after 1925, an

\textsuperscript{189} Grant, 14–17, 69–72.
\textsuperscript{192} Ferrari, interview, 5 November 1998, 11–13.
economic indicator often overlooked by historians because of the severity of the Wall Street stock market crash of 1929. Although best illustrated by the Florida real estate bubble, the housing construction industry across the United States slowed before the Great Depression.\textsuperscript{193} Housing starts peaked in 1925 at 937,000 only to decline to 753,000 in 1928 and bottom out in 1933 at 93,000.\textsuperscript{194} The contraction of the housing market before 1929 hurt Italian Americans because the group predominated in the construction industry. Many immigrants had arrived in the United States with skills such as masonry and carpentry that they had learned as supplemental trades to agricultural work. These basic skills transferred well to construction projects in Pittsburgh and Cleveland, but only if work was available.\textsuperscript{195} Italian-American masons, carpenters, and bricklayers benefited from the mid-1920s housing boom, but it was temporary.

Small businessmen and white-collar workers also faced uncertain economic prospects. Early entrepreneurial endeavors depended heavily on the ethnic populations that they served.\textsuperscript{196} This social group’s success and affluence relied on the fortunes of the local Italian-American community as a whole. Class advancement was not lasting and certain. Pittsburgh’s East Liberty neighborhood hosted dozens of Italian-American fruit stores, grocers, tailors, and barbershops, but turnover was high, and many lasted only a few years

before being replaced by other aspirant entrepreneurs. In Cleveland, Italian Americans were one of the more likely immigrant groups in the city to attain homeownership and advance to white-collar labor, but few fathers were able to pass middle-class success to their sons. In the small coal towns throughout the region, private shopkeepers found themselves at a disadvantage where company stores existed. Furthermore, since some Italian-American small businessmen offered purchases on credit during strikes, they faced the possibility of bankruptcy if workers delayed their repayments. Tradesmen supplemented their profits with wage work, such as one butcher who doubled as a night watchman for the coal mines or a barber who also did seasonal railroad and mining labor. Social class advancement was precarious.

Since professionals served the community, their restricted clientele kept them from rising to native-born white Americans’ status levels. As one Pittsburgh resident recounted, medical doctors like A. Bianco only served Italian Americans because there was a tacit understanding that such professionals were not to work alongside native-born whites. The Italian Americans respected Bianco. He introduced toastmaster and noted jurist Michael A. Musmanno during a ceremony in which the Italian government honored Dr. Charles J. Barone. The doctor was one of a handful of ethnic leaders that University of Pittsburgh Chancellor John G. Bowman called upon to solicit community contributions for

198 Barton, Peasants and Strangers, 118–46.
199 Furgiuele, interview, 17; Forno, interview, 20.
200 Garufi, interview, 2; Catanzarito, interview, 2–3, 6.
the college’s Italian Room in the new Cathedral of Learning building. Nevertheless, respect within the ethnic community during the 1920s and 1930s did not translate to eminence throughout Pittsburgh. Instead, many of these doctors became associated with Belvedere Hospital, an institution founded by Dr. G. William Alvin in 1921 to serve Italian Americans. Small and understaffed, Belvedere welcomed those who could not afford other area hospitals.

For the few who did manage to rise during the 1920s, the Great Depression reaffirmed the impermanence of financial advancement and the elite’s interdependence on the Italian-American middle and lower classes. One of Dr. Bianco’s clients offers a good example. When he could not pay Bianco during the Great Depression, the doctor offered him the same terms that he gave to other unemployed Italian Americans: take the bill and pay when you can. Although everyone supposedly repaid his or her debts to Bianco, the use of credit within the Italian-American community was common and, in some cases, did not end well for other professionals and small businessmen. One such barber threw out his accounting books to lessen the shame of the men who owed money and could not repay him. Others were less fortunate. One butcher in Vandergrift, Pennsylvania, lost his business and was unable to collect the debts owed by his customers. His family was evicted from their home during the Great Depression. Louise Kenosh (née Pace) was born in Homer City, Pennsylvania, in 1911. Although her family was never poor, the Great

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204 Castelli, 10; Baccelli, interview, 11.  
205 Del Rosso, interview, 28–29.  
206 Silvestri, interview, 3–4.
Depression crippled her father’s furniture business. Kenosh managed to become the first Catholic teacher in the Center Township school district, but her college education did not translate to economic security as she and other women taught for seven months without pay during the Great Depression. The whole community suffered, including a local Italian-American homebuilder and community leader who nearly lost his own house when clients could not pay their loans.\(^{207}\)

Close relations between various social strata of Italian Americans produced a type of mutual respect. As one 1934 editorial from *Unione* asserted, in exchange for “the rugged individualism of a Harding-Coolidge-Hoover regime,” Americans celebrated “a New Deal that would include in the nation’s prosperity the small entrepreneur and laboring class.”\(^{208}\)

The US Chamber of Commerce, a group that presented itself as speaking for the entrepreneur, took an opposing view and denounced most of Franklin Roosevelt’s legislation as harmful to business.\(^ {209}\) Italian Americans believed that there was nothing inconsistent about helping both groups, even as other entities expressed concerns that aiding workers meant hampering businessmen. They used an extended definition of class, one in which “worker” included blue-collar wage earners, small businessmen, and professionals. Their overriding emphasis on ethnicity, lived experiences, and fluid social positions lessened class divisions. This ethnic solidarity and familiarity with working-class

\(^{207}\) Kenosh, interview, 1–2, 5, 9–10, 15–17. Kenosh was not clear about the loss of her father’s furniture store. At one point, she claimed that the Great Depression ruined it, but she also claimed that her father operated a store from 1913 until it was forced to close in 1922. It is likely that her father suffered through both economic downturns, the Depression of 1920–1921 and the Great Depression.

\(^{208}\) Premo J. Columbus, “I Scribble Away,” *Unione*, 12 January 1934, 8.

issues explain why Antonio J. Palumbo, a multimillionaire mine owner who became a significant philanthropist in western Pennsylvania, stated during an interview later in life that while he believed “some of the union organizers were terrible,” he had no issues with unionized workers.\footnote{Gary Rotstein, “Who Is A.J. Palumbo?,” Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, 2 January 2000, http://old.post-gazette.com/magazine/20000102palumbo1.asp; A. J. (Antonio John) Palumbo, interview by Cathy Cerrone, transcript, 19 April 1994, 10, 1998.0202, Detre Library and Archives, Senator John Heinz History Center, Pittsburgh, PA.} He grew up bilingual and followed his Italian-born father into the mines to qualify to take the state examination to become a foreman.\footnote{Palumbo, interview, 1–5.} Palumbo certainly felt a connection to these working-class people because he referred to himself as P.C.M., initials for poor coal miner.\footnote{Rotstein, “Who Is A.J. Palumbo?”} These life experiences, common among those born around the turn of the twentieth century, influenced people’s perceptions of class and social position.

When class tensions occurred within the community, they derived from assumptions of superiority rather than actual economic status. In the memory of one Vandergrift resident, the town had a few “cake eaters,” Italian Americans who presented themselves as a local ethnic aristocracy. The “cake eaters” looked down on other members of the community. According to the man, this was a farce because their affluence was a state of mind; had they been wealthy, they would have stayed in Italy and enjoyed their prosperity.\footnote{Silvestri, interview, 2, 18.}

The blurring of class lines is not to argue that a social hierarchy was nonexistent. Each community had prominenti, local Italian-American leaders who were often better-educated and wealthier than the average community member. However, a traditional
Marxist-type class division did not exist because ethnicity served as the primary self-identifier. Instead, as John Bodnar argued concerning the rising immigrant middle class, “if their elevated status relied on the support of the larger immigrant community, … they attempted not only to retain a close association to the mass of newcomers but influence their thinking as well.”\textsuperscript{214} Conversely, some businessmen and professionals attained success outside of the confines of the ethnic community, moved their residences to affluent areas, and separated themselves from Italian-American institutions.\textsuperscript{215} This type of assimilation reinforces the argument made previously; once these people changed from Italian Americans to Americans of Italian heritage, they left the public sphere and had little influence in it.

In addition to class identity, Italian regionalism had the potential to divide people. However, by the 1920s, factors such as Italian nationalism, discrimination, and Americanization strengthened, rather than divided, an Italian-American identity. Coinciding with the First World War, Italian nationalism grew both in Italy and in the United States. After the American entry on the Allied side in 1917, Italian immigrants had an apt response to American discrimination against them. As a nation that sacrificed alongside the United States in the conflict, identifying with the Italian state, rather than a particular region, served as a counter to nativist comments about the unacceptability of the Italian ‘race.’ The rise of Fascism brought new propaganda about Italian greatness, and those living abroad further attached themselves to that national identity as protection against tropes of Italian-American criminality and inferiority. Institutions like ethnic

\textsuperscript{214} Bodnar, \textit{The Transplanted}, 142.
\textsuperscript{215} Bodnar, 138–43.
societies followed suit, believing that national, rather than regional, identity offered people the best counter to discrimination.  

Ethnic slurs and prejudice further collapsed regionalism as all Italian Americans, regardless of their origins in modern cities such as Turin or southern, rural villages in the Mezzogiorno, felt the sting of discrimination. As one man stated forcefully, “when kids pick on you it really strengthens your identity.” When other children hurled slurs such as guinea, dago, and wop at Italian-American youth, both foreign and native born, it produced ethnic distinctiveness and solidarity regardless of regional origins. One man even remembered the irony of a conversation that he had with a young German immigrant. After the abduction of Charles Lindbergh’s baby in 1932, the German American told him, “oh, no doubts of Italians behind that,” repeating the popular stereotype of Italian criminality. Coincidentally, the kidnapper was German American. Nevertheless, stereotypes were common and transcended any previous background, such as when Trafford, Pennsylvania, councilmen justified the unpaved street on which many Italian Americans lived as acceptable because “they are used to walking in the mud.” Evidently, no paved roads or sidewalks existed in Italy, and immigrants did not deserve such luxuries in the United States.

217 Lucchino and Lucchino, interview, 4.
218 Lucchino and Lucchino, 3; Silvestri, interview, 7; Marcoline, interview, 39; Camarda, interview, 11–12.
221 Del Rosso, interview, 17.
Job discrimination was common. Some men experienced slurs from employers or coworkers. Others felt that prejudice kept them from succeeding. According to a story told by one man who was denied advancement to a railroad inspector job, he discovered later that the interviewer complained to a coworker, “listen, I [didn’t] ask you to send me a wop up here. I asked for you to send me an American fellow with an American name.”

Long-term residents warned new immigrants to hide their identity when searching for work. James Pierolo had apprenticed as a carpenter in Italy, and he eventually found his way to Warren, Ohio, via Pittsburgh during the mid-1920s after learning about job openings constructing furniture, doors, and windows. Some of the best advice he received after arrival was to use the name James Pierol and claim French origins (Pierolo was born outside of Turin and knew the French language). Pierolo felt awful about the need to hide his ethnicity, including his status as an Italian Great War veteran. In some cases, companies went to extreme lengths to place workers in positions that supposedly suited their national origin. Pittsburgh’s Central Tube Company categorized three dozen ethnicities concerning their adaptability to certain types of work performed at the plant in 1925. The company considered Italians as some of the best workers for pick and shovel labor. They were less suited for positions like boilermaker’s and engineer’s helpers, positions better fit for native-born whites, Irish, Scots, and Canadians.

A more significant fear for many Italian Americans was the reemergence of the Ku Klux Klan, which now targeted immigrants and Catholics alongside African Americans.

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222 Mastrangelo, interview, 3.
224 Pierolo, interview, 1, 3, 9–10, 15–16.
According to Pierolo, one of the reasons he decided to hide his Italian identity publicly was the strength of the Klan in Ohio during the 1920s. Rumors swirled at the time that Mayor Charles Scheible of nearby Youngstown was a member, and although no one could prove his affiliation due to the organization’s secrecy, the Klan publicly endorsed his victorious 1923 campaign. A similar Klan presence existed in Pennsylvania, and the organization claimed at least a quarter-million members in the state during its peak from 1923 to 1925. Allegheny County, home of Pittsburgh, topped the list of Klan lodges in the state at thirty-three, while the surrounding counties of Westmoreland, Armstrong, Fayette, Indiana, and Washington each hosted a minimum of ten. Bloodshed between Klansmen and their Catholic opponents occurred in the Pittsburgh suburb of Carnegie, the borough of Scottdale in coal country to the southeast, and Lilly, a small community between Johnstown and Altoona. Others remembered a strong Klan presence in their towns, including a building in Blairsville, Indiana County, emblazoned with the organization’s cross that exhibited a physical presence to residents and open hostilities in Masontown, Fayette County. When the Ku Klux Klan targeted Italian Americans, the harassment helped consolidate regional identities into a national one; people disregarded provincial differences to respond as one group against a more significant threat to their existence.

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226 Pierolo, interview, 15.
229 Jenkins, 70–71.
230 Jenkins, 66.
231 Pesci, interview, 30; Vicinelly, interview, 15–16.
Some Americanization efforts blurred the lines of regionalism. In their quest to assimilate immigrants, settlement house programs often produced “hyphenated Americans” because they supported cultural pluralism as a way to reach populations and build trust between the newcomers and the Americanizing institutions. Cleveland’s Hiram House was an example. Settlement workers initially created an integrated mothers’ group that consisted of African Americans and ethnic Poles, Greeks, Slavs, and Italians. This group was a failure. After Hiram House employees organized women by ethnicity, numbers grew substantially. From the original fourteen-member integrated club, derivatives included an eighty-member African-American mothers’ group and two Italian-American organizations equaling about one hundred and fifty members. Since settlement houses built success by first getting bodies into their facilities and registered for their programs, they willingly allowed “nationality” groups that divided people by ethnicity.

Workers viewed the creation of a hyphenated identity as a necessary part of the Americanization process. As one settlement house associate explained to an acquaintance in a 1920 letter, “the weight of settlement experience is that when the immigrant reaches a certain stage in assimilation, his national group organizations are sluffed off somewhat as a chicken does his shell.” Before that point, the organizations needed to accommodate and respect differences. When discussing the future of adult programs, an unidentified Hiram House worker asserted that “there should parallel with the development of self-

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232 George P. Bauer to John J. Grabowski, “Notes to Grabowski on Pictures of Staff Members and Mothers Clubs,” letter, 1 March 1976, 1, George P. Bauer Correspondence, MS 4325, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, OH.

233 Unknown to Allen T. Burns, letter, 15 June 1920, 2, box 21, folder 3, Hiram House Social Settlement Records, MS 3319, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, OH.
determination a spirit of co-operation, eagerness for an understanding of the virtues of other races and individuals.”234 Instead of pressuring people toward immediate assimilation, the settlement experience helped many linger in the transitional stage by reaffirming social interactions with Italians from all regions while supporting the notion of cultural pluralism.

Besides the mothers’ groups, Hiram House and affiliates offered various programs that targeted and, perhaps unintentionally, reinforced Italian-American community and social bonds. These included home citizenship and English classes organized by nationality, the sponsorship of around two dozen Italian-American societies, and even a spring festival during which attendees celebrated with ethnic songs and dances, such as the Tarantella.235 When Hiram House president George Bellamy received an analysis of interviews conducted in 1924, the reporter concluded that “without any suggestions the Italian boys seem to feel the effect of personal friendship much above club life.”236 The settlement house became a location to strengthen relationships within the ethnic community as much as it was to connect these people to mainstream American society. Certainly, Americanization programs altered some aspects of ethnic culture, an argument

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234 Unknown to Albert J. Kennedy, letter, 21 June 1920, box 21, folder 3, Hiram House Social Settlement Records, MS 3319, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, OH.
236 Bertha L. Moore to George A. Bellamy, letter, 1 April 1924, 2, box 21, folder 6, Hiram House Social Settlement Records, MS 3319, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, OH.
supported in the following chapter, but by allowing pluralism over compulsory assimilation, the settlement houses reinforced Italian-American identity.

The Temporary Sphere

There is one crucial caveat when speaking about the creation of Italian-American political ideology: the strongest influences came from those most incorporated within the described public sphere. Those who socialized at ethnic halls, interacted with Italian-American shopkeepers and neighbors, and read Italian-American newspapers were the most receptive and responsive. This vigorous interchange of ideas and beliefs coincided with a stable community that peaked during the interwar period. After the New Deal, assimilation slowly peeled away younger generations. These people, Americans of Italian heritage, merged into the larger society and absorbed opinions from outside of their ethnicity. The dissolution of the ethnic enclave, the disuse of the Italian language, and the decline of social organizations brought about the end of the unique public sphere.

Immigration restriction initially aided the creation of identity, only to destroy it over time. Limits forced community stability. Many early-twentieth-century Italians arrived in the United States as migrant laborers (“Birds of Passage”) who worked for months or years only to return to Italy temporarily or permanently. During some pre-First World War years, these figures were quite significant, and in some periods, for every two people that emigrated to the United States, another repatriated.\(^{237}\) Immigration restriction forced them to choose permanent settlement in the United States or life in Italy. Migration slowed, and repatriation numbers fell: over 400,000 in 1910–1914, around 235,000

between 1920–1924, and finally 95,000 between 1925–1929.\textsuperscript{238} As a result, communities became more stable as young men married, had children, and planted roots firmly in America.

Stability was temporary. Without the constant movement of people between the two states and the desire to eventually return to the Italian homeland, language maintenance declined. The children of the new immigrant groups from Southern, Central, and Eastern Europe born before 1916 had high foreign language use rates within their childhood homes, amounting to over three-quarters of families. This figure declined to about seventy percent for those born between 1916 and 1930 and to under half of households for those born after 1931.\textsuperscript{239} The Second World War hastened the shift away from the Italian language. Since Italy was an enemy state, the Federal Bureau of Investigation targeted Italian-language newspapers, radio programs, and speakers in general as possible subversives. Many separated themselves from their language as protection, and ethnic publications switched to English or ended entirely.\textsuperscript{240} Ethnic societies were not immune. Pittsburgh’s Lega Toscana began recording meetings in English as a precaution if the government needed to inspect the books for subversion. The double effort of using Italian for correspondences and meetings and then translating everything proved to be too much work, and the club switched entirely to English.\textsuperscript{241}

Post-Second World War housing patterns contributed to community disintegration. Government programs created during the 1930s and 1940s, such as infrastructure spending

\textsuperscript{238} United States Department of Commerce, Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, \textit{Statistical Abstract of the United States}, 98.
\textsuperscript{239} Roediger, \textit{Working Toward Whiteness}, 153–54.
\textsuperscript{240} Carnevale, \textit{A New Language, A New World}, 158–70, 178.
\textsuperscript{241} DiRicco, interview, 19.
on highways and low-interest home loans to military veterans, encouraged white ethnics to seek newer dwellings in the suburbs, an opportunity available to them as white Americans but often denied to racial minorities.\textsuperscript{242} Inner-city ethnic enclaves, whose expansion was impossible because of limited physical space, never could have absorbed subsequent generations, even if the younger members had consciously spurred newer housing in the suburbs for the older residences in the enclave. Immigrant neighborhoods that remained, like Italian-American Bloomfield in Pittsburgh, contained mostly elderly generations by 1960.\textsuperscript{243} Housing patterns did not eliminate ethnic ties for all people. In some cases, suburban neighborhoods absorbed an ethnic identity as younger Italian Americans from specific urban areas replicated clusters outside the city.\textsuperscript{244} Distance, however, split the community. The ethnic club, once an accessible place to socialize in the neighborhood, became an inconvenience. Younger generations fell away. Ethnic halls remained as districts changed racial composition. Fears about crime kept many from venturing into the area, especially at night.\textsuperscript{245} Paul Del Rosso theorized that a car culture contributed to the decline of his club. Ethnic halls had long been a place to socialize over drinks, and many covered operating costs by selling alcohol to members and associates. People limited their contact because they did not want to drink and drive. Moreover, the younger generation was uninterested. They became honorary members and occasionally stopped by for a drink, but they never wanted to be more involved.\textsuperscript{246} For those now residing safely in the suburbs,

\textsuperscript{242} Roediger, \textit{Working Toward Whiteness}, 224–34.
\textsuperscript{244} Luconi, \textit{From Paesani to White Ethnics}, 139.
\textsuperscript{246} Del Rosso, interview, 35–37.
the hassle of traveling a half hour into a perceived dangerous neighborhood to socialize over one drink was not an attractive option.

Marriage patterns diluted ethnic influence. As Richard Alba theorized, the loss of ethnicity was generational, a product of assimilation and acculturation. Each subsequent generation became further removed from the immigration experience, and they passed more easily across the boundary into mainstream America. Intermarriage rates reflected this change.\textsuperscript{247} Italian Americans were certainly not alone. The new immigrant groups’ general pattern was to marry within their ethnicity during the first generation and often into the second. By the third generation, ethnicity became blurred. In 1960, 58 percent of the third generation claimed a non-Italian parent or grandparent.\textsuperscript{248} Over three-quarters of those born after the mid-1960s had mixed ancestry.\textsuperscript{249} This shift in demographics undermined a public sphere that immigrants and their children built on their shared background.

Ethnicity became performative rather than a lived experience. By the 1970s, the Catholic Church was the only remaining ethnic institution comparable in strength to its prewar predecessor. Instead of newspapers and mutual aid societies, Italian Americans displayed their identity primarily through food purchased from ethnic markets that remained in the old neighborhood and attending religious festivals and other yearly ethnic celebrations.\textsuperscript{250} Those in the third generation claimed inclusion usually because of

\textsuperscript{249} Alba, \textit{Italian Americans}, 111.
rediscovering their Italianess. It was a nostalgic and romanticized vision of their roots. People who once grouped themselves by language, personal experiences, and club affiliations died out and no longer existed.

The Italian-American public sphere emerged at a particular time of ethnic development. Ethnicity pulled together otherwise diverse people and created a group with similar political concerns. Within this milieu, three major influences – American civic nationalism, leftism, and Italian Fascism – shaped Italian Americans’ political ideology.

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Chapter Two

Creating an Italian-American Civic Identity

Louis Pesci was an Italian American whose life story was typical of the community described in the first chapter. Born in 1900 near Freeport, Pennsylvania, a small town less than thirty miles up the Allegheny River from Pittsburgh, Pesci returned to Italy as a child and then migrated back to the United States when he was eight years old. He was not from southern Italy, like most Italian immigrants. His family hailed from a small mountainside village north of Parma, and his paternal grandparents were farmers who owned a tiny piece of property. Still, the Pesci family found living in the United States preferable, and after they returned to Pennsylvania, they settled near Blairsville, a town midway between Pittsburgh and Altoona, where Pesci’s father found work in the city’s glass factory as an unskilled laborer. Pesci grew up in the Italian section of town, eventually joining the same mutual aid society as his father, where members spent time playing cards and conversing in Italian. Unlike his father, Louis Pesci was employed as a fireman for the railroad, shoveling coal into the steam engine, usually along a route from Pittsburgh to Altoona. Like other railroad workers of that period, he often stayed and passed the time at the local YMCA in both cities while waiting for his next assignment. During the Great Depression, he found temporary work in the area coal mines, as a farm laborer, and eventually on a Works Progress Administration (WPA) project. His family supplemented this meager income by taking in two boarders, skilled laborers working on a nearby state hospital. Although his formal education did not extend beyond the eighth grade, he was literate and
often read the Italian-American newspapers subscribed to by his father. Except that his wife won the first automobile ever raffled off by the local American Legion post, which the couple immediately sold to put toward a house down payment just before the Great Depression, Pesci was for all intents and purposes an average Italian American.¹

It was Pesci’s average life experiences that made his political engagement also typical. According to his son, Louis Pesci and his contemporaries in the Italian-American community were very active before the Second World War: “Oh, they voted I mean … not like today. They cherished their voting rights and of course a lot of the older ones didn’t understand. But the first generation they voted, like my Dad’s family and all of them. They got into it.”² What Pesci experienced was not unique. During the interwar period, Italian Americans across the United States increasingly developed a civic identity with a firm understanding of their rights and liberties as Americans, the importance of politics, and their potential power within the system.

This development was no different from a 1938 WPA assessment concerning New York City Italian Americans. If one substitutes Pittsburgh, Cleveland, or even Pesci’s hometown of Blairsville, then a similar pattern of civic change was evident:

The process of Americanization among the Italian settlers during the last quarter century has been rapid in tempo as well as wide in range. It is hard to imagine the extent of the transformation that has taken place in the social and political mentality of the Italian immigrant. He was confronted with an entirely new political philosophy when he reached these shores. It also should not be forgotten that the

² Pesci, interview, 28.
majority of New York’s Italians came from the rural districts of Italy. The peasants of the Southern provinces and of Sicily had never possessed the franchise or the political and civil rights they unexpectedly found within their grasp when they came to this country. At first they manifested a complete apathy towards political affairs and their civic obligation towards them, which was but natural under the circumstances. Not all made efforts to become citizens of this country. But gradually, under the moral and educational pressure exerted by the more political-minded Italian-Americans hailing from industrial and urban centers of Italy, and under the even more powerful pressure brought to bear upon them by the imponderable but all-pervasive influences of the American environment, the backward agricultural elements of New York Italians became more and more assimilated, so that at present they compose one of the most active and politically conscious groups among New York’s citizenry.³

Throughout the 1910s and 1920s, Italians living in the United States developed a civic identity that laid the foundation for a political culture. Unlike in Italy, where an inherited monarchy, bureaucracy, and political elites dampened democratic participation, immigrants and their children discovered that American citizenship and political engagement offered them a means of advancement unavailable in their homeland. If the rewards of political power offered positive reasons to seek citizenship, then discriminatory laws and practices, such as new immigration restrictions and Prohibition, introduced negative pressures to understand their rights.

Italian Americans engaged with Americanizing agents – settlement houses, public schools, the YMCA and YWCA – to gain and appreciate citizenship. In the process, they learned to value civic nationalism, American ideals related to participatory democracy and the requirements of good citizenship. However, since an Italian-American identity never conflicted with adopting democratic values, the ethnic group remained cohesive and never assimilated the conservative, individualistic economic views associated with the old-stock,

affluent Americans who typically ran the programs. Democratic beliefs primed them for engagement with American government and laid a foundation onto which they grafted compatible ideas taken from leftist and Fascist influences circulating within their ethnic community.

**A Clean Slate**

Most Italian immigrants lacked a robust civic culture when they arrived in the United States. They had an adversarial view of the government and state that they left.4 The acceleration of mass migration to the United States during the 1890s and early 1900s coincided with a highly chaotic period in Italian history. According to scholar Giordano Bruno Guerri, the creation of the Italian nation during this time had more to do with shared misery and discontent than Risorgimento ideals related to “the religion of the homeland, … loyalty to the State, or a communal hold of consciousness.”5 Political expression, and disapproval, existed, but as Donna Gabaccia stated, “Italian workers could not be expected to participate in politics as workers increasingly did in other nations.”6 A migratory proletariat emerged, and it found employment in Europe and the Americas. Disenfranchisement in Italy and abroad created an internationalist outlook. Direct challenges to the Italian state came from the peasants who remained, but their methods consisted of unorganized protests rather than active political parties to challenge the government from within the system.7

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7 Gabaccia, 68–69.
The state was a hindrance rather than a means of help. For example, in 1920, Paul Del Rosso arrived in the greater Pittsburgh area at age nine to join his father. Among the few things that he remembered decades later about his small village in the Abruzzo region was the cleanliness of the surrounding forests; since the government prohibited cutting down trees, the wooded areas were cleared of twigs and fallen branches almost immediately by poor Italians searching for firewood.\(^8\) Additionally, no local schools existed because they were “not where ordinary people lived.” Instead, they were in Piedmont, the home of the Italian king.\(^9\) Schools existed in other areas of Italy besides the northern region of Piedmont, but the idea articulated by Del Rosso is clear: the government benefited the elite and not ordinary people.

Del Rosso’s worldview had roots dating back to the creation of a unified Italy in 1861. The *Risorgimento* formed the Italian state, but not necessarily one Italian nation. Unification of the peninsula involved consolidating various regions under the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia. This process lacked popular consent as unifiers took much of the territory by force, and the subsequent plebiscite surveyed only a narrow, elite section of the population. Leaders encouraged people to view themselves as part of an Italian nation to provide legitimacy to the state over the following decades, but efforts were unsuccessful, especially concerning southern Italy.\(^10\) The peasants in the southern regions viewed the state as an intrusion that occasionally appeared to collect taxes and conscript young men

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9 Del Rosso, 3.
without leaving many tangible benefits. Unification worsened conditions for those lacking property. The state sold large tracts of land once held in common or by the Catholic Church. An unorganized rebellion occurred, and the state subdued the ‘brigands’ by force in a conflict that lasted throughout the 1860s. The new government’s composition contributed to the belief that those in power did not intend to serve average citizens. The Piedmontese monarchy and parliament were the foundation for the new national government, and conservative monarchists controlled the system. The wealthy and those with ties to the aristocracy predominated the appointed senators. Elected deputies in the lower chamber were local elites and prone to provincialism. Their indifference to national concerns, high residency costs in the capital, and disillusionment (members of parliament passed most legislation with little debate) created a high rate of absenteeism. Since the Italian state and government formed without a popular mandate, many lower-class subjects were skeptical about its place in their lives.

The operation of the state over the next fifty years confirmed beliefs held by emigrants like Del Rosso that the Italian government failed to address the needs of regular people. Government repression against ‘brigandage’ spawned an anarchist movement, which in turn furthered state intervention. Courts condemned anarchist radicals to ammonizione, restrictions on their movement and freedom, and domicilio coatto, internal exile to prison or one of several Mediterranean islands. These methods succeeded at

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limiting anarchist politics to small cells by the 1880s and 1890s, but not without advancing the narrative of state tyranny.\textsuperscript{14} The government’s response to economic issues deepened popular criticism. By the 1880s, foreign competitors, including American grain producers and Asian silk manufacturers, decimated sectors of the Italian economy. Resultant tariffs meant to stabilize Italian businesses failed. A tariff war with France closed markets for Italian products, and Italian banks faltered once foreign investors withdrew their funds. To average Italians, late-nineteenth-century colonial endeavors in Africa appeared to drain their country of money that politicians should have spent at home during years of economic crisis. The government’s inability to improve the situation brought frequent riots and protests. These culminated during the 1890s with the Sicilian \textit{Fasci}, a movement that the government put down by force in 1894 and resulted in a wave of emigration from the island, and numerous food riots in 1898, most notably in Milan, because of the high cost of bread.\textsuperscript{15}

When the government did act to solve national problems, its methods were slow, gradual, and moderate. Politicians relied on \textit{trasformismo}, a technique in which leaders governed by using centrist coalitions to blunt the ideological extremes that may have challenged the status quo. Giovanni Giolitti was a notable practitioner. During his long career, which included multiple, noncontiguous terms as prime minister between 1892 and 1921 that coincided with the height of Italian immigration to the United States, Giolitti accommodated challenges from the ideological right and left by offering small concessions

\textsuperscript{14} Nunzio Pernicone and Fraser M. Ottanelli, \textit{Assassins against the Old Order: Italian Anarchist Violence in Fin de Siècle Europe} (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2018), 29–36.

\textsuperscript{15} Clark, \textit{Modern Italy}, 86–87, 115–18, 121–27.
to subordinate the political extremes under liberal, centrist rule. As interior minister, he responded moderately to a significant strike wave in 1901. Rather than punish striking workers with immediate state repression, Giolitti positioned the government as neutral in the disputes if they were peaceful, allowed strikebreakers to enter the workplace, and maintained public services. He urged union leaders and employers to find agreement. Giolitti requested more police funding and instructed prefects to monitor potential union activity and have the military ready to respond if needed.\textsuperscript{16} There has been some debate about the interpretation of \textit{trasformismo}. While some scholars viewed \textit{trasformismo} as a sinister mechanism to uphold hegemony, others have argued that it was necessary to ensure government continuance in light of challenges from radicals. Italy was a young state, formed in 1861, and moderate politicians governed from the center to respond to the extremes that threatened the state’s legitimacy. Whether a form of elite domination or a necessary evil, \textit{trasformismo} created an Italian government that reacted slowly to the needs and desires of regular people.\textsuperscript{17} Immigration to the United States was a response to government failures, and Italians arrived with a poor assessment concerning the state’s role in ordinary people’s lives.

this was still a fraction of the population. In 1913, the eligible electorate increased again to over eight million, or about 24 percent of the population, but it was not until the 1919 elections that universal manhood suffrage took effect. Italian women gained the full right to vote in June 1946. Most immigrants, therefore, lacked experience with participatory democracy. Trasformismo further stifled expression. Various new parties and movements arose with the expansion of the vote, but the political system did not feel their weight until after the First World War. The Italian Socialist Party formed in 1892, and while it claimed numerous members and parliamentary allies by 1913, it was a fragile organization that lacked a large, formal base of registered supporters. Other groups, including the Nationalists, the Catholic-oriented Popular Party, and the Fascists, arose immediately before or after the First World War to challenge Giolitti and the centrist liberals.

Furthermore, the expansion of the right to vote made a negligible difference before the conflict. The 1912 reform law that expanded voting rights to masses of poor and illiterate Italian men for the first time should have theoretically elected more reformist politicians to the chamber of deputies. Returns instead showed little change between the 1909 and 1913 elections as a similar number of traditional elites won seats in parliament.

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18 De Grand, The Hunchback’s Tailor, 5.
19 De Grand, 179, 215.
The lack of the right to vote suppressed a civic identity in many of the areas from which Italians emigrated, and various scholars have theorized that even a Fascist emphasis on all people being part of, controlled by, and responsive to the state did not entirely succeed in forging a people with more modern civic views and national attachments.\textsuperscript{23}

For many emigrants from Italian villages and small towns, the local power structure was the landowner class, not the government. As Marta Petrucewicz argued in \textit{Latifundium}, Italian estates helped peasants to navigate socioeconomic changes throughout the nineteenth century. Until the collapse of the \textit{latifondo} system around 1900, the landed elites served as the mediator between the state and the worker-peasant. Since the landowner-peasant relationship operated as a “guarantee system,” a compromise in which both landowner and peasant had mutual responsibilities to each other, most Italians within the system had little need to resort to outside entities, such as the government, for aid. The \textit{latifondo} system provided jobs for all able-bodied workers, operated as a moneylender, and often supplied minor assistance to the elderly, widows, and infirm.\textsuperscript{24} Years later, when immigrants looked back on their youth in Italy, the local moneyed elites, or as one interviewee put it, the “big man [who] own[ed] mostly everything” in his town of Patrica, had control.\textsuperscript{25} They were the first points of contact, rather than the state and its prefects, in


\textsuperscript{25} Elizio Montini, interview by unknown, transcript, 12 December 1979, 1, 5, box 2, folder 54, Beaver Valley Labor History Society Collection, 1909–1981, AIS.1981.08, Archives & Special Collections, University of Pittsburgh.
the local power structure, especially in southern agricultural areas that sent the most immigrants to the United States.  

This is not to say that all Italians immigrated to the United States absent of political considerations. Some fled from the government repression described above. One man claimed that his father went to western Pennsylvania precisely to escape Fascism. Michele Ponzio, born in 1900, attended the University of Catania in Sicily and earned a reputation of being politically outspoken. Ponzio’s father sent him to Heidelberg, a borough a few miles southwest of Pittsburgh, after warnings that Ponzio’s anti-Fascism would endanger himself and his family if he remained.

The principal reason for emigration, however, was economic. More common was the sentiment expressed by another that immigration was “strictly out of survival and desperation.” Cleveland’s La Voce del Popolo Italiano summarized the Italian position clearly: “He that emigrates from his country does so because he has to emigrate. … [The immigrant] comes here to ask work[,] to ask employment for those energies that special

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conditions do not permit his using in his native land.”

While most Italian Americans believed these and similar statements once they made comfortable lives in the United States, this view was only partially factual. The majority of European immigrants were not the poorest of society on the verge of starvation, but the middle-tier peasants who experienced declining futures as a modern capitalist society penetrated once remote towns and villages. Conditions did not force people to immigrate, but they highly encouraged it. Migration was the only sensible option for those who could afford the steamship ticket. The Italian government failed to provide solutions, and people left for opportunities abroad rather than hope that politicians would provide answers in the future.

When arriving in the United States, most Italian immigrants lacked a history of civic values and a sense of their place and purpose within a democracy. Although Italy gradually expanded the franchise before the 1920s, many did not benefit because they had already left. Those who came to the United States immediately after the First World War, before American immigration restriction laws effectively ended the mass movement of people, may have participated in a couple of elections. However, a few years of enfranchisement did not automatically erase decades of distrust toward the state. The Italian government was at best unresponsive and at worst repressive concerning their needs. Once they understood the protections and rewards that citizenship and voting offered in the United States, they began reevaluating their place in American democracy.

31 “'A Very Grave Error,'” La Voce del Popolo Italiano (Cleveland, OH), 22 January 1921, 2.
Pressures for Citizenship

It is best to view the Italian-American shift from nonengagement to civic participation as a process in which various entities nudged people toward politics. Those who came of age during the 1910s and 1920s felt vast pressures from mainstream American society and Italian-American community leaders to become politically engaged citizens. The initial impetus was the need for protection or immediate reward. Aliens naturalized to defend themselves from ongoing discrimination and avoid the worse penalties of the recent immigration restriction laws and Prohibition. Newcomers acquired citizenship with the belief that it made them more competitive in the job market. These pressures alone did not create a group of people who suddenly viewed participatory government differently. The process of gaining citizenship, not the physical naturalization certificate, caused them to reevaluate their importance in the system.

American nativists anticipated that immigration restriction would arrest the growing size and potential power of many “lesser” nationalities in the United States by barring new arrivals from places like Italy. The plan backfired and strengthened these “undesirable” people’s ability to have a voice in American government and society. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the end of mass migration reinforced Italian-American communities by creating stability for the population. As fewer immigrants arrived and repatriation to Italy became permanent, Italians created families and a new generation of American-born children. They planted deeper roots in the United States.

Immigration restriction prompted newcomers to seek out citizenship as a means of protection and opportunity. They came to believe that many of the reasons posited by lawmakers for restriction were falsehoods meant to conceal the truth that certain people
were not welcome in the United States. For example, one of the main arguments offered by prolabor supporters was that restriction would improve the workingman’s economic position by tightening the job market. However, as Cleveland’s La Voce del Popolo Italiano argued concerning the literacy test, a method for limiting immigration that had been regularly raised and debated by Congress from the 1890s until passed in 1917, the ability to read and write was not a marker of a person’s character. Literacy was not a guarantee that kept people from the poor house, manual labor jobs such as ditch digging and coal mining, and criminality, including murder. Specific unskilled jobs needed filling in the United States, and Americans should have welcomed immigrants to perform them. Additionally, since the United States was an exporter nation, it was in the country’s interest to receive new immigrant populations since they, especially those in the next generation, could open new markets and facilitate transnational trade due to their bilingualism and knowledge of both nations and cultures.

Italian Americans disagreed with immigration restriction, but they learned that they were not powerless. Although the ethnic group experienced discrimination and American society cast its members as “others” or “inbetweens,” racially white but at the bottom of the social hierarchy, they – unlike African Americans and many Asian Americans – were never officially denied the right to citizenship and its associated protections.

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34 “The Immigration Bill Passes,” La Voce del Popolo Italiano, 18 December 1920, 2. Page 2 of this source was mistakenly printed as 17 December 1920.
35 “A Very Grave Error,” La Voce del Popolo Italiano, 22 January 1921, 2.
36 “One of the Opportunities for the Sons of the Foreign Born in America,” La Voce del Popolo Italiano, 15 January 1921, 2.
offered a place to Italian immigrants through civic nationalism. They found conditional acceptance if they became citizens and adopted American civic values related to democratic government, liberty, and rights.\textsuperscript{38} The benefits of citizenship were too great to reject, and the ethnic press urged longtime residents to take advantage of the offers that the United States presented them by naturalizing.\textsuperscript{39} Some states had employment and licensing laws that disadvantaged aliens during the 1920s, and local control over New Deal-era relief programs sometimes illegally discriminated against noncitizens.\textsuperscript{40} Fear, rather than reward, was an equal – if not stronger – pressure to naturalize. \textit{La Voce del Popolo Italiano} urged readers to be proactive and file for their first papers for citizenship before more restrictive laws went into effect.\textsuperscript{41} In 1925, the ethnic press informed readers that there was a high probability that Congress would pass new laws to register all foreigners to find and deport illegal aliens.\textsuperscript{42} The best counter to existing and potential discriminatory laws was to gain citizenship.

\textsuperscript{38} Gary Gerstle, \textit{American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century} (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 4–8, 44–47. As Gerstle shows throughout his work, it was conditional because new European immigrants had to adopt (or at least not challenge) America’s racial order. As long as they tolerated the equivalence of citizenship with whiteness, they were judged by a different standard, one in which adoption of American values made them acceptable for full inclusion into the nation.

\textsuperscript{39} “La crisi attuale,” \textit{La Voce del Popolo Italiano}, 18 December 1920, 1.

\textsuperscript{40} Roediger, \textit{Working Toward Whiteness}, 148; Daniels, \textit{Guarding the Golden Door}, 66.

\textsuperscript{41} “Il dovere degli stranieri,” \textit{La Voce del Popolo Italiano}, 1 January 1921, 1.

\textsuperscript{42} “Per la Registrazione Obbligatoria degli Stranieri negli S. U.,” \textit{La Trinacria} (Pittsburgh, PA), 2 October 1925, 5. A mass roundup did not occur, but deportations increased steadily during the 1920s from 2,762 at the start of the decade to 19,865 in 1933. See Daniels, \textit{Guarding the Golden Door}, 66.
A desire for family reunification caused some to naturalize. In 1921, Congress passed a new immigration law that, for the first time, set a cap on new arrivals to the United States and assigned quotas to various European nationalities. This measure was followed in 1924 by the Johnson-Reed Act, which established more stringent allocations. Rather than use the recent 1920 census, Congress calculated new quotas by taking two percent of each ethnic group’s population as found in the 1890 census. The earlier version was a specific choice; most southern and eastern Europeans arrived in the United States after 1890, and this assigned a lower quota number for less desirable groups, like the Italians. Although discriminatory, the new laws offered a significant concession. Congress included preferences and exceptions for family members of citizens in both statutes. The 1924 law granted entrance to citizens’ wives and children (if they were unmarried and under the age of eighteen) outside of the quota. Furthermore, the law prioritized family reunification when assigning visas under the official quota cap, and it offered parents of citizens first preference. Immigrants learned to operate under these new rules. The ethnic press reported that as Congress debated whether to keep the exceptions in the Johnson-Reed Act, some 35,000 wives and children had entered the United States from 1921–1924 outside of official quotas. Although laws set Italy’s official allocation number at 3,845 people, actual immigrations were over twice this figure for the fiscal year 1925–1926 because of the exceptions. Annual Italian immigration to the United States from quota and non-quota

43 Daniels, 48–57; “Le Mogli di Cittadini e la Loro Entrata negli Stati Uniti,” Il Cittadino Italo-Americano (Youngstown, OH), 16 August 1924, 4.
sources grew from 8,000 in 1924 to 22,000 in 1930 primarily because of the family reunion provisions,\textsuperscript{46} and many who arrived during the 1920s noted that their husbands or fathers sought citizenship to bring them over.\textsuperscript{47}

Discriminatory policies in other areas of American law and society also encouraged Italian Americans to seek citizenship for protection. Prohibition was the most prominent example. As noted in the previous chapter, Italian Americans prided themselves on their community and institutions. Imbibing wine together was one foundation of their social culture, so alcohol restrictions became viewed as a personal assault on the ethnic group.\textsuperscript{48}

In addition to a cultural issue, Prohibition became an economic dilemma because it had the potential to upset the boarding system. Many lodgers were recent arrivals from Italy, and they expected wine either included with their rent or for sale by the host. Some broke the law because compliance threatened relied upon forms of supplemental income.\textsuperscript{49}

\textsuperscript{46} Daniels, \textit{Guarding the Golden Door}, 56–57.


\textsuperscript{48} “Un Bicchiere di vino!,” \textit{La Voce del Popolo Italiano}, 14 February 1920, 1.

\textsuperscript{49} Aldo Ferrato, interview by Cathy Cerrone, transcript, 30 November 1995, 14, 1999.0068, Detre Library and Archives, Senator John Heinz History Center, Pittsburgh, PA; Clara Grillo, interview by Annette Fromm, transcript, 31 October 1978, 30, box 2, folder 14, Greater Cleveland Ethnographic Museum Records, 1971–1990, MS 5175,
From the beginning, Italian Americans believed that the “noble experiment,” as reformers called Prohibition, would fail. The ethnic press protested the law throughout the 1920s. It created anarchy in cities, and the act needed to be either wholly enforced or rescinded. Prohibition created “the spectacle of a whole nation gone criminal” and ushered in “the most hypocritical years known to the history of our country” as people broke the law or found loopholes. Prohibition did not solve problems, but it did cost the United States considerably as it necessitated increased spending on police and prisons, robbed the government of an important revenue source, and contributed to criminality. The ethnic press quantified this failure; by early 1931, Prohibition was directly responsible for 1550 deaths, and some 1,000 doctors and 500 pharmacists operating as part of a New York City “syndicate” were charged with bootlegging after they wrote and filled phony prescriptions for whiskey.

Reporting of arrests within the Italian-American community became common. In January 1920, two police officers, disguised as streetcar drivers, raided Albert Fasolo’s saloon on Mayfield Road in Cleveland’s Little Italy after asking the bartender for “a drink with ‘kick.’” The report of the arrest of Bessie De Marco, who worked at New Roma

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Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, OH; Anna Forno, interview by Cathy Cerrone, transcript, 12 December 1995, 32, 1998.0200, Detre Library and Archives, Senator John Heinz History Center, Pittsburgh, PA.

50 “Prohibition and Anarchy,” La Voce del Popolo Italiano, 18 December 1920, 2. Page 2 of this source was mistakenly labeled as 17 December 1920.

51 “It Won’t Last,” La Voce del Popolo Italiano, 8 January 1921, 2.

52 “After One Year,” La Voce del Popolo Italiano, 5 February 1921, 2.

53 “Quanto costa la proibizione,” La Trinacria, 2 October 1925, 5.


56 “ Arrestati perchè [sic] vendevano liquori,” La Voce del Popolo Italiano, 10 January 1920, 1.
Restaurant on East Ninth Street near downtown Cleveland, began humorously as agents discovered that she sold liquor that she hid in her stockings. Her punishment was a four-hundred-dollar fine, a large sum of money in 1921. Newspaper articles about raids and arrests reminded Italian Americans about the possibility of conviction for making or transporting liquor and how costly it could be for acts that only a few years prior were legal.

A constant theme in later interviews concerning Italian Americans during this period was the ubiquity of alcohol, even in light of possible punishments. Family members made wine and liquor, transported moonshine across state lines, and operated illegal speakeasies out of homes and backrooms. One man remembered his response when Prohibition ended. At the time, he was a student at the Carnegie Institute of Technology,

57 “Il whisky nelle calze,” La Voce del Popolo Italiano, 19 February 1921, 1.
and his professor and classmates wanted a taste of the no-longer forbidden vice after legalization. The Italian American declined, and he told them half in jest, “no, we are very familiar with beer and wine, we always have it at home.” Alcohol flowed freely regardless of possible punishment.

According to Italian Americans, the problem was not that they had a drinking culture but that an unnecessary law targeted them. Prohibition did little to stamp out any negatives related to alcohol in the Italian-American community because they were the exception and not the norm. As George P. Bauer, a settlement worker at Cleveland’s Hiram House, later stated, he routinely turned a blind eye to the “gallons of ‘dago red’ wine in the small serving room” when the institution hosted weddings. He continued that in his “16 years living in that slum, and in and out of hundreds of homes, [he] never saw a drunk Italian, Slav, Greek, Russian, Mexican or negro.” A 1934 Hiram House “Liquor Control Questionnaire” concerning Cleveland supported Bauer’s observations: “To sum up, repeal has made little difference in poorer sections but has increased drinking in better ones.” As much as teetotalers believed that Prohibition would solve society’s ills, its effect on Italian Americans was negligible. Breaking Prohibition allowed nativists to cast the ethnic group as “others” and unacceptable. Il Cittadino Italo-Americano mocked the evangelical preacher Billy Sunday for his belief that “they [the ‘foreigners’] are some filthy people

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60 Rea and Rea, interview, 5–6.
61 Rea and Rea, 6.
62 George P. Bauer to John J. Grabowski, “Hiram House,” letter, 26 February 1976, 25, George P. Bauer Correspondence, MS 4325, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, OH.
63 Hiram House, “Liquor Control Questionnaire,” report, 5 May 1934, 2, box 37, folder 12, Hiram House Social Settlement Records, MS 3319, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, OH. Within these “poorer sections” were “Italians and other southern European nationalities,” along with African Americans.
because they drink.” The paper suggested that the preacher must have been drunk himself to propose such ideas.\(^6^4\) Those outside of the community were ignorant about the group and its culture. When another minister and temperance advocate visited Italy in 1925, he noticed the abundance of wine and spent eight weeks of his trip looking for evidence of drunkenness. He failed to find any. As Pittsburgh’s \textit{La Trinacria} concluded, American Prohibition law, not the alcohol itself, created problems.\(^6^5\)

If Prohibition had been only a private moral and religious issue, it would not have elicited much of a response from the Italian-American community. However, since Prohibition was the law of the land and infractions led to real-world repercussions, Italian Americans quickly learned to be concerned. As one Aliquippa, Pennsylvania, resident remembered, the police raided homes – including a neighbor’s house in which they broke down the door – without any search warrants because people did not understand their rights.\(^6^6\) Nicola Criscione of Youngstown, Ohio, agreed. Enforcement of the dry laws was a means to target and harass certain ethnic groups. Vice squads acquired “John Doe warrants,” which allowed them to search anyone’s home at will. When they raided Criscione’s residence, part of a routine neighborhood canvas, the family followed the police closely through every room. The officers supposedly planted evidence in the past, and the policeman who arrived with a basket of liquor – presumably bottles collected

\(^{65}\) “Punti e Spunti: Sono ubbriaconi gli italiani?,” \textit{La Trinacria}, 2 October 1925, 1.
\(^{66}\) Ormond Montini, interview by unknown, transcript, 2 August 1978, 8, box 2, folder 55, Beaver Valley Labor History Society Collection, 1909–1981, AIS.1981.08, Archives & Special Collections, University of Pittsburgh.
during previous raids – refused to leave the contraband outside. The notion of police abuse of power and harassment in immigrant communities was not an illusion created later in popular memory. *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* printed a disturbing event in which police raided the Youngstown home and restaurant of Minnie Manilla in 1928. They found no alcohol and made no arrests, and Manilla sued the police for damages. After her action, the police arrested her and stated that they had found some 2.86 percent alcohol during the first raid on her home. The newspaper was disgusted by what it viewed as retaliation against an innocent woman.

Another issue was the uneven application of the law, which made Prohibition confusing to many in the ethnic community. As one man remembered, if a bootlegger knew someone of importance, he received a pass from the police. Less prominent lawbreakers, including most Italian Americans and other new immigrant groups who lacked connections, were arrested. In other cases, a prescribed system for breaking the law emerged. Guido Ferrari of Pittsburgh accidentally became involved in the liquor business. Some organized bootleggers had convinced his future father-in-law to sell alcohol at his home. While visiting the family, Ferrari served an undercover agent and was arrested. This was not an issue, as he explained: “At the time, … they had a fellow, anybody who

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67 Nicola Criscione, interview by William Jenkins, transcript, 8 May 1984, 6–8, Youngstown State University Oral History Program: Ku Klux Klan Project: Personal Experiences, O. H. 311, Maag Library, Youngstown State University, Youngstown, OH.
69 Bert Iacobucci, interview by unknown, transcript, 23 October 1979, 14–16, box 2, folder 49, Beaver Valley Labor History Society Collection, 1909–1981, AIS.1981.08, Archives & Special Collections, University of Pittsburgh.
got arrested, he used to go down and put the bonds out for them. Because almost, not everyday, but almost everybody used to sell booze, and somebody got arrested on and off.”

A one-hundred-dollar fee was enough to dismiss the case: fifty dollars to the lawyer and fifty dollars to the judge. The problem was that leniency differed by location. In New Castle, Pennsylvania, attorneys, judges, and policemen frequented an Italian-American speakeasy without trouble. However, in Homer City, Pennsylvania, another man spent six months in jail for the same type of action, selling wine out of a backroom.

The discriminatory nature of the law, including the feeling of being targeted for their culture and the unevenness of punishment, boosted interest in civics. Prohibition dovetailed with concerns surrounding immigration law for those born in Italy because alien bootleggers were subject to potential deportation. There was no large-scale expulsion for simple liquor possession and minor bootlegging, but immigrants did not know at the time whether Prohibition enforcement officials would have successfully lobbied Congress for more lax deportation requirements. Some feared the worst if caught. In one late example, December 1932, from the Cleveland Plain Dealer, dry enforcement agents arrested Patsy Gliozzo, an unemployed carpenter who told authorities that he had become a bootlegger –

71 Ferrari, 24.
73 Carmen Amabile, interview by Cathy Cerrone, transcript, 23 June 1994, 1, 8, 10–11, 1995.0092, Detre Library and Archives, Senator John Heinz History Center, Pittsburgh, PA.
74 Patti, interview, 14–15.
all of four days’ worth – to provide for his pregnant wife. He spent his time in jail crying because, according to a deputy marshal, “he’s scared he’s going to be deported.” His story and fears were likely not a ruse because agents narrowly saved his life after Gliozzo attempted to hang himself in the jail cell.\textsuperscript{77} The children of immigrants, who were citizens by birth, did not have to fear deportation, but they still faced hefty fines and other punishments.

The ethnic press encouraged Italian Americans to get involved in politics to fight and eventually overturn Prohibition.\textsuperscript{78} As \textit{La Voce del Popolo Italiano} told readers during a 1920 registration drive, “the vote is our weapon,” and “he who does not register is a deserter in the electoral fight.”\textsuperscript{79} Liquor laws, immigration restrictions, and other forms of perceived discrimination pushed Italian aliens toward gaining citizenship and the naturalized and native-born toward expressing their rights openly, a story described in more detail in the context of Italian-American political clubs in chapter five.

\textbf{The Americanizing Agents}

In October 1925, Rev. A. Di Santo of Mt. Pleasant, Pennsylvania, recounted recent comments made by a local businessman concerning his polling station experience. The man, “one of our fellow citizens,” Di Santo began, denounced ethnic voters: “A respectable American cannot go to the polls … without having to brush through a gang of filthy and greasy Italian women.” Di Santo rejected the businessman’s comments and views. These women were citizens, and they performed their “patriotic duty.” He continued by asserting

\textsuperscript{78} “Il Nuovo Piano di Battagli [sic],” \textit{La Voce del Popolo Italiano}, 21 February 1920, 3.
\textsuperscript{79} “Registratevi,” \textit{La Voce del Popolo Italiano}, 16 October 1920, 1.
their rights: “Does not the Constitution of the United States give equal rights to all its citizens? And, let it be understood that these Italian women are citizens of the United States, and any one trying to keep them away from the polls, even by a mere sneer, is disloyal to the Constitution.” In Di Santo’s opinion, the underlying motive for these comments was not the women’s hygiene but that “they turned out in such numbers.”80

Rev. Di Santo expressed the concept of civic nationalism, the belief that citizens’ rights and participation defined the American nation. Many immigrants arrived in the United States without this belief. Their past experiences in Italy taught them to hold the state and government at arm’s length, but conditions in the United States prompted a reconsideration. Fear and concerns about nativist-led discrimination, immigration law, and Prohibition caused them to view knowledge of the American system of law and government as essential. Italian Americans increasingly understood the importance of acquiring citizenship for protection and the benefits it conferred, and they turned to a variety of entities for assistance. Organizations such as settlement houses, schools, mutual aid societies, and the ethnic press supported them on their journey toward citizenship, voter registration, and political participation. In the process of learning about their rights and duties, their view of their own place in the American system changed. They adopted civic nationalism and a belief in participatory democracy, which proved crucial during the years of the New Deal.

There is one critical caveat concerning this period of American history. While the act of gaining citizenship papers had long been available to most foreigners, the process to

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acquire them changed under the Naturalization Act of 1906. During the nineteenth century, American leaders held a Jeffersonian view of American society, one in which assimilation occurred when immigrants modeled themselves after yeoman farmers and adopted their values. As demographics shifted to urban residences and industrial occupations by the start of the twentieth century, the federal government sought more stringent means to create loyal and knowledgeable citizens. Motivated by nativism and concerns about whether new arrivals would adopt fundamental American values, Congress strengthened naturalization to ensure that new citizens acquired essential democratic beliefs in addition to their paperwork.81

Before 1906, the United States operated a haphazard naturalization system. Local courts could grant citizenship, and approval was in the hands of the judge. Although some magistrates tested applicants’ knowledge of government, law, and the Constitution, this was not an obligation, and other judges did not bother with exams. Even the five-year residency requirement was unevenly applied because it was difficult to verify. Political machines in some cities took advantage of the situation, and they possibly played a role in naturalization because rates differed significantly by location.82 For example, albeit an unsuccessful one ultimately, in October 1902, a local Irish-American Democratic party

82 Irene Bloemraad, “Citizenship Lessons from the Past: The Contours of Immigrant Naturalization in the Early 20th Century,” Social Science Quarterly 87, no. 5 (December 2006): 927, 931–35, 945–46, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6237.2006.00409.x. Bloemraad organized machine politics under the larger category of political mobilization. Although it can be argued that the influence of coercive machines has been overstated, the successful ability of local parties to mobilize voters in general likely contributed to higher naturalization rates.
leader in St. Louis, Missouri, offered members of the Italian-American community citizenship and alcohol in exchange for their support. The political machine took men to the courthouse and processed them en masse. The Democrats continued to work with Giovanni Barbaglia, the leader of the North Italy American Society, who presented names of potential voters in exchange for more than ninety forged naturalization certificates. Barbaglia turned state’s evidence, and the court indicted and convicted the machine-associated perpetrators in 1903.\(^3\)

Granting naturalization without requiring new citizens to learn about their rights, privileges, and responsibilities created a group of people who were American on paper but not by values. The new 1906 law forced those who wanted citizenship to learn about the beliefs associated with it. United States circuit and district courts and other courts of record now processed standardized application forms, and knowledge of English became required.\(^4\) Candidates had to undergo standard procedures, including a civics test based on knowledge of the Constitution. The exact composition was left open.\(^5\) The new Bureau of Naturalization advocated for the view that civics included understanding the Constitution’s language and showing an attachment to its values. In 1914, Richard K. Campbell and

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Raymond Crist, the agency’s director and deputy, initiated a new program to provide more guidance. Influenced by the ongoing Americanization movement, which sought to assimilate immigrants rapidly, the pair created educational materials that instilled attachment to American civic values in addition to knowledge of government. The Bureau of Naturalization worked with various ethnic groups, private Americanizing organizations, and public schools (including night programs catering to immigrants) to spread its citizenship philosophy.\textsuperscript{86} Stricter barriers were arguably one contributing factor to the declining rate of naturalization, which fell from 65 percent of all foreign-born males over the age of twenty-one in 1900 to 49 percent in 1920.\textsuperscript{87} The quantity declined, but the quality of new citizens increased. These requirements forced all potential citizens to learn about the intricacies of federal, state, and local government, the US Constitution, the Bill of Rights, general liberties, American beliefs in representative democracy, and a basic understanding of US history. In sum, citizens created after the 1906 law generally learned and adopted a civic culture to a greater extent than those who previously naturalized. This produced a growing group of Italian Americans who believed in civic nationalism and their rights and duties as citizens.

The settlement house is perhaps the clearest nexus for the creation of an Italian-American civic identity. Many attributes for shaping a civic culture developed at that location. The settlements provided English and citizenship classes, hosted lectures and talks about American government and politics, and provided meeting spaces for many


\textsuperscript{87} Bloemraad, “Citizenship Lessons from the Past,” 930–32.
ethnic societies. In addition to engaging new arrivals, these organizations also sought to include children and youth, many of whom were American born and already citizens on paper. Realizing that alien parents with no knowledge of civics or a natural desire for political participation raised many of these children, settlement houses and other entities developed programs to indoctrinate young, often second-generation, Italian Americans to believe in the superiority of democratic governance. In sum, these entities worked to shape both young and old, alien and natural-born, toward becoming productive citizens.

Cleveland’s Hiram House, founded in 1896 by George Bellamy, was one notable example. Originally it catered to Jewish immigrants, but it became predominantly Italian by the First World War until African Americans began replacing the group in the postwar period. It served the enclave known as Big Italy.88 By 1910, Cleveland was the home of four additional settlements besides Hiram House, and Pittsburgh hosted another four.89 During the height of the movement, Cleveland contained a dozen settlements of various sizes, but Italian Americans chiefly utilized Hiram House and Alta House in Little Italy.90 Hiram House was one of the most notable settlements in the United States; however, many other cities and towns in western Pennsylvania and eastern Ohio contained similar organizations.

90 Van Tassel and Grabowski, *The Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*, 881.
Smaller entities dotted cities and towns throughout the region and served people beyond these metropolises. Community leaders founded the Akron Settlement House association in 1912 after a campaign by the Akron Beacon Journal newspaper climaxed with a local talk by famed New York City social reformer Jacob Riis. His departing words, “money cannot buy good citizens,” were quickly turned into action as the association enrolled over four hundred foreigners in educational classes during its first year in operation. The Woman’s Home Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church ran city missions in Altoona (the Italian Mission), Youngstown (the Pearl Street Community House), and Warren, Ohio (Rebecca Williams Community House), along with three associated programs in Pittsburgh. The Young Men’s and Young Women’s Christian Associations were involved in the movement. For example, the YWCA opened Neilson House in Youngstown’s Brier Hill neighborhood, an Italian-American enclave, in 1915.

Regardless of the settlement house’s name or affiliation, these institutions conditioned immigrants and their children to embrace a Protestant-type view of morality and civic responsibility. The settlement house was a product of its time. Progressive reformers, often advocates of Social Christianity, believed that the revitalization of the United States required a culture of sacrifice and reform. They urged people to condition

92 “Settlement Work Reviewed,” Akron Beacon Journal, 8 March 1913, 11.
their personal, private behaviors to conform to the public good. Settlement house workers often consisted of Christian, affluent, college-educated men and women trying to save souls while improving the United States. In tandem with Social Christianity, the settlement house movement operated under the guise of civic nationalism. New European immigrants, such as those from Italy, were offered a position in the American polity if they shed old identities and accepted American values. Cleveland’s Alta House provided an excellent example of this concern. According to the settlement’s namesake, Alta Rockefeller, the organization’s goal was to create “more liberally educated men and women; a purer home life; a better class of citizens and a higher regard for the government under which we live and the country of which we are all proud to be citizens.”

Hiram House, and other settlement projects, accomplished this by conditioning attendees to accept and value democratic ideals as the pinnacle of American identity, but they often began by enticing converts less overtly. As Jane Addams and some progressives believed, their work imparting American civic values was compatible with most forms of multiculturalism. To reach new immigrants, settlement workers needed to accommodate some of the newcomers’ culture. It was a pragmatic approach. George Bauer repeated

98 Alta House Social Settlement, “Report, 1900–1902,” report (Cleveland, OH, n.d.), 3, box 2, folder 12, Little Italy Historical Museum Records and Photographs, MS 5353, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, OH.
this idea decades later when he stated that Hiram House fulfilled its goal, which was to “help the immigrant to adjust to America and be a good citizen, but not sacrifice the cultural values of the old country.”100 The settlement houses found success by appealing to ethnic groups by their separate communities, and this catering to specific cultures continued throughout their existence.101 For example, Hiram House used music to lure first-time visitors. Settlement workers had scheduled lectures and film showings to draw new audiences, but the language barrier proved too great. In 1914, the organization found more success with Sunday concerts, which included folk songs, classical music, and selections from well-known operas.102 The community response was strong, and “Italian men came in increasing numbers and formed a rather critical but highly-appreciative musical audience.”103

Settlement house workers also utilized ethnic plays and dances, believing that participation by second-generation children would strengthen ties with their immigrant parents, thus reinforcing family stability.104 Nationality nights and cultural events gave Italian Americans, many of whom would have rejected attending lectures from unknown

participants had it been too authoritarian and demanded complete and immediate assimilation.

100 Bauer to Grabowski, “Hiram House,” 26 February 1976, 4.
101 Davis, Spearheads for Reform, 89–90. Settlement workers understood that Americanization was a difficult and sometimes alienating process because it meant shedding some parts of an immigrant’s previous identity. The workers favored the preservation of some culture to aid assimilation.
102 Hiram House, “Nineteenth Annual Report of the Hiram House,” report (Cleveland, OH, 1 October 1915), 50–52, box 50, bound volume 1, Hiram House Social Settlement Records, MS 3319, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, OH.
103 Hiram House, 51.
104 E. Prashek, “Neighborhood Program,” report, n.d., box 34, folder 1, Hiram House Social Settlement Records, MS 3319, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, OH.
figures, an entertaining reason to visit the settlements. For example, Cleveland-area settlement houses hosted “A Spring Festival” at Friendly Inn in 1925, during which an Italian-American group performed the Tarantella alongside folk dances by other ethnic populations.\(^\text{105}\) Other examples during the 1920s included the performances of “Drill of the Neapolitan Clowns” by the Dante Dramatic Club, the operetta *Gino e Mimi* by the Giuseppe Verdi Singing Club, *Magia Nera* (or *Black Magic*), a drama written by Hiram House worker F. Gasbarra (better known as Frank Casper) for the group Circolo Meridionale, and the famous Italian opera *Cavalleria Rusticana*.\(^\text{106}\) These cultural activities remained prominent throughout this period to the point that Casper, who was the head of the adult department, called for the continuation and promotion of many of these groups, including the Giuseppe Verdi Singing Club, in a 1931 evaluation.\(^\text{107}\)

If culture helped Hiram House gain new visitors, other forms of aid spread its reach, consolidated trust in the institution, and encouraged more participation with Americanization programs. For example, in 1924, George Bellamy described the encounter between Gaetano Gemelli and a staffer. Gemelli came to Hiram House one morning to

\(^{105}\) “A Spring Festival: Given by Girls of the Cleveland Settlement Houses,” program (Friendly Inn, 3754 Woodland Avenue, Cleveland, OH, 16 May 1925), box 60, folder 2, Hiram House Social Settlement Records, MS 3319, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, OH.

\(^{106}\) “World’s Harmonies: Fourth Annual Spring Festival,” program (Hiram House Auditorium, Cleveland, OH, 21 May 1927), box 60, folder 2, Hiram House Social Settlement Records, MS 3319, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, OH; “Spring Festival, 1929,” *Hiram House Life*, 11 May 1929, 4–5, box 60, folder 2, Hiram House Social Settlement Records, MS 3319, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, OH. The first source did not include a year but was held in 1927 if these were annual events.

\(^{107}\) Casper, “Dept. Adult Education: Evaluation of House Activities,” program evaluation, December 1931, box 30, folder 8, Hiram House Social Settlement Records, MS 3319, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, OH.
inquire why his young son, Salvatore, spent so much time there. The staffers reassured him that his son was safe at the settlement, participated with other boys in various clubs, and was a star basketball player. She encouraged Gemelli to come one night and watch Salvatore play. In some cases, the institution built trust even before people arrived in Cleveland, such as one Italian woman who swore that a letter of introduction from Hiram House expedited her processing at Ellis Island. In time, this level of trust reached the point that some Italian Americans sought settlement house workers to mediate personal disputes.

The settlements also offered meeting spaces to ethnic societies, and Casper included this in his 1931 evaluation of activities to promote. Some of these groups were large, such as the two-hundred-member Calabrese Lodge of the Sons of Italy and the ninety-member Bruno Chimirri mutual aid society. During the winter of 1932–1933, two dozen social organizations, with a total enrollment of 2355 members, met at Hiram House. Offering meeting space to ethnic organizations was typical. Around the same time, Little Italy’s Alta House hosted twenty-one societies and associations totaling almost

108 George Bellamy to Samuel Mather, letter, 18 March 1924, box 21, folder 6, Hiram House Social Settlement Records, MS 3319, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, OH.
109 Miss Moore, “Immigration,” report, n.d., box 37, folder 8, Hiram House Social Settlement Records, MS 3319, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, OH.
112 F. Casper, “Adult Dept,” weekly club schedule, 8 April 1930, 1, box 44, folder 1, Hiram House Social Settlement Records, MS 3319, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, OH.
113 “Analysis of 260 Winter Groups at Hiram House 1932–33 on an Interest Basis,” report, n.d., 2, box 30, folder 8, Hiram House Social Settlement Records, MS 3319, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, OH.
two thousand people.\footnote{La Voche Del Popolo [sic]} (newspaper clipping, 1 March 1931), box 5, folder 4, Alta House Records, MS 3401, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, OH. The settlement house workers conditioned immigrants and their children to trust their organizations by offering the group concessions, such as preferable activities and meeting space for ethnic associations. This mutual respect aided the success of the settlements’ Americanization efforts.

Progress City was a Hiram House program that encouraged youth civic engagement from its 1906 creation into the New Deal era.\footnote{UP, “Group Has Own Police, Mayor,” Mansfield News-Journal (Mansfield, OH), 30 July 1937, 18.} Asserting “that the welfare of a democratic nation depends upon an intelligent citizenship,” the objective of Progress City was to create a model town operated and governed by local children and teenagers.\footnote{“Progress City: An Answer to the Demand for a Civic Education,” report, n.d., 1, box 36, folder 3, Hiram House Social Settlement Records, MS 3319, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, OH. Undated, but possibly 1907 because the report speaks of Progress City as a new project undertaken the previous year.} Concerned about the annual dumping of “a million peasant immigrants from the most backward countries of Europe” into American cities, Hiram House sought to discourage vices amplified by poverty and overcrowding to ensure the future of the American polity.\footnote{“Progress City: An Answer to the Demand for a Civic Education,” 1.} The solution was youth civic education. Progress City assembled people from ages eight to eighteen during the summer. They created a city modeled after Cleveland, complete with a mayor, city clerk, city judge, and prosecuting attorney, among other positions. All participants belonged to “Industrial Departments,” each encompassing activities offered at the settlement house, such as carpentry, printing, or cooking. The workers earned Progress City money, out of which they owed a ten-percent income tax. They could purchase the goods created by the various departments or donated from local department stores with
their pay. The Industrial Departments served two purposes. First, occupational positions reinforced the notion of citizenship as a contributor to industry, society, and government. Those involved in printing, for example, published a weekly newsletter that included information about court proceedings, laws, and athletics. Second, the Industrial Departments acted as wards for electing city council members. Although participants held weekly elections for government positions, Progress City also included a General Assembly modeled after the democratic town halls held in colonial New England. During this democratic procedure, the citizens listened to addresses, received petitions, and created new laws in conjunction with the mayor and city council. The Progress City court handled minor infractions and arguments between participants, and punishments ranged from fines (in Progress City money) to temporary revocation of settlement house privileges, such as using the playground.118

In time, Progress City became more refined and an important Hiram House program. Participants received tags to document their activities and printed ballots, courtesy of the Hiram House printery, to mark their choices for elected officials.119 The program began with a vague “several hundred” mostly Russian, Jewish, and Italian children.120 The 1915 event attracted between 250 and 300 youths per week, with a total

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118 “Progress City: An Answer to the Demand for a Civic Education,” 1–8.
119 “Citizen Tag,” memorabilia, n.d., box 60, folder 4, Hiram House Social Settlement Records, MS 3319, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, OH; “Progress City Official Ballot,” memorabilia, 29 July 1912, box 60, folder 4, Hiram House Social Settlement Records, MS 3319, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, OH; “Progress City Official Ballot,” memorabilia, 27 July 1917, box 60, folder 4, Hiram House Social Settlement Records, MS 3319, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, OH.
120 “Progress City: An Answer to the Demand for a Civic Education,” 4.
enrollment of about 650.\footnote{Hiram House, “Nineteenth Annual Report of the Hiram House,” 42.} This number grew to over 800 in 1921, including 330 Italian boys and girls, the largest ethnic group involved.\footnote{Unknown to F. F. Prentiss, letter, 1 August 1921, 1, box 21, folder 3, Hiram House Social Settlement Records, MS 3319, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, OH; “Report on 1921 Progress City,” report, 5 September 1921, 8, box 36, folder 4, Hiram House Social Settlement Records, MS 3319, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, OH.} Organizers sought to bring government alive to young participants. The 1915 program included a field trip to the local courthouse.\footnote{Hiram House, “Nineteenth Annual Report of the Hiram House,” 44.} In 1921, Progress City brought in numerous outside speakers, including the mayor of Cleveland.\footnote{“Report on 1921 Progress City,” 1.} The newswriting class stressed the importance of the press, studied the \textit{Cleveland Plain Dealer} for style and form, and included assigned topics such as “Citizenship,” “An American Citizen,” and “A Progress City Citizen.”\footnote{Miss Lahna, “Newswriting,” report, 1927, box 37, folder 1, Hiram House Social Settlement Records, MS 3319, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, OH.}

Hiram House offered additional activities for youth civic development beyond the summer Progress City program. In 1914, the settlement created a junior juvenile court to build respect for the law. With the blessing of George S. Addams, the actual municipal juvenile court’s judge, the Hiram House derivative enforced rules based on the Ohio juvenile code and Cleveland city ordinances, such as concerning petty theft, gambling, and truancy. Boys over the age of fourteen applied to be probation officers by handing in a written request explaining the position’s duties while a local attorney sat as judge. Failure to follow a summons meant an appearance before Judge Addams’s court.\footnote{“Boys Hold Court at Hiram House,” \textit{Cleveland Plain Dealer}, 1 February 1914, 10; Hiram House, “Nineteenth Annual Report of the Hiram House,” 45–47.}
Youth groups sought to replicate participatory democracy and teach the fundamentals of government. Hiram House credited the boys’ clubs for bringing concerns about local housing conditions to the Cleveland city council’s attention. Boys programming leader P. D. Graham noted in his 1922–1923 report that as a child became a teenager and learned “to play as a member of a team[,] … there [was] an opportunity for the development of self government among the classes through the Junior Congress of Clubs.” Some took this to heart. The Utopian Club aspired “to teach [members] the principles of honest and intelligent self-government” as one of its purposes. Similarly, the Viton Club, organized by Italian-American boys in 1925 at the associated Anthony Wayne Community Center, included the “study of parliamentary law” as one of its attributes.

Active participation created an atmosphere in which youth learned the importance of voting and staying informed concerning politics, law, and government, a trait that they carried with them into adulthood. The Progress City newsletter displayed supportive testimony from participants about the importance of citizenship. Hiram House Life,

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127 Unknown to Allen Burns, letter, 24 June 1920, 3, box 21, folder 3, Hiram House Social Settlement Records, MS 3319, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, OH.
131 Rose Baldwin, “Why I Come to Progress City,” Progress City News, 27 July 1927, 2–3, box 37, folder 1, Hiram House Social Settlement Records, MS 3319, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, OH; Ruby Morgan, “Citizenship,” Progress City News, 11 July 1927, 3, box 37, folder 1, Hiram House Social Settlement Records, MS 3319, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, OH; Grace D’Amore, “Progress City,”
another student-printed monthly publication, echoed these sentiments: “We want fair judges; we want reasonable laws; we want an upright council; we want loyal, enthusiastic citizens.”

As George Bellamy proclaimed in his 1927 address for the summer program, “a number of boys and girls who have held official positions and worked at Progress City in earlier years today hold important positions, working for the city government, public schools, and private industries. … They tell me, especially those working for the government, that what they learned in Progress City helped to prepare them for their special work.”

These comments were more than hype pushed by settlement house employees to justify their efforts. As one newspaper article reported, in preparation for upcoming mock elections at the Anthony Wayne branch, which ran a similar program to Progress City called Merryburg, visitors overheard children discussing candidates on the playground. A few days later, the youth voted for their preferred councilmen and city manager using authentic ballot boxes supplied by the Cleveland election board.

One Italian-language newspaper concurred with Bellamy. The crosstown Alta House settlement helped produce several local Italian-American government officials, including councilman Alessandro DeMaioribus, assistant county prosecutor Michael A. Picciano, and assistant police

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Progress City News, 11 July 1927, 4, box 37, folder 1, Hiram House Social Settlement Records, MS 3319, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, OH.

132 “Progress City,” Hiram House Life, 11 May 1929, 2, box 60, folder 2, Hiram House Social Settlement Records, MS 3319, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, OH.

133 George Bellamy, “Mr. Bellamy’s Message to Progress City Citizens,” Progress City News, 10 August 1927, 1, box 37, folder 1, Hiram House Social Settlement Records, MS 3319, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, OH.

134 “Lay City at Anthony Wayne” (newspaper clipping, June 1929), box 62, folder 2, Hiram House Social Settlement Records, MS 3319, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, OH.
prosecutor D. H. Lorienzo. The settlement houses conditioned youth to accept and express their civic duties.

Americanization efforts targeted adults in addition to children. The rise of adult Americanization programming at Hiram House coincided with the implementation of the more stringent naturalization standards in 1906, and it served as a model for a citywide effort. Judge Manuel Levine, a Russian-Jewish immigrant who arrived in the United States as a young man in 1896 and immediately made use of Hiram House, taught the first citizenship class at the settlement in 1908 to a group of fifty people representing twelve nationalities. The municipal Immigration Bureau and private Cleveland Immigration League, which Levine helped organize and served as chairman, standardized assimilation and Americanization efforts by partnering with the local board of education, the YMCA and YWCA, nationalization courts, public libraries, and settlement houses. The Americanization Information Bureau (later the Citizens’ Bureau), created in 1917 to conduct citizenship lessons and offer help with naturalization paperwork and procedures, cooperated with Hiram House. These entities used points of contact within the immigrant communities to promote classes. The night programs were particularly successful –

135 “La Voche Del Popolo [sic]”; “Obituaries: Michael A. Picciano, lawyer,” Cleveland Plain Dealer, 16 April 1977, 11-B.
including a 44 percent increase in night school enrollment in one term – because they offered lessons during times convenient to the working class.139 The Cleveland Immigration Bureau also circulated a booklet, “The Immigrant’s Guide,” through its various partners. The guide offered advice about how to adjust to the American city and information on helpful institutions. Translated into eight or nine foreign languages, seventy thousand copies were printed by 1915.140

The “Citizenship Manual for Cleveland, Ohio” was one outcome of this standardization effort. Spurred by the Cleveland Immigration League, the city Immigration Bureau published the booklet for students enrolled in citizenship classes offered at settlement houses, public schools, and libraries.141 This forty-page document provided the fundamentals that aliens needed to learn to gain citizenship and American values. These included the following: a summary of the naturalization process along with sample forms; descriptions and graphs of the three branches of government; the composition of state and local government; the Constitution; traditional patriotic songs and oaths; a question-and-answer section; and, a list of laws pertaining to immigrants, such as codes about minors and tenant rental rights.142 One of the first lessons dealt with the meaning of citizenship. This included the advantages and the responsibilities of being an American: “You have the right to vote and help make the laws which govern our nation,” and new citizens had the

140 Cole, 40; Cleveland Immigration League, American Club and the City Immigration Bureau of Cleveland, “Citizenship Manual for Cleveland, Ohio” (booklet, Cleveland, OH, 1916), back matter, Pam. C239, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, OH.
142 Cleveland Immigration League, American Club and the City Immigration Bureau of Cleveland, “Citizenship Manual for Cleveland, Ohio.”
duty “to take an interest in American Government … [and] to vote intelligently and for the welfare of all the people.”

Trained teachers highlighted the meaning of civic nationalism in their lessons. R. E. Cole, the Cleveland Immigration League secretary, stated that citizenship classes had three areas of inquiry: “1. Organization and machinery of our government with emphasis upon its operations and functions. 2. Method of becoming a citizen. 3. Duties and responsibilities of citizenship compared with rights and privileges, setting forth the reciprocal and coöperative relationship of the principles of democracy.” To make classes civically engaging, Cole also encouraged teachers to make Americanization a lived experience by including patriotic stories, mock trials and city council meetings, speeches by public officials, and trips to public institutions. Adult education, in this sense, did not differ much from youth Americanization programming. It did, however, redefine the meaning of American citizenship to new arrivals. For the masses of Italian Americans who lacked a history with participatory democracy, naturalization classes encouraged them to view citizenship in terms of their rights and responsibilities concerning self-governance.

Boards of education and the public schools worked alongside Hiram House and other settlements to foster Americanization and citizenship. Across the United States, immigrants advocated for evening school classes. Italian residents petitioned the Cleveland

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143 Cleveland Immigration League, American Club and the City Immigration Bureau of Cleveland, 5.
144 Cleveland Immigration League, American Club and the City Immigration Bureau of Cleveland, 1.
146 Cole, 606.
Board of Education in 1910 for night school courses, including English. An in-home program for women began at the urging of Hiram House staff. Cultural practices and familial responsibility kept many immigrant wives from leaving the house, so settlement workers organized English-language classes in kitchens and living rooms for homemakers and their neighbors. Participants’ enthusiasm for the program led the board of education to agree to supply teachers for in-home classes of fifteen or more enrollees. Although period commentator Professor John J. Mahoney of Boston University criticized Ohio for not granting state funding aid for immigrant education programs, he praised its training policy – which built from the experiences in Cleveland – for preparing qualified instructors. Similar programs existed in Pennsylvania. Pittsburgh offered Americanization coursework for Italians through schools such as Westinghouse, Woolslair, Schenley, and Peabody.

American-born youth were also susceptible to similar efforts from the local schools, especially as lawmakers revised and better enforced compulsory attendance laws. The Pennsylvania legislature amended its statute in 1907 to require attendance until age

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148 Georgia M. Bowen, “’Kitchen Classes’ Bring Emancipation, Happiness, to Women of Foreign Birth,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 14 May 1922, women’s magazine section, 1, 11.
fourteen and authorized the searching of factories and mines to find truant child laborers to ensure compliance.\textsuperscript{152} After 1913, Ohio required all males between ages eight and fifteen and all females between ages eight and sixteen to attend public or private school.\textsuperscript{153} Unlike other ethnicities, Italian-American immigrants, at least in Cleveland, rejected sending their children to parochial schools, the only private institution that would have been financially feasible for most. Instead, Italian-American children attended public schools, complete with all of their Americanizing influences.\textsuperscript{154}

Other organizations served those whom the settlement houses and public schools failed to reach. The International Institute operated under the YWCA umbrella to provide classes and assistance to foreign-born women. These included English courses and multilingual pamphlets such as “Why Foreign-Born Women Should Learn English,” “What America Has for You,” and “Courts of Law and Their Use.”\textsuperscript{155} During one 1928 enrollment drive in Youngstown, the International Institute targeted prospective applicants in the local ethnic press and noted that the previous year netted two hundred students.\textsuperscript{156}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[156] “Per Chi Vuole Imparare l’Inglese e per Divenire Cittadino,” \textit{Il Cittadino Italo-Americano}, 22 September 1928, 2.
\end{footnotes}
For convenience, the organization offered nine different class times for English courses to prepare women for citizenship. Beginning the first week of October, participants had the option of choosing the location most convenient for them, including the main International Institute office in Youngstown, a community center, Neilson House (a settlement), a local school, and two factory sites, United States Steel’s Ohio Works and Truscon Steel Company. Concurrently, the YMCA advertised its Americanization classes for men. These efforts likely drew large numbers of ethnic Italians. According to the Pittsburgh International Institute, which prided itself on having served over two thousand individuals and families in 1930, “the Italian immigrants have been and are the most frequent visitors at the International Institute; more aid has been supplied to this group than to any other.”

Hiram House and other entities successfully conditioned immigrants and their children to become attentive American citizens. As one 1921 letter concerning those attending English and civics classes asserted, “I was surprised to see how quickly they had gotten the spirit of America, how interested they were in our country, and how much they knew about our government. The fact is, I think they would pass a better examination than a lot of American born citizens.” George Bellamy further illustrated the immigrants’ adoption of an American mentality in a letter a year later concerning a speech given by

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160 Unknown to F. F. Prentiss, letter, 30 April 1921, 2–3, box 21, folder 3, Hiram House Social Settlement Records, MS 3319, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, OH.
Judge Manuel Levine at the Italian American Citizens’ Club. Levine, who was responsible for early Americanization efforts in Cleveland and was “beloved by the Italians” and other white ethnics, presented a story about his civics class in 1908. At the start of the first lesson, he asked his students, “What is an American?” One nineteen-year-old replied, “a man who has a lot of money.” When Levine pressed for elaboration, the man explained that while “in Europe a man is called a great man when he is a great lawyer, a great doctor, [or] a great scientist,” Americans readily used the term “great American” to describe millionaires and the wealthy. When the course ended six months later, the young man revised his outlook: “In Europe, to be a citizen you have to die for a king; in America, you have to live for a great republic, not for yourself but for your country.” From advancements such as this made through club and class activities at Hiram House, Bellamy concluded that “the Settlement can help to make democracy real.” Citizenship class enrollments increased weekly, a trend that Bellamy noted with much satisfaction to a benefactor.

161 George Bellamy to F. C. Case, letter, 24 March 1922, 2, box 21, folder 4, Hiram House Social Settlement Records, MS 3319, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, OH. This is an unsigned copy of a letter to Case. Folder 4 is attributed to Bellamy.
162 Unknown to Bruno Lasker, letter, 1 March 1924, 1, box 21, folder 6, Hiram House Social Settlement Records, MS 3319, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, OH.
163 Bellamy to Case, 24 March 1922, 2. It is unclear if the event actually happened in 1908 because the Cleveland Plain Dealer reported a similar story in 1911. No matter the exact date, Judge Levine probably used the story repeatedly to highlight the importance of civics to prospective Americans. See “Declares Yankee Man with Cash,” Cleveland Plain Dealer, 13 January 1911, 4.
164 George Bellamy to F. F. Prentiss, letter, 7 February 1922, 1, box 21, folder 4, Hiram House Social Settlement Records, MS 3319, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, OH. This is an unsigned copy of a letter to Prentiss. Folder 4 is attributed to Bellamy.
It is best to think about this time from the late 1910s into the 1930s as an accelerating movement toward civic engagement as pressures from family and friends to attain citizenship and become politically involved reached a critical mass of people. Each successful naturalization class added new Italian-American citizens to the neighborhood, ethnic club, and family. They, in turn, induced others to attend classes and adopt civic, democratic values. Peer pressure and pride motivated many. After one man gained citizenship, his father, feeling “humiliated,” appeared “at Hiram House and very emphatically stated that he was going to show up his son; that not only he would become a citizen, but he could learn, by heart[,] the whole Constitution of the United States.” As citizenship and naturalization became normative, the expression of American values and political participation grew.

Perhaps the most significant inducement was due to the second generation. American-born children unconsciously brought foreign-born parents into the American system. The new generation – American citizens by birth and firmly rooted in the United States – encouraged the immigrant group to remain, adapt, and assimilate. For example, while Salvatore Gemelli’s father was concerned in 1924 about his son’s attendance at Hiram House, as described earlier in this chapter, the son’s engagement likely sparked an interest in the elder Gemelli to gain citizenship. Three years later, in 1927, after having lived in Cleveland for fourteen years, Gaetano Gemelli finally naturalized at age forty.²⁶⁶

²⁶⁵ “La Voce Del Popolo: Hiram House News” (newspaper clipping, 3 February 1938), box 62, scrapbook 2, Hiram House Social Settlement Records, MS 3319, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, OH.
²⁶⁶ “Gaetano Gemelli, Office No. 73794” (naturalization file card, Cuyahoga County, OH, 24 June 1927), https://familysearch.org.
Much of the willingness to acquire American citizenship and express civic values was because of the second generation.

The wider Italian-American community pushed the same message. The ethnic press played a role in Americanizing immigrants.167 Newspapers published recurrent question-and-answer guides for the naturalization test, summaries of American rights, voting and registration notices, and even an Italian translation of the Declaration of Independence.168 Numbers and lists of people completing naturalization classes and receiving citizenship served as civic achievement celebrations that gently pushed aliens toward the same goal.169 Ethnic societies complemented the newspapers. The Sons of Italy provided information

about citizenship classes and hosted some courses as well.\textsuperscript{170} The Italian Sons and Daughters of America and the Sons of Columbus, two other umbrella organizations, professed the same desire for Americanization and civic engagement.\textsuperscript{171} Additionally, the governance of these organizations was democratic in nature. The constitution for Youngstown’s Colombo lodge, formed in 1895, set clear parameters for involvement. The rules followed parliamentary procedure, and “every member ha[d] the right to speak in the General Meetings.”\textsuperscript{172} The only restrictions dealt with decorum. Comments were to be brief and direct, required being given the floor by the president, and no one member was allowed to dominate a discussion about a single topic. To hold office, elected candidates needed to have been a member in good standing for a year and be literate.\textsuperscript{173}

The result of all these Americanizing influences was a community that viewed itself as a part of the nation. As one letter accompanying a banquet donation stated: “Whether we [the members of the San Benedetto mutual aid society] contribute twenty-five or a thousand dollars, we know that the service rendered by Hiram House cannot be paid with money. We as a part of this community feel that our indebtedness to Hiram House can only be paid by thanks and loyalty to America and to you.”\textsuperscript{174} Although most Italians arrived in

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\textsuperscript{172} “Costituzione e Regolamenti della Loggia Colombo” (fraternal society membership book, Youngstown, OH, 20 January 1924), 11, in the author’s possession.
\textsuperscript{173} “Costituzione e Regolamenti,” 11, 13–14.
\textsuperscript{174} Ben Difranco to Mr. Derbyshire, letter, 20 June 1920, box 21, folder 3, Hiram House Social Settlement Records, MS 3319, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, OH.
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the United States with uncertain intentions, they made America their adopted nation. In the process, they also learned to appreciate and celebrate the democratic values at the heart of the American ideal.

**Civic Identity and the Influence of Italian Americanism**

Americanization succeeded in convincing many Italian Americans to seek citizenship and become politically engaged, but those efforts did not bequeath the community a political ideology beyond the adoption of civic nationalism. While Italian immigrants and their children experienced de facto discrimination, the United States was still a pluralist country by law. Citizenship meant accepting democratic values, and it did not require the complete rejection of a person’s previous culture. To express themselves as Americans, the ethnic group merged its history and values into the American narrative to claim a place in society. By rejecting a type of assimilation that would have erased their past, they doubled down on an Italian-American identity. It was through this lens that they interpreted political issues and built an ideology. Americanizing agents, such as the settlement house workers, sympathized with the new immigrants; however, their diverse lived experiences and daily personal contacts meant that the two groups had different outlooks. In sum, Italian Americans learned civic values as they Americanized, but their political ideas – beyond civic nationalism – came from their public sphere, not from the settlement houses or other organizations.

American history was a core element of civic education, and Italian Americans discovered that some patriotic narratives easily merged with a celebration of *italianità* (Italianness). They read stories about the American Revolutionary War and the lives of
George Washington and Abraham Lincoln. They emphasized the cases in which American and Italian histories became intertwined. For example, they noted with pride that Lincoln was a friend to the Italians and had offered a military post to their hero Giuseppe Garibaldi, a man who held the same character strengths as Washington and Thomas Jefferson. Italian Americans learned that their ancestors had a long history of assisting the development of the United States. Colonel Francis Vigo provided money and aid to George Rogers Clark during the Revolutionary War’s northwest campaign. Filippo Mazzei communicated with and influenced the political thoughts of Jefferson. Generals Edoardo Ferrero and Luigi Palma di Cesnola fought with distinction during the American Civil War, including Ferrero’s command at such noted battles as Antietam and Vicksburg. They claimed Christopher Columbus as the first immigrant, and Columbus Day rose as a birthright defense for Italians’ place in America.

Italian Americans benefitted from the friendly relationship between the United States and Italy before the Second World War. Unlike other ethnicities that had to shield themselves from association with their home nations because of the First World War or the rise of communism, those of Italian origin pointed to Italy as an American ally. The fact

that Americans and Italians fought the First World War against the same enemies meant that the conflict’s commemoration became a celebration of American and Italian patriotism, reinforcing Italian-American nationalism. Italian commander-in-chief General Armando Diaz’s 1921 tour of the United States offers a good example. As the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* wrote, “not only the 50,000 residents of Cleveland who are of Italian birth or ancestry, but the entire city will honor one of the most striking figures of the World War.”

Diaz’s visit to the city was significant because the US 332nd infantry regiment, which served on the Italian front during the war, consisted mainly of Ohioans. Chief Judge John P. Dempsey of the municipal court, who served as an army captain under Diaz, was a speaker. There was also no issue when Italian Commander Zopito Valentini gave a speech at a packed Park Theater in Youngstown about the history of the First World War and concluded with the belief that Italian Americans fit comfortably in both nations. It helped that the United States government sought favorable relations between the two countries. The foreign policy directions of both states were primarily aligned. Even after Fascist Italy’s aggressions in Ethiopia and Spain during the mid to late 1930s, the Roosevelt administration continued to reach out to Benito Mussolini’s government as a possible ally.

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179 “Cleveland ready for Welcome to Gen. Diaz Today,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 17 November 1921, 1.
180 “Cleveland ready for Welcome to Gen. Diaz Today,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 17 November 1921, 1, 2.
What those outside the community derided as dual patriotism, Italian Americans embraced as entirely consistent with Americanization. Those interviewed years later remembered the pride that their fathers had for both the United States and Italy. Hiram House worker George Bauer remarked that the Italian ethnic clubs proudly displayed both flags during the interwar period. Their approach stood in stark contrast to a communist meeting that he witnessed during the 1930s in which participants stood under a solitary, giant Soviet banner. When these societies hosted events, they included both countries’ national songs, the “Italian Royal March,” “Giovinezza,” and the American national anthem. A 1920 Columbia records advertisement showed a clear sign of this patriotic merger when it offered renditions of “America (My Country, ‘Tis of Thee)” and the “Star-Spangled Banner” in Italian. If Italian Americans viewed Italy as the motherland, they interpreted the United States as an adoptive fatherland. Love for both parents was not mutually exclusive, and a passion for their European homeland never undermined their newly learned civic values as they became adopted offspring of the United States. This worldview served to reinforce their identity as Italian Americans, but it also laid a foundation for acceptance of Italian Fascist ideology, an influence detailed in chapter four.

Settlement house workers were allies to the immigrant communities, but most were not part of them. The typical settlement resident was college educated and came from an

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183 Amabile, interview, 8; Ginocchi and Ginocchi, interview, 9.
184 George P. Bauer to John J. Grabowski, “Notes to Grabowski on Pictures of Staff Members and Mothers Clubs,” letter, 1 March 1976, 3, George P. Bauer Correspondence, MS 4325, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, OH.
185 “Indimenticabile Seduta della Loggia Cittadini No. 4,” Unione, 5 January 1934, 4.
186 “Dischi Italiani,” La Voce del Popolo Italiano, 24 January 1920, 8.
187 Davis, Spearheads for Reform, 86–87. As one unidentified immigrant remarked, “no one but a member of our own race can really understand us.”
old-stock, middle-class family. Many felt a religious calling to help the less fortunate. Most concurrently viewed their time at the settlement as a temporary position; college students and recent graduates gained experience and firsthand evidence for research projects before advancing to other careers.188 In 1921, Hiram House employed ten college students to assist Progress City. These volunteers received room and board in exchange for their work, and they earned college credit upon completing the assignment.189 Indeed, they wanted to uplift the individual, but in a Gospel of Wealth or progressive-style model. This meant providing programs to strike down barriers to individual success and advancement, such as educational opportunities and alternatives to vices like drinking. The goal was to have immigrants and their children function within society’s parameters, not to offer fundamental changes to America’s economic and hierarchal status quo.

As the leader of Hiram House, George Bellamy’s beliefs loomed large over the whole institution. By the 1920s and 1930s, after years of ingratiating himself into the philanthropic social circle of Cleveland’s elite business class that funded his project and salary, Bellamy was more conservative than when he founded Hiram House in 1896.190 Certainly, the settlement remained committed to a progressive idea of fairness, such as striking down prejudicial barriers against minority groups. In conjunction with a 1935 National Association for the Advancement of Colored People anti-lynching meeting featuring the organization’s secretary, Walter White, and the bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Cleveland, Joseph Schrembs, the Cleveland Settlement Union voted to lobby

188 Davis, 27–39.
189 Unknown to Prentiss, 1 August 1921, 1.
Congress. The association asked member organizations, including Hiram House and Alta House, to write to local congressmen to support anti-lynching legislation, which Hiram House did a few days after the event. However, Bellamy and his settlement house were less open to challenging the economic order, a political issue that resonated with immigrants and their children who were overwhelmingly working class. Even before the Great Depression, Bellamy was skeptical of collectivist change. After one 1924 talk, an attendee wrote to Bellamy in support of the Hiram House leader’s position: “I was particularly well pleased to learn that individual rather than the mass effort was your objective, and that your belief is that this is an individualistic world rather than a mass world.” The political implication was clear to the listener, and he continued his remarks by discussing the “close connection between the ideas of one God and an individualistic society” as the antithesis of communist Russia.

Changes driven by the Great Depression and the New Deal crystalized Bellamy’s views and Hiram House’s aversion to collective political action. In an August 1932 report, a Hiram House committee noted that Clevelanders needed jobs, and employment would have solved many problems. However, the report also recommended an individualistic approach, concluding that Hiram House “must not create dependent people, feeling that

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191 Russell W. Jelliffe, memorandum (5 February 1935), box 23, folder 5, Hiram House Social Settlement Records, MS 3319, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, OH; Unknown to C. C. Bolton, letter, 12 February 1935, box 23, folder 5, Hiram House Social Settlement Records, MS 3319, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, OH. The copy of this letter to House Representative Bolton includes a handwritten note that additional copies were sent to other politicians, including Senator Robert J. Bulkley.  
192 Geo. W. York to George A. Bellamy, letter, 5 November 1924, box 21, folder 6, Hiram House Social Settlement Records, MS 3319, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, OH.
the world owes them a living.” Since the New Deal relied on collective responses and government intervention to solve problems, Bellamy and Hiram House viewed Franklin Roosevelt’s reforms as a clear threat. Bellamy hated the National Recovery Administration (NRA) and asserted that its codes “may retard progress for a generation.” When Congress sought to regulate public utilities for the common good, Hiram House dispatched disapproval letters arguing that the proposed Wheeler-Rayburn Bill sought to punish honest businessmen and investors. The Federal Power Commission responded with reassurances that the proposed law would not harm average investors. The reorganization of utility holding companies would help most shareholders because regulation would prohibit granting large bonuses and salaries to the corporations’ officers. These savings would be added to the companies’ legitimate profits, thereby increasing the payout to investors. The explanation did not sit well with Bellamy, or whoever received the Federal Power Commission’s response, because scribbled on the back of the letter is a tirade about the loss of constitutional rights and the new “socialistic communistic” leanings of the governmental agencies.


195 Unknown to Vic Donahey, letter, 20 May 1935, box 23, folder 5, Hiram House Social Settlement Records, MS 3319, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, OH; Unknown to C. C. Bolton, letter, 7 August 1935, box 23, folder 5, Hiram House Social Settlement Records, MS 3319, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, OH.

196 Federal Power Commission to unknown, letter, 24 May 1935, box 37, folder 11, Hiram House Social Settlement Records, MS 3319, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, OH.
In this atmosphere of extreme contempt, the Hiram House Christmas play of 1935, a scathing satire of New Deal ideas and programs, becomes comprehensible. At the annual Hiram House staff Christmas parties, workers performed amateur plays for Bellamy and other attendees. The composition of the performances was nominally up to the staff. George Bauer often wrote the script, and the actors practiced at his residence; however, Bellamy still retained some control over the content. For example, during one skit, Frank Casper played a Hawaiian dressed in a grass skirt. Unable to locate a large enough costume during their rehearsals, the actors instead dressed Casper in a bedsheet that ended up looking like a diaper. When notified of this, Bellamy intervened and proclaimed that he would not allow any such indecency to occur at a play attended by guests that included his teenage daughter. However, Bellamy’s notions of indecency were selective. Although Bauer clearly remembered this incident of disapproval – which he claimed was the only time they pushed Bellamy too far – decades later, the absence of the 1935 play from Bauer’s memory meant that Bellamy and others had no qualms with the political satire, no matter how morbid it became at times.197

Titled “‘Friendly Townsend Tunes’ or Check and Double Check” with music by “Iva Grievance” and lyrics by “Heeza Grafter,” the 1935 Hiram House Christmas play – billed as an operetta – mocked and ridiculed the Townsend Plan for old-age pensions, politician Huey Long, and perceived socialist influences in the United States. The prologue introduced the audience to “Iban A. Washoutsky,” a character exiled from Russia that rose to the United States presidency.198 Washoutsky adopted Townsend’s idea to send two-

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198 “The Hiram House Christmas Dinner” (program, 21 December 1935), box 61, scrapbook 1, Hiram House Social Settlement Records, MS 3319, Western Reserve
hundred-dollar checks to citizens, as he sang: “This is where our tax bill goes / Buy your baby some needed shoes / Spend it if you like on booze / … Life’s just one check after another.” In an apparent reference to Franklin Roosevelt, the second scene included a parody of his 1932 election song, “Happy Days Are Here Again”: “Townsend brought our checks again / And sorrow ne’er will vex again / Just spend your dough and you will know / Happy Days are here again.” By contrast, the taxpayer was overbilled, overworked, and broke in lyrics set to the tune “How Dry I Am.” Continuing a critique of old-age pensions, “Friendly Townsend Tunes” explained via song how the Townsendites admitted that they were wrong. They no longer celebrated their two-hundred-dollar pensions because inflation crippled their ability to enjoy the good life on the taxpayer’s dime.

The second half of the play took place in hell, a strange choice for an audience of settlement house workers whose mission was helping to redeem the less fortunate. The act opened with the Townsendites singing, “Hell, Hell, the gang’s all here! / … To the Devil we have gone!!,” after which the Devil himself ruminated on his recent misfortune. All had been well, the Devil explained, until Huey Long arrived and usurped his realm. The fictional Long arrived in hell and organized the imps to fight the Devil for power. As the Devil lamented: “Old Huey’s robbed me of my power / … The De’il himself can not compete / With Kingfish Huey Long!!” After a scene in which Long explained that he

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199 “‘Timely Townsend Tunes’ or ‘Check and Double Check,’” 1.
201 “‘Timely Townsend Tunes’ or ‘Check and Double Check,’” 3–5.
202 “‘Timely Townsend Tunes’ or ‘Check and Double Check,’” 5.
203 “‘Timely Townsend Tunes’ or ‘Check and Double Check,’” 5–6.
204 “‘Timely Townsend Tunes’ or ‘Check and Double Check,’” 6.
would reshape hell using the political machine and vote-buying methods that he learned while alive, the play ended with the Townsendites in the underworld offering a warning that their program would only create theft and graft, deprive the elderly of respect, and burden the honest taxpayer.\textsuperscript{205} These scenes were remarkable, and quite disrespectful, as political satire because an assassin had killed the real Senator Huey Long of Louisiana only a few months prior. A parody of “’Twas the Night Before Christmas,” written the previous year, was gentle by comparison. The Hiram House author teased that people could remain in the dreamland of “St. Roosevelt” and his advisors if they continued to vote for him.\textsuperscript{206} The point that Bellamy and the settlement workers, who were concerned with issues of vice, morality, and behavior in the surrounding neighborhood, had no objections to casting left-wing leaders and supporters into hell illustrates the general anti-New Deal sentiments of the organization during the mid-1930s.

Many settlement house workers were vehemently against the New Deal, but not all those engaged in Americanization efforts felt similarly. While Bellamy disapproved of the NRA, his subordinate Frank Casper organized a rally of six thousand Clevelanders to support the program.\textsuperscript{207} These people had different life experiences and social networks that brought them to interpret political developments differently. Casper was not a typical settlement house worker of white Protestant, middle-class origin. He was an Italian American, sharing the same background as those he served. Born Francesco Gasbarra in Ferentino, a town southeast of Rome, in 1883, Casper studied for the Catholic priesthood

\textsuperscript{205} “’Timely Townsend Tunes’ or ‘Check and Double Check,’” 7–9.
\textsuperscript{206} “Christmas 1934” (poem, n.d.), box 43, folder 7, Hiram House Social Settlement Records, MS 3319, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, OH.
\textsuperscript{207} “6,000 Here Unite in Rally for NRA,” \textit{Cleveland Plain Dealer}, 8 September 1933, 6.
but fled Italy as a young man to avoid conscription since he did not believe in violence. He arrived in the United States in 1907 and gained citizenship in 1921. He worked as a machine operator for a steel company in Chester, Pennsylvania, in 1918. After having lived at some point in Michigan and New York in addition to Pennsylvania, Casper became Hiram House’s director of adult programming in 1923. Since he knew multiple languages and dialects, as well as various European customs and cultures, the immigrants and their children who frequented Hiram House viewed him as a fair mediator. Unlike Bellamy, who, according to Bauer, had “the haughty attitude of the English landlord” and never would have connected with people on a personal level, Casper was well-liked and trusted by the community, and “his tiny office was busier than a priest’s or clergyman’s office” as individuals sought help and advice. He seldom attended staff meetings and ran night and weekend programming for adults, times when Bellamy was usually at his home in neighboring Chagrin Falls, so the Hiram House director “didn’t know what the hell was going on in Franky’s Dept.” Casper operated as a supervisor to many self-led groups,

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210 Bauer to Grabowski, 5.

211 George P. Bauer to John J. Grabowski, “Western Reserve Hist. Soc., Att: John J. Grabowski,” letter, 8 February 1976, 2, George P. Bauer Correspondence, MS 4325, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, OH.

such as Russo’s Band or various ethnic societies and organizations. Frank Casper was the most vital point of contact for many Italian immigrants who used the settlement house.

Casper operated as an ideological buffer between more conservative elements within the settlement house and the Italian-American community. He supported Americanization; Bauer noted the pride they both felt at annual naturalization ceremonies, which almost brought Casper to tears. Bauer adamantly believed that his coworker “was the most skilled citizen maker of Cleveland,” and Casper worked tirelessly to help immigrants become Americans. However, while Hiram House workers agreed about civic nationalism and Americanization, the Italian’s political views differed from the consensus even before the NRA. In June 1928, an unidentified group penned a farewell song for Casper and his wife’s pending trip to Italy that showed the ideological divisions that existed under the settlement house’s surface. At one point, the lyrics highlighted Casper’s affiliation: “But what on earth will Al Smith do / For votes while you’re away / Our talks on Hoover we expect / The residents to sway.” Although written lightheartedly, the song raised the issue that Casper was the lone voice that spoke in support of Democrat Al Smith in the upcoming presidential election, while the rest of the Hiram House staff steered attendees toward a favorable view of the Republican Herbert Hoover. Frank Casper served as a broker for Italian Americans; he impressed native-born desires for

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213 Bauer to Grabowski, 26–27.
214 Bauer to Grabowski, 11–12, 15.
215 Bauer to Grabowski, 15.
216 “We All Agree This Song Should Be” (lyrics, June 1928), 4, box 44, folder 2, Hiram House Social Settlement Records, MS 3319, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, OH.
Americanization, but he was also part of the Italian-American community and drew some political ideology from the group’s public sphere.

Similar mediators existed within other Americanizing entities, such as in the YWCA’s International Institute. Clara Grillo (née Corica), the daughter of an illiterate immigrant gardener, earned a bachelor’s degree in education from Ohio State University before returning to Cleveland to serve as a nationality secretary for the city’s organization in 1926. Grillo worked at Hiram House and Friendly Inn (another settlement in Cleveland’s Big Italy), teaching English and assisting in citizenship efforts. She also organized dances for older Italians at Alta House and youth clubs sponsored by the YWCA for Italian-American girls. According to her recollection, she was the point of contact for one hundred agencies when they needed an Italian-American interpreter. In Pittsburgh, this broker figure included Maria Chianelli, Aidee Lisotto, and Rena MiConi at various times. Other cities and towns also employed similar mediators. The International Institute established an office in New Castle, Pennsylvania, in 1923 and employed Polish and Italian secretaries, including Antoinette Barbanti, who served from January 1925 until 1930 when she returned

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217 Grillo, interview, 1–3, 5–6, 9–10, 20–22, 30–32; Shirley Gallina, “She Fought Her Father to Learn,” Daily Breeze (Torrance, CA), 1 December 1974, E1. It was common practice to employ people of specific nationalities to reach their ethnic communities. While Grillo reached out to Italian Americans, she was one of eight nationality secretaries for Cleveland in 1927. The other represented nationalities were the Romanians, the Russians, the Greeks, the Poles, the Yugoslavians, the Czechoslovakians, and the Hungarians. See “Girls of the Y.W.C.A. Back Aquatic Meet This Week,” Cleveland Plain Dealer, 4 September 1927, woman’s magazine section, 7.

to her hometown of Boston. Her replacement, Espedita Marie Abruzzini, was educated in Italy and came to New Castle from Akron, Ohio, and remained until December 1932. Akron’s International Institute had Josephine Cataldi Emley, a graduate of the Collegio del Sacro Cuore in Florence, Italy. Frank Casper was not alone; numerous cities throughout the region employed Italian Americans to assist in Americanization. Cultural pluralism and the availability of ethnic mediators ensured that Americanization did not require the shedding of an Italian-American identity.

Conclusion

Italian immigrants arrived in the United States lacking a solid background in civic engagement. Their history reinforced a general distrust of government. However, developments in the United States pressured them toward naturalization and a reinterpretation of the role of government in their lives. They sought citizenship as a protection against perceived discrimination, and in the process, they came to adopt civic nationalism. Through the help of Americanization agents, such as settlement houses, Italian Americans accepted their new place in the body politic. They professed their rights and duties: freedom of speech and ideas, equality under the law, participation in elections. Yet, civic nationalism never meant a repudiation of ethnic identity. They approached partisan politics not as fully assimilated Americans but as Italian Americans whose public sphere influenced their opinions about contemporary issues. As shown in the following chapters,

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they absorbed additional ideological influences that shaped their outlook before the New Deal.
Chapter Three

Sacco and Vanzetti, Causes Célèbres

The Penetration of Leftist Ideology

On 31 July 1927, supporters of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti met in Lyceum Hall, Kingsley House, a social settlement which stood on the corner of Auburn Street and Larimer Avenue at the heart of an Italian-American enclave in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, to hear speeches in support of the two convicted men destined for execution.¹ Their case had shocked and animated the Italian-American community for the better part of a decade. On 5 May 1920, authorities had arrested Sacco and Vanzetti in connection with the robbery and murder of a company paymaster and his guard in South Braintree, Massachusetts, the previous month. Both were working-class Italian immigrants. Sacco labored in a shoe factory, while Vanzetti was a fish peddler. They were, however, anarchists who socialized in political circles of like-minded individuals and had fled to Mexico during the First World War in hopes of joining a revolution in Italy that they anticipated erupting after the conflict. They returned to the United States disappointed, but neither man had a criminal record when authorities arrested them.²

¹ “Two Rallies Planned Here to Win Freedom for Sacco, Vanzetti,” Pittsburgh Sunday Post (Pittsburgh, PA), 31 July 1927, section one, 11; “Appeal to Italians,” Pittsburgh Press (Pittsburgh, PA), 1 August 1927, 4.
The evidence of their involvement was unclear. Police initially picked up Sacco and Vanzetti, who were armed when arrested, as part of a trap set for another radical, Mario Buda. The pair subsequently lied when questioned; police told neither man about the murder and robbery charges, and both assumed that authorities wanted admissions about their political beliefs as evidence for prosecution and deportation of themselves and their compatriots. Evidence was primarily circumstantial. The prosecution asserted that a cap found at the scene belonged to Sacco and that his gun was the murder weapon. However, the police failed to recover the stolen money, and Sacco and Vanzetti offered alibis. Rather than address these reasonable doubts, the prosecution played upon prejudices against the two men, which Judge Webster Thayer, who was himself biased against anarchists and other radicals, happily allowed. To many observers, the guilty verdict appeared predicated on the men’s foreign and anarchist backgrounds rather than a confirmation of their involvement in the crime. Later evidence seemed to confirm this. Thayer rejected seven appeals, including the last in 1926, which sought to enter as evidence testimony from a prisoner who confessed to being involved in the murder. The Massachusetts Supreme Court refused two appeals. When executed by the electric chair on 23 August 1927, the two men became a representation of the failures of justice and equality under the law.³

The question of whether the pair were truly guilty of murder is inconsequential compared to their symbolism as wronged working-class immigrants. As historian Paul Avrich concluded, “the case against them remains unproved. Nor, on the other hand, can

their innocence be established beyond any shadow of doubt.”

Instead, the pair became causes célèbres because they personified the effects of ethnic and class prejudices in the eyes of subaltern peoples in the United States and around the world. To Italian Americans, there was nothing inconsistent about using space provided by Kingsley House, an Americanizing entity, to rally in support of two political radicals. One could still be a good American citizen and support Sacco and Vanzetti because their conviction conflicted with American values of freedom of expression and equality regardless of a person’s background, class status, or personal beliefs.

The previous chapter documented how Italian Americans came to adopt civic nationalism. Spurred by perceived discrimination and a rise in nativism, the community increasingly naturalized and expressed their rights as American citizens to secure a place in the body politic. However, as Italian Americans’ belief in civic participation deepened, they simultaneously absorbed ideology from the political left. They felt no inconsistency because they defined Americanism by its democratic norms and values rather than an economic philosophy.

The Red Scare threatened to end the spread of ideas from the political left. Radical ideology had circulated in the United States before the First World War, but the 1917 communist Bolshevik Revolution in Russia prompted a massive reactionary movement

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against “red” ideology. Fear of a potential revolution in America caused the government and its attendant apparatuses to target all forms of leftist ideology – communism, socialism, anarchism, syndicalism – by surveilling, jailing, and deporting leaders and adherents. The Red Scare arrested the spread of the most radical and potentially revolutionary groups, such as the Galleanists, the followers of Luigi Galleani, who advocated bombings and other methods of violent insurrection. However, repression of these movements failed to eliminate the conditions they sought to address, such as working-class grievances against perceived American exploiters. A receptive audience still existed, and dissemination of ideas occurred under an altered form during the 1920s.

The murder trial and conviction of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti provided a cover under which certain leftists kept ideology circulating after the Red Scare shifted the national political environment toward the right during the 1920s. The pair were political radicals, but they also suffered from the prejudice that many old-stock, white Americans cast upon working-class immigrants. In a nation that theoretically promised political freedom and equality under the law for all people, Sacco and Vanzetti became archetypes for the unfair treatment that Italian Americans experienced in their own lives. Leftists harnessed this rage to reach a receptive audience. Noted radical Carlo Tresca, his associate Luigi Quintiliano, and others used the Sacco and Vanzetti case to arrange talks and lectures throughout western Pennsylvania and eastern Ohio. By advertising fundraisers in support of the two condemned men, Tresca and other leftists drew crowds for proselytization. Italian Americans who might have rejected leftist political events out of fear of retaliation by employers or the police instead justified their attendance as supporting two condemned men wronged by the legal system.
Sacco and Vanzetti offered leftists the opportunity to discuss the issues innately tied to the legal case and most Italian Americans’ personal lives. In halls, theaters, and homes throughout the region, meetings supporting the condemned men segued into related themes. First, the events reinforced the need to uphold American civic ideals. They highlighted the discrepancy between stated American principles and reality; American society prided itself on supporting free speech and equality while the government targeted and punished nonconformists. Second, these leftists disseminated economic arguments related to workers’ rights. The ability to unionize was supreme, but they confirmed many grievances held by workers. They reiterated opinions about a moral economy, one in which workers received fair wages, acceptable hours, and safe conditions. The meetings reinforced civic nationalism while merging leftist economic ideas into the Italian-American public sphere.

Few Italian Americans became fanatical, subversive leftists. They agreed with many issues espoused by the speakers, and they desired an economy that served working people. However, they would not defend violent revolution. While some radicals desired to tear down the government to accomplish their goals, most Italian Americans were not dismissive of the state. They had been, and were still being, conditioned by American civics, and they were cautiously optimistic about the potential value of gaining the state as an ally. The rise of Fascism in Italy further arrested any actual radicalization. If new civic ideals cautioned Italian Americans from turning away from government, then Fascism showed the potential power that the state could provide concerning a change in people’s lives. As individuals searched for a way to turn ideological beliefs into political action, Fascism appeared to offer real-world successes that helped regular people.
Remembrance and Radicalism

The proliferation of leftist radicalism into ethnic communities was a forgotten chapter in the Italian-American experience. As historians Philip V. Cannistraro and Gerald Meyer noted, “few [Italian Americans] have ventured to remember or ask about that part of their history that deviated from the norms of the dominant society.” An apt example was the story of Cammella Teoli’s testimony to Congress during the 1912 Bread and Roses strike, a protest of predominantly female, white-ethnic textile workers in Lawrence, Massachusetts. Speaking about poor labor conditions in the factories, the teenage Teoli described being scalped by a machine and her months-long recuperation. Newspapers across the United States carried Teoli’s story, and her narrative helped prompt a federal investigation into the industry. Her daughter learned about the testimony only years after Cammella Teoli’s death. The unwillingness of participants to pass such stories to the next generation created a historical gap. Police raids against radical clubs and organizations contributed to historical amnesia since they often meant the destruction of texts – newspapers, pamphlets, handbills, internal records – on which historians rely. Since early sociological research described Italian immigrants and their children as conservative, family-oriented, inward-looking people prone to regionalism, there was little reason to

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7 Cannistraro and Meyer, 1–3. When the American Italian Historical Association sponsored a conference about radicalism in 1972, organizers had difficulty finding presenters because of the lack of research beyond a few major topics, such as the Bread and Roses Strike. Scholars had more success twenty-five years later as research had expanded significantly.
search for popular radicalism since it was assumed not to have existed or was negligible in size. Some approaches have perpetuated the narrow historiographical scope. During the 1920s, many leftist leaders and organizations became consumed in the fight against Fascism. This gave the impression that leftist radicalism was the antithesis of other politics rather than its own inquiry area.

More recent histories have shown that Italian-American radicalism existed across the United States, and it had numerous networks of advocates. Paul Avrich’s *Anarchist Voices* highlighted those who worked on a local level, such as Guy Liberti, a committed Galleanist who operated in Cleveland from the 1910s until the 1930s. Gary Mormino and George Pozzetta noted that leftism existed outside the metropolises, such as in Ybor City, Florida, where “radicals formed debating clubs and political groups, published newspapers, participated in strikes, led unions, and in many other ways attempted to spread their message.” According to Jennifer Guglielmo, Italian-American women in the New York

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10 John P. Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism: The View from America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972), 112–39. This is not to argue that leftists lacked their own ideas, but by placing the radicals in the paradigm of Fascism, they became people on the defensive, constantly critiquing and condemning the developments in Italy.


City metropolitan area followed the same strategies. They were typically organizationalists, those who rejected the individualist, violent approach of the Galleanists and advocated for organized responses such as general strikes and industrial unionism. They entered the unionization movement during the 1910s and eventually formed their own sections, such as the Italian Dressmakers Local 89, by the end of the decade. The previous belief that these women were apolitical was due to invisibility rather than apathy. Italian Americans operated independent organizations because they distrusted mainstream unions and had difficulty uniting with other ethnic groups who spoke their own languages, such as Jewish Americans. This separateness caused the group to be less noticed and documented. As Marcella Bencivenni argued, culture, rather than class alone, formed the foundation for radicalism. The *sovversivi* (subversives, or Italian-American radicals) operated as examples of Antonio Gramsci’s “organic” intellectuals to disseminate ideas into Little Italies. People imbibed political ideology through clubs, the radical press, lectures, and artistic expressions, including theater and literature. In *Transnational Radicals*, Travis Tomchuk furthered the argument that historians need to view leftism as a mass phenomenon. He asserted that a vast network of personal contacts and publications sustained radical communities across national boundaries. The historiographical trend has been to recognize anarchism, syndicalism, and their variants as pervasive and influential ideological currents within Italian-American communities.

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This chapter builds from this approach and shows how the widespread diffusion of leftism during the 1920s offered another influence, after civic nationalism, that informed regular people’s politics. Most Italian Americans never became devoted adherents to radical ideology. They did not attend weekly meetings, nor did they own home libraries stocked with writings by theorists such as Karl Marx, Errico Malatesta, or Mikhail Bakunin. However, rudimentary philosophy crept into the community through local talks by radicals and other events. The majority of Italian Americans never learned the theoretical approaches to anarchism or socialism; instead, they took away general concepts and ideas related to working-class rights and unionization. Since they were not ideologues, their nondogmatic approach to economic and social issues allowed them to be ideologically flexible, an essential trait once Fascism entered the community and offered a competing vision.

The Spreading of Ideology

There is some historiographical disagreement concerning Italian emigrants’ ideological background before they arrived in the United States, but the consensus is that ideologues fought for converts within the new American environment.\textsuperscript{16} Italian anarchist

\textsuperscript{16} For example, in The Immigrant World of Ybor City, Mormino and Pozzetta believed that experiences in Italy primed people for politics in the United States. Likewise, Guglielmo asserted in Living the Revolution that women in southern Italy had a culture of resistance, and it was not a coincidence that Sicily was home to a strong socialist party. Bencivenni wrote in Italian Immigrant Radical Culture that “most of the leaders of the Italian American Left had already embraced socialist dreams in Italy, but thousands of Italian immigrant workers were radicalized by their experience in America, particularly by their exposure to ethnic discrimination and economic exploitation.” Vanzetti was an example of this. He was apolitical before he arrived in the United States. These conflicting interpretations are because of different definitions of what constitutes political. It can be argued that immigration to the United States was a political act, a protest against conditions in Italy and an unresponsive government. However, few of these arrivals were card-carrying party members or versed in political theory. See
groups first appeared in the United States during the 1880s and spread to most major immigration centers by the end of the century. The arrival of various anarchist lecturers and writers aided the proliferation. Some, such as Francesco Saverio Merlino, Errico Malatesta, and Pietro Gori, stayed only briefly during the 1890s and early 1900s before returning to Europe. Gori, in particular, had been a vital preacher for anarchist ideology as he traveled from coast to coast, holding, at his height, more than two hundred meetings per year.¹⁷

By the 1910s, Luigi Galleani was the preeminent Italian anarchist in the United States. While a student at the University of Turin, Galleani became a committed anarchist and militant anti-capitalist. His radicalism earned him exile from France and Switzerland and a prison sentence in Italy, which he escaped after serving five years and eventually found his way to the United States in 1901. His oratory skills and newspaper, Cronaca Sovversiva (Subversive Chronicle), gained him devotees. Galleani’s ideology, a type of communist anarchism, rejected both the state and private property. He preached the importance of action as a catalyst to a revolution, and he justified the use of violence, including bombings and assassinations, in overthrowing government and capitalism.¹⁸

His followers, the Galleanists, turned his ideas into reality. They escalated the Red Scare with a wave of bombings, including most famously against Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer’s Washington, DC residence in June 1919 and later the New York City Wall Street Bombing, which killed over thirty people, in September 1920 as retaliation for

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¹⁷ Avrich, Sacco and Vanzetti, 45–48.
¹⁸ Avrich, 48–52.
Sacco and Vanzetti’s arrest. Galleanists also existed beyond the east coast. In Pittsburgh, they bombed the homes of United States District Court Judge W. H. S. Thompson and Bureau of Immigration Inspector W. W. Sibray, both of whom worked legal cases against radicals. Cleveland Mayor Harry L. Davis became a target for his role in suppressing radicalism, including the city’s May Day celebration of 1919. The explosions killed no one, but the homes of all three men suffered damage. The Galleanists predominantly clustered in a few centers of radicalism, such as Paterson, New Jersey, and Barre, Vermont, the publishing site of Cronaca Sovversiva. However, associated cells existed throughout the United States, including in western Pennsylvania and eastern Ohio.19

Radicals formed circoli di studi sociali (discussion groups, literally circles of social studies) to learn anarchist doctrine, reinforce and widen networks of supporters, and debate ideology. To Americans outside of the circoli, these groups appeared subversive, threatening, and dangerous. Philip M. Rose, a pastor at an Italian Congregational church in Hartford, Connecticut, described his experience with a local circolo consisting of “young men of which represented a number of brands of socialism, anarchism, and atheism.” Rose dismissed the group and concluded that “the noticeable thing about them was the defectiveness of their logic, the violence of their prejudice, and the onesidedness of their reading.”20 Historians have treated these groups more objectively. According to Mormino and Pozzetta, organized circoli, alongside debating clubs and speaking societies, offered radicals in and around Ybor City, Florida, a sense of community with other like-minded people. Organizations provided education. As one member claimed after arriving in 1902,

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he passed his time at the club “read[ing] pamphlets, newspapers, books, and all kinds of sociological literature” and occasionally attending lectures and debates. If Cronaca Sovversiva’s book list offers insight into a typical circoli di studi sociali library, Rose was correct in asserting a “onesidedness” of their readings. However, the focus on leftist political ideology certainly did not undermine the breadth of their ideological acquisitions. Book offerings from 1915, for example, included not only Galleani’s pamphlet “La Salute è in Voi!” (“The Health is in You!”), a bomb-making guide that contributed to the wave of anarchist terror that later occurred, but also standard leftist texts still studied by scholars today, such as Karl Marx’s Communist Manifesto and works by Peter Kropotkin. Other selections included Malatesta and Gori’s writings and publications by leading theorists in various European states, such as Spaniard Francisco Ferrer and Georgian-Russian Warlaam Tcherkesoff.

Similar clubs with the same purpose existed in various Italian-American communities throughout western Pennsylvania and eastern Ohio. For example, Cleveland’s Little Italy hosted a group in 1910 that met at 1981 or 1983 Coltman Road, a few lots down from Holy Rosary Church, the settlement’s primary religious institution. The circolo advertised itself as having a library for use by members and lessons on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays from 7:30 to 9:30 in the evening. This initial schedule may have been too rigorous because, in 1911, the group’s contact, F. G.

21 Mormino and Pozzetta, 144.
Trivisonno, welcomed readers of *Cronaca Sovversiva* to attend the radicals’ weekly meetings every Thursday evening.\(^{24}\) Cleveland also hosted a group named after Pietro Gori, and its contact, Arturo Caruso, lived in the Big Italy enclave at 2483 East Ninth Street, not too far from Hiram House.\(^{25}\) Pittsburgh had two organizations, Gruppo Socialista-Anarchico 29 Luglio di Pittsburgh and Gruppo Socialista-Anarchico di Bloomfield, that met and discussed a merger with regular meetings to be held on the first and third Sundays of the month at three o’clock in the afternoon.\(^{26}\) Other clusters existed in the area around Pittsburgh, such as in Monongahela and Fredericktown, and in Ohio, especially in towns and cities along the Ohio River, like Steubenville and Bellaire, and in the adjacent mining communities, such as Glencoe and Dillonvale.\(^{27}\)

Like the Tampa circles described by Mormino and Pozzetta, the *circoli di studi sociali* in Pennsylvania and Ohio tried to spread their influence and stay connected to other organizations by offering events meant to draw in allies from nearby communities and perhaps convert new adherents to anarchist philosophy. Luigi Galleani spoke in Cleveland’s Little Italy in November 1910. His stay involved two events, one talk

\(^{24}\) F.G. Trivisonno, “Comunicati: Da Cleveland, Ohio,” *Cronaca Sovversiva*, 23 September 1911, 4.

\(^{25}\) F. Monteleoni, “Comunicati: Da Cleveland, Ohio,” *Cronaca Sovversiva*, 6 May 1911, 4


presented at the circolo named earlier and a second appearance at Garibaldi Hall.\textsuperscript{28} The location was important. Garibaldi Hall was a neighborhood institution promoted and partially financed by local prominente (Italian-American community leader) Joseph Carabelli, founder of the Lakeview Granite & Monumental Works and Cleveland’s first Italian mutual aid society. He was involved in the campaign to fund Alta House and served as a Republican in the Ohio House of Representatives.\textsuperscript{29} Carabelli and others envisioned Garibaldi Hall as a multipurpose community site complete with a theater designed for five hundred patrons and rooms for business and social gatherings. The February 1907 opening ceremony included a speech by Cleveland Mayor Tom L. Johnson.\textsuperscript{30}

Galleani’s appearance at the location speaks to the Italian-American community’s tolerance for various political ideologies. The anarchist radical’s presence was not a one-off mistake and oversight by the hall booking agent. Edmondo Rossoni, a revolutionary-syndicalist leader who later merged his trade unionist movement into Benito Mussolini’s Fascism after 1921, spoke there in 1911.\textsuperscript{31} The following year, the hall hosted a talk on the theme “who we are and what we want” by Umberto Postiglione, a young anarchist who became a contributor to Galleani’s \textit{Cronaca Sovversiva} in 1912 until he, like many radicals,

\textsuperscript{28} F. M., “Per la Vita e per l’Idea: Cleveland, O.,” \textit{Cronaca Sovversiva}, 26 November 1910, 3.
\textsuperscript{29} David D. Van Tassel and John J. Grabowski, eds., \textit{The Encyclopedia of Cleveland History} (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987), 152–53.
\textsuperscript{30} “Italians Seek Charter,” \textit{Cleveland Plain Dealer} (Cleveland, OH), 7 February 1902, 10; “Commences on Big Blocks,” \textit{Cleveland Plain Dealer}, 23 March 1902, part 2, 3; “Much New Work is Under Way,” \textit{Cleveland Plain Dealer}, 17 June 1906, part 4, 10; “Italians Dedicate Hall,” \textit{Cleveland Plain Dealer}, 10 February 1907, part 2, 5.
fled the United States for South America during the First World War. Although large cities regularly drew noted speakers, the diffusion of ideology reached smaller towns throughout the region through a web of contacts. For example, Calogero Speziale, a member of the Cleveland Little Italy circolo who published the radical newspaper *L’Appello (The Appeal)* with U. Balzano, advertised a speaking tour for eastern Ohio in 1916 in support of striking Minnesota workers.

The problem for the Galleani-inspired sovversivi was that they were unable to reach most of the workers. The anarchists distrusted large, formal organizations by temperament, so they typically operated as close-knit clubs with few members. The prohibitive frequency at which some circoli di studi sociali met, such as the Cleveland Little Italy circolo’s thrice-weekly gatherings, attests to the exhausting and unrealistic scheduling maintained by some of the most committed anarchists. Members noted the lukewarm reception they received within the wider Italian-American community. In 1911, F. G. Trivisonno of the Cleveland group remarked that “it is very discouraging to notice that in this city and [its] surroundings there are many sovversivi,” but these Italian Americans lived “isolatedly[,] and therefore their energy goes uselessly wasted.” The radical asserted that many in the area shared the same concerns, but because they were prone to pettiness,

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34 Mormino and Pozzetta, *The Immigrant World of Ybor City*, 151.
most chose to remain idle and uninvolved, so their exploitation continued.\textsuperscript{35} A conversation between two men that supposedly occurred in Dillonvale, Ohio, reinforced this idea. One man from the country, likely a mine worker, given the episode’s location, entered the town of Dillonvale to find some newspapers when he met an acquaintance. Their conversation turned to the local \textit{circolo di studi sociali}, and the visitor confirmed his reasoning for not joining. He noted that some sought to pick fights with others, and there was a lack of toleration that resembled the exploitation that workers experienced under their bosses. The acquaintance assured the man that things had changed over the past few years and offered him the next group meeting time.\textsuperscript{36} The visitor was not antagonistic to leftist ideology, but he found some members’ views restricting. The Galleanists made a few converts before the 1920s, but their emphasis on doctrine failed to motivate regular people who agreed about the problems but lacked time to attend weekly meetings and felt uncomfortable with the rigidity of beliefs.

Furthermore, while Trivisonno may have been correct that many sympathized with the anarchists, most people did not want to be officially involved with these groups because local authorities and the United States government targeted them. In October 1910, radicals met at Union Temple in Pittsburgh to commemorate anarchist Francisco Ferrer, whom the Spanish had executed the previous year.\textsuperscript{37} Known for his \textit{Escuela Moderna} (Modern School) movement, Ferrer was a freethinker who believed in separating religious doctrine and political influence from education. His beliefs and popularity made him a target for the

\textsuperscript{35} F. G. Trivisonno, “Comunicati: Da Cleveland, Ohio,” \textit{Cronaca Sovversiva}, 23 September 1911, 4.
Spanish authorities. They branded him the orchestrator of the Spanish popular uprising known as Tragic Week in 1909, which led to his arrest. The mock trial, lack of evidence by the state, and Ferrer’s execution by firing squad made him a martyr to others around the world.\(^{38}\) D. Nucera Abenavoli praised the Pittsburgh meeting because it enticed wageworkers, intellectuals, and miners from the surrounding area to hear speeches by radicals Carlo Tresca and Arturo Giovannitti. Numbers and enthusiasm were large enough to scare away possible police harassment, and the writer celebrated that “not even the shadow of a club” was visible during the daylong event.\(^{39}\) However, fears of such harassment frightened possible allies and kept the less committed from attending similar events.

The uncompromising positions of the more radical *sovversivi*, who took Galleani’s recommendation of violence to heart, did not help the cause. Returning to the unnamed visitor to Dillonvale described previously, his conversation about intolerance might have been an allusion to Emilio Coda, a coal miner and extremist from the area. The year after the visitor’s purported comments, police arrested Coda for causing a riot. When a company store and two coal tipples burned during a strike, accusations immediately fell on the radical. Although Coda’s connections to Galleani brought the latter to Dillonvale in November 1916, many, such as the United Mine Workers of America (UMW) leadership that Coda physically threatened, were pleased when he fled to Mexico the following year.\(^ {40}\)


\(^{40}\) Avrich, *Sacco and Vanzetti*, 61.
While Coda was one of the prominent figures that fled the United States during the crackdown on suspected subversives that escalated during the First World War, the federal government targeted the circoli and networks of associates across the country. In a prelude to the Red Scare, federal agents arrested one hundred Pacific Northwest Italian Americans in November 1917 who were part of “un Circolo di Studi sociali” and linked to Cronaca Sovversiva, a clear message to radicals across the United States that persecution would go beyond the movement’s national leadership. Federal agents went to great lengths to find Galleanists. Carlo Valdinoci, a publisher of Cronaca Sovversiva that later became infamous for blowing himself up during the bombing of A. Mitchell Palmer’s home in 1919, was a target since 1917. When the Bureau of Investigation discovered in early 1918 that he lived at one point in Youngstown, the Cleveland office sent agent Rayme W. Finch to find him. The hunt took Finch through Youngstown to Steubenville, Dillonvale, and the surrounding mining communities. Valdinoci failed to surface, but home searches and questioning discovered other associates for arrest, including Emilio Coda, who had returned to the area. For many Italian Americans, the risks of being associated with the Galleanists were too significant.

Rival ideological movements also failed once First World War nationalism and the subsequent Red Scare painted all radical groups as un-American. The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), founded in 1905 as a revolutionary-syndicalist organization, made

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41 “Anarchici Arrestati,” L’Italia (San Francisco, CA), 28 November 1917, 2; “Bare Gigantic Plot by Anarchists; Most Colossal in America’s History,” Spokane Daily Chronicle (Spokane, WA), 29 November 1917, 20.
42 Avrich, Sacco and Vanzetti, 63–64, 118–21, 153–56.
numerous attempts during the same period to recruit and organize Italian Americans. These included textile workers in the aforementioned Bread and Roses strike in Lawrence, Massachusetts, those employed in the canneries and bakeries around the San Francisco Bay, and silk industry laborers in Paterson, New Jersey. General IWW activities also occurred in this project’s area of investigation. In eastern Ohio, local groups existed in Canton, Cleveland, Conneaut, Elyria, Glencoe, Lorain, Massillon, Martins Ferry, Niles, and Youngstown by 1912. Organizers from Cleveland and elsewhere aided a notable but ultimately failed strike in the Akron rubber industry in 1913. The IWW was also involved in organizing steel mills in Youngstown and Campbell (then East Youngstown), the latter of which experienced a significant strike in 1916. Although the extent of Italian-American involvement in local IWW activity is unclear because of mixed membership, evidence suggests that areas with prominent ethnic communities had some contact with, or at least knowledge of, the Industrial Workers of the World and its brand of syndicalism. In the coal mines around Bellaire, Ohio, Italian-American laborers broke from the United Mine Workers during a strike to ally with the IWW. Prominent IWW leader Joseph J. Ettor,

46 Nicola Criscione, interview by William Jenkins, transcript, 8 May 1984, 17–18, Youngstown State University Oral History Program: Ku Klux Klan Project: Personal Experiences, O. H. 311, Maag Library, Youngstown State University, Youngstown, OH.
an Italian American, arrived in early 1915 to assist the effort.\textsuperscript{47} Revolutionary syndicalism was a strong competitor for the Galleanists as both sought to influence the same workers.

Nevertheless, the Industrial Workers of the World also failed. High turnover hampered the organization, and the leadership split over supporting or condemning American involvement in the First World War. A public belief that the group sought to undermine American war efforts prompted a massive raid on forty-eight IWW halls in September 1917, and the subsequent indictment of one hundred and one leaders crippled the movement.\textsuperscript{48} The American Protection League, a citizens’ group that solicited information about un-American activities to pass to government authorities, made 1,529 investigations in Cleveland and 183 in Youngstown related to the IWW and radical activities.\textsuperscript{49}

The campaign of intimidation worked and left a lasting impression. During an interview conducted with Bert Iacobucci concerning conditions in Aliquippa, Pennsylvania, sixty years after the events, he described the repression campaign that peaked in 1919–1920 as those caught with radical literature were fired or forced to leave. In one instance, a suspected Bolshevik and his family disappeared after being picked up by authorities. There was no distinction made between radicals. During Iacobucci’s statement, the interviewer asked explicitly whether those targeted were anarchists, socialists, or communists, but Bert Iacobucci never offered a clear division.\textsuperscript{50}

\textsuperscript{49} Wortman, “The IWW in Ohio,” 82.
\textsuperscript{50} Bert Iacobucci, interview by unknown, transcript, 23 October 1979, 21–22, box 2, folder 49, Beaver Valley Labor History Society Collection, 1909–1981, AIS.1981.08, Archives & Special Collections, University of Pittsburgh.
through the Red Scare, he conflated all forms of the extreme left into one creature targeted by the state. By 1920, leftists of any stripe were on the defensive.

**Sacco and Vanzetti**

The campaign to free Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti is the key to understanding how leftist political ideology continued to flow from the ideologues to the masses after the Red Scare. As Moshik Temkin argued, Sacco and Vanzetti’s historical importance derives from the episode’s “dramatic transformation from criminal *case* to public *affair.*”51 The controversy caught the public’s attention, and leftists used the pair to reach an audience. As the Red Scare deepened, the question remained if any leftists could survive the onslaught. The Galleanists were easy targets for being too revolutionary, violent, and single-minded, and the state’s anti-radical dragnet trapped other extreme left movements with them. The campaign to free Sacco and Vanzetti offered a veil under which leftist intellectuals and organizers entered local Italian-American communities in an unthreatening manner. Abstract ideas about anarchism and syndicalism gave way to assertions of American rights and values: a fair trial, innocence until conviction, the burden of evidence on the state, and equality under the law regardless of class or national origin. Regular people justified supporting Sacco and Vanzetti not because the two were anarchists but despite their politics. The crackdown on groups like the Galleanists and the IWW failed to eliminate the roots of their radicalism, such as poor labor conditions and notions of

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51 Temkin, *The Sacco-Vanzetti Affair*, 2. Temkin argued that this change occurred over time and became an “affair” probably around 1926, the year before the execution. He is correct if argued from the point of view of a broader American (and even a global Western) society. This chapter pushes back that timeline for Italian Americans. Sacco and Vanzetti caught the Italian-American community’s attention more quickly because of ethnic solidarity.
exploitation. Sacco and Vanzetti offered men like Carlo Tresca a suitable reason to organize talks during which speakers veered into these grievances and built a foundation for leftist ideology regarding social and economic rights.

Sacco and Vanzetti became relatable figures in the quest to proselytize listeners. The radical’s loner image gave way to portraying a family man as Sacco’s devoted wife Rosina witnessed the trial while holding “a very pretty little girl” in her arms. The trial projected familiar themes of discrimination faced by many immigrants on the two men. The prosecutor badgered Sacco about whether he loved or hated America. Proponents raised concerns about the state’s evidence. One witness, Carlos Goodridge, identified Sacco as the armed man who drove past him the day of the crime. He, however, was unreliable, and it was later revealed that he had a criminal record and was a bigamist. In addition to this background, Italian Americans learned in 1922 about Goodridge’s hatred toward certain immigrants. According to one of his wives, the man once remarked that “all the Italians that come to America should be drowned in the harbors.” Vanzetti summarized the feelings of many of his fellow ethnics when he thanked his supporters but admitted to being pessimistic throughout the trial: “Italian and sovversivo, judged by twelve [100 percent] American citizens.” The outcome was predetermined; the guilty verdict handed down by native-born white Americans against a foreign-born worker adhering to unorthodox political ideas had already been decided before the trial began.

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Sacco and Vanzetti became causes célèbres, not because of their political beliefs but because they represented the consequences of discrimination experienced by many Italian Americans. While native-born, old-stock Americans fixated on the pair’s anarchist background, the campaign to free Sacco and Vanzetti within the Italian-American community dealt with the notions of class and ethnic exploitation that many endured.\textsuperscript{57} As Youngstown’s \textit{Il Cittadino Italo-Americano} explained in the summer of 1922 concerning the heightened feeling of prejudice in America, “the hunting of the Italian, driven by fanaticism more than by other causes, does not show signs of ending.”\textsuperscript{58}

Sacco and Vanzetti became the standard to compare regional cases of prejudicial court decisions, including Sam Purpera’s sentencing, the murder charges against Dominick Venturato and Dan Agosti, and acquittals in the Beaverdale, Pennsylvania, riot.\textsuperscript{59} Purpera, a Cleveland gang member, was involved in the murder of two men during a payroll robbery on 31 December 1920. When arrested months later in Los Angeles, California, the seventeen-year-old suspect initially maintained his innocence before confessing to the crime after police convinced him that they had ample evidence to charge him with murder.\textsuperscript{60} Sentenced to death, his attorney sought an appeal arguing that Purpera was


\textsuperscript{58} “Dopo Beaverdale Pa. Telluride Colo.,” \textit{Il Cittadino Italo-Americano} (Youngstown, OH), 15 July 1922, 1.


involved in the robbery, but others were the triggermen. Unfair application of justice spurred many, including the Ohio Sons of Italy and its leader, Giovanni A. Barricelli, to defend the youth. It was not just, in their view, that Purpera received a sentence to the electric chair because he was a minor who was not directly responsible for the shootings. Advocates accepted the teenager’s explanation that he had no prior knowledge that the robbery would have ended in murder. Purpera’s execution remained a cited injustice two years after the failed appeal.

In the Venturato and Agosti trials, juries sentenced the two men to life in prison for the murder of a mine strikebreaker during a fight in New Lafferty, Ohio. Advocates noted that the men did not receive a fair trial and were part of a more extensive campaign against workers and foreigners in the region. Mine owners disliked Venturato because he was president of a UMW local. The judge and special prosecutor previously worked as lawyers for the miners, but they had a falling-out which contributed to a grudge. The judge stacked the jury against the defendants. After Venturato and Agosti’s convictions to life in prison, the courts denied an appeal.

The Beaverdale case confirmed that Italian Americans faced unfair application of the law even when they were the harmed party. In July 1921, simmering tensions related

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61 “Carries Fight for Life to High Court,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 16 December 1921, all Ohio edition, 2.
62 “Try to Save Purpera from Death Penalty,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 4 March 1922, all Ohio edition, 15.
to purported Black Hand (organized crime) activity by the Italian Americans erupted into a riot when a mob of four to five thousand Americans stormed the Italian-American section of Beaverdale, a mining community east of Johnstown, Pennsylvania. The men in the crowd, “all armed with Winchester rifles and revolvers, carrying [an] abundance of ammunition,” rushed into the community discharging their weapons. Some Italians returned fire with their own guns before the entire group fled to the hills, after which the mob destroyed five Italian-American businesses. Only the intervention of the state police prevented a massacre.\(^{65}\) State law enforcement, however, was unable to stop the rioters. Locals hosted a mass meeting the following day and drew up a list of twenty-five to thirty “undesirable Italians” for eviction.\(^{66}\) The state police officer at the meeting pleaded for time and a proper investigation,\(^{67}\) but the response from the group’s spokesman about their demands was not encouraging: “you policemen may stay here and protect them, but we will get them sooner or later, perhaps tonight, even against your opposition.”\(^{68}\) Over four hundred Italian Americans fled,\(^{69}\) some at the urging of police.\(^{70}\) The episode prompted immediate denunciations from Italian Americans.\(^{71}\) The final verdict in the subsequent

\(^{65}\) “Italians Driven to Beaverdale Hills!,” *Indiana Evening Gazette* (Indiana, PA), 12 July 1921, 1, 4.


\(^{67}\) “Beaverdale Quiet After Excitement,” *Indiana Evening Gazette*, 13 July 1921, 1.

\(^{68}\) Associated Press, “Aliens Forced by Mass Meeting to Leave Homes,” *Harrisburg Telegraph* (Harrisburg, PA), 13 July 1921, 10.

\(^{69}\) John Nimick, “Mafia is Dreaded, Counsel Declares as Rioters Trial Opens,” *Pittston Gazette* (Pittston, PA), 14 June 1922, 2.


June 1922 trial acquitted all defendants for the crimes. The decision prompted further outrage as the justice system failed to condemn a violent act of prejudice. Sacco and Vanzetti came to represent a pattern of inequality under the law. They served as national stand-ins for many local causes, including these trial events and the constant discrimination and targeting related to Prohibition and nativism that masses of people experienced, as described in the previous chapter.

The ethnic aspect of the case drew in diverse organizations and individuals who would not have supported parts of leftist radicalism by principle. Speakers made use of ethnic affinity, such as in one 1922 meeting advertisement for a talk in Youngstown at the Duca degli Abruzzi hall, which appealed to people’s sense of justice and identity by noting that “Italian blood flows in [their] veins.” Il Cittadino Italo-Americano editor Angelo Di Renzo defended the pair “in the name of justice, of humanity, and of italianità.” Even Benito Mussolini, certainly no ally of the radical left, sympathized with their plight. Italian-American affinity explains why people and organizations that generally rejected radical-leftist politics supported the two men. Defenders used the argument that they were “victims of racial prejudice and misunderstanding” to enlist national Italian-American

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72 “Compromise Verdict Seen in Evidence,” Indiana Evening Gazette, 16 June 1922, 1, 4. The final decision charged some defendants for court costs, but none were found guilty of either indictment, the first for use of explosives and the second for rioting.

73 “Le ingiustizie della giustizia,” La Libera Parola, 1 July 1922, 2; “Beaverdale,” Il Cittadino Italo-Americano, 8 July 1922, 1. The La Libera Parola article included a reprint of a letter from S. De Maria which originally appeared in Greensburg, Pennsylvania’s La Stella d’Italia on 24 June 1922.

74 “Pro Sacco e Vanzetti,” Il Cittadino Italo-Americano, 11 March 1922, 1.

75 A. Di Renzo, “Pro Sacco e Vanzetti, Il Cittadino Italo-Americano, 16 April 1927, 2.

leaders in the cause, including Giovanni Di Silvestro, the Supreme Venerable of the Sons of Italy, a friend of Fascism, and certainly not an ideological ally of Sacco and Vanzetti. Di Silvestro made this stance known in clear terms in his appeal for the two men at a Sons of Italy Supreme Convention. He disapproved of their ideology but unequivocally stated that “the sentence of Sacco and Vanzetti [was] a monstrosity” and the condemned deserved justice. Before their execution, the pair received support from numerous mainstream Italian-American organizations, including three important Youngstown entities: the Italian American Political Association, the Napoleone Colaianni lodge, and the Duca degli Abruzzi society. This backing was significant because, as explained in chapter five, groups like the Italian American Political Association contained an ideologically diverse membership concerning views on leftist radicalism.

In addition to ethnic anxieties, the campaign to liberate the condemned radicals revived the debate about working-class issues that the Red Scare had stifled. The government suppression of radical groups and strikes failed to eliminate the causes that

80 “Per Sacco e Vanzetti,” Il Cittadino Italo-Americano, 23 April 1927, 5; “Per Sacco e Vanzetti,” Il Cittadino Italo-Americano, 30 April 1927, 1. In the 30 April source, the Italian American Political Association was identified by a longer name, the Italian American Citizens’ Political Association of Mahoning County, Ohio.
motivated their beliefs and actions. Mainstream organizations encountered by Italian Americans, such as the settlement houses that aided so many in Americanizing and acquiring citizenship, offered few tangible solutions. Settlement workers were not blind to these issues. For instance, Hiram House reported appalling conditions in local establishments, such as in the needle trades and at the Cuyahoga Bottling Works. At the Cleveland Chocolate & Cocoa Company, all employees worked fifty-nine hours a week, including eight children under eighteen, which the report noted broke laws prohibiting excessive working hours for minors. At a local cigar factory, workers bit off the products’ ends to finish them and then spat the remnants and saliva onto the floor. The monotony of the work coupled with poor ventilation depersonalized employees in the eyes of the investigator: “Every face wore the same blank expression. They looked and acted like machines. Did not notice a single person smile in the place.” Nevertheless, Hiram House also acknowledged that it failed to solve employment issues. As one private 1920 letter attested, while Hiram House had been sympathetic to unionization and concerned about workers’ problems, it could not be involved much more because no settlement could adequately solve all the people’s problems.

81 “Progress City: An Answer to the Demand for a Civic Education,” report, n.d., box 36, folder 3, Hiram House Social Settlement Records, MS 3319, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, OH. Hiram House envisioned Progress City as one answer to the problems caused by industrialization.
82 Hiram House, “Regarding the Conditions in Cleveland,” report, n.d., 1–5, box 30, folder 4, Hiram House Social Settlement Records, MS 3319, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, OH.
83 Hiram House, 2.
84 Unknown to Allen Burns, letter, 24 June 1920, 2, box 21, folder 3, Hiram House Social Settlement Records, MS 3319, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, OH.
While the settlement houses deferred, most American labor unions failed Italian-American workers. Many trade unions represented by the American Federation of Labor (AFL) were leery of foreigners because mass immigration had oversaturated the labor pool and depressed wages. Furthermore, the AFL’s model concentrated on craft unionism – the organization of skilled laborers by trade – at the expense of industrial unionism, the organization of all workers, regardless of skill, within a factory into one entity. In other cases, the division of workers by department or craft into multiple groups undermined collective action, one reason why the AFL-led 1919 Steel Strike failed.\footnote{85} The Industrial Workers of the World offered an alternative vision, but the First World War and Red Scare destroyed its potential by the 1920s.

All the while, terrible and discriminatory labor conditions continued. In late 1918, an employee’s improper discharge prompted a Department of Labor investigation into the Jones and Laughlin Steel mill in Aliquippa, Pennsylvania.\footnote{86} The investigator reported that “many Italians who have been at the plant for several years are discharged for apparently no cause and replaced by others, without consideration for their skill and experience.” For those who remained, company foremen demoted some Italian Americans to lower-wage positions without reason, while others demanded kickbacks to retain employment.

\footnote{85} Vernon M. Briggs, Jr., *Immigration and American Unionism* (Ithaca, NY: ILR Press, 2001), 61–62, 67–78; David Brody, *Steelworkers in America: The Nonunion Era* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960), 257–58. This is not to say that there were no exceptions. As Briggs stated, a few select groups, notably the United Mine Workers and the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, which relied on immigrant rank-and-file members, were components of the AFL. As a whole, the AFL was pro-immigration restriction.

\footnote{86} Bernice E. Todd, “Ethelbert Stewart, Director, Investigation and Inspection Service, Department of Labor” (report, 9 October 1918), 1, box 1, folder 6, Beaver Valley Labor History Society Collection, 1909–1981, AIS.1981.08, Archives & Special Collections, University of Pittsburgh.
Coworkers made “continuous threats in vile and abusive language to ‘chase all of the Italians away from the plant’ and ‘to send them to Germany and have them shot,’” even though the head of the local draft exemption board asserted that the group was “the most patriotic of all [the] foreigners.”\footnote{Todd, 2.} As one interviewee declared decades later, Italian Americans and other white ethnics eventually succeeded in unionizing the Aliquippa mill during the 1930s because the years of discrimination caused them to band together, determined to right previous wrongs.\footnote{Mary Cozzicoli, interview by unknown, transcript, n.d., 8–9, box 2, folder 44, Beaver Valley Labor History Society Collection, 1909–1981, AIS.1981.08, Archives & Special Collections, University of Pittsburgh.}

Problems were not confined to the Jones and Laughlin mill as personal remembrances and newspaper reports show a web of grievances throughout the region. Work conditions in the coalfields were incredibly unsafe. In Heilwood, Pennsylvania, a local mining company used the shaft depth at which workers began to pass out from lack of oxygen as a sign to stop digging deeper and open a new mine.\footnote{Florie Gaston, interview by Nicholas Ciotola, transcript, 13 October 2000, 8, From Italy to Indiana County: The Italian Immigrant Experience in Indiana, Pennsylvania and Environs, 1900–1950 Records, 2000–2001, MSS 344, Detre Library and Archives, Senator John Heinz History Center, Pittsburgh, PA.} Unsafe conditions and practices led to excessive numbers of people killed or injured on the job. As one Italian-American woman recounted with broken English in an interview decades later: “Everyday, everyday, come, come home, somebody get killed.”\footnote{Anna Forno, interview by Cathy Cerrone, transcript, 12 December 1995, 20, 1998.0200, Detre Library and Archives, Senator John Heinz History Center, Pittsburgh, PA.} Numerous Italian Americans lost friends and family, including one man who lost his brother in 1909 and his father in 1922.
to mine cave-ins. Others barely escaped death, with some losing appendages or being crippled. Children remembered the accidents that almost killed their family members, such as one man whose father returned home burnt after a mine explosion that killed other men. Another recounted a story about how a coworker dragged his unconscious father out of a mine. After a mine fire started, the company ordered the man to hang a piece of canvas to starve it of air. He passed out from the fumes. Italian-American press accounts and statistics reinforced personal experiences. In 1919, for example, there were twelve


95 “Gli Infortuni nelle Miniere,” La Trinacria (Pittsburgh, PA), 2 October 1925, 3.
killed and forty-seven injured in Indiana County, Pennsylvania’s seventy-six coal mines. Since Italian Americans constituted the second-largest ethnic group (1023 workers) employed in the industry after generic “Americans” (1257 people), they likely suffered proportionally high numbers killed and hurt on the job. Men did not easily forget that they sometimes earned their positions because they replaced those who previously died in the mines.

Those employed outside of the coal mines did not fare much better. Ethnic papers carried the news of men hurt and killed in industrial accidents. Angelo Sorcano of Cleveland died in St. Alexis Hospital after being burned while working at the Ohio Clay Company. Boiler vapor scalded Tony Cinquini and Antonio Canatti at Youngstown’s Republic Rubber Works, leaving the men seriously injured. A week later, members of the Youngstown community attended a ceremony for Richard Ricardo, whose body was being sent by railroad to family in Waynesburg, Ohio, for burial. A young laborer at Carnegie Steel, a red-hot rod pierced Ricardo’s leg. Complications from the resulting amputation caused his death. Like Ricardo, Frank Picciochi died at the hospital “after a week of horrible agonies” caused by a workplace incident at Republic Iron & Steel

96 “Quanto Carbone Si E’ Estratto in 76 Miniere della Nostra Contea durante l’Anno 1919, Il Patriota (Indiana, PA), 6 March 1920, 2.
98 “Vittima del lavoro,” La Voce del Popolo Italiano (Cleveland, OH), 29 January 1921, 1.
100 “Una Pietosa Cerimonia,” Il Cittadino Italo-Americano, 4 September 1926, 2.
Company, which fractured his skull.\textsuperscript{101} One interviewee described the death of a relative, Paolo Lucente, years after a fatal accident in Pittsburgh. Lucente worked on a construction project when a cement cart hit him. He lost his legs and subsequently died in the hospital.\textsuperscript{102}

These workplace incidents reinforced a belief based on real-world experiences that companies exploited workers. Speaking about Paolo Lucente’s death, his relative concluded dryly: “He laid there for two hours … [before they picked] him up and took him to the hospital. For 7 dollars a week. Treated like dogs.”\textsuperscript{103} Workers understood the probability that many of them would one day experience a workplace accident as participants or observers. However, they were angry that business owners, managers, and other elites refused to compensate them appropriately for their risks and stonewalled workers’ attempts to air grievances. For example, Angela Baccelli recounted a story about her grandfather, who worked in a Pittsburgh candy factory. An elevator broke, killing one man and injuring her relative. Unfortunately, her grandfather was illiterate, and the manager at the factory “made him sign a paper with an ‘X’ forfeiting all his rights for any salary or recompensation at all for his hospital bills and for his injuries,” which destroyed his life savings.\textsuperscript{104} The feeling of dual exploitation for being immigrants and working class was familiar. As Lucia Borgna explained in an interview concerning her husband, who arrived from Italy in 1922 with no knowledge of English, “they just put you there [in the

\textsuperscript{101} “La Morte di Frank Picciochi,” \textit{Il Cittadino Italo-American}, 18 December 1926, 3.
\textsuperscript{102} Emiliano (Emil) Lucente, interview by Nicholas P. Ciotola, transcript, 8 October 1998, 17, 2002.0070, Detre Library and Archives, Senator John Heinz History Center, Pittsburgh, PA.
\textsuperscript{103} Lucente, 17.
\textsuperscript{104} Angela Silvioni Baccelli, interview by Laura Baccelli, transcript, 1 December 1975, 5, box 1, folder 11, Ethnic Fraternal Organizations Oral History Project Collection, 1975–1976, AIS.1976.25, Archives & Special Collections, University of Pittsburgh.
coal mines,] and you work like a jackass.”¹⁰⁵ The ethnic press reinforced these feelings at the time, such as reporting about the “sad conditions” in Hillsville, Pennsylvania, along the Ohio border, where Italian-American miners worked ten- to twelve-hour days in all types of weather for poor pay. Their conditions were further proof, La Trinacria of Pittsburgh stated, that their lives were “certainly worse than the serfs of the Middle Ages.”¹⁰⁶ The prejudice was so prevalent at the time that they felt as though they were almost at the very bottom of the social hierarchy. As Borgna continued, Italian Americans and other new immigrant groups “were almost treated like colored [people]. We always used to say, we was [sic] the second, the next one after the colored.”¹⁰⁷

In other cases, Italian-American workers noted how employers maintained the minimum required by law or utilized loopholes to harass employees and their families, gambling that many would simply fall into line rather than fight. As coal miner Florie Gaston explained, the law required paying employees at least one dollar in cash every two weeks. Companies followed that minimum and doled out the remainder in credit only valuable at the company-owned store.¹⁰⁸ In some towns, patronizing the company store was an unwritten requirement for keeping one’s job.¹⁰⁹ In other cases, according to miner Richard Furgiuele, employees purchased food from farms run by the mine bosses “because you didn’t know if you were going to have a job if you didn’t.”¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁵ Borgna, interview, 11–12. Quote on 12.
¹⁰⁶ “Le Triste Condizioni delle Nostre Colonie,” La Trinacria, 20 February 1925, 1. The article also pointed readers to Pascal D’Angelo’s recently published memoir “Son of Italy” about life in America as an unskilled laborer.
¹⁰⁷ Borgna, interview, 14.
¹⁰⁸ Gaston, interview, 11.
¹⁰⁹ Borgna, interview, 3.
¹¹⁰ Furgiuele, interview, 17.
Furgiuele’s comment illustrates the more significant problem concerning how the local power structure marginalized workers. As one 1922 letter to *Il Martello*, Carlo Tresca’s radical labor newspaper, lamented, “spies, lackeys, State guards, all this social filth seems to had found in Colver[, Pennsylvania,] and the surrounding area, favorable terrain.”\(^\text{111}\) One form of “social filth” that the writer had in mind was the dreaded Coal and Iron Police. Authorized by the Pennsylvania State Legislature in 1865, the Coal and Iron Police supplemented county sheriffs in maintaining order for the railroad and mining businesses that operated in sparsely populated areas. The organization became a private police force for companies akin to, and initially trained by, the better-known Pinkerton Detective Agency. Although the Pennsylvania Legislature charted the State Police in 1905 to have more control and oversight, the Coal and Iron Police continued to intimidate workers until Governor Gifford Pinchot ended the organization in 1931.\(^\text{112}\)

Italian Americans recalled terrible stories about the Coal and Iron Police harassing workers on businesses’ behalf. The organization utilized fear as a means of control. The companies and police encouraged and rewarded workers for spying on each other, and they threatened noncitizens with deportation. When miners claimed to be sick and failed to show up for work, the Coal and Iron Police put them in jail under the pretext that the worker was drunk or hungover.\(^\text{113}\) In order to arrest unionization efforts in mining communities, the police restricted travel between towns, forbid any assembly of men over two in number during strikes, evicted tenants from company housing, and in Heilwood, Pennsylvania,

\(^{113}\) Gaston, interview, 12–14.
adopted a 9:00 p.m. curfew. In some cases, the conflict between employer and employee followed a scorched earth policy, such as when a group of strikers blew up the company trucks used by the Coal and Iron Police to import “scabs,” or nonunion strikebreakers.

These feelings of exploitation crossed gender lines. While some asserted that the Italian-American community favored a traditional domestic role for women, this notion is misleading. Indeed, women did not consider themselves wageworkers, but many still performed work within the home that contributed to the family income, an attribute that separated these ethnic women from the middle-class ideal. Census records about women’s employment underrepresented female laborers because many operated in an informal economy performing work that few wanted to admit, given the culture at the time. For example, one 1913 study of lower Manhattan families found that over half of Italian-American mothers contributed to the family income, with many performing piecemeal work at home or keeping boarders. Italian-American women toiled in higher numbers than other groups because many husbands performed manual labor occupations that slowed or halted during the winter, and there was an overwhelming desire for families to save money. In one extreme example, a woman recalled her mother taking in boarders in

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114 Furgiuele, interview, 13–15.
117 Christine E. Bose, Women in 1900: Gateway to the Political Economy of the 20th Century (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2001), 22–50. According to Bose’s estimates, close to a quarter of Italian-American women aged 15–64 lived with boarders in 1900. They were the racial/ethnic group with the highest percentage. See page 46.
119 Foerster, The Italian Emigration of Our Times, 380–81.
Donora, Pennsylvania, south of Pittsburgh, after her father died in a 1914 mining accident. They hosted fourteen men – the first half working days and the second half working nights – for three dollars each per month. In other cases, wives and daughters labored in family stores, especially when a husband or father worked another job in the mines or mills. The more affluent aided husbands and fathers with bookkeeping and timecards. While seldom identifying themselves as wage laborers, many Italian-American women were nevertheless workers.

During the 1920s, an Italian-American audience existed that shared class grievances. The Red Scare may have stopped the most extreme manifestations of workers’ movements, but failure to address the roots of that working-class anger left masses of people searching for ideas that would solve their problems. Sacco and Vanzetti provided the cover to present economic arguments under the guise of ethnicity.

The Tours

The Red Scare’s success and the deportation of Luigi Galleani opened the door to Carlo Tresca and his softer, more malleable form of leftist radicalism. As historian Nunzio Pernicone stated bluntly, “there is no question that during the period of the Sacco-Vanzetti case, Tresca was the most important and best-known Italian radical in the United States.”123 As explained previously, the Galleanists followed a strict doctrine and were known as the *anti-organizzatori* because they disliked organizations and were committed to individualism. Tresca was an anarcho-syndicalist once associated with the IWW, which allowed him to have a foot in the unionization movement. Additionally, he had connections with Americans outside of the radical left, including lawyers and politicians. While the Galleanists never accepted the idea of Tresca as a leader because of their political temperament, there was little that they could do to challenge him, especially after the US government drove them underground. This allowed Carlo Tresca to assume the mantle of the two men’s defense.124 As Pernicone concluded, Tresca, through his newspaper *Il Martello* and public speaking events, “was thus instrumental in raising desperately needed funds and in keeping the case a live issue within the Italian and American communities.”125

Importantly, although Tresca was nominally an anarcho-syndicalist, he never bound himself to a specific ideology. According to Guy Liberti, the pseudonym of an anarchist active in Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and Ohio who eventually joined a Cleveland group that published the newspaper *L’Appello*, Tresca was “an opportunist, a

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124 Pernicone, 538–41.
125 Pernicone, 541.
jumping jack” and certainly not an anarchist by Liberti’s standards. Historians have generally agreed with this assessment. John P. Diggins described the radical as “neither a callous apparatchik nor a doctrinaire ideologue,” and he was instead a man willing to fit the needs of his times. Pernicone believed that Tresca “was too eclectic and unorthodox to be classified according to standard typology,” and he and his newspaper’s “primary mission was not to engage in evangelical propaganda on behalf of the ‘Movement’ or the ‘Ideal,’ but to fight the battles of the working class.” Tresca’s skill was his oratory and personality. He was an excellent speaker in Italian, and although his mastery of English was limited, he was still able to project ideas sufficiently, if not as eloquently, in the language. His open personality gained him friends within and outside of various radical circles. Tresca’s flexibility encouraged a broad definition of leftism and allowed it to operate as a big-tent movement.

Tresca and his associates reached average Italian Americans through lecture and fundraising tours across the United States. By the time of Sacco and Vanzetti’s indictment in 1920, Italian Americans increasingly searched for a political ideology that would provide solutions to their ethnic, working-class grievances while being compatible with Americanization and their newly adopted civic values. Even before the Red Scare, it was difficult to dismiss the radical-leftist label once one committed, and arrest and conviction

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129 Pernicone, 1–2, 83.
130 Pernicone, “Carlo Tresca and the Sacco-Vanzetti Case,” 540.
brought harsh penalties.\textsuperscript{131} Defending Sacco and Vanzetti as two wronged Italian-American workers rather than anarchists presented a more palatable means to reach people. In the process, Tresca and others used the opportunity to continue their fight on behalf of the working class.

Two main associations provided financial assistance and media relations for Sacco and Vanzetti. The first was the \textit{Comitato Italiano Pro-Vittime Politiche} (Italian Committee for Political Victims), which Tresca initially created in 1919 to provide aid and assistance to persecuted Italian-American political radicals during the Red Scare.\textsuperscript{132} The organization was innately linked to Tresca, who served as its chairman.\textsuperscript{133} The next most important member was the group’s secretary, Luigi Quintiliano, who served as the point of contact for the group and \textit{Il Martello} concerning Sacco and Vanzetti and any matters arising from the case.\textsuperscript{134} The Italian Committee for Political Victims was a catchall that went far beyond Sacco and Vanzetti, and in subsequent years, it expanded to include relief to victims of Fascism.\textsuperscript{135} After the pair’s indictment, radicals established the Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee, another organization. The Defense Committee’s core consisted of Galleanists,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{131} Avrich, \textit{Sacco and Vanzetti}, 191. “The immigration law of October 16, 1918, authorized deportation for those who ‘knowingly have in their possession for the purpose of circulation, distribution, publication, or display any written or printed matter, advising, advocating, or teaching opposition to all organized government.’”
\item \textsuperscript{132} Nunzio Pernicone, “War among the Italian Anarchists: The Galleanisti’s Campaign against Carlo Tresca,” in \textit{The Lost World of Italian American Radicalism: Politics, Labor, and Culture}, ed. Philip V. Cannistraro and Gerald Meyer (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), 82.
\item \textsuperscript{133} Dorothy Gallagher, \textit{All the Right Enemies: The Life and Murder of Carlo Tresca} (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1988), 78–79.
\item \textsuperscript{134} Gallagher, 86; Avrich, \textit{Sacco and Vanzetti}, 190.
\end{itemize}
devout ideological anarchists. Secretary Amleto Fabbri had operated a shoemaking business with noted radical Mario Buda in Italy before returning to the United States. In 1924, Emilio Coda, who had been living in Paris and writing in support of Sacco and Vanzetti, returned from self-exile. He assumed the secretary role of the Defense Committee. Coda personally hated Tresca and worked to separate him from having any role in the Defense Committee while repeatedly attacking the man in the anarchist press; however, Tresca remained the predominant figure on the Italian-American left regardless of Coda’s animosities.

While personal issues may have hampered a deep friendship between the two entities’ men, the organizations appeared to have a good working relationship during the early 1920s. In December 1920, as the movement to defend Sacco and Vanzetti began to grow, members of the Italian Committee for Political Victims and the Defense Committee met in person “to put [themselves] completely in agreement,” likely concerning the role each organization would play. A few days later, Quintiliano, writing on behalf of the Italian Committee for Political Victims, responded to Frank Lopez and Aldino Felicani of the Defense Committee, stating that they had cleared up “all the misunderstandings” and

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136 Avrich, *Sacco and Vanzetti*, 62, 208. Buda was the embodiment of the violent anarchist character. Although never arrested and tried, he is the assumed perpetrator of the Wall Street Bombing. See Avrich, 204–7.
planned to “work with more energy” for the cause.\textsuperscript{139} Over the following months, the two organizations exchanged information regarding financial collections, transfers of money, and upcoming programming.\textsuperscript{140} However, these were separate organizations, and that allowed Tresca, Quintiliano, and other associates to speak freely about the trial, discrimination, and political ideology in a manner they viewed fit.

The establishment of a Tresca-backed speaking and fundraising tour came at the optimal time to fend off the loss of potential audiences. As the Red Scare deepened, attending political events became more dangerous, and there was the possibility that many Italian Americans would choose to stay home out of fear of being involved. For example, a lecture tour in December 1919 took Tresca through Pennsylvania and Ohio to Detroit, Michigan, before returning east via Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania.\textsuperscript{141} On 21 December 1919, Tresca was scheduled to speak at the Cristoforo Colombo Hall in Beaver Falls on “the labor movement in America and in England” at five o’clock. Police waited for Tresca’s arrival at the train station, but they missed the radical because he arrived late. He immediately went to the hall “where the crowd still waited anxious[ly]” to hear his talk, but the police banned the event and refused to allow him to enter the building. Tresca and others then

\textsuperscript{139} Luigi Quintiliano to Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee, letter, 28 December 1920, box 6, folder 1, Aldino Felicani Sacco-Vanzetti Collection, 1915–1977, MS 2030, Boston Public Library, https://ark.digitalcommonwealth.org/ark:/50959/hx11z632z.


\textsuperscript{141} Pernicone, \textit{Carlo Tresca}, 110–12.
went to the home of a man named Di Cicco. At this point, eight officers, “armed to the
teeth” and headed by Police Chief Michael Coyne, illegally entered Di Cicco’s home to
harass Tresca and force him to leave town at gunpoint. While waving his revolver at the
group, it discharged, causing terror. Tresca identified himself as the man that the police
sought, and they escorted Tresca and his companion, Domenico Ciotti, to the local train
station to ensure that the two men left town immediately. It was at this point, when Tresca
and Ciotti left the house for the station, that associates informed the pair that James Terracio
went to the hospital, bleeding from the abdomen, apparently shot.142 According to Terracio,
Coyne shot him in the back. Coyne and the other officers claimed that they heard a small
explosion while questioning the Italian Americans, but all denied shooting Terracio.143

For James Terracio, being involved with the talk proved fatal; he died on Christmas
Day, 1919, from his wounds. By all accounts, Terracio was not a radical. He was a
stonework contractor and prominent Italian American in the community, having
naturalized and resided in Beaver Falls for twenty-five years with his wife and children.
He served as president of the Cristoforo Colombo club, Tresca’s intended meeting venue,
and he supported the Allied cause during the First World War. Terracio was with Tresca

142 Domenico Ciotti, “Le violenze della polizia a Beaver Falls, Pa.,” Il Martello, 1
January 1920, 15–16. Throughout this episode, sources spelled James Terracio in
multiple ways. This article used Giovanni Terraccio and Giovanni Terracciano, while
Pernicone identified him as Giovanni Terracini in the above source. Most of the English-
language articles referred to him as James Terracio (or some close misspelling of that
name), which is corroborated by the 1910 US Census and local city directory. See “James
Terracio, Pennsylvania, Beaver County, Beaver Falls Borough, Ward 3, Enumeration
District 10, Page 7A,” in 1910 United States Census, NARA microfilm publication T624,
roll 1310, Washington, DC; National Archives and Records Administration; Beaver
143 “Wounded Man Accuses Police at Beaver Falls,” Pittsburgh Press, 22 December
1919, 15.
because he had known the man during his early career in Italy, and he wanted to convince Tresca to leave behind the life of a radical.\(^{144}\) Coyne was tried and acquitted of the murder after the jury accepted the argument that Terracio was shot using “a gun in the hands of a party or parties unknown.”\(^{145}\) As the English-language press noted each time, the shooting occurred during a meeting of alleged anarchists, “reds,” or radicals.\(^{146}\) With men like Coyne on a “crusade” against Italian-American radicals, attendees were not safe to frequent meetings no matter their political philosophy.\(^{147}\) Many would have agreed with Tresca’s statement about Pennsylvania after the murder: “The black land of the Cossacks. Here every liberty is dead.”\(^{148}\)


\(^{145}\) “Squire Holds Beaver Chief; Coroner Jury Finds Unknown Slew Italian,” *Pittsburgh Post* (Pittsburgh, PA), 30 December 1919, 11. See also “Beaver Chief of Police Is Acquitted of Murder,” *Pittsburgh Gazette Times*, 21 March 1920, 6. A few days after the acquittal, Coyne announced that he would work to bring Terracio’s murderer to justice. According to the police chief, an Italian American who supposedly assaulted Terracio months before was present during the raid and may have been the culprit. Coyne, however, did not explain how a shooting occurred with several police officers in the direct vicinity, and no one was able to identify a killer at that immediate time. See “Acquitted Police Chief Will Seek Murderer,” *Reading News-Times* (Reading, PA), 24 March 1920, 6.


\(^{147}\) “Beaver Falls Italian, Shot in Raid, Dies,” *Pittsburgh Gazette Times*, 26 December 1919, 5.

\(^{148}\) Carlo Tresca, “Note di Viaggio,” *Il Martello*, 15 January 1920, 12
If Tresca and his associates could open the door to speaking in a community, then they easily held the public’s attention with their ideas. During the tour that ended with the Beaver Falls murder, some attendees at earlier events wrote feedback to *Il Martello* about the meaning of Tresca’s visit. In Detroit, where he spoke for two hours, including on “the pressing truths about the European conflict,” a participant noted the significance of the visit. Many knew of Tresca’s reputation as a leader because of his involvement in the unionization movement in the Minnesota iron range and elsewhere. The Detroit lecture was the first time that most met him personally, and those that did not attend regretted the decision.\(^\text{149}\) He received a similarly enthusiastic reception during a Cleveland lecture in the summer of 1920. Speaking “about the Italian situation,” which most likely meant describing the post-First World War leftist turmoil across the country in a favorable light, the packed room “followed the orator with the liveliest attention.” His logic was simple and convincing, and it allowed for “the good sowing of our ideas.” The conference organizers recalled the meeting’s success at rousing the community: “All [of the attendees] ask us: when will he return, Tresca? And we respond: soon.”\(^\text{150}\) Tresca’s ideas held the public’s attention because class and ethnic discrimination had primed them to follow such arguments with an open mind. Considering some of the topics from the latter part of his tour in western Pennsylvania (“The Italian Situation” in New Derry, “From Slavery to Freedom” in Iselin, “Capital and Labor” in Ernest), attendees heard opinions steeped in

working-class resentment. If Tresca and his associates could arrange a lecture, Italian Americans were willing to listen and consider their ideas.

The key was providing a cover for people to attend. As had been shown in Tresca’s December 1919 tour, miners in eastern Pennsylvania who once flocked to such meetings were now afraid, and they only appeared once it was clear that police would not harass them. As Sacco and Vanzetti became causes célèbres and people like Sons of Italy leader Giovanni Di Silvestro defended the pair, it became easier for Tresca and others to enter communities. Lectures and fundraisers held to benefit the two men were ostensibly about ethnic and class discrimination rather than revolution. The mass sensation of the cause célèbre made it more difficult for police or other agents of the state to disrupt meetings organized under the pretext of supporting American values rather than subversive rhetoric.

As the meeting and fundraising tour began in earnest during the winter of 1920–1921, leftist ideology reached wider and larger circles of Italian Americans throughout the region. Shortly after Luigi Quintiliano penned responses to the Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee about having cleared up “all the misunderstandings” concerning the role of the Italian Committee for Political Victims, the Tresca associate embarked on a lecture circuit. He was uniquely qualified to serve as a stand-in for the better-known radical. The Abruzzo-born Italian arrived in the United States in 1910. A tailor by trade, he was a lifelong leftist. Quintiliano’s collaboration with Carlo Tresca began in 1915. He was an original member of Il Martello’s editorial board, sometimes writing under the pseudonym “Lucifero” (Lucifer), and his association with the radical paper lasted two decades. During the 1930s,

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152 Pernicone, Carlo Tresca, 111.
he became an organizer for the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU) and the Steel Workers Organizing Committee (a precursor to the United Steelworkers of America). He remained associated with the ILGWU after the Second World War. Quintiliano’s position on the Italian Committee for Political Victims and his role as an editor-writer for *Il Martello* kept him informed on many current Italian and working-class issues. He occasionally wrote articles about the Red Scare, events with other radicals, cases of discrimination and police abuse against Italian Americans, and Italian politicians and politics, including the advent of Fascism and its influence in the United States. He later served alongside Tresca on the Anti-Fascist Alliance of North America’s executive committee. Quintiliano was well-versed in current events and developments, and he had an extensive repertoire of topics that he could have interpreted and diffused from a leftist position during his travels.

After some events in Utica and Rochester, New York, Quintiliano began his month-long speaking tour of western Pennsylvania in mid-January 1921. In addition to Pittsburgh, Quintiliano scheduled visits to another two dozen cities, towns, and mining communities, including South Fork, Beaverdale, Johnstown, Heilwood, Emeigh, Ernest, Homer City, New Derry, Latrobe, Mount Pleasant, Irwin, Freeport, Russellton, Curtisville, Bentleyville,

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155 Pernicone, *Carlo Tresca*, 175.
Marianna, Newell, Rillton, Uniontown, McIntyre, Aultman, and Rossiter. There was some trouble – Quintiliano arrived too late in Uniontown to address the assembled group in that city, and organizers failed to find meeting spaces in Johnstown and Heilwood – but the tour was generally successful. The speaker added other destinations to his circuit, including Greensburg and Monongahela. Quintiliano would have visited a crowd in Coraopolis if not for the lack of transportation.

Figure 3.1 Quintiliano’s January–February 1921 Speaking Tour of Western Pennsylvania

Importantly, these were open events, not confined to small groups of radicals in each area, and they appeared to have had community support in many places. In Rossiter, local Luigi Del Grande noted that after Quintiliano’s first visit, they expected the leftist to return, this time in conjunction with the opening of a Sons of Italy lodge. Instead of blocking the radical speaker from presenting, many ethnic societies opened their doors and wallets to his lecture and fundraising tour on behalf of Sacco and Vanzetti. In Monongahela, Quintiliano spoke under the auspices of the Loggia Amilcare Cipriani in cooperation with other local societies, including Società Cesare Battisti, Società Bersaglieri, and Società Pre Alpina. Loggia Amilcare Cipriani’s leader, Vincenzo Bartolotta, opened the assembly. Quintiliano spoke alongside Domenico Ciotti, Tresca’s associate from the Beaver Falls incident, at the Società Unite C. Colombo-Grande Italia hall in Greensburg. Other entities provided group contributions in support of the cause, including the following: Loggia Nuova Piave of McKeesport; Loggia Conte di Torino of Braddock; Loggia Nuova Giovane Italia of New Kensington; Loggia Provincia Caserta, Trento e Trieste, Loggia Terza Italia, Loggia 24 Maggio, Loggia Cooperativa Calzolai, Società Reggia Marina, Loggia Pittsburgh, and Loggia Nuova Vittorio Emmanuele, all of Pittsburgh.

Comments sent to Il Martello showed attendees’ enthusiasm and the breadth of Quintiliano’s remarks. L. Fiorentini noted that the audience in South Fork was “strongly impressed,” and Domenico Ciotti commented that the ideas conveyed during the Latrobe

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158 “Pro Sacco e Vanzetti,” Il Martello, 5 February 1921, 4. According to the tour of cities noted above, Quintiliano had two visits scheduled for Rossiter, the first on 20 January (which misspelled the town as “Rsoviter”) and the return visit on 10 February.
presentation were “clear, convincing.” ¹⁶⁰ In Beaverdale, G. Mainetti wrote that even with the cold and snowy Pennsylvania winter, “a strong number of workers rushed to hear the word of our young comrade.” The details of the trial captivated the audience, such as L. Borgognoni of Freeport, who noted that Quintiliano’s speech included “a vivid explanation of the inquisitorial methods used by [Attorney General A. Mitchell] Palmer against free thinkers.” As F. Temporelli of Bakerton, who probably attended the conference in nearby Emeigh, wrote, Quintiliano’s talk alone lasted for an hour and a half. In other cases, such as in Pittsburgh and Greensburg, Quintiliano shared the stage with local speakers who espoused leftist ideology, including in the latter town Domenico Ciotti and C. Pitocchi, who spoke about workers’ rights. The inclusion of Pitocchi, the director of Greensburg’s La Stella d’Italia newspaper, was a clear example of how the Sacco-Vanzetti cause célèbre brought in prominenti, local community leaders, as allies. In at least one town, Homer City, Quintiliano “closed with a strong appeal for the working class’s solidarity,” only to remain for another hour to discuss current events in Italy.¹⁶¹

As time passed and Quintiliano began to address Italian-American listeners who already had a basic understanding of the Sacco and Vanzetti case, his conferences increasingly delved into leftist ideology. For example, during a celebration coinciding with May Day, Quintiliano went to Swatara Station, near Harrisburg, to fundraise for the condemned men. His talk, which for the better part of “two hours held all of us [in the audience] under the allure of his word,” went beyond calling for solidarity and support for the two condemned radicals. He spoke “heated words for Italian social-democracy.”

¹⁶⁰ “Pro Sacco e Vanzetti,” Il Martello, 5 February 1921, 4.
Domestically, the United States was a “bourgeois republic,” and the Sacco-Vanzetti trial was part of a more significant wave of “infamous organized persecutions against Italian free thinkers in America.” Keeping with May Day’s theme, the meeting ended with a hymn in honor of “red Russia” and the Russian people. Sacco and Vanzetti made a useful cover.

Luigi Quintiliano and others made subsequent speaking tours throughout western Pennsylvania and eastern Ohio. During the summer of 1921, Quintiliano embarked on an extended trip across the industrial Midwest with plans to pass through Ohio, Michigan, Illinois, West Virginia, and Pennsylvania. In late June, he visited Canton, Bedford, and Lorain, Ohio, before continuing to Detroit and numerous small towns throughout Illinois. Unfortunately for those wanting to hear the radical, the Sacco-Vanzetti trial in Dedham, Massachusetts, forced the speaker to end his tour short. Once in St. Louis, Missouri, he received a telegram asking for his return to aid Vanzetti’s defense.

The Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee funded additional tours for several leftist speakers. From August 1921 through March 1922, the organization disbursed travel funds each month for Constantino Zonchello to advocate for the condemned men. Zonchello, who fled Italy after a 1908 conviction for embezzlement, was a Galleanist who had been

164 “Pro Sacco e Vanzetti: Itinerario del giro Quintiliano,” Il Martello, 18 June 1921, 3.
165 “Pro Sacco e Vanzetti,” Il Martello, 16 May 1921, 4; “Giro Quintiliano,” Il Martello, 23 July 1921, 4.
publicly speaking about leftist ideology since at least the mid-1910s. He directed the newspaper *L’Adunata dei Refrattari*, founded by Galleanists in 1922 as a successor to *Cronaca Sovversiva*, and he briefly collaborated with Tresca, Quintiliano, and others as part of an American anti-Fascist front.\textsuperscript{167} In Bellaire, Ohio, he gave an Italian-language address on behalf of Sacco and Vanzetti and their ideals alongside Jacob Margolís’s presentation in English and an unnamed Russian speaker.\textsuperscript{168} More importantly, the Galleanist-dominated Defense Committee also paid the traveling expenses for radicals such as Arturo Calvani (first for August through November 1921 and again from February to March 1922) and Elizabeth Gurley Flynn (February through June 1922). They were more ideologically aligned with Tresca than with the Galleanists.\textsuperscript{169} While the pair operated a joint tour of New England beginning in October 1921, both speakers also presented independently at times.\textsuperscript{170}

Flynn was the better-known orator. She was a leader in the Industrial Workers of the World, a critical figure in the 1912 Lawrence textile strike, and a founding member of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). Besides these organizational memberships that brought her to Sacco and Vanzetti’s defense, Flynn was in a decade-long professional and personal relationship with Carlo Tresca until 1925. She joined the Communist Party in

\textsuperscript{167} Tomchuk, *Transnational Radicals*, 72, 81, 100, 148, 152; Pernicone, *Carlo Tresca*, 145. There is some discrepancy about the spelling of Zonchello’s first name. Tomchuk called him Constantino while Pernicone wrote Costantino.


\textsuperscript{169} Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee, *Financial Report*, 29, 32, 35, 37, 43–47, 49. Throughout this source, Calvani is referred to as A. Galvani. This was a typographical error because donation entries from this financial report match within days of newspaper accounts of Calvani’s visits to those places.

Calvani was associated with the United Mine Workers, and he contributed to *Il Martello* in that capacity. His visits included stops in Rayland, Ohio, and Avella, Pennsylvania, in August, and in Masontown and Monessen, Pennsylvania, where he spoke at the Nord Italia Hall, in September, before starting his joint work with Flynn in New England in October. Calvani recrossed western Pennsylvania in November to fundraise in Monessen (again returning to Nord Italia Hall for a two-hour-long presentation) and Gallatin. Beyond their paired tours, Flynn spoke in several larger cities around the Great Lakes, including Cleveland, Akron, and Erie, Pennsylvania. If these conferences followed a similar script to the one held in Minneapolis as part of the same lecture circuit, Flynn immersed the audience in class resentment. The *Minnesota Daily Star*’s Herbert E. Gaston opined that locals needed not to fear Flynn, who was fighting for justice and American-style equality for two working-class immigrants that did not receive either. The *Minneapolis Morning Tribune* was more explicit about Flynn’s class agitation. She denounced “New England class hatred” and described Vanzetti as a “marked man” by

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capitalist interests because of his previous support for striking workers. After Flynn and Calvani’s paired presentations throughout Illinois in February and March 1922, Calvani returned to Ohio and raised money in Cleveland, Youngstown, and Lorain. He held subsequent talks in Monongahela and Gallatin, the latter of which he spoke during a benefit dance.

Additional associates contributed to keeping the message alive and circulating. Guido Mascio, who would be arrested in 1925 and later cleared for supposed-anarchist sedition in Pittsburgh alongside two fellow Italian-American machinists from Detroit, planned a mining camp tour throughout eastern Pennsylvania, Ohio, and West Virginia during the summer of 1921. F. Di Stefano gained responsibility for Il Martello’s outreach in Pennsylvania. Erasmo Abate, a Philadelphia-based radical that the government deported in early 1922, spoke to a large gathering in Renton, a mining town about twenty

177 “Sacco and Vanzetta [sic] Cause Pleadèd Here,” Minneapolis Morning Tribune (Minneapolis, MN), 3 February 1922, 17.
178 Arturo Calvani, “Comunicati: Giro Flynn-Calvani,” Il Martello, 11 March 1922, 3; “Comunicati: Continuazione Giro Caliani [sic],” Il Martello, 8 April 1922, 4. The 8 April article has a typographical error with Calvani spelled Caliani. This was Arturo Calvani because the 11 March article notes that he planned to visit towns in Wisconsin, Michigan, Ohio, and New York, and these match the 8 April collections tally.
179 Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee, Financial Report, 44–45; Il Comitato, “Nostre Corrispondenze: Gallatin [sic], Pa.,” Il Martello, 15 April 1922, 4. Both locations are misspelled in the Financial Report, the latter as “Callatine.” This was Gallatin because the collected money matches that indicated in Il Martello.
180 “Comunicati,” Il Martello, 2 July 1921, 4; “Court Drops Sedition Case,” Pittsburgh Post-Gazette (Pittsburgh, PA), 22 June 1929, 2; “Sedition Charges Against Trio Dropped,” Pittsburgh Press, 22 June 1929, 3. Mascio, Ralph Ferrone, and Joseph Leone were arrested 26 December 1925 on charges of possessing anarchist literature. They were later cleared when an expert explained the Italian-language evidence; the word “anarchist” was used in the context of Fascist Italy, it was not directed against the United States government.
miles east of downtown Pittsburgh, on 19 November 1921.\textsuperscript{182} Local friends worked to spread information to nearby communities. Vincenzo Palmieri, who had presided over Quintiliano’s January 1921 meeting hosted by the group Giordano Bruno in Pittsburgh’s East Liberty neighborhood, noted that while unemployment was still high in the city, he was working hard to collect funds.\textsuperscript{183} Domenico Ciotti of Latrobe, Tresca’s companion during the Beaver Falls incident who had opened the February 1921 meeting for Quintiliano in Greensburg, made a brief tour south of the Pennsylvania state line to Fairmont, Wyatt, and Owings, West Virginia.\textsuperscript{184} Although Tresca was the most famous touring radical leftist, many others filled the void when he and national figures were busy elsewhere.

Perhaps more importantly, additional funds and messages about solidarity with Sacco and Vanzetti came from Italian-American organizations and groups throughout the region separate from the numerous tours. Taking even a small sample, the last quarter of 1921, it is clear that Sacco and Vanzetti enjoyed popular support throughout the region, and their trial was on the minds of ordinary people.

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\textsuperscript{184} D. Ciotti, “Comunicati: Latrobe, Pa.,” \textit{Il Martello}, 8 October 1921, 4.
\end{flushleft}
Table 3.1 October Collections and Support (Location and Collector of Funds)\textsuperscript{185}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Collector</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Morgan (PA)</td>
<td>Antonio Placido\textsuperscript{186}</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pittsburgh</td>
<td>Vincenzo Palmieri\textsuperscript{187}</td>
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<tr>
<td>Russelton (PA)</td>
<td>F. Cappello\textsuperscript{188}</td>
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<td>Belle Vernon (PA)</td>
<td>M. Nardi</td>
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<td>Dunlevy (PA)</td>
<td>Garibaldi Association by Nardi</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dubois (PA)</td>
<td>P.D.S. Sec. and the Roma dei Cesari Lodge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridgeport (OH)</td>
<td>J. Anselmo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bellaire (OH)</td>
<td>Carlo Zaccagnini from proceeds from a benefit play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Kensington (PA)</td>
<td>S.O.M.S. Umbria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allison (PA)</td>
<td>G. Vignali</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pittsburgh</td>
<td>S.M.S. G. Marconi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renton (PA)</td>
<td>A. Bianchi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marstellar (PA)</td>
<td>P. Causa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rayland (OH)</td>
<td>F. Gianotto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piney Fork (OH)</td>
<td>L. Modolo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McKeesport (PA)</td>
<td>W. Midakes and friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridgeville (PA)</td>
<td>Daniel Lupi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gallatin (PA)</td>
<td>Periccinoli</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sutersville (PA)</td>
<td>Andrew Sciaviarin and friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McKeesport</td>
<td>P. Hoffer and friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pittsburgh</td>
<td>Hirsh Book Store</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emeigh (PA)</td>
<td>F. Temporelli</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monessen (PA)</td>
<td>Emil Thermes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Mine Workers (UMW)</td>
<td>locals in Finleyville (PA), Wyano (PA),\textsuperscript{189} Avonmore (PA), Large (PA), Dillonvale (OH), Marstellar (PA), Stewartsville (OH), Neffs\textsuperscript{190} (OH), Bannock (OH), Bellaire (OH), Adena (OH), Willock (PA), Farmington (WV),\textsuperscript{191} Cambridge (OH), and Piney Fork (OH)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{185} From Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee, \textit{Financial Report}, 32–34, unless otherwise noted. These October through December lists do not include collections from touring speakers, like Calvani, or individual donors. Only included are collections marked as by, from, or through an organization or individual on behalf of a group.

\textsuperscript{186} Antonio Placido, “Morgan, Pa.,” \textit{Il Martello}, 15 October 1921, 2.

\textsuperscript{187} Vincenzo Palmieri, “Pittsburgh, Pa.,” \textit{Il Martello}, 15 October 1921, 2.

\textsuperscript{188} “Pro Sacco e Vanzetti: Russelton [sic], Pa.“, \textit{Il Martello}, 26 November 1921, 3.

During meetings on 28 and 29 October, the group decided to send telegrams of disapproval to Judge Thayer rather than donate money.

\textsuperscript{189} Misspelled as “Wyamo.”

\textsuperscript{190} Misspelled as “Noffs.”

\textsuperscript{191} Misspelled as “Framington.”
Table 3.2 November Collections and Support (Location and Collector of Funds)\textsuperscript{192}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Collector or Proceeds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Homer City (PA)</td>
<td>Fedele D’Amico\textsuperscript{193}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pittsburgh, PA</td>
<td>Regia Marina Mutual Aid Society, Nuova Vittorio Emanuele Lodge, and Giordano Bruno Lodge\textsuperscript{194}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iselin (PA)</td>
<td>benefit dance proceeds by Tony Leone\textsuperscript{195}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rillton (PA)</td>
<td>benefit dance proceeds via Luigi Negro\textsuperscript{196}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youngstown, PA</td>
<td>N. Colaianni Lodge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youngstown, PA</td>
<td>Casa Savoia Lodge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girard (OH)</td>
<td>V. E. Lodge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Struthers (OH)</td>
<td>S.O. di M.S.\textsuperscript{197}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youngstown, OH</td>
<td>S. di M.S. Colombo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dunlo (PA)</td>
<td>A. Casca</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pittsburgh, PA</td>
<td>Irene Kaufman Settlement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avella (PA)</td>
<td>Biagio Fanchini and friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latrobe, PA</td>
<td>F. Currado</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connerville, OH</td>
<td>P. Dolfi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleveland, OH</td>
<td>Brotherhood of Painters, Decorators and Paperhangers (B. of P.D.&amp;P.), Local 867</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UMW Locals in Bellaire, Connearville (OH), and Avella (PA)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{192} From Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee, \textit{Financial Report}, 35–37, unless otherwise noted.
\textsuperscript{193} “Corrispondenze: Homer City, Pa.,” \textit{Il Martello}, 19 November 1921, 2.
\textsuperscript{194} “Pro Sacco e Vanzetti: East Liberty, Pa.,” \textit{Il Martello}, 26 November 1921, 3. V. Palmieri noted that they decided to send telegrams to Judge Thayer since they donated money previously.
\textsuperscript{196} “Corrispondenze: Rillton, Pa.,” \textit{Il Martello}, 7 January 1922, 4. Collected from a benefit dance held at Vittoria Hall.
\textsuperscript{197} Misspelled as “Struther.”
Table 3.3 December Collections and Support (Location and Collector of Funds)\textsuperscript{198}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Collector/Proceeds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bellaire, American Alliance meeting\textsuperscript{199}</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiltonsville (OH), play proceeds via A. Algeri\textsuperscript{200}</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steubenville (OH), G. Simone</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charleroi (PA), S. Barzilai Lodge, number 468, Sons of Italy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warren (OH), Ferrisi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monarch (PA), F. Alfonso</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masontown (PA), dance proceeds</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avella, F. Giordano</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rayland, F. Gianotto for pamphlets</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pittsburgh, E. Gusberti and friends</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilmerding (PA), Indo Paggetti</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yorkville (OH), Gianotto</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleveland, Pistillo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bellaire, C. Di Nobile</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bellaire, UMW Sub-District 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleveland, Bakers and Confectioners, Local 56</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiltonsville, play proceeds via Algieri\textsuperscript{201}</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3.2 Map of Collections, October to December 1921

\textsuperscript{198} From Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee, \textit{Financial Report}, 38–39, unless otherwise noted.

\textsuperscript{199} The meeting was on 27 November 1921 but listed as a December deposit.

\textsuperscript{200} Misspelled as “Tiltonville.”

\textsuperscript{201} Algieri is likely A. Algeri, but it is unknown which is the correct spelling.
The Sacco-Vanzetti cause célèbre kept the fire of leftist ideology burning for Carlo Tresca’s return to the region in 1922. On 6 May, Tresca spoke at Miners Hall in Canonsburg, Pennsylvania, in support of the two condemned men. During his hour-and-a-half-long speech, he covered topics including the trial, workers, and the American police. The following day, he headlined another meeting at the Italica Unita hall in Charleroi, where “the room was full of workers [who] rushed from the nearby towns.” An estimated five hundred people, including many women, heard about “the corruption of justice” concerning the Sacco-Vanzetti trial in Dedham. He ended with some words about unions and worker solidarity during strikes.\textsuperscript{202} The large crowd attests to the popularity of Tresca’s message, even in light of continued harassment by the state. During a tour set to take the speaker to Chicago and Detroit, Tresca arranged for a week-long detour to present in West Virginia mining towns south of the Pennsylvania border.\textsuperscript{203} While speaking at a Labor Day event in Fairmont, police entered the home of Tresca’s host to search through his guest’s books, most likely seeking to find subversive materials on which to charge the radical.\textsuperscript{204} In nearby Monongah, “the police’s brutal intervention” stopped locals from holding meetings, and “Tresca was forced to leave the camp.”\textsuperscript{205}

During the fall of 1922, Tresca embarked on an extensive lecture tour to Ohio, Michigan, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Indiana, Illinois, and New York. His potential speech topics touched on numerous leftist ideas: “The origin of capital,” “The class struggle in

America,” “Why I do not believe in god,” “State, Homeland and religion,” “Fascism and Italy,” and “The Russian revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat.”

By the end of November, Tresca had paid visits to Russellton (where he spoke about “State, Homeland and Religion”), Renton, McIntyre, Aultman, Homer City, Bridgeville, Ellsworth, and Sharon, Pennsylvania, and Lowellville and Canton, Ohio. During Tresca’s 15 November presentation in Lowellville, E. Innocenzi recounted the speaker’s denunciation of the “parasitic class,” a reference to capitalist elites who possessed “all the joys and all the pleasures” of life while unloading work and suffering onto others. Even more critical for continuing the diffusion of leftist ideology, a few attendees purchased newspaper subscriptions to Il Martello and available radical literature.

Besides this continued diffusion of leftist ideology after Tresca’s departure, the radical’s conferences were also notable for drawing an audience from across the immigrant class spectrum. According to Vincenzo Novelli, who documented Tresca’s 12 November 1922 speech in Bridgeville, a city ten miles southwest of downtown Pittsburgh, the crowd included more than nameless working-class Italian Americans. While laborers from Morgan and other neighboring towns flocked to hear the famed speaker’s talk about “The Class Struggle,” several prominent local Italian Americans also attended. Even after

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206 “Per la nostra propaganda,” Il Martello, 30 September 1922, 4. By “the origin of capital,” Tresca most likely spoke in a Marxist context to include class and the acquisition of wealth.


209 E. Innocenzi, “Corrispondenze: Louinsville, Ill. [sic],” Il Martello, 2 December 1922, 4. This location was a typographical error. According to “Giro Tresca,” in the note above, Carlo Tresca did not plan to start his Illinois tour until 1 December. However, Tresca visited Lowellville, Ohio, in November. Additionally, E. Innocenzi was a known contact from Lowellville or the surrounding area. See E. Innocenzi, “Comunicati: Strutthers [sic], Ohio,” Il Martello, 2 September 1922, 4.
Tresca’s presentation shifted to a denunciation of Fascism and Benito Mussolini, these *prominenti*, implied by Novelli to have been open if not favorable to the system, listened quietly and did not contradict Tresca’s words.\(^{210}\)

The Sacco-Vanzetti cause célèbre served as a protective shield for leftist speakers. They hid behind it to weather the worst effects of the Red Scare’s assault on left-wing ideology. As Tresca, Quintiliano, and others toured western Pennsylvania and eastern Ohio, the masses turned out not to support anarchism but to defend two wronged Italian-American workers that experienced discrimination commonly felt by many immigrants and their children. However, leftist ideology was inseparable from the Sacco and Vanzetti case. Defense of the two men meant condemning a superstructure of laws, courts, and government built upon an exploitive capitalist base. Sacco and Vanzetti touring lectures were as much about pushing leftist ideas as supporting the convicted men. Furthermore, as Tresca and associates dispersed ideas into communities throughout the region, their efforts also prompted grassroots discussion, as evidenced by the numerous donations collected beyond their talks. Sacco and Vanzetti kept ideas circulating and ensured that leftist ideology continued to permeate the Italian-American community.

**Leftist Ideas**

A one- to two-hour-long talk persuaded people to adopt leftist ideas, but it did not indoctrinate the audience. The lectures presented by Tresca and associates spread broad leftist views within communities; they did not create a mass of committed, revolutionary theorists. Most attendees did not experience a political awakening, purchase writings by

Marx, Malatesta, or Kropotkin, and organize themselves into radical cells. Instead, lectures and subsequent discussions disseminated concepts related to two themes innately linked to Sacco and Vanzetti: labor rights and free expression. Ethnic working-class resentment reinforced ideas about mass unionism. Free expression entailed holding the United States accountable for its promise of free speech and assembly.

Lecture attendees returned home imbued with new ideas about unionization. This ideology derived from the IWW’s emphasis on “one big union” rather than the AFL’s concentration on craft unions. Consider, for example, Tresca’s previously mentioned talk to a crowd of five hundred people in Charleroi in May 1922. While billed as a meeting in support of Sacco and Vanzetti, Tresca also spoke about the recent miners’ strike in the area.\textsuperscript{211} Much of his oral comments likely matched his written arguments printed only weeks later in \textit{Il Martello}.\textsuperscript{212} The radical condemned the usual enemies, including the “violence of the Cossacks” (a reference to the Coal and Iron Police and other prejudicial law enforcement agencies) and the “bestial repressions” by the mine owners. However, he also denounced nonunion laborers and the United Mine Workers organization. The “scab” labor undermined union workers by producing five million tons of coal per week. The UMW bureaucracy set up the striking workers for failure. It did not provide enough direction and strength from the top, offering workers only uncertainty. Its methods undermined the union’s source of strength: “And it is here that lies the greater danger[.]


\textsuperscript{212} Carlo Tresca, “Nel Buio,” \textit{Il Martello}, 3 June 1922, 1. In the article, Tresca specifically noted developments in Westmoreland, Fayette, and Somerset Counties. The first two are located across the Monongahela River from Charleroi.
general strike. It has always … divided the organized mass with partial contracts.” Each
district had different agreements.213 An unattributed article printed a few weeks later
explained the problem with the UMW model in detail. An incident occurred in Oklahoma
in which women sought to heckle and denounce union coal miners who were still working.
The local UMW official sent the women away, saying that the union needed to respect the
contract, even as others went on strike. The women’s belief, shared by Il Martello, was that
partial contracts undermined collective bargaining power because they allowed continued
production, thereby blunting a strike’s effects. Additionally, the newspaper was critical of
UMW officials who sought to negotiate fairly with owners because mine bosses never
followed agreements. Operators disregarded a previous contract provision that required the
parties to reach new terms before April. The owners instead spent the time stockpiling coal
to dampen any effect of the anticipated strike.214

This model of labor organizing could never succeed because it allowed capitalism
to subjugate the workers. As Tresca commented in September: “Who won the strike? Wall
Street.” The temporary decline in coal production caused increased prices. The conclusion
of the strike reopened mines, but it did not bring a comparable pay raise for workers.
Failures would continue as long as labor organizations divided membership. For example,
during a meeting to discuss a sympathy strike for the railroad workers, the AFL leadership
held back the maintenance workers who wanted to walk out. This type of weak, divided
unionism only favored capitalist interests.215

213 Carlo Tresca, “Nel Buio,” Il Martello, 3 June 1922, 1.
214 “Dai campi minerarii [sic]: Krumiraggio unionista,” Il Martello, 15 July 1922, 3
Attendees to Tresca’s lectures left with a particular vision of unionization, the same one supported in his writings: the IWW’s concept of “one big union.” Rather than organize themselves by craft or skill, Tresca encouraged worker solidarity and the creation of industrial unions. His idea of solidarity filtered down and sustained the workers’ plight, which is why many oral histories specifically noted a solid attachment to the union and resistance to scabbing during the 1920s and 1930s. In one example, Nino Colonna, a child at the time, remembered being evicted from company housing after his father refused to scab during a 1921 miners’ strike in Westmoreland County, southeast of Pittsburgh. The family spent over a year living on a farm before the father returned to work. As explained in subsequent chapters, Italian-American approval of Tresca’s industrial-union model informed their approach to Fascism and the New Deal.

Coinciding with these ideas about unionization was the conviction that people had the guaranteed right to free thought, speech, and assembly. The fight for these values was at the core of the Sacco-Vanzetti case; Italian Americans believed that the court convicted the pair because of their anarchist ideas. Tresca’s actions and newspaper Il Martello put that issue at the forefront. By doing so, they too became victims of the coercive forces. For years he had attracted the attention of the Justice Department’s Bureau of Investigation. After Mussolini gained power in Italy, the Fascist government directed its clout against the radical. Ambassador Gelasio Caetani found a willing partner in J. Edgar Hoover and others at the Justice Department, and the federal government increased its efforts to entrap Tresca

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217 Lorelli, interview, 13; Forno, interview, 24; Santucci, interview, 2–3.
218 Nino Colonna, interview by unknown, transcript, 9 October 1979, 1–2, box 2, folder 43, Beaver Valley Labor History Society Collection, 1909–1981, AIS.1981.08, Archives & Special Collections, University of Pittsburgh.
in 1923 and force his deportation. An article denouncing the Italian monarchy led to Tresca’s initial arrest in August, but his actual conviction rested not on disseminating radical ideology through the mail but on an advertisement in his newspaper for a book concerning birth control. His harsh sentence, one year and one day at the Atlanta Federal Penitentiary (later commuted to four months), served in early 1925, created public sympathy for the man. Like Sacco and Vanzetti, Tresca gained supporters from people who might otherwise not have openly backed the radical, such as then-congressman Fiorello La Guardia.\footnote{Pernicone, \textit{Carlo Tresca}, 147–58.}

These actions aided another Luigi Quintiliano tour in spring 1924, billed explicitly for Tresca’s defense. He passed through many towns in western Pennsylvania, then spoke in Youngstown and Lowellville, Ohio, before touring Illinois and returning to Pittsburgh. Similar to Sacco and Vanzetti, Tresca’s plight became a cover to spread ideology, specifically anti-Fascism.\footnote{“Giro Quintiliano,” \textit{Il Martello}, 8 March 1924, 4; “Per la difesa di C. Tresca: Giro Quintiliano,” \textit{Il Martello}, 29 March 1924, 4.} The core critique was the unfulfilled promise of free thought and open conversation. As Quintiliano wrote in December 1923, before his tour, the Italian government’s efforts to silence the radical aligned with the American government’s plan. Quintiliano described Ambassador Caetani’s role and the spy, Giuseppe Sposa, that American investigators had planted at \textit{Il Martello}’s offices to gather evidence. The significance of these actions was greater than one man: “But it is not Tresca that they want, it is not the man that makes [a] shadow on the government[s] of Coolidge and of Mussolini; but it is \textit{Il Martello}, and it is not \textit{Il Martello} in itself, that produces fear[,] … but it is the
truth that shines through from *Il Martello.*”\(^{221}\) These same ideas carried over to his talks. During the Pittsburgh event, Quintiliano explained that Carlo Tresca condemned the Fascists and their allies during his rallies and in his newspaper, and the trial was a Fascist plot to silence a man. At the core was the promise of liberty: “Quintiliano closed paying tribute to freedom that has not died and will not die, in spite of all the Mussolinis of this world.”\(^{222}\)

The message was always in support of civil liberties. Leftist speakers certainly delved into Fascist brutality, but the critique about the “Mussolinis of this world” pointed to a global problem: the infringement of rights occurred even in supposedly free nations.\(^{223}\) Americans failed to uphold their values and ideals. When authorities deported the radicals Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman to Russia, Quintiliano argued hypocrisy, suggesting that perhaps the Statue of Liberty should be holding a club instead of a torch.\(^{224}\) Tresca invoked the names of Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln when he argued that America punished free thinkers rather than advanced their needs.\(^{225}\) Other condemnations related to the dissonance between rhetoric and reality. Woodrow Wilson proclaimed democracy abroad, but the United States failed to uphold freedom at home.\(^{226}\) Americans asserted the supremacy of their democracy and freedoms while political prisoners remained

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\(^{221}\) Luigi Quintiliano, “Serriamo le file,” *Il Martello,* 22 December 1923, 1.


\(^{223}\) For example, in Altoona, Pennsylvania, Quintiliano made remarks about how Mussolini organized thugs to harass and kill people. See Pasquale De Angelis, “Corrispondenze: Altoona, Pa.,” *Il Martello,* 10 May 1924, 4.

\(^{224}\) Luigi Quintiliano, “All’ombra della statua della Liberta’,” *Il Martello,* 1 January 1920, 8–9.

\(^{225}\) Carlo Tresca, “Nell’Agosto,” *Guardia Rossa,* 1 May 1920, 1. This is a supplement publication for *Il Martello.*

confined to jail cells for their ideals. A graphic piece about lynchings ended with a desire to destroy this type of inhumane society in the name of justice.

Contributors also noted this dissonance between American civic values and everyday life. Writing from the small community of Chestnut Ridge, Pennsylvania, Candido Mucciante described the harassment that workers faced in Fayette County. Miners responded to poor pay and company exploitation by going on strike. While marching on a public street in a nearby town, “without giving disturbance to anyone,” they were attacked by “the Cossacks of the republic,” state police on horseback. Police suppressed a group in another community as they marched on Labor Day under the American flag. These assaults on basic American privileges provoked a strong denunciation by Mucciante: “We do not doubt it anymore. [In] … the United States of America … the proletariat [is] praised … [and] flattered in the hours of the electoral carnival, [but] is, in all other days of the year[,] considered a simple beast of burden, without rights, without [a] brain.”

Leftist support for American values like free thought, speech, and assembly went beyond talk. Tresca, Quintiliano, and others desired open meetings because they believed in the persuasiveness of their message. During the early part of Quintiliano’s fundraising tour for Tresca, the radical was supposed to speak in Mount Carmel, Pennsylvania, in the state’s eastern anthracite coal region, but several prominenti convinced local authorities to block the rally. The action was notable enough to draw condemnation from the American

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Civil Liberties Union.231 The heart of the issue was free speech. As Quintiliano himself wrote about the episode, “none of these great men had the civic courage to confront me … [from the public floor of the theater], to counter ideas with ideas, arguments with arguments.”232 The leftists reveled in the opportunity to answer critics, and they advertised free events with open debates.233 Those with differing political views attended. At Quintiliano’s Altoona event, an observer claimed that a local pro-Fascist lawyer attended specifically “to oppose our speaker’s speech [but,] in the face of the arguments of our speaker, he did not know what to reply and had to be silent.” The critic instead ripped down some wall posters on his departure.234 A similar response happened when pro-Fascists confronted Quintiliano at his Youngstown lecture: “Citing facts, he made be quiet the usual followers of the rotten Mussolini,” who then left the event.235 These talks were open to all, and leftists such as Quintiliano favored the opportunity to address those with opposing views directly.

The leftists contributed two main concepts to the Italian-American public sphere for the creation of a mass ideology. First, they argued for and supported unionization. Their particular vision was not the trade unionism of the past concentrated on skilled workers, but mass industrial unionism in which all employees, regardless of job status, supported each other to attain better wages and working conditions. Second, even as the leftists

232 Luigi Quintiliano, “Chi Sono i Filofascisti che non Mi Fecero Parlare in Mt. Carmen [sic], Pa.,” Il Martello, 5 April 1924, 4.
criticized the American government, they praised the civic values it was supposed to support. Free thought, expression, and debate were worthy principles, and the leftists denounced Americans whenever they failed to uphold their standards. In this way, the leftists unintentionally reinforced American civic nationalism.

**Red Colony Arrested**

Carlo Tresca, Luigi Quintiliano, and other leftist radicals were popular within working-class-dominated Italian-American communities, but most ordinary people did not become committed anarcho-syndicalists, socialists, or other shades of “red.” The radicals had a healthy, stable network. *Il Martello* circulated 6,500 copies weekly in 1923, 10,500 in 1924, and 8,000 in 1929.236 The newspaper penetrated mining towns and small communities across the United States, and these far-flung connections made Tresca and others’ tours possible. However, the leftists were not the only sources of news and ideas, and they contended with the mainstream Italian-American press that had higher circulation numbers and was open to Fascism.237

Ideological competition stopped the creation of a mass-revolutionary Italian-American population. Leftist grievances denounced rapacious capitalist exploitation, but the continued Americanization efforts described in the previous chapter tempered radical solutions – such as revolution and Galleanist-style bombings – to solve those problems. Increasing acceptance of civic nationalism and participation in American democracy moderated the antipathy toward the state found in anarchism and its derivatives. A cautious optimism developed about the government’s potential role in working people’s lives. The

236 Pernicone, *Carlo Tresca*, 142.
237 Pernicone, 142.
state was, at times, a hindrance to the political left, but Americanization also taught the naturalized and their children that the government could theoretically be responsive to their needs. Furthermore, as will be described in the following chapter, Fascism provided another counter to leftism. As Mussolini consolidated power, Fascist propaganda presented an image of a nation that reformed its broken political system. Fascist Italy became an example worthy of replicating.\textsuperscript{238} In sum, Italian Americans accepted the left’s ideas of mass unionism and civil liberties but increasingly searched for a means to accomplish them within the extant political system.

Few Italian immigrants by the 1920s had a desire to carry out a revolution to establish a classless society. Their goal was to foster a fairer economic system, not eliminate wealth entirely. As Rudolph Vecoli pointed out in his critique of Oscar Handlin’s \textit{The Uprooted}, the \textit{contadini} – the Italian peasants who formed the bulk of emigrants – were ambitious, and many sought careers as artisans and shopkeepers. Immigration to the United States was an alternative method of socioeconomic advancement.\textsuperscript{239} As mentioned in the previous chapter, economics drove immigration. Italian Americans desired wealth and affluence, or at the very least, to shore up their declining class status in Italy by finding work in the United States.\textsuperscript{240} Anthony Panza, who followed his father to the Youngstown

\textsuperscript{238} Guglielmo, \textit{Living the Revolution}, 199–229. Guglielmo asserted that the Red Scare, Americanization, and the advent of Fascism disrupted leftism and forced radical women into more closed groups or less revolutionary unions. Her analysis differs from that made in this project in that she approaches the topic through the lens of the radical women themselves. Her story is oppositional concerning the radical left and the Fascists. This project is more concerned with those friendly to Fascism but not overtly aligned.


area at age sixteen, was succinct when asked why they left the Abruzzi region for the United States: “He came here for money. … That is why I came here too.” However, emigration costs – the steamship ticket alone totaled months’ worth of labor for a contadino – limited the types of American arrivals. Those at the very bottom of the hierarchy, the poorest and therefore most susceptible to completely overturning the economic order, could not afford to leave Italy.

New challenges forced demographic changes. Some of the most radical leftists viewed themselves as part of a diasporic, working-class community. The Red Scare and American immigration restriction ended migration and produced a new demarcation in identities. Residency in the United States was no longer temporary, and people had to choose whether to remain and conform or leave. A few returned to Italy, but most stayed and embraced a permanent life in America. No longer migratory, male workers sent for wives and children to live with them in the United States, and community ties deepened.

241 Anthony Panza, interview by Frank Mancini, transcript, 12 October 1988, 1–2, Youngstown State University Oral History Program: Italian Immigration: Personal Experiences, O. H. 1174, Maag Library, Youngstown State University, Youngstown, OH.

242 Giovanni Ermenegildo Schiavo, Italian-American History, reprint edition, vol. 1 (New York, NY: Arno Press, 1975), 520. A steerage-class ticket from Naples to New York in 1904 potentially cost one hundred days’ worth of labor to men from Calabria and Basilicata. See Richard Gambino, Blood of My Blood: The Dilemma of the Italian-Americans, second edition (Toronto, Canada: Guernica, 2003), 94. The costs, in many cases, were likely much higher for most emigrants. According to one study, which used the same 35-dollar ticket cost as Gambino, the average total cost for the trip was 69 dollars. Additional expenditures included travel, lodging, and food to the embarkment port and costs incurred between landing in New York and beginning a job at a new location. See Drew Keeling, “Costs, Risks and Migration Networks between Europe and the United States, 1900–1914,” in Maritime Transport and Migration: The Connections between Maritime and Migration Networks, ed. Torsten Feys et al. (St. John’s, Newfoundland: International Maritime Economic History Association, 2007), 168.

243 Guglielmo, Living the Revolution, 205.
Italian Americans were moderate leftists, and only a minority were inflexible radicals who refused to see the potential of gaining allies within government. As one 1922 mocking response from *Il Martello* began: “Wait, wait! We [will] fix our bosses next November when we will vote for our candidates.” According to the article, the adherents of “yellow unionism” – a reference to the conformist American Federation of Labor – pushed this sentiment. While they sought to organize new workplaces, they simultaneously squelched any tangible improvements by transferring the burden of revolutionary action from themselves as potential leaders to the ballot box. The belief that new political representatives in Washington would have provided workers everything that they deserved was a fanciful wish, nothing short of a miracle, and the article ended sarcastically, “and we wait!”

Italian Americans may have shared the leftist ideologues’ belief that revolutionary change via political engagement was questionable, but they refused to believe it to be impossible. This attribute separated them from men like Tresca, who later denounced the New Deal as a counter-revolutionary measure meant to shore up the old order. As exemplified in an article printed in *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* a month before *Il Martello*’s critique of politics, both camps generally agreed about working-class problems, but they differed significantly in approach. Titled *Scioperomania* (Strikemania), the editorial opined about recent strikes in the railroad industry. The piece began bluntly: “We are not communists” and do not identify with the extreme parties and their obsession with strikes, but “we sympathize with the workers of any type, because we believe not in the

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absolute dominance of capital on … the workers,” but in collaboration. It was a nuanced interpretation. The writer agreed with the critique about craft unionism and asserted that Samuel Gompers and other labor officials pushed workers into unnecessary strikes. They acted not as concerned leaders but as bosses who wrongly exploited the rank and file for self-profit. The article raised the issue of fairness; the railroad workers were not wrong to want improved conditions, but a strike by one sector of the economy hurt workers in other industries that already suffered pay cuts and layoffs. Moreover, a worker’s revolution was unrealistic as the community lacked the necessary “conscience,” an allusion to Marxist theory. The majority of those associated with the revolutionary political movements were “passive,” primarily because the most dissatisfied were free to return home. Instead, voting was the most feasible means for community and worker advancement. The solution was for laws to raise the worker to create a balance between capital and labor. Increased political participation was necessary, and future success meant engagement with the state rather than rejecting it.246

The editorial was not a one-off interpretation, and even those committed to revolutionary ideals noted that civic nationalism and democratic principles stifled radicalism. In 1921, *Il Martello* printed a letter from “A. D.” of Monongahela, Pennsylvania, that recounted a memorial for a fallen soldier.247 Given the timing, A. D. was most likely referring to services for Antonio Fiorentino, a recipient of the Distinguished Service Cross who was killed in France on 25 August 1918 at age twenty. Anticipated as the largest military funeral seen in Rankin, Fiorentino’s memorial included

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a high Catholic mass followed by a procession comprised of the American Legion and other organizations from Rankin, Homestead, Swissvale, Wilmerding, and Wilkinsburg to nearby Braddock Catholic Cemetery for burial.248 A. D. watched those in the procession who “were the members of the Circolo Pietro Gori” leftist organization as they walked under the American flag, “hat in hand, the new devotees of the patriotic religion.” Only a few years prior, this flag represented the “enemy of every liberty.” Now the “red camp” of revolutionaries was “a true cemetery” as adherents strayed from the ideology. These people instead “all crouched in societies of mutual ruin” (a derogatory reference to the perceived reactionary mutual aid societies) and proclaimed, “we emancipated ourselves.”249 Guy Liberti, the anarchist leader from Cleveland, directly commented in a later interview about the ability of Americanization to temper radicalism. When speaking about Galleani’s son, Liberti remarked that “the children were drawn away from anarchism because the influence of the school and the street is more powerful than any other.”250 If Americanizing influences and the street’s public sphere turned the son of the most notable Italian-American anarchist away from the ideology, few people could resist moderating effects.

Steeped in civic nationalism, Italian Americans realized that only their involvement with government and the state would bring systemic and lasting change. They never lost a

250 Avrich, Anarchist Voices, 158.
sense of working-class grievance and the need for mass unionization as bequeathed from the leftists, but they found alternate means to attain their goals. The advent of Fascism in Italy presented the community with a real-world inspiration. Benito Mussolini offered a third way between capitalism and socialism that benefited the working class, and Italian Americans consumed this additional influence to inform their political ideology before the New Deal.
Chapter Four

An Alternative Vision

Fascist Influence and Ideological Moderation

In the final episode of the previous chapter, writer “A. D.” chastised fellow leftist radicals from around Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, for turning “a red camp” into a “true cemetery.” During a June 1921 memorial service for a fallen Italian-American soldier, whose body had been returned from France for burial in Braddock, roughly ten miles up the Monongahela River from downtown Pittsburgh, A. D. watched in disbelief as revolutionary idealists suddenly changed opinions. The people who had previously referred to the United States as “the enemy of every liberty” for the government’s role in suppressing dissent now paraded “hat in hand” under the American flag. In disgust at this perceived betrayal, A. D. proclaimed, “if people go forward at this rate[,] … Fascism will gain a foothold even in this unfortunate continent.”¹ A. D.’s remarks provide an eerie foreshadowing concerning the Italian-American community’s ideological shift during the 1920s: Fascism became extremely popular, including within circles of people who only a few years prior expressed support for leftist radicalism.

Fascism was the last significant influence of the ideological triad – alongside civic nationalism and leftism – that reshaped Italian Americans’ political beliefs before the New

Deal. To the dismay of leftist radicals, Fascism became extremely popular within Italian-American communities because it appeared to improve conditions in their homeland and therefore offered an apt counter to American nativists that looked down on the ethnic group as a lesser people. However, most Italian Americans never became committed Blackshirts. As John P. Diggins remarked in *Mussolini and Fascism*, when “put to the ultimate test, Italian-American Fascism proved more gesture than substance.” Even after a decade of influence, Italian Americans responded with performative support for Benito Mussolini’s imperialist war in Ethiopia in 1935; few answered the Fascist call to fight. Once the United States entered the Second World War in 1941, the Italian-American community repudiated its past allegiance. Certainly, committed Fascists existed in the United States, but most Italian Americans were philo-Fascists, open and friendly to Mussolini’s regime but not consumed by the ideology.

Unlike radical leftism, Fascism disseminated vigorously into Italian-American communities. While Carlo Tresca and other leftists fought an uphill battle for acceptance even before the Red Scare, Fascism used state apparatuses and local *prominenti* (prominent Italian-American community leaders) as carriers. The ethnic group had long accepted local and regional consular agents, and their respectability made the diffusion of Fascism palatable. Personal support from local notables, such as Cleveland physician and Ohio Sons

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3 Diggins, 108.
4 Diggins, 106–8.
5 Philo-, rather than pro-, Fascist is specific here. This distinction is borrowed from Nunzio Pernicone, who used the term philo-Fascist to identity Italian Americans who were favorable to Fascism but did not join Fascist organizations and become devout followers. Nunzio Pernicone, *Carlo Tresca: Portrait of a Rebel* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 127–34.
of Italy state lodge Grand Venerable Dr. Giovanni A. Barricelli, added weight to ideological acceptance. Finally, the ethnic press played a considerable role. Since their inception, Italian-American newspapers had carved out a niche in the media market by providing immigrants stories that concerned their lives and families. This included extensive coverage of Italian events. As Fascism unfolded and grew, Italian-American editors documented and interpreted the developments. Fascism diffused into the Italian-American public sphere because it utilized all these bridges to reach ordinary people.

Ideological dispersion was wide and generally accepted. Fascism caught on in Italian-American communities for three main reasons. First, there was media inaccuracy. People formed opinions based not on historical reality but on the day-to-day information they read in the newspapers and heard from friends and family. The deepening of Fascist state repression in Italy sanitized information regarding the regime. The “cleansed” version of Fascism became acceptable as criticisms of the system related to violence and repression appeared to give way toward consensual approval in Italy. Second, Fascism caught on because it worked. Within only a decade of the regime’s creation, it appeared to have implemented solutions related to Italian economic instability and class tensions that had plagued the nation for decades. Although much of this perceived progress was propaganda and the result of media misinformation, average Italian Americans believed reports about Fascist functionality. Finally, as Benito Mussolini revived Italy’s status as a preeminent world power, Italian advancement reflected positively on the ethnic population in the United States. Italian Americans adopted Italian nationalism to claim these victories as their own, and they used these successes to defend themselves from American nativists’ arguments of ethnic-Italian inferiority.
As an ideological consideration, Fascism acted similarly to the leftist influence described in the previous chapter. It penetrated communities via the work of its most devout followers. However, average Italian Americans were not bound to every aspect of Fascist doctrine. They approached the system with a background in leftist ideas, and this foundation affected their views of the new system. Areas of overlap, such as concerning syndicalism, which formed the basis of Fascist corporatism (a system in which industry and worker trade unions negotiated labor policy under state mediation), deepened commitment to organizational attributes first learned from the leftists. Civic nationalism also influenced ideological amalgamation. As seen in the previous chapter, Italian Americans rejected the radical leftists’ hatred of government; instead, they viewed the state as a possible partner in their quest for working-class rights. Fascism provided examples of a government intervening in the economy on behalf of ordinary citizens. Italian Americans celebrated the attributes that worked in Italy: corporatism, public works programs that provided employment to the people and improved the nation, and a strong central leader willing to act quickly to solve crises. Fascism presented Italian Americans with examples that influenced their thinking about political issues at home. As will be explained in chapter six, they invoked these ideas borrowed from Mussolini’s Italy when America experienced its economic crisis during the late 1920s.

However, this moderation of ideological influences was always a two-way street, which explains why the vast majority of Italian Americans did not become outright Fascists. They purged the Fascist attributes that were irreconcilable with the other influences. This was most noticeable concerning the Blackshirts (the paramilitary squads) and state repression. After years of learning about American free speech and democratic
values, along with the leftist denunciations of the American state when it failed to live up to those tenets, Fascists never convinced Italian Americans that political intiOhioation was an idea worth replicating in the United States. By Franklin Roosevelt’s election in 1932, the vast majority of Italian Americans were not Fascists that desired the complete replication of the Italian model in the United States; they were philo-Fascists that had absorbed the best attributes of Mussolini’s system to inform and shape their beliefs about an ideal American domestic policy.

A Philo-Fascist Community

Fascism was popular during the 1920s and 1930s, but the Second World War and the disastrous collapse of Fascism in Italy created historical amnesia in which few scholars wanted to discuss the ideology in the United States during the immediate postwar period. Initial investigations of the topic derived from transnational works on Italy, notably how Mussolini’s foreign policy affected the United States and its people. The academic acceptance of ethnic history during the 1960s prompted a surge of new works beginning in the 1970s that treated Fascism in the United States as an appropriate inquiry area.6

John P. Diggins’s 1972 book, Mussolini and Fascism, opened the field by arguing that the Italian system was popular across a wide range of American demographics.7 Others followed suit concerning narrower topics about the acceptance of Fascism, all while increasing the evidence that it was a mass phenomenon. According to Philip V.

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7 Diggins, Mussolini and Fascism, see especially 58–73. As Diggins explained, much of this was hero worship. Fascism and Mussolini were inseparable.
Cannistraro, an early, independent form of Fascism began in Italian-American communities before the October 1922 March on Rome, the event that put Mussolini in power. Peter R. D’Agostino exposed how Mussolini’s détente with the Vatican increased the prestige of Fascism for Catholics in the United States. The American government favored Mussolini’s regime because it offered political stability and was more amenable to American goals than the communist alternative. Others noted that Fascism found popularity with Italian Americans because its nationalistic rhetoric forged a new identity and cast a better image of the Italian people. Fascism was undoubtedly popular in the United States, peaking during the late 1920s and early 1930s.

Popularity did not automatically translate to servile loyalty. As Diggins suggested, much of the period debate about affiliation derived from misinterpretations by the political extremes: “Too often anti-Fascists regarded the Italian-Americans’ devotion to the home country as unqualified allegiance to Fascism and Mussolini, just as pro-Fascists assumed that any criticism of Mussolini and his regime bespoke a slander on Italy itself.” Historians typically document significant figures and organizations, entities that left the most extensive written records. However, these people and groups were frequently pro-Fascist and on the ideological spectrum’s fringes. Scholars presented their subjects’ views,

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8 Cannistraro, Blackshirts in Little Italy, 8–23.
12 Diggins, Mussolini and Fascism, 108.
thereby creating a narrative in which all people who favored Fascism, including the philo-
Fascists, were always opposed to leftism. While undoubtedly true for the most devoted
adherents who viewed Fascism from the same perspective as their anarchist and socialist
enemies, a type of all or nothing ideology, ordinary people were not bound by dogmatic
purity. Instead, regular Italian Americans, who did not live under the shadow of totalitarian
Fascism like their relatives in Italy, were free to accept or reject facets of Mussolini’s
system to inform their political ideology in the United States.

This oppositional narrative draws from the reality that as Fascism spread, it
provoked a vocal anti-Fascist reaction. The two camps became mutually exclusive in that
any favorability toward one received condemnation from the other; there was no gray area
between them. Some of this is a legacy from period anti-Fascist intellectuals who left some
of the earliest in-depth analyses and investigations into Italian-American Fascism but
whose own political beliefs and activism colored their perceptions. As Diggins remarked,

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13 This is not an indictment or rejection of previous research but an acceptance that
following the written record can unintentionally obscure the silent masses. Diggins
alluded to this point in the introduction of his book by noting that his methods were
qualitative. Even after the widespread use of public opinion polls during the 1930s, these
quantitative results lacked depth and nuance. In another example, in *Blackshirts and
Little Italy*, Philip Cannistraro spent much of the book talking about pro-Fascist figures
and organizations like Agostino De Biasi and the Fascist League of North America
(FLNA). Less is known about the rank-and-file of the FLNA and those that may have
attended related events but never joined. Jennifer Guglielmo raised a similar issue in
*Living the Revolution* when she noted that Fascism appealed to many women, but only a
fraction of them joined a formal organization. See Diggins, xviii; Cannistraro, *Blackshirts
in Little Italy*; Jennifer Guglielmo, *Living the Revolution: Italian Women’s Resistance
and Radicalism in New York City, 1880–1945* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North
Carolina Press, 2010), 218.
14 Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism*, 111–43; Cannistraro, *Blackshirts in Little Italy*, 36–
40.
15 Cannistraro, “Fascism and Italian Americans,” 53–55; Gaetano Salvemini, *Italian
Fascist Activities in the United States*, ed. Philip V. Cannistraro (New York, NY: Center
many on the political left forced Fascism into a Marxist class interpretation and failed to see any of the “progressive features” in the system, such as Edmondo Rossoni and Giuseppe Bottai’s syndicalism. The workers became lumpenproletariat (those that utterly lacked class consciousness) because these intellectuals could not comprehend working-class support for Fascist labor programs.\textsuperscript{16} However, as seen in the previous chapter, most Italian Americans liked parts of leftist ideology, but they scoffed at revolution and wished to work within the extant political system. An oppositional narrative was also a product of the Fascist origin story, in which Mussolini and his party declared themselves the enemies of Bolshevism.\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Il Duce} confirmed this in \textit{My Autobiography}, a work written for an American audience in 1928, when he described his early political career in 1919: “But to the eyes of the glowing crowd I was a patriot, a preacher of resistance, he who succeeded, through the violent articles written from day to day in the \textit{Popolo d’Italia} [Mussolini’s newspaper], in beginning the smashing of Bolshevism.”\textsuperscript{18}

Fascists and leftists were admittedly the sworn enemies of each other, but those committed to either side accounted for only a fraction of the population. According to its leader, Count Ignazio Thaon di Revel, the Italian government-sponsored Fascist League of North America (FLNA) contained 7,000 members in 1926, which doubled to 14,000 the following year. The exiled anti-Fascist intellectual Gaetano Salvemini believed that some five percent of Italian Americans were “out and out Fascists.”\textsuperscript{19} Estimates from testimony

\textsuperscript{16} Diggins, \textit{Mussolini and Fascism}, 218–19.
\textsuperscript{17} Mabel Berezin, \textit{Making the Fascist Self: The Political Culture of Interwar Italy} (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 99. For example, the identification of Fascist enemies, notably socialists, became a core theme during the commemoration of the March on Rome.
\textsuperscript{19} Cannistraro, \textit{Blackshirts in Little Italy}, 113.
presented to the Dies Committee on un-American activities placed the number of committed pro-Fascists at around 10,000. This figure was a fraction of an Italian-American population estimated at four and a half million people in 1940.\textsuperscript{20} By comparison, as noted in the previous chapter, Carlo Tresca’s radical-leftist newspaper, \textit{Il Martello}, circulated 10,500 copies weekly in 1924 and 8,000 in 1929, forming a community numerically similar to the FLNA.\textsuperscript{21} However, just as the leftists reached and influenced thousands beyond their tight-knit groups, so did the Fascists. The result was a large number of philo-Fascists. Count Ignazio Thaon di Revel estimated that seventy percent of Italian Americans admired Mussolini.\textsuperscript{22} Salvemini asserted that around the five percent core of true Fascists, another thirty-five percent leaned in its direction.\textsuperscript{23} He continued that fifty percent of Italian Americans “tend[ed] to be concerned only with their own affairs” and had not put much thought into it.\textsuperscript{24} Most people were not Fascist advocates or adherents; instead, they laid somewhere in the middle as Fascist sympathizers to varying degrees.

When discussing Fascism as it concerned most average Italian Americans, Mussolini’s system was an influence, not a raison d’être. The majority did not harbor a deep partisan commitment. They were willing to identify with Fascism during celebrations, but they were not loyal defenders of the regime. They were philo-Fascists whose beliefs were influenced by Mussolini’s system but not bound to it.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{20} Diggins, \textit{Mussolini and Fascism}, 106–7.
\item \textsuperscript{21} Pernicone, \textit{Carlo Tresca}, 142.
\item \textsuperscript{22} Cannistraro, \textit{Blackshirts in Little Italy}, 113.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Salvemini, \textit{Italian Fascist Activities in the United States}, 244–45.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Salvemini, 244.
\end{itemize}
Fascist Popularity

In 1923, Francesco Biamonte, publisher of the Italian-American newspaper *Il Patriota*, wrote a letter to the editor of the *Indiana Evening Gazette* to explain some of the ideological cleavages within the Italian-American community to an English-language audience. While seeking to calm anxious Americans about rumors of a local Fascist organization, he documented three types of Italian-American views related to Mussolini’s movement. The first group consisted of long-term residents so thoroughly Americanized that members considered Fascism an Italian institution only and had little more to say about it. The second cohort contained the younger generations, including First World War veterans and “many moderate socialists,” along with some older Italian Americans, who wanted to see Italy’s improvement. The final group, which was anti-Fascist, consisted of “the extreme socialistic type, which [did] not share [viewpoints], opinion or sympathy with anything not its own.”²⁵ Biamonte’s assessment is an excellent interpretational framework to explain the Italian-American situation. While fringe groups either dissociated themselves from Fascism or were so radicalized by extremism that they refused to hear anything that would question their dogmatic beliefs, a larger, more ideologically flexible group contained nationalists and moderate leftists.

As described in the previous chapter, leftist ideology was prevalent, even in light of the numerous obstacles to its spread. This raises the question of why so many Italian Americans became philo-Fascists if leftist ideologues viewed Mussolini and his party as an antithesis. Popular reception occurred because Fascism provided solutions to problems

in the Italian-American community. As Biamonte suggested, these were along two avenues. First, Fascism satisfied a sense of nationalism. By stabilizing and improving Italy, Mussolini provided Italian Americans a sense of self-respect and an example that they could use to defend themselves from American nativists’ declarations of Italian inferiority. Second, Fascism appealed to those “moderate socialists,” those with flexible leftist beliefs, because Mussolini incorporated parts of leftist ideology from the syndicalists into his system. Underlying all this growing acceptance was propaganda; the Fascism that Italian Americans came to appreciate was not a historical reality. Censorship in Italy shaped perceptions in the United States. Whether or not Mussolini made the trains run on time, as the old adage claimed, is irrelevant; the importance is that Italian Americans believed statements of Fascist propaganda because the totalitarian state allowed no competing narrative. Italian Americans did not live under the Fascist regime, and they did not see the successes and failures of the system firsthand. As Mussolini’s government silenced critics, banned publications, and pressured regular citizens to conform at home, Italian Americans received misinformation, rather than facts, about Fascist successes to shape their opinions. For these reasons, Fascism became popular in Italian-American communities.

Fascism as a story of nationalistic triumph provided a counter to American discrimination. As Diggins pointed out, Italian-American acceptance of Fascism was a logical response to American nativism. Residing in a society dominated by white Anglo-Saxon Protestants, Italian Americans developed an inferiority complex. Alienation pushed them toward Mussolini. Cannistraro continued Diggins’s thesis: “Politically and

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26 Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism*, 109–10. Diggins also asserted that this acceptance was because Italian Americans had not learned American civics, and “most immigrants never fully grasped the essential distinctions between a democracy and a dictatorship.”
ideologically most Italian Americans were not fascists. Rather, for many of them, fascism was a means through which they could achieve stature and adjustment within the context of American society.”\textsuperscript{27} The attributes that Fascism offered fit the needs of the community at the time. As mentioned in chapter one, Italian-American identity was in a transitionary period during the 1920s and 1930s. Promenti, who pushed the idea of a single Italian community rather than regional identities, found an ally in Mussolini and his party’s celebration of the Italian nation and a modern “New Italy.”\textsuperscript{28} Mussolini’s attempts to elevate Italy’s status to preeminent world power became akin to defending Italians in the United States from ethnic prejudice and perceived inferiority. However, Cannistraro was correct that most were not outright Fascists; instead, as philo-Fascists, they used Mussolini’s Italy, borrowing to support their ideas and beliefs when necessary.

Prejudice against Italian Americans was rampant by the 1920s. As described in detail in chapter two, this discrimination drove many Italian Americans to seek citizenship to secure their civil rights. The growing second, American-born generation made repatriation unlikely. People increasingly felt the need to defend themselves now that the United States was their permanent residence rather than a temporary sojourn. This prejudice also caused many to look for a national savior to improve their homeland because they understood that events and actions abroad reflected positively or poorly on those in the United States. For example, in February 1920, Senator John K. Shields of Tennessee

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While true for some people, chapters two and five of this project dispute this argument. Italian Americans did learn about democracy, and the point that they organized into political clubs to assert their place in the American body politic speaks to a change in civic attitudes. \\
\textsuperscript{27} Cannistraro, “Fascism and Italian Americans,” 59. \\
\textsuperscript{28} Guglielmo, \textit{White on Arrival}, 113–17.
\end{flushright}
commented on Italian territorial claims around the Adriatic Sea. During a speech about the United States’ future role in Europe, Shields interjected: “How far should the United States enter a controversy concerning a few ‘Dagoes’ over on the Adriatic?” This slur by a sitting senator against the Italian people, which officials struck from the Congressional Record, drew condemnation from the community. Representative William S. Vare of Pennsylvania, responding to outrage from prominente C. C. A. Baldi and other Italian-American constituents in Philadelphia, denounced Shields’s comments. New York State Senator Salvatore A. Cotillo, one of the few Italian-American politicians above a local level at the time, filed a resolution in the New York Legislature that called for Shields’s censure. The slur resonated not because it was about a “few Dagoes” in Europe; rather, these views about Italians colored perceptions of those who no longer resided in Italy. Italian Americans understood that they suffered from dual criteria for judgment. They could not wholly shed an Italian identity despite their stated commitment to American principles or military service to the United States during the First World War.

Italian Americans adopted civic nationalism, but American judgments predicated on foreign issues in which those living outside of Italy had no control stifled ethnic

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advancement and full acceptance into American society. Writing “We Protest!” in Il Patriota from his home in Lucerne Mines, Pennsylvania, Donato Stabile asserted, “we cannot … remain indifferent and silent” about such slurs and Italy, which “was the cradle of civilization, of the arts and of science.” Although Stabile claimed the Battle of Vittorio Veneto – the Italian breakthrough that collapsed the Austro-Hungarian lines and contributed to the end of the First World War – as a recent point of national pride, the fact that Italy “was the cradle” of societal advances proved to be an issue for the community. Whether conscious or not, Stabile admitted that the height of Italian political, artistic, and scientific power was in the past.\textsuperscript{33} Historical superiority was an inadequate reply to accusations of modern inferiority.

However, some living in the United States were hopeful about the future. Around the same time as Shields’s comments, Cleveland’s La Voce del Popolo Italiano printed a piece titled “The Bright Economic Outlook of Italy.” Paolo De Vecchi, an Italian-American prominente from San Francisco, described his recent visit to the peninsula to reassure those in the United States about Italian potential. Contrary to American news reports, which described Italy as on the verge of collapse or a Bolshevik-style revolution, the Italian people were uniformly optimistic about their nation’s future. De Vecchi noted that the economy was well on the road to recovery, or as La Voce del Popolo Italiano summarized it, “Italy is resuming her march upon the path of progress and civilization to glory and prosperity.”\textsuperscript{34}

\textsuperscript{33} Donato Stabile, “Protestiamo!,” Il Patriota, 13 March 1920, 1.
\textsuperscript{34} Paolo De Vecchi, “The Bright Economic Outlook of Italy,” La Voce del Popolo Italiano (Cleveland, OH), 14 February 1920, 2.
De Vecchi was a good salesman but not a prophet. Italy continued to experience upheaval throughout 1920 and 1921. The post-First World War recession that affected the United States also harmed Italy. Inflation crippled the value of the lira. Thousands of industrial workers occupied factories and shipyards in the fall of 1920. Ansaldo and Ilva, two of the largest companies in Italy, went bankrupt the following year. Concurrently, peasants claimed and occupied lands in the rural areas. While De Vecchi was correct about a Bolshevik-style revolution’s improbability, the Italian government provided few solutions to these national problems. The inclusion of new voters and parties, including the Socialists and Catholic-oriented Popolari, created a divided parliament and unstable government leadership.35

Italian Americans became open to Fascism for the same reason as other Americans: it offered to elevate Italy’s status and create stability without significant upheaval. The period context is essential. As noted in the previous chapter, the ongoing Red Scare frightened many Americans from association with leftist radicals; this is why the Sacco-Vanzetti case and other causes célèbres were necessary for the continued diffusion of ideology. Italian Americans did not want their homeland painted red, which would have reflected badly on them. Some news reports, such as a summer 1921 series by the Cleveland Plain Dealer’s European correspondent, W. C. Howells, offered fair, balanced, and accurate commentary of the Italian situation, but others played into red hysteria.36 Six

36 W. C. Howells, “Italy, Behind in Recovery, Faces Economic Crisis,” Cleveland Plain Dealer (Cleveland, OH), 21 July 1921, all Ohio edition, 1, 4; W. C. Howells, “Italy’s Business Ills Similar to Those Vexing U.S.,” Cleveland Plain Dealer, 22 July 1921, all Ohio edition, 1, 9; W. C. Howells, “Statesmen Will Save Italy from Herself by Work,”
months after Stabile’s defense of the Italian people, his local English-language paper commented about the “crisis” in Italy. The Indiana Evening Gazette began with a disclaimer that most Italians were not communists. However, it asserted forcefully “the peril is real and imminent” and doubted whether the government could enforce law and order because the military and police were “honeycombed with Bolshevism.”37 After King Victor Emmanuel III appointed Mussolini prime minister in response to Fascist threats to march on Rome, assume control of the government, and bring order in October 1922, the American press responded with relief. In a worldwide fight against Bolshevism, newspapers willingly overlooked Fascist violence as a small price to pay for Italian stability against communist encroachment.38 This pattern was evident in one Associated Press report shortly after the March on Rome under the subheading “nation saved from Bolshevism”: “The triumphant entry of Fascisti troops into Rome today was the apotheosis of Italy’s bloodless revolution. … [The day] will forever mark a great epoch in Italy’s national life. For, in 1870, they [the old Romans] said, Italy was born; today she has been saved from Bolshevism.”39

The American government and diplomatic corps operated in tandem with the press to create an acceptable view of Fascism. Many American diplomats had initially painted the Fascists as violent thugs who contributed to postwar political chaos as much as the

37 “The Italian Crisis,” Indiana Evening Gazette, 8 September 1920, 4.
38 Diggins, Mussolini and Fascism, 29–31.
communists. In the summer of 1922, the Warren Harding administration reversed policy and accepted that working with the Fascists offered Americans the best chance of creating stability in Italy. The American government and business leaders – who wanted stable markets – accepted Fascism as an appropriate compromise for a friendly, capitalist ally. These actions by the American press and government presented a green light for Italian Americans to embrace Mussolini’s regime.

Once allowed by American society to favor Fascism, Italian Americans were open to Mussolini’s system because they were not revolutionary anti-statists by disposition, as mentioned in the previous chapter. According to Charles Edward Merriam and Harold Foote Gosnell’s study of nonvoters in Chicago during the early 1920s, less than one percent of Italian Americans listed “disbelief in all political action” as a reason for not participating in elections. In this light, many would have disagreed with the assessment made by Luigi De Cecco in Il Martello concerning Professor Bertelli’s December 1922 talk in Pittsburgh that preceded a radical drama written by Pietro Gori. After condemning Fascism, Bertelli offered his opinion that the working class would only succeed by organizing itself and replicating the corporate trusts used by capitalist businessmen. De Cecco, who supported his argument by noting that he and his kind had three decades of experience, remarked that Bertelli and other parliamentarian socialists were wrong. The state supported the capitalist

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41 Charles Edward Merriam and Harold Foote Gosnell, Non-Voting: Causes and Methods of Control (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1924), 42. Merriam and Gosnell had anti-statism in mind when they included this question on the survey because the note to the interviewer included trying to find out if the person was “an anarchist, a syndicalist, a direct actionist,” or the like. See Merriam and Gosnell, 268.
interests, and direct action by the people was the only solution. The problem with De Cecco’s argument was that his thirty years of experience had not brought tangible success.

While Professor Bertelli argued for mass organization, many Italian Americans disfavored one possible end to collective action: communism. Italians emigrated primarily for economic reasons. Sociologist Robert F. Foerster came to this conclusion in 1919 when he stated, “the causes which have sustained an emigration of millions of persons for half a century do in truth constitute a defect or an inadequacy of great magnitude in the Italian economic system.” Nevertheless, the solution was never to overturn that system entirely. One commonality in many family histories was the assertion that immigration to the United States happened because of the need for money, often with the intention of returning home to buy land in Italy because jobs there were limited. Full communism,

complete with common ownership of businesses and land confiscation, was not what most people sought. Italian Americans wanted to reform the system, not eradicate it. When Italian socialists met in Livorno in January 1921 to discuss their movement’s future, Cleveland’s *La Voce del Popolo Italiano* stood firmly with the gradual-reformist wing led by Italian parliamentarian Filippo Turati. Those who wanted to follow Vladimir Lenin’s Bolshevik Revolution and communism had lost their minds. This stance was similar to that made a few weeks prior: “It is necessary to work in the interest of the collective good. The relations between capital and labor must be improved – the class hatred, in a word the hatred that pushes man against man, brother against brother, must cease.” The “collective good” required class cooperation, but it did not mean accepting the current system that exploited workers for the benefit of the wealthy.

Fascism was the logical evolution of leftism, a more workable solution to the left’s economic critique. Many Fascist leaders and theorists began their political journeys from the ideological left. They viewed problems through a Marxist lens, but they had concluded that a proletarian revolution was not an appropriate solution to the problems produced by

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46 The *contadini* who remained in Italy felt similarly. The feared uprising in rural areas did not end with land collectivization; instead, the number of peasant landowners doubled between 1911 and 1921. See Clark, *Modern Italy*, 251.


industrialization and modernity. Benito Mussolini had been an outspoken member of the Italian Socialist Party, and his revolutionary stances often put him in conflict with the group’s reformist wing. He was the editor of its newspaper, Avanti!, before splitting from the party in 1914 because of his interventionist stance during the First World War. Edmondo Rossoni, who later became an important theorist for the Fascist-syndicalist wing of Mussolini’s party, was a revolutionary syndicalist associated with the Industrial Workers of the World. During his time in the United States from 1910 until he left for Italy in January 1913, he wrote for the radical newspaper Il Proletario, organized workers, and went on speaking tours, including a talk in Cleveland in 1911. Other leaders who became Fascists after beginning their careers as leftists included Alfredo Rocco (a significant contributor to corporatist economic theory), Michele Bianchi, and Massimo Rocca.

The argument that Fascism evolved from leftist ideology assisted Italian-American acceptance. According to Steubenville, Ohio’s Messaggero, there was a clear connection between the two doctrines because Fascism was simply Bolshevism in action. As the writer theorized, “anarchism and dictatorship, in their necessary dialectic, … intertwine

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themselves together: the tumult of the most disparate tendencies always finishes with the ending in one whirlpool. This whirlpool is fascism.” Committed leftists dismissed such a notion. As Il Martello responded, “a beautiful minestrone, in fact: anarchism and dictatorship that intertwine themselves together. Unbelievable[!]”\textsuperscript{53} The evolution of anarchism, Bolshevism, or any other left-wing radicalism into Fascism appeared inconceivable to many theorists, but this progression was what some analysts told average Italian Americans to believe. Giuseppe Prezzolini, who later disseminated Fascism from his position as head of Columbia University’s Casa Italiana, argued in his article, “The Fascisti and the Class Struggle,” that the movement usurped syndicalism. The working class would benefit as much from Fascism as from socialism or communism.\textsuperscript{54}

High-profile conversions after the March on Rome in 1922 fed the narrative. Enrico Ferri, a socialist and expert on criminology, evolved politically and, before his death, accepted a senate position from Mussolini.\textsuperscript{55} In early 1927, Italian Americans learned that a group of socialist leaders, including Lodovico D’Aragona, the former secretary of the Confederazione Generale del Lavoro (a powerful Italian labor organization), converted to Fascism. Corporatist class cooperation, rather than class struggle, was a more practical approach to syndicalism, they admitted.\textsuperscript{56} Count Ilya Tolstoy, the son of famed writer Leo Tolstoy, argued that even Soviet Russia was destined to evolve into Fascism.\textsuperscript{57} Italian

\textsuperscript{53} L’Homme Qui Rit, “Martellate,” Il Martello, 16 September 1922, 2.
\textsuperscript{54} Diggins, Mussolini and Fascism, 213, 255.
\textsuperscript{56} “Capi Socialisti Italiani Convertiti al Fascismo,” Il Cittadino Italo-Americano, 5 February 1927, 1. Often spelled alternatively as Ludovico.
\textsuperscript{57} “Il Bolscevismo Sara’ Sostituito dal Fascismo in Russia,” Il Cittadino Italo-Americano, 11 December 1926, 5.
Americans came to view Fascism as the next ideological progression concerning economic theory.

Media inaccuracy contributed to acceptance. Italian Americans formed opinions based on available information, not on absolute truth. Some of this inaccuracy was due to the nature of Fascism as an ideology. As Diggins noted, “Italy’s strange revolution from the Right wrapped itself in a tissue of synthetic ideologies, a deliberate exercise in obscurantism enabling Mussolini to exploit the ambiguity of his movement and present to Americans a many-sided image.”\(^{58}\) Fascism was a fluid ideology and not easily defined.\(^{59}\) Carlo Tresca’s *Il Martello* noted this vagueness in 1921, quoting Mussolini as having defined himself and his followers as “monarchists and antimonarchists, … republicans and antirepublicans, socialists and antisocialists, [and] revolutionaries and antirevolutionaries.”\(^{60}\) Mussolini’s unwillingness, or inability, to define Fascism as a doctrine during the first half of his regime left people to interpret his conflicting statements. *Il Duce* approved a definition around 1931 to appear in the *Enciclopedia italiana*, but the entry, penned by men such as philosopher Giovanni Gentile, was enigmatic beyond its

\(^{58}\) Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism*, 205. Diggins concluded that underneath the “trappings,” Fascism was “nothing less than a negation of America’s basic political ideas and values.” While true, many did not see through the illusion at the time.

\(^{59}\) De Grand, *Italian Fascism*, x. According to De Grand, the historical interpretation of Fascism is complicated by a few issues related to its definition: “The great problem is to bridge the gap between what the Fascists said they wanted to do and what they actually did. The difficulty is greater in the case of fascism because it was a vague, composite ideology that evoked different responses at various times from even the Fascists themselves.” The gap between rhetoric and reality was meaningless for Italian Americans who only heard and read about the system and did not live under the results. The believed reporting, not absolute truth, became the facts to them. See also Robert O. Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 206–20, for issues about defining Fascism.

emphasis on state supremacy. The passage admitted that Fascism began with no doctrine, but it came to define itself in opposition to liberalism, socialism, and democracy; nonetheless, Fascism also borrowed from the successful aspects of these ideologies. In Mussolini’s mind, there was nothing incompatible about denouncing the mechanisms of democracy (“Fascism denies that the majority, by the simple fact that it is a majority, can direct human society.”) while also supporting its aims (“Fascism desires the State to be a strong and organic body, at the same time reposing upon broad and popular support.”). Conflicting statements throughout the 1920s and early 1930s provided ammunition for sources like Il Martello to attack Fascism, but they also allowed editors within the mainstream Italian-American press to tailor their reporting in a more positive light if desired.

Developments in Italy aided presentation in the United States. As Fascists repressed dissent at home, Italians abroad received an increasingly sterilized, more acceptable image of Fascism. Initially, during the early 1920s, many Italian Americans had a wait-and-see mentality concerning the new political system. Disparate elements existed within the Fascist Party, but it was unclear if Mussolini and his moderate allies would suppress the violent Blackshirts and their local leaders in the provinces. Moreover, the Fascists were

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63 Mussolini, 347, 354.
64 “Nel fungaio coloniale: La Stella d’Italia,” *Il Martello*, 20 January 1923, 3. *Il Martello* dismissed *La Stella d’Italia*’s argument of waiting to judge the Fascist government. Interestingly, the director of the newspaper, C. Pitocchi, had shared a stage with Luigi Quintiliano when he spoke in support of Sacco and Vanzetti in 1921. See above, page 206.
one of many Italian political parties during Mussolini’s first years as prime minister. He had hoped to consolidate his rule during the April 1924 elections. Intimidation ensured good Fascist returns, but irregularities prompted Giacomo Matteotti of the Unitary Socialist Party to denounce the elections on the floor of parliament on 30 May 1924. Matteotti’s disappearance and murder prompted a crisis during the summer of 1924, which Mussolini used to consolidate his power and establish a true dictatorship beginning in 1925.65

Local media presented Italian Americans with a different story than the reality documented by historians. In September 1924, Youngstown’s Il Cittadino Italo-Americano reprinted a letter sent to Alberto Di Tommaso from a cousin who had returned to Italy two years prior after living in the US for almost a decade. The letter told readers that “the Matteotti affair concerns only the hotheaded enemies of the present government[, an administration] that was able to restore order and put [an] end to the strike mania of the socialist times.” Most Italians found the murder deplorable, but they also felt that the “idealists,” assumably the radical socialists and communists, wanted to use the crisis for their benefit.66 Underlying the letter was a narrative that Matteotti’s killing only involved militant elements that did not represent the majority of Fascists. In this explanation, the Fascists were right to suppress their party’s violent extremists, and their “normalization” appeared to bring stability to Italian politics.67

The reality was that the Fascists achieved the end of dissent by using totalitarian methods, including press censorship. Italians in the United States did not see this process, and they relied only on news reports and letters filled with propaganda and inaccuracies. The great public works projects lauded by the Fascists are concrete examples of this dissonance. Much of Italy remained untouched and in poverty when the regime fell after two decades in power. Messina serves as a useful illustration. After the 1908 earthquake destroyed much of the Sicilian city, which had been the fourth-largest trading port in Italy, the government began rebuilding structures. Upon taking power, the Fascists accused the ruling Liberals of lagging to the extent that it would have taken eighty years to rebuild and recover fully. However, the Fascist government was also unsuccessful in turning the temporary wooden structures into permanent edifices, which Mussolini noted privately in his conversation with the Minister of Public Works in 1937. Fifty years after the earthquake, many of the ‘temporary’ structures remained.

As is discussed later in this chapter, public works became celebrated in the Italian-American press. Those in the United States were unable to see the reported progress in person, especially after American

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68 This is not to dismiss the fact that some projects were significant and long-lasting. As Borden W. Painter, Jr. explained in Mussolini’s Rome, Fascist projects reshaped the Italian capital in a manner that the victors could not erase after the regime’s fall. Rome, however, was atypical. As prominent Italian journalist Luigi Barzini, Jr. wrote two decades after the regime fell, most projects would have been built no matter the government in power. The difference between Fascist and hypothetical non-Fascist public works was showmanship and the noise surrounding them. See Borden W. Painter, Jr., Mussolini’s Rome: Rebuilding the Eternal City (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), xv–xix; Luigi Barzini, The Italians: A Full-Length Portrait Featuring Their Manners and Morals, first Touchstone edition (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 143.


immigration restrictions slowed people’s movement to and from Italy. Most people accepted inaccurate information because they had little evidence on which to question its validity.

As the Fascist police state imprisoned or harassed opponents to the point of silence, seeking refuge abroad, or acquiescing to Mussolini’s regime, counter-narratives to the propaganda became less common and perceived as less reliable. The lack of debate convinced those abroad that Fascism was being refined, perfected, and more widely accepted. One of the biggest potential threats to Fascist rule during the early 1920s was the Catholic Church and the related Partito Popolare Italiano (PPI, or the Italian Popular Party). Founded in 1919 by Don Luigi Sturzo, a Sicilian priest, as a Christian democracy alternative and counter to the entrenched Liberals and revolutionary Marxists that vied for power immediately after the First World War, the PPI quickly became the second-largest party in the nation.71 Nevertheless, as David I. Kertzer concluded in The Pope and Mussolini, “the Vatican played a central role both in making the Fascist regime possible and in keeping it in power.”72 Pope Pius XI and Mussolini came to a mutual understanding about the role of the PPI. In exchange for Mussolini restoring Catholic influence in Italian life and promising to suppress the Fascist Party’s anticlericalism, Pius XI agreed to disempower the PPI and pressure Sturzo’s removal.73 Sturzo fled Italy, and by 1924 the

73 Kertzer, 47–59, 63–68.
PPI was in decline.\textsuperscript{74} The Catholic Church could have challenged the Fascists but did not do so publicly. While Pius XI and Mussolini fumed about each other in private, the public only saw a concordance between the two men and their institutions, best exemplified by the landmark Lateran Accords of 1929 that ended formal hostilities between the Catholic Church and the Italian state.\textsuperscript{75} Mussolini became a celebrated statesman, and the conciliation made front-page news in the Italian-American press.\textsuperscript{76} By appeasing the Catholic Church, the Fascists removed their strongest political opponent.

They forcibly silenced other critics of the regime from public debate. This was especially true after Matteotti’s murder in June 1924, an event that Mussolini used to establish a true dictatorship by the following year. Italian Fascism always had violent elements within it, but state institutions became mechanisms for political repression as the party formally merged with the state. A new police code, which went into effect on 6 November 1926, allowed Arturo Bocchini, Mussolini’s chief of police from 1926 until 1940, to target, harass, and jail critics of the regime, many of whom the Fascists had been surveilling for years.\textsuperscript{77} The state imprisoned the worst offenders in what Michael R. Ebner termed the “Fascist archipelago,” internal confinement camps on the various Mediterranean islands and in southern Italy.\textsuperscript{78} A special tribunal prosecuted Italian Communist Party leaders beginning in February 1927, including parliamentary deputy and

\textsuperscript{74} Murphy, “Don Sturzo and the Triumph of Christian Democracy,” 90.
\textsuperscript{75} Kertzer, \textit{The Pope and Mussolini}, 99–113.
\textsuperscript{78} Ebner, 1–5.
party secretary Antonio Gramsci who received a twenty-year prison sentence. Others fled. Matteotti associate and socialist leader Filippo Turati escaped to Paris, where he and other exiles, such as Carlo Rosselli, formed an anti-Fascist network. The historian and politician Gaetano Salvemini left Italy in August 1925 after six weeks in jail for his involvement with an anti-Fascist underground newspaper. He joined the Paris network and later immigrated to the United States to continue his political activities and teach at Harvard University. In total, the Fascists sentenced about fifteen thousand opponents to political confinement. More impactful was the fear created by the regime’s violence, intimidation, and punishment.

As the Fascist government silenced critics or forced their exile, the media increasingly presented Italian Americans with a sterilized image of the situation in Italy, one in which Fascism became easier to accept. In addition to purging rival politicians, state repression separated anti-Fascists from Italian organizations that gave them legitimacy and authority. In December 1927, Italian Americans learned that authorities expelled ex-Prime Minister Francesco Nitti and Arturo Labriola, a prominent syndicalist politician, from the Consiglio dell’Ordine degli Avvocati, essentially disbarring them. As critics of the regime became separated from Italy and Italian organizations, their credibility to comment on

79 Ebner, 76–77.
81 Ebner, Italian Fascist Activities in the United States, x, xiv, xxi–xxii.
82 Ebner, Ordinary Violence in Mussolini’s Italy, 4.
83 Ebner, 1–5.
84 “Nitti e Labriola Non Più Avvocati per Antifascismo,” Il Cittadino Italo-Americano, 18 December 1927, 3.
current events declined. New associations created by dissidents as counters to their old ones did not carry the same authority. Instead, the Italian-American press repeated warnings from the Fascists to not trust those connected to new entities, such as *Il Corriere degli Italiani*, an anti-Fascist newspaper published by the *fuoriusciti* (the anti-Fascist exiles) in France. *Il Corriere degli Italiani* was “the center of pitfalls and conspiracies and of an ignoble libel to the harm of our Country.” The newspaper was likely responsible for inciting an assassination attempt against Benito Mussolini.\(^{85}\) In time, editorial-styled articles independently offered similar condemnations. In January 1929, for example, *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* printed a rant titled “Idiota!” (“Idiot!”), which attacked a piece published the previous month in *La Libertà*, another anti-Fascist paper from Paris. The source criticized General Luigi Cadorna, who had died recently. In response, *Il Cittadino* asked: “But it is an Italian that writes like this? We do not believe [it].”\(^{86}\) The implication was clear; the *fuoriusciti* were so outside the mainstream of Italian opinions that those in the United States needed to reject their writings altogether.

Harsh press laws in Italy compounded the problem of misinformation about the regime. Italian Americans questioned the legitimacy of arguments from those who fled Italy, but the remaining news sources in the country, which theoretically presented firsthand accounts of Fascist rule, became inaccurate and full of propaganda. This was no accident. Benito Mussolini understood the role of the press in creating consensus. He had first gained an audience as editor of *Avanti!* The creation of his newspaper, *Il Popolo d’Italia*, served to disseminate his political philosophy and build Fascist followers. Media

\(^{85}\) “Perche’ Fu Soppreso [sic] il ‘Corriere degli Italiani,’” *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, 18 December 1927, 1.

was not to inform people but to shape views and opinions. Prominent American journalist George Seldes commented on the Fascist leader’s obsession with the press: “But almost every one who has ever interviewed Mussolini … will remember the colored pencil scanning the columns of the local or foreign papers. These great men seem to care so much for public opinion!”

The Fascists understood that ‘public opinion’ of the regime was moldable. As Frank Rosengarten argued in *The Italian Anti-Fascist Press*, the successful creation of Mussolini’s dictatorship from 1922 to 1927 relied on the “incorporation of the Italian press into a totalitarian state apparatus.” The free press’s incremental destruction began in the summer of 1923 when Mussolini, Luigi Federzoni, and Alfredo Rocco convinced King Victor Emmanuel III to approve new press laws that updated an edict from 1848. The new decree actively targeted editors and newspapers that hurt “national prestige within Italy or abroad or … cause[d] a disturbance of public order,” which included provoking class tensions. A more consequential law followed in December 1925 and went into full effect by the end of 1926. The new code required listing journalists and editors in a professional directory. Since the Fascist Party controlled registration, the obligation barred those deemed disloyal to the regime from publishing. Radio, as a new medium, quickly fell

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91 Rosengarten, 13–14; Clark, *Modern Italy*, 277.
under state control by the end of 1928. A commission screened and censored all programming, and Agenzia Stefani, the Fascist-aligned news agency, provided broadcast reporting.\(^{92}\) The eventual direct transmission of programming from Rome to cities such as Pittsburgh included news reports in English and Italian.\(^{93}\) A final act in May 1929 completed the profession’s subjugation to state control when Alfredo Rocco established the High Commission for the Press under Mussolini’s brother, Arnaldo, to provide discipline and centralization.\(^{94}\) These laws ultimately ensured that the state vetted editors while providing a veil of autonomy because the organization’s members consisted of influential journalists.\(^{95}\)

These laws sterilized reporting in the Italian-American news media. Living across the ocean, Italian-American editors relied on external sources to explain current events in Italy. For example, during November 1922, the month following the March on Rome, the Fascist seizure of power, Youngstown’s *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* cited political information, either verbatim or summarized and digested, from *Gazzetta del Popolo* (Turin), *La Stampa* (Turin), *Giornale di Roma*, and *Rivista Popolare*.\(^{96}\) These articles had

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\(^{93}\) “Trasmissione Periodica Radiofonica da Roma,” *Unione* (Pittsburgh, PA), 12 October 1934, 2.

\(^{94}\) Rosengarten, *The Italian Anti-Fascist Press*, 16.


262
to compete with reports from the new Fascist-led government during the same period, including reprints or summaries of Mussolini’s speeches and comments now that he was the prime minister. Selections from Mussolini carried the authority associated with his new office. However, the breadth of sources offered competing views about Fascism, such as Filippo Turati’s denunciations of Mussolini. Subsequent press laws purged the independence of these sources. For instance, the Fascists temporarily suspended the publication of *La Stampa*, one of the most influential Italian national papers, in September 1925 for printing articles critical of the army. *La Stampa* reopened, but over the next few years, the Fascists forced the resignations of chief editorialist Luigi Salvatorelli and director Alfredo Frassati and the appointment of Fascist deputy Andrea Torre as managing editor to guarantee ideological compliance.

The American ‘free press’ offered little counterweight to this trend. American news media generally supported the Fascists after their route to power succeeded without revolution and bloodshed. Some, such as the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, viewed Fascism as the savior of Italian democracy. A few events raised condemnation in the American press, such as the Matteotti murder, but criticism was generally minor. The media mostly overlooked the negatives of Fascism until Mussolini’s aggression in Ethiopia in 1935. Foreign correspondents contributed to the whitewashing. The Associated Press and Reuters representative in Rome, Salvatore Cortesi, was friendly to Fascism. So too was his son,

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Arnaldo, a correspondent for the New York Times. American journalists stationed in Italy benefited from perks such as free wire service, better housing, and tax benefits if they refrained from writing negative stories and joined the press syndicate’s foreign branch. The Fascists expelled nonconforming reporters, such as George Seldes.\footnote{Diggins, Mussolini and Fascism, 29–34, 42–49; Seldes, You Can’t Print That!: The Truth Behind the News 1918–1928, 69–83.} When the Italian-American press sought English-language reports, those articles presented the same tone concerning Fascism as their Italian sources.\footnote{“Fascisti triumphant,” Il Cittadino Italo-Americano, 1 November 1924, 4.}

Italian Americans were open to Fascism because it fit their needs and appeared popular. Early in the regime’s founding, American policymakers and media concluded that Fascism was an acceptable alternative to Italian instability. In searching for a savior to improve their homeland’s image to better reflect on their ethnicity, Italian Americans found a helpful tool in Mussolini. As totalitarianism took hold, the media portrayal of Fascism benefited. These attributes created a mass of people open and willing to support a novel ideology.

**Fascist Diffusion, Bridges to the People**

Fascism diffused widely across the Italian-American community. As seen in the previous chapter, leftists faced numerous obstacles to reach audiences. Fascism did not have this problem. As historians Stefano Luconi and Matteo Pretelli showed, the Italian state and its associated apparatuses aided the spread of Fascism to emigrants. In particular, Mussolini wanted to create a political lobby to pressure the American government to enact economic and diplomatic policy favorable to Italy.\footnote{Stefano Luconi, La “diplomazia parallela”: il regime fascista e la mobilitazione politica degli italo-americani (Milan, Italy: FrancoAngeli, 2000), 16–17.} To achieve this, the Fascists
developed a soft power campaign, often appealing to identity. Mussolini’s regime regularly used everything from commercial ties and Italian-educational programming to ethnic newspapers and radio shows to connect to Italians abroad. Many in the United States were happy to cooperate. The *prominenti* especially took an interest in Mussolini’s system. They had been at the forefront of the movement described in chapter one to forge an ethnic community based on nationality. The nationalist aspects of Fascism fit their needs. Additionally, the Fascist promise to solve problems without overturning the class structure appealed to this group of professionals. Proponents of the ideology used the ethnic institutions, such as newspapers and fraternal societies, which were already integral to the community, to imbue respectability onto Fascism. Few ordinary Italian Americans escaped its embrace.

Notable community leaders served as bridges for ideological diffusion to regular people. Unlike the *padroni*, the “bosses,” who established power bases within communities by providing jobs and thereby forming patron-client relationships, the *prominenti* earned respect because they promoted and defended the Italian-American population as a whole rather than their self-interests. By the 1920s, the *prominenti* had replaced the *padroni* as the community leaders. The earned respect aided the *prominenti* when many of them pushed their communities and local organizations toward favoring Fascism.

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One of these notables was Giovanni A. Barricelli of Cleveland. Born in Benevenuto, Italy, in 1873, Barricelli immigrated to New York City at sixteen. Having completed some coursework at the University of Naples, the young man continued his medical studies in the United States at St. Francis College of New York and the University of Illinois at Chicago. He completed additional work at New York’s Long Island Medical College and had an office on Woodland Avenue in Cleveland’s Big Italy neighborhood. Before his death in 1934, Barricelli became a noted cardiopulmonary specialist and a translator for other medical works, such as Leonardo Bianchi’s *Foundations of Mental Health*.\(^{106}\)

By the advent of Fascism in Italy, Barricelli had already become a recognized Italian-American leader in Cleveland and eventually Ohio.\(^{107}\) During his early years as a doctor, Barricelli was interested in ethnic uplift, seeking the dual goals of Americanization and group respect. In 1907, after local “Black Hand” criminals threatened Barricelli and an associate, the men utilized the American solution, turning over the extortion letters to the police.\(^{108}\) During the 1910 Columbus Day celebration, described as “the most pretentious undertaking in which they [the Italian Americans of Cleveland] have ever participated as a unit,” Barricelli stood as a representative and official speaker (in Italian) for the ethnic

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\(^{107}\) “Cronaca Locale: La Croce di Cavaliere al Dr. Barricelli,” *La Voce del Popolo Italiano*, 12 February 1921, 1. The Italian government honored him for his efforts.

group. His reputation spread further because of his association with the Sons of Italy. In May 1915, six fraternal societies organized the Ohio Grand Lodge and chose Alfredo Militello as Grand Venerable. Francesco Zammataro replaced Militello only a few months later, but during the 1917 leadership elections, Zammataro was happy to have Barricelli as his successor.

Barricelli’s tenure as leader of Ohio’s Sons of Italy coincided with the rise of Fascism, and while he was not the most sycophantic advocate, the doctor certainly favored the ideology and was a partner to entities that wished to spread it. He was an attendee at a February 1924 dinner concerning the development of the Institute of Italian Culture, an educational organization founded the previous year by noteworthy-Fascist adherents Giuseppe Prezzolini and Henry J. Burchell, who was also secretary of the pro-Fascist Italy-America Society and received a knighthood from Mussolini in 1923. In spring 1925, Barricelli raised funds for Columbia University’s Casa Italiana, which developed into a center for Fascist intellectualism under Prezzolini. He was a participant in the Fascist League of North America. On 3 August 1926, members of a local Fascist section gathered at the Hotel Statler in Cleveland to formalize their administration. After the provisional secretary read a circular, which a news report called “a program of vibrant faith and …

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constructive fascist action,” from E. Citriolo, the national secretary, the attendees elected leaders for the organization, including Barricelli as the “political secretary.”

His friendliness to Fascism went beyond organizational affiliation. In a 1932 open letter honoring the thirtieth anniversary of *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*’s creation, he praised the newspaper for elevating the Italian people in tandem and similar to Mussolini’s successful efforts in Italy. As a measure of solidarity with *il Duce*’s revived Italy, he closed with the Fascist battle cry *alalà.* Barricelli’s position as Grand Venerable until 1925, and thereafter as ceremonial ex-Grand Venerable, facilitated the spread of Fascism and lent respectability to it.

As part of his duties, he traveled throughout Ohio, engaging with membership as a guest and sometimes as a noted speaker. Some of his visits included to the Loggia Gabriele D’Annunzio in Bedford, the men’s Colombo and women’s Benevento societies in Alliance, a Sons of Italy celebration in Girard, Cleveland’s Loggia Fraterna, Loggia Sinagra, Loggia Guglielmo Marconi, and Loggia La Giovane Italia, a Columbus Day celebration in Steubenville, and Youngstown’s Loggia Giuseppe Garibaldi and Loggia Napoleone Colaianni. Pro-Fascists like Barricelli, who was highly regarded within


various Italian-American communities, helped make Mussolini’s government acceptable and aided the inclusion of philo-Fascist programming, rhetoric, and comments.

One example of such an event involved Zopito Valentini, billed as a “special envoy of His Excellency Benito Mussolini.”[^117] He toured Ohio in 1924, speaking about Italy and raising money for a “building … in Pescara[, in the Abruzzo region,] for facilitating the Arts and Industries in the *Mezzogiorno* of Italy.”[^118] Barricelli encouraged attendance, which included visiting multiple lodges to build enthusiasm and ticket sales.[^119] He was the chairman for Valentini’s Cleveland appearance, where he introduced the Italian visitor, national Sons of Italy leader Giovanni Di Silvestro, and Countess Irene di Robilant, the manager of the Italy-America Society who was known for her pro-Fascist lectures.[^120]

[^120]: “Gli Italiani Negli Stati Uniti,” *Il Carroccio* 10, no. 6 (June 1924): 698, https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015073737366; “Ordine Figli d’Italia in America:
Cleveland was one of many Ohio cities that hosted Valentini, and the speaker held similar events in Akron, Canton, Ashtabula, Steubenville, Niles, Youngstown, and Bellaire. Billed as a “Commemoration of the Italian Victory” coinciding with the anniversary of Italy’s entry into the First World War, Valentini’s program linked the success of Fascism and Mussolini to the country’s rebirth. The speech, which included comments concerning the First World War and Italian nationalism, ended with Fascist rhetoric:

“I can affirm to you[,] friends, that Italy’s current life is rich in work and in conscious discipline. The financial reports of the State are almost in balance, the work of the workshops is continuous, the workers are fully aware of their sacrosanct rights and of no less sacrosanct duties… Not one strike, not one turmoil[,] all is magnificently serene and balanced in a perfect way. While the other European Nations are engulfed […] by various problems[,] Italy is the only nation that… struck up trade treaties with neighboring peoples… overtook the financial crisis… preventing any danger of bolshevik revolution… marches with certain faith toward a bright future. The credit for this rebirth, of this great spring, goes […] to BENITO MUSSOLINI…!”

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122 Advertisement for Zopito Valentini’s event at the Park Theatre, Youngstown, Ohio, Il Cittadino Italo-Americano, 17 May 1924, 4; “Il Comm. Zopito Valentini a Youngstown, Ohio,” Il Cittadino Italo-Americano, 24 May 1924, 1; “Ordine Figli d’Italia in America: Celebrazione del 24 Maggio,” Il Cittadino Italo-Americano, 25 May 1924, 1; “Il Successo della Conferenza del Comm. Zopito Valentini,” Il Cittadino Italo-Americano, 31 May 1924, 1. The programs for Cleveland and Youngstown were similar in that each included a film of Gabriele D’Annunzio in Fiume, a talk by Valentini, and another film, Gloria, about the Italian Unknown Soldier. In all likelihood, Valentini delivered similar speeches in each town that he visited, and different prominenti supplemented the rest of the program. While Barricelli chaired the Cleveland event on 24 May, Giuseppe Napoletano, the Grand Orator for the Sons of Italy Ohio Grand Lodge, provided the state-level representation at the Youngstown showing on 25 May 1924.
123 “L’orazione pronunciata dal Comm. Zopito Valentini,” Il Cittadino Italo-Americano, 7 June 1924, 3. See also “L’orazione pronunciata dal Comm. Zopito Valentini,” Il Cittadino Italo-Americano, 31 May 1924, 1, for part one. The transcript of Valentini’s speech was printed as from his tour, rather than at a particular location, signifying that
Barricelli was not the only person who facilitated the spread of Fascism. Giovanni Di Silvestro’s position alongside Valentini and di Robilant was no accident. An attorney and Philadelphia *prominente*, Di Silvestro became Supreme Venerable of the entire Sons of Italy in 1922. One of his early acts as national leader was to telegram Benito Mussolini on 11 November 1922, only weeks after the Fascists gained power, to pledge his organization’s support to the new regime. Some members expressed concerns about the action, and Di Silvestro temporarily moderated any immediate subservience to the Fascists. However, only a few years later, in October 1925, the organization’s supreme executive council endorsed the general message of the telegram, and the Sons of Italy went on to serve as an unofficial “transmission belt” for the Fascist government. In addition, many local lodge leaders were amenable to Fascism, such as Cesare Amadio, venerable of Loggia Operaia N. 1122 in Struthers, Ohio, and Ciro Saulino, head of the Loggia Napoleone Colaianni in Youngstown.

Valentini was a “special envoy” who temporarily spread positive views about Fascism in the United States, but local diplomats played the same role with more permanence. Cleveland Consul Nicola Cerri, who was part of Valentini’s 1924 event, had reassured Americans only months after Mussolini assumed power that the growing Fascist movement among Italian Americans in Cleveland and other cities was harmless. The

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126 See below, pages 363–365.
Cleveland Fascist organization, which restricted membership to military veterans, wanted to help ex-soldiers readjust, aid Americanization efforts, and “oppose any organization which [was] not law abiding.” 

Cerri and his wife hosted the visiting Princess Santa Borghese when she came to speak about Fascism, including presentations at Hiram House and Alta House settlements. Subsequent representatives Valerio Valeriani and Count Cesare Pier Alberto Buzzi Gradenigo continued the message. Pittsburgh’s vice-consuls facilitated the same propaganda. In 1926, the Fascist government appointed Giuseppe Castruccio. He had previous leadership roles in the New York Fascio, the Federation of the Italian War Veterans in the United States, and the Fascist League of North America. Castruccio fulfilled the requirement of presenting a positive image of Italy and Fascism, such as during a banquet celebrating the March on Rome’s anniversary. He proclaimed, “Premier Mussolini has restored order, discipline, production, finance, religion and prestige in the country.”

His successors, Giovanni Giurato and Leone Sircana, offered

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130 “Outlines Fascist Plans for Italy,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 9 November 1927, 26; “Mussolini Names New Consul Here,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 1 March 1929, 6; Cornelia Curtiss, “Cleveland Society Attends Contests in East and West: Society Entertains,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 19 October 1931, 20; “600 Italian War Vets Celebrate,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 13 November 1933, 6; “1,000 Celebrate Italian Armistice,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 5 November 1934, 5. Gradenigo was a friend of Count Galeazzo Ciano, Mussolini’s son-in-law. Count Ciano and his wife Edda Mussolini were invited guests to Gradenigo’s 1934 wedding in Rome. See Cornelia Curtiss, “Italian Nobility to Attend Wedding of Miss Grasselli to Count Gradenigo in Rome,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 14 March 1934, 14.
132 “Italians Will Honor Premier,” *Pittsburgh Press* (Pittsburgh, PA), 28 October 1927, 34.
similar positive public portrayals of Fascism. For consuls and vice-consuls down to local consular representatives, presenting a positive image of Mussolini’s Italy was necessary. *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* expressed this community role clearly when it noted that such agents’ functions included defending the Italian race and informing people of Italy’s true political and financial conditions.

Other people associated with entities beyond the mutual aid societies and consular corps contributed to the spread. *Il Fascio XXVIII Ottobre*, an early pro-Fascist organization based in Pittsburgh, contained numerous *prominenti* as members. Charles F. Schisano, one of the proponents for the group’s creation, was a decorated, four-times-wounded Italian Great War veteran who had once served as an escort for General John J. Pershing. After immigrating to Pittsburgh, Schisano became a figure in ethnic society. He managed the local Bank of America’s foreign department, taught Italian literature and language classes, and headed the campaign to fund the Italian Room in the University of Pittsburgh’s Cathedral of Learning building. By 1933, he was a regular contributor to *Unione*, a

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135 *Il Fascio XXVIII Ottobre*, “Nella Ricorrenza Fatidica del Natale di Roma” (booklet, Pittsburgh, PA, April 1928), 11–12, folder Italian Americans - Pennsylvania, Archives of Industrial Society (AIS) Information Files, Archives & Special Collections, University of Pittsburgh.

Pittsburgh Italian-American newspaper. Other members included Rev. Ercole Dominicis, one-time editor of Pittsburgh’s *La Trinacria* and the main speaker for a 1926 Fascist League of North America meeting in the city, and Drs. Antonio E. Abbate and G. Alvino, notable members of the Sons of Italy.  

Fascism reached out from the metropolis to include smaller cities and towns. Il Fascio XXVIII Ottobre included members from Ambridge, Farrell, McKeesport, Beaver, Uniontown, Homer City, Hillsville, Braddock, Rankin, and Canonsburg, Pennsylvania. The town of Indiana had Francesco Biamonte, owner-editor of *Il Patriot*, who harbored Fascist sympathies and even served as an interpreter for famed Italian airman Italo Balbo during his 1933 flight from Italy to Chicago’s Century of Progress Exposition. In Ohio, early groups existed in Youngstown and Niles in addition to Cleveland. Fascism had local advocates in almost every town with a sizable Italian-American population, which aided diffusion and acceptance.

Mainstream Italian-American newspapers were friendly toward Fascism. As Diggins stated, “it was the Italian-American press that provided Mussolini his most

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138 Masthead, *La Trinacria* (Pittsburgh, PA), 4 April 1924, 4; “Riot Ends Fascisti Meeting,” *Pittsburgh Gazette Times*, 21 June 1926, 1, 3; Biagi, *The Purple Aster: A History of the Order Sons of Italy in America*, 150. Also written as Ercole De Dominicis occasionally. Guerino Alvino was the Italian name for G. William Alvin from chapter one. See above, page 79.
important vehicle of propaganda in the United States.”

Many prominent favored Fascism, and because they controlled the local-commercial presses, their views predominated. Furthermore, the Italian press censorship described earlier found its way to the United States. As the Fascists tightened their control on the spread of information in Italy, they also sanitized the reporting sent to Italian Americans. They meddled when possible to ensure favorable coverage. In spring 1927, New York’s *Il Progresso Italo-Americano* went up for sale after founder Carlo Barsotti’s death. The Fascist government worked secretly to ensure that it found an appropriate owner. As one of the preeminent Italian-language newspapers in the country, numerous entities, including the Hearst syndicate, were interested in purchasing it. Italian diplomats worked behind closed doors to arrange its sale to Generoso Pope in 1928 for over two million dollars. Pope met with Mussolini in Italy the following year to discuss purchasing Luigi Barzini’s *Il Corriere d’America*, another prominent Italian-American newspaper. Mussolini gave his blessing after Pope’s assurance of a pro-Fascist editorial policy. While *Il Progresso Italo-Americano* was headquartered in New York City, distribution still reached Pennsylvania and Ohio.

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143 Cannistraro, *Blackshirts in Little Italy*, 112.
144 Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism*, 81.
Newspapers specific to western Pennsylvania and eastern Ohio were generally philo-Fascist. These included La Stella di Pittsburgh and Cleveland’s L’Araldo. Pittsburgh’s Unione remained friendly to Fascism until 1938, when Mussolini moved closer to Adolf Hitler and war.\(^{148}\) Similarly, Cleveland’s La Voce del Popolo Italiano was favorable to Mussolini until 1940, when Columbus Melaragno published an editorial denouncing Italy’s entry into the Second World War.\(^{149}\)

Fascism diffused easily throughout the Italian-American community. The work of the prominenti, Italian government, and ethnic institutions, like fraternal societies and newspapers, provided an aura of credibility. These entities, which already had some influence in the community before the March on Rome, reassured Italian Americans about the new ideology. They passed information, which often verged on propaganda, to the people. Fascism, therefore, entered the Italian-American ideological cauldron alongside civic nationalism and leftism to inform people’s opinions.

**A Mediated Fascism**

As Fascism diffused across the United States, Italian Americans learned not the philosophical debates about the doctrine but the practical application of Mussolini’s system. Unlike the American government that insisted on returning to normalcy and a conservative, laissez-faire approach during the 1920s, Fascism presented an example of a


\(^{149}\) Van Tassel and Grabowski, *The Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*, 603–4; “Quits as Editor of Italian Paper After Editorial on War,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 19 June 1940, 20.
working government responsive to the masses’ needs. Italian-American appreciation for this alternative approach was a logical evolution in the formation of the group’s ideology. As Italian immigrants and their children Americanized, acquiring citizenship and a sense of civic identity and responsibility, they increasingly looked toward the abstract state not as an enemy but as a potential mechanism for help. The leftists during the early 1920s amplified working-class grievances with calls for mass unionization. Fascism, especially once Mussolini adopted corporatism, provided an example of the state solving the economic problems that plagued the lower classes. Fascist Italy showed the possibilities offered by a robust and responsive government to solve the problems noted by the left, and Italian Americans increasingly paid attention to the aspects of Fascism that worked and could be replicated in some form in the United States. These included the government meddling in the economy when necessary, the appearance of new laws, syndicalist organizations, and public works to help the laboring masses, and less apprehension about a strong national leader. As shown in chapter six, Italian Americans referred explicitly to these ideas when the domestic economic crisis began in 1929 and people debated solutions.

The transition toward accepting Fascism as an influence was a process. In tandem with deepening censorship that presented a positive image of Mussolini’s Italy, Italian Fascism gradually shed most of its negative attributes that caused Italian Americans to hesitate in favoring the system. These were notably the associated violence and the Party’s initial acceptance of laissez-faire economics. An early issue for Mussolini was the decentralized nature of the Fascist political movement.150 While he was ostensibly il Duce,

150 It is more historically accurate to speak of fascisms during the early history of the movement, including conservative and innovative currents. See Emilio Gentile, The
the leader, he had minimal control of his party’s elements during the early 1920s.\textsuperscript{151} There was high turnover throughout 1921 and 1922. One of the few unifying factors in terms of a Fascist “constituency” was that a large proportion, over half of the party in late 1921, were military veterans, and many took no issue with introducing the violence that they learned at the front into national politics.\textsuperscript{152}

Some organized themselves into paramilitary squads that terrorized leftists. \textit{Squadrismo}, as the phenomenon became known, was especially prominent in the agrarian regions in northern and central Italy, where it was a reactionary response to workers’ uprisings. From bases of power in provincial cities, local \textit{ras} (Fascist chiefs) organized lower-middle-class urbanites with rural landowners, farm managers, and rising peasants to threaten, divide, and terrorize agricultural workers.\textsuperscript{153} By condoning violence as an appropriate means to arrest possible revolution, \textit{ras} such as Roberto Farinacci in Cremona, Italo Balbo in Ferrara, and Dino Grandi in Bologna encouraged the spread of terror. Amerigo Dumini, the head of the group that murdered Giacomo Matteotti in 1924, got his start in Florence, leading paramilitary units on raids throughout the region. During one event in Arezzo in April 1921, Dumini kidnapped a local socialist member of parliament, beat him, and paraded the man through the town’s working-class sections as a warning. He

\textsuperscript{151} This was clearest during the Matteotti Crisis. Mussolini played an intricate balancing act, trying to appease the Fascist squads in the provinces while using them to secure his own power. See Clark, \textit{Modern Italy}, 271–73.
\textsuperscript{152} Bosworth, \textit{Mussolini’s Italy}, 151–52.
\textsuperscript{153} De Grand, \textit{Italian Fascism}, 31–32.
and his associates then raided a local leftist organization and burned their records in the
town square.\textsuperscript{154}

While it is debatable how informed Italian Americans were about specific acts of
brutality in Italy, they certainly understood that violence appeared innately connected to
Fascism from the beginning. Those associated with leftist circles heard specifics about
terror, including, for example, Matteotti’s denunciations of Fascist aggression reprinted in
\textit{Il Martello} only a month following the Arezzo incident.\textsuperscript{155} Violence was the main critique
repeated by people like Carlo Tresca and entities such as his newspaper.\textsuperscript{156} The brutality
struck a chord with those in the United States, and it was probably not an overstatement
that “many [wept]” after hearing about the terror unleashed by Mussolini’s people during
a sizeable anti-Fascist meeting with Tresca and Luigi Quintiliano in Pittsburgh in late
1922.\textsuperscript{157} The mainstream Italian-American press also carried news of Fascist aggression,
albeit while also placing some blame on leftist extremists. \textit{Il Patriota} documented one such
incident in Florence, a bombing and reprisals that killed eleven and wounded over one
hundred. Although the article noted that reports included contradictory evidence and that
extremists existed on both sides, it blatantly admitted that “the fascists have, after the
provocation [the bombing], acted with extraordinary violence,” including the murder of a
local union leader “with a revolver shot to the head.”\textsuperscript{158}

\textsuperscript{154} Bosworth, \textit{Mussolini’s Italy}, 126–35, 143–44.
\textsuperscript{155} “Il Terrore Bianco in Italia,” \textit{Il Martello}, 1 May 1921, 10.
\textsuperscript{156} L’Homme Qui Rit, “Martellate,” \textit{Il Martello}, 16 September 1922, 2; A. Angeloni,
\textsuperscript{157} “Preti, prominenti e fascisti allo sbaraglio,” \textit{Il Martello}, 23 December 1922, 1.
\textsuperscript{158} “Morti e feriti nei gravi: Disordini di Frienze [sic],” \textit{Il Patriota}, 5 March 1921, 1.
This violence was irreconcilable with American civic values, specifically to the freedoms of assembly. It was possible to dismiss the turmoil in the provinces as the actions of a few extremists, but the March on Rome brought the issue of intimidation and illegality to the forefront. Italian-American newspapers documented conflicting opinions about the event. *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* was optimistic about the potential of a new government, but it and *La Trinacria* condemned the intimidation and violence associated with the seizure of power. The question was whether the new government could purge those attributes.\(^{159}\) The mechanism for the Fascist seizure of power aided their interpretation. As Emilio Gentile argued, the March on Rome was not revolutionary. Mussolini grafted Fascism and his new ministry onto the old liberal order, thereby rejecting the party’s extreme idealists, who favored the government’s complete transformation.\(^{160}\) This unique ascension to power allowed Italian Americans to present cautious optimism that reformatory, not revolutionary, policy would prevail. The murder of Giacomo Matteotti upset this interpretation and showed that the provincial violence had indeed reached the top echelons of government. Nevertheless, Italian-American editors continuously noted the possibility, and hope, that Mussolini and the reformists could purge the violent revolutionaries. As *La Trinacria* informed readers, there were certain undesirable Fascists, “those of the worst breed and of the worst type, that believe that the only law is violence and [the] only right force.”\(^{161}\) However, although Fascism was born


\(^{161}\) “Rassegna Editoriale,” *La Trinacria*, 20 June 1924, 1.
the “son of violence,” the product of turbulent times in Italian history, violence was not necessarily the product of Fascism.\footnote{Ercole Dominicis, “Fascismo e Violenza,” \textit{La Trinacria}, 27 June 1924, 1.} It was unclear whether Fascist leaders could separate violence and illegality from their party. However, as \textit{Il Cittadino Italo-Americano} told readers, Mussolini and the state had the responsibility to uphold the law and suppress Fascist violence by force if necessary.\footnote{“L’agitazione perdura in Italia,” \textit{La Trinacria}, 11 July 1924, 1; Antonucci, “Changing Perceptions of il Duce,” 73–75.}

Indeed, there was a crackdown. In time, the consolidation of one-party rule, Fascist control of repressive state apparatuses, and the imprisonment or exile of political opponents contributed to a subsiding of turmoil in Italy.\footnote{Clark, \textit{Modern Italy}, 276–89.} Since Fascist actions were no longer extralegal, the interpretation of their processes and outcomes depended solely on the individual’s view of the state and whether to trust the bureaucracy and legal system. Concerning the Matteotti murder, the ethnic press informed Italian Americans that Attorney General Vincenzo Crisafulli reviewed the evidence and made recommendations in late 1925.\footnote{“La istruttoria Matteotti Conclusa,” \textit{La Trinacria}, 16 October 1925, 4.} The court found most of the perpetrators guilty of manslaughter – they had murdered Matteotti but not intentionally – in March 1926. Amerigo Dumini received an almost six-year prison sentence, although a previous amnesty law and the subtraction of time served left only a few months remaining.\footnote{“Il processo Matteotti e’ finito!,” \textit{Il Cittadino Italo-Americano}, 27 March 1926, 1. When \textit{La Trinacria} informed Italian Americans of the new amnesty law in August 1925, it painted their perceptions of who would have received commutations. The specific extension of amnesty to those involved in the nationalistic struggles to control Fiume after the First World War marked those receiving the law’s benefits as patriots rather than criminals. See “La Nuova Amnistia,” \textit{La Trinacria}, 7 August 1925, 4.} Later histories showed that the Fascists rigged the trial by substituting homicide charges with involuntary murder and creating the...
new amnesty law specifically for Dumini and company, but the public knew nothing of this at the time.\textsuperscript{167} To philo-Fascists in the United States, the trial confirmed that the violent elements were subject to Italian law.

After the perceived reduction of violence and illegality associated with Fascism, a conservative economic policy was the second element that changed to enable widespread Italian-American acceptance. Economic conditions in Italy improved from 1920 to 1925, but they remained fragile. When the Fascists assumed power in late 1922, they followed conservative economic policies with the goal of financial stabilization. Alberto De’ Stefani, Mussolini’s Minister of Finance, preferred classical-liberal economics, including free trade over protectionism, the denationalization of state-owned industries, and a balanced budget.\textsuperscript{168} He enacted public spending cuts to solve the government tax deficit, eventually lowering the gross domestic product’s debt ratio from 167 percent to 57 percent between 1922 and 1926, a decline of over eighty billion lire.\textsuperscript{169} Italian Americans, however, also understood that absolute statistics about economic health hid other problems, similar to how American prosperity during the 1920s did not necessarily mean that all citizens and sectors shared in its benefits. Public debt stabilized and decreased, but the agricultural industry lacked modern methods and could not supply Italian needs. The country required the vast importation of grain, thereby draining the national economy.\textsuperscript{170} Furthermore, they were informed by early 1925 that the anti-Fascist press in Italy reported doubts that the

\textsuperscript{168} Bosworth, \textit{Mussolini’s Italy}, 186, 224.
government could meet its wartime loan payment obligations to the United States fully, even though Mussolini and others refuted this interpretation.  

Political, rather than economic, considerations changed Mussolini’s financial policy and set Italy on a different path. Matteotti’s murder deepened the schism within the Fascist movement related to labor and business. Il Duce had checked the rise of left-leaning Fascist syndicalists, such as Edmondo Rossoni, throughout 1923 and early 1924, but the crisis caused many Fascist-allied unionists to reconsider their support for the movement. Meanwhile, conservative industrialists, repulsed by the murder, turned against Fascism. Mussolini harnessed more state power and used his position to weather the crisis. He allowed Fascist-backed strikes in 1925 to pressure the industrialists. He then incorporated the Fascist-syndicalist wing more firmly into his party to purge potential rivals, like Rossoni. Giuseppe Volpi replaced De’ Stefani in July 1925, and Mussolini gambled that more widespread state intervention would set a new tone for his regime. Had he opted to continue a classical-liberal approach to the economy, then Italian Americans would not have been offered an alternative to their government in the United States. However, the move toward a new economic model presented them with a real-world test of something innovative.  

The Battle for Grain, or the Fascist government’s push for increased agricultural production, was the first large-scale intervention noticed by Italian Americans. Citing Mussolini’s newspaper, Il Popolo d’Italia, the ethnic press told readers in February 1925  

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172 Tinghino, Edmondo Rossoni, 144–70; Clark, Modern Italy, 296–98, 315–16; De Grand, Italian Fascism, 59–60; Bosworth, Mussolini’s Italy, 225–30.
that the Fascists planned to solve the grain issue. Although initially vague about how the government would accomplish higher production, the plan broke with the historical precedent of price controls.\footnote{173 “L’Italio [sic] Resolve il Suo Problema Granario Interno,” \textit{Il Cittadino Italo-Americano}, 14 February 1925, 2.} Mussolini declared his program’s intention to “liberat[e] the Country from the slavery of foreign wheat,”\footnote{174 “Il Programma Agricolo del Governo,” \textit{La Trinacria}, 7 August 1925, 4.} and his government promptly allotted millions of lire for agricultural modernization and land reclamation.\footnote{175 “La Lotta per l’Aumento del Grano in Italia,” \textit{La Trinacria}, 21 August 1925, 4.} By October, those in the United States learned that the solution included a standing committee of representatives comprised of government officials, agricultural specialists, and labor leaders to draw on their combined expertise.\footnote{176 “La Battaglia per l’Aumento del Grano in Italia,” \textit{Il Cittadino Italo-Americano}, 26 June 1926, 2.} This state intervention worked. In June 1926, the government declared victory in the Battle for Grain, citing an annual harvest of sixty million tons, which was almost enough to satisfy national needs.\footnote{177 “La Battaglia del Grano Vinta in Italia,” \textit{Il Cittadino Italo-Americano}, 26 June 1926, 2.} Italian Americans noted the success. Although the battle needed to continue for the foreseeable future, the government’s plan resulted in a higher agricultural yield than expected. Government intervention in agriculture was part of a “wise program” that put Italy on the path to solving its economic issues.\footnote{178 “L’ascesa della Lira e la battaglia del grano,” \textit{Il Cittadino Italo-Americano}, 16 October 1926, 1.}

The Battle for the Lira, or currency manipulation, was the other half of the “wise program” of state intervention that appeared successful.\footnote{179 “L’ascesa della Lira e la battaglia del grano,” \textit{Il Cittadino Italo-Americano}, 16 October 1926, 1.} Although De’ Stefani had solved many financial concerns during his tenure, he failed to rectify the lira’s poor

\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{173 “L’Italio [sic] Resolve il Suo Problema Granario Interno,” \textit{Il Cittadino Italo-Americano}, 14 February 1925, 2.}
\item \footnote{174 “Il Programma Agricolo del Governo,” \textit{La Trinacria}, 7 August 1925, 4.}
\item \footnote{175 “La Lotta per l’Aumento del Grano in Italia,” \textit{La Trinacria}, 21 August 1925, 4.}
\item \footnote{176 “La Battaglia del Grano,” \textit{La Trinacria}, 2 October 1925, 4.}
\item \footnote{177 “La Battaglia del Grano Vinta in Italia,” \textit{Il Cittadino Italo-Americano}, 26 June 1926, 2.}
\item \footnote{178 “L’ascesa della Lira e la battaglia del grano,” \textit{Il Cittadino Italo-Americano}, 16 October 1926, 1.}
\item \footnote{179 “L’ascesa della Lira e la battaglia del grano,” \textit{Il Cittadino Italo-Americano}, 16 October 1926, 1.}
\end{itemize}
exchange rate with other world currencies. Mussolini, driven by these real economic concerns and the psychological desire not to lose ground to other nations, made solving the currency crisis a new goal of his regime.\textsuperscript{180} Italian Americans recognized the problem from abroad, so it was a pleasant surprise when readers of \textit{Il Cittadino Italo-Americano} received their 4 September 1926 copy of the newspaper with a large headline in no uncertain terms: “The First Successes of the Battle of the Lira.”\textsuperscript{181} The victory concerned war loan repayment modifications. Through efforts by Treasury Secretary Andrew Mellon and Federal Reserve Bank of New York Governor Benjamin Strong, the United States intended to offer European allies, such as Italy, reduced payments if the debt created an undue burden on their domestic finances. This reevaluation was logical since these countries, a third of the world, could not realistically be in debt for a century, but this move also brought optimism since it would benefit Italian currency.\textsuperscript{182} Agenzia Stefani, the Italian news wire service, informed those abroad that through loans secured via J. P. Morgan bank, the Italian treasury transferred immediate payments to the Banca d’Italia (Bank of Italy), which allowed the cancellation of two and a half billion lire in credit. The consequences of this move reduced state circulations and increased the reserves of the Banca d’Italia, causing an increase in the lira’s value.\textsuperscript{183}

\textsuperscript{182} “La Revisione dei Debiti di Guerra,” \textit{Il Cittadino Italo-Americano}, 4 September 1926, 1.
\textsuperscript{183} “La Valuta Italiana in Notevole Rialzo,” \textit{Il Cittadino Italo-Americano}, 4 September 1926, 1.
Mussolini famously declared that he would set the exchange rate at ninety lire for one pound sterling (Quota 90, as it became known), further encouraging Fascist intervention in the economy.184 Throughout the fall of 1926, Italian Americans learned more specifically about the goals and methods of the Battle for the Lira and the government’s role in it. According to Mussolini and Volpi, reform meant centralizing the Italian financial system through the Banca d’Italia, which included guaranteeing its autonomy, giving the entity control of the exchange markets, and extending monitoring power over other banks. The Morgan loan and money transfer succeeded in shoring up the currency, leaving no doubt in the minds of those living in the United States that the plan succeeded. Furthermore, while the Italian people and residents abroad had a role in collaboration, much of the policy’s accomplishments resulted from “the precise and brilliant will of the Head of Government [Mussolini], who interprets the deepest needs of our people, destined to repeat, under His guidance, the [past] glories.”185 Naysayers commented that Italy likely could not balance its imports and exports, but this was a false argument because as long as the deficit lessened, then other sources of income – emigrant remittances, tourist spending, profits from Italian-owned industries abroad, and colonial revenues – had the potential to offset the losses. More importantly, the Battle for the Lira was “a principally psychological phenomenon” premised on the Italian people’s spirit rather than any abstract economic theory.186 A study by the commercial attaché for the Italian Ambassador in Washington reinforced the importance of the Italian government’s

184 Zamagni, *The Economic History of Italy*, 251.
intervention, noting the Italian Treasury’s policy stabilized and corrected the economy more than otherwise possible. The Italian government doubled down on the success of its economic meddling by announcing the Prestito del Littorio, a new loan named for the symbol of the Fascist Party. Fascists asserted that the loan campaign guaranteed a successful conclusion to the Battle of the Lira. The rejection of laissez-faire capitalism, the economic style most familiar to Italian Americans living in the mid-1920s United States, presented an example of a new model worthy of consideration.

Outside approval of Fascist economic policy contributed to Italian-American acceptance. In November 1925, early in the Battle for the Lira, Treasury Secretary Mellon contended that “the courageous and strong policy inaugurated by President Mussolini has radically reduced governmental expenditures, increased revenue and balanced the financial budget of Italy.” He claimed that if Italy “continu[ed] its political stability and present economy,” then the state would rise to the status of a great nation. Many Italian Americans were open to Fascism for nationalistic reasons, so Mellon’s praise certainly struck a chord. When Youngstown’s consular agent, Attilio Rosapepe, told his countrymen the following year that “a future of prosperity and greatness for Italy is assured,” he specifically cited Mellon’s positive observations about the economy from a recent visit to Europe.

191 “Rosapepe Says Italy Prospers,” Youngstown Vindicator (Youngstown, OH), 22 August 1926, 4-A.
Privately, Mellon had little confidence in Fascist methods becoming the new norm. When appointed Treasury Secretary in 1921, he was already one of the richest men in the United States. Like De’ Stefani’s laissez-faire policy, Mellon advocated for government spending cuts, a balanced budget, and deregulation. When the Wall Street stock market crashed in 1929, he did not look toward the Fascist economic policy that he publicly supported as an example but instead advised President Herbert Hoover to continue a hands-off approach.¹⁹² As historian Gian Giacomo Migone noted, “Mellon and the House of Morgan had faith in Mussolini because he guaranteed precisely that social stability and cooperative attitude toward their plans for systematizing the international economy in order to secure the best conditions for American expansion that they needed for long-term success.”¹⁹³ American policymakers viewed Mussolini as a tool to be used rather than a model for economic theory. News media presented a different image to Italian Americans. When National City Bank of New York began underwriting the Prestito del Littorio in late 1926, this only added more evidence that Mussolini’s economic interventionism gained approval from those most knowledgeable about the issue.¹⁹⁴ The old factions of ex-Prime Ministers Giovanni Giolitti and Antonio Salandra endorsed the Prestito del Littorio and Fascist plans, which further supported the belief of a consensus concerning Fascist

¹⁹² John Olszowka et al., America in the Thirties (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2014), 7–8, 17.
methods. The economic intervention appeared successful to Italian Americans, and such approaches were a model worthy of replicating.

Personal involvement in the program increased Italian-American approval and kept the theme of interventionism in public discussion. Italian-American newspapers repeated Fascist Italy’s nationalist propaganda and told readers to buy Italian currency to force change and bring total economic victory. Youngstown-area residents pledged around half-million lire to the Prestito del Littorio, and those in the Cleveland consular district, which included Akron, surpassed that amount. As a sign of popular institutional support, numerous mutual aid societies invested, including Youngstown’s Napoleone Colaianni and Duca degli Abruzzi and Cleveland’s Casa Savoia. Revised lists with more subscriptions from individuals and fraternal organizations came in the following weeks. Italian-American participation in the loan drive encouraged their ideological incorporation into Fascist interventionist theory. The tactic increased interest in the regime’s novel economic

195 “Giolitti Salandra e i Fasci,” Il Cittadino Italo-Americano, 18 December 1926, 1.
approach and allowed regular people to feel as though they could make a difference in
government when allowed to participate.

While Italian Americans learned a new, seemingly successful model for dealing
with currency and macroeconomics, the Fascists also presented an innovative means to
integrate the needs of labor into the state. Corporatism accomplished this integration, which
in the minds of Italian-American readers before the New Deal became less a theoretical-
economic idea and more a catchall for government mediation and working-class advances,
a notion discussed in more detail in chapter six. Fascist corporatism, an alternative
economic theory that rejected laissez-faire capitalism and communism, sought to subjugate
labor and business to the state and impose class harmony. The Fascists organized both
groups into a series of corporations (twenty-two of them after 1934), each corresponding
with a particular industry, such as textiles, chemicals, and agricultural cereals. Each
corporation included an equal number of representatives from labor and capital, three
appointed Fascist Party members, and optional industry specialists and technicians. Since
these were organs of the Italian state, they could set wages and mediate labor disputes. 199

Actual corporatism failed to develop. As period political scientist H. Arthur Steiner
commented in 1938, although corporatism first launched during the mid-1920s, “in
practice, the corporations did not come to life until 1934–1935.” 200 Steiner’s assessment
was kinder than that offered by historians, such as Denis Mack Smith, who noted that “the

90–93, 109–16; Clark, *Modern Italy*, 296–301.
200 Steiner, *Government in Fascist Italy*, 89.
corporations were more an aspiration than an actuality.”201 For informing Italian-American ideology before the New Deal, the ultimate corporatist failures are irrelevant. Before reorganization in 1934, Italian corporatism did not use mixed corporations; instead, separate syndicates for labor and capital existed under state mediation.202 This feature, the collection of workers into a mass Fascist union to negotiate rights, influenced Italian Americans. Furthermore, propaganda mitigated any policy failures. Economic efficiency, including corporatism, was a dominant theme for marketing Fascism to those abroad, and even American liberals showed partiality for the novel theory as a more democratic, alternative form of state intervention than repressive Soviet policies.203

Italian Americans understood corporatism not as bureaucratic restructuring, which was dry, complicated, and difficult for the layperson to comprehend, but rather as a new activist government policy that cared about workers and offered positive, tangible results. Italian Americans learned that the Fascists sought to merge syndicalism, the unionization cause commonly associated with the left, into their system.204 For example, the Palazzo Vidoni Pact (October 1925) was an early step toward corporatism. Under the terms of the agreement, the Confindustria (the General Confederation of Italian Industry) and the Fascist syndicates agreed to become the sole negotiating entities for business and labor. The arrangement theoretically strengthened Edmondo Rossoni’s Fascist trade unions

204 “Cronaca Italiana: La questione sindacale,” La Trinacria, 2 October 1925, 4.
because it eliminated organizing competition from other entities, allowing one body to speak on workers’ behalf. In practice, the Vidoni Pact gave more power to capital than labor, and the lack of an alternative union hurt their cause. Committed Italian-American leftists at the time recognized these negative long-term implications as *Il Martello* printed an in-depth article stating the improbability of impartial industry-labor collaboration and deriding what amounted to forced enrollment in the Fascist unions.

Outside of the left, reporting was more nuanced and optimistic. The fluid nature of corporatism in practice gave Italian Americans only a superficial understanding of its structure while allowing for a prolabor interpretation. They understood that initial Fascist efforts sought to organize workers and businesses into approved corporations to mediate future labor-industry conflicts and end unrest. Reporting from Rome explained that the Italian government had two approaches in mind: “the obligatoriness of arbitration, and the compulsory union that will resolve in a tangible way the complicated question of the [employers’ and workers’] organizations.” Corso Bovio, a deputy expelled from the socialist party, commented about the potential of Fascist labor policies, especially those pushed by Rossoni. “Do not forget,” he counseled, “that the Honorable Mussolini is on the way to achieving a union program of exceptional importance and that will definitively move fascism nearer the proletariat.”

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The Catholic view concluded a similar merger stating that “the original socialist mentality of the honorable Mussolini, despite his evolutions, reveals itself completely in the fascist monopoly of the corporatist movement.” Galliano favored the idea of replacing the Italian Senate with representatives from the corporations. The critique from the Catholic perspective was more partisan than ideological. Workers had the right to unionize, and the state had the right to regulate unionization, similar to how it policed other liberties. The Fascist plan to merge syndicalism into a corporatist state went too far in that it would destroy independent labor groups, such as the Catholic-aligned trade unions. Whether readers viewed the loss of an independent-Catholic labor movement as a threat did not matter; the importance was that Fascism accepted syndicalism and sought to incorporate unionization and labor rights into state policy via corporatism.

As it developed, Fascist syndicalism and the corporatist state appeared to offer more concessions to help average Italians. Galliano used *Rerum Novarum* as the foundation for his criticism. This 1891 papal encyclical outlined the Catholic Church’s position concerning labor issues by supporting the rights of workers to unionize and receive fair wages while also reaffirming the Church’s stance against communism by endorsing private property rights. The problem in 1925 was that Fascist methods appeared to stifle the workers’ rights because the Vidoni Pact was a de facto ban on non-Fascist unions. Italian Americans learned two years later that the Fascists mitigated these concerns with the new *Carta del Lavoro* (Labor Charter). Augusto Turati, the General Secretary of the Fascist Party, proclaimed that it was a document second only to *Rerum Novarum* for addressing

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211 Clark, *Modern Italy*, 129.
the relationship between capital and labor. Through United Press correspondent Thomas B. Morgan, the *Pittsburgh Press* reported all thirty declarations of the document. Much of it was consistent with the modern welfare state and guaranteed concessions to workers, including minimum wages, paid vacation after a year on the job, and insurance for work accidents, sickness, and unemployment. Employers could fine or discharge workers for disciplinary reasons, ensuring that Italy would not return to its earlier strike waves. In return, the state had the power to intervene in cases of controversy regarding negotiated contracts.

Like the Vidoni Pact, Italian Americans probably did not internalize every specific provision; however, they understood it as part of the grander Fascist effort to protect syndicalism and help workers. According to Giuseppe Bottai, the undersecretary for the Ministry of Corporations, the Labor Charter brought collaboration, discipline, and a path for those who feared the end of private initiative but were also concerned about “the fate of the Italian worker[,] capitalism’s slave.” Of course, historians have pointed out that it ultimately benefited businesses rather than workers, but this was unknown to the masses at the time. Just as the Labor Charter became symbolic in Italy for reimagining the state and society, it became another believed myth about Fascism’s prolabor position in the United States. By early 1929, *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* reported Bottai’s assertion

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212 “L’Importanza della Carta del Lavoro,” *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, 23 April 1927, 4
215 Garau, *Fascism and Ideology*, 112–14. For example, arbitration via the established labor tribunals handled only forty-one cases over a decade. See Clark, *Modern Italy*, 298.
that “Fascism … has not destroyed the socialist social program, but preserved and perfected it[,] integrating it into new syndicalist laws.”

To Italian Americans viewing developments from abroad, this vague Fascist corporatism became synonymous with an activist government ensuring working-class concessions. Their ethnic press reported the successes. Labor and business negotiated work hours. Journalists finalized a pension program. The Great Depression showed that the Fascists were committed to addressing economic issues. The Italian government encouraged the nation to lower the cost of living. The media told Italian Americans that “the organizations of the Fascist Party transformed themselves into relief committees.” Unemployment insurance was available to many workers, the government allocated winter job funds to help the idled, and Italian mothers gained new maternity benefits. To those viewing the situation from abroad, workers in Italy reaped many advantages from Fascist economic policy, thus making government intercession preferable to free-market solutions.

Public works projects provided tangible results of state intervention. When interviewed decades later concerning the Italian-American opinion of Mussolini in the East Liberty neighborhood of Pittsburgh, Angelo Dozzi offered a defense of il Duce because of his work helping average Italians. “Mussolini, what he did for Italy, it’s unbelievable,”

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217 “Per le Elezioni in Italia,” Il Cittadino Italo-Americano, 23 March 1929, 1.
220 “Spontanea Campagna in Italia per Diminuire il Costo della Vita,” Il Cittadino Italo-Americano, 29 November 1930, 1.
221 “Gara Italica per i Soccorsi ai Disoccupati Reduci dall’Estero,” Il Cittadino Italo-Americano, 2 January 1932, 2.
222 “La Disoccupazione in Italia,” Il Cittadino Italo-Americano, 8 November 1930, 4; “Nuove Provvidenze a Tutela della Maternita’,” Il Cittadino Italo-Americano, 8 November 1930, 3.
Dozzi recounted. “He put the southern Italian people down there on their feet because they were desperate down there. He built roads and everything.”

Dozzi and his neighbors likely drew from period newspaper accounts in Pittsburgh’s *La Trinacria* about this southern-Italian emphasis, such as in one August 1925 article in which the Minister of Public Works specifically called for projects in the *Mezzogiorno* to create a rebirth in the region.

In January 1925, around the same time that Fascist concerns about future economic issues grew, the Italian government announced an extensive public works program to reduce unemployment. Planners prioritized projects in Naples, the symbolic capital of the *Mezzogiorno*, including a major road tunnel connecting to the Chiaia neighborhood and a new hospital in Capodimonte. Other projects included approval for aqueducts to the Sicilian towns of San Pier Niceto and Augusta, plans for modernizing over a thousand kilometers of road to handle current traffic in Calabria and Basilicata, the creation of hydroelectric dams in Calabria’s Ampollino and Arvo valleys, and public housing projects in the province of Reggio Calabria.

Public works were not a new concept, but the national government allocating vast resources to projects spoke to new priorities. Italian Americans celebrated the

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224 “Per l’Italia Meridionale,” *La Trinacria*, 30 January 1925, 4; “Pei lavori pubblici nel mezzogiorno,” *La Trinacria*, 27 February 1925, 4; “Pro Campania,” *La Trinacria*, 27 February 1925, 4; “Per la rinascita del mezzogiorno d’Italia,” *La Trinacria*, 28 August 1925, 4. This last article’s date was misprinted as 25 August.


achievements because they provided jobs and an increased standard of living to ordinary people. The aforementioned individual projects were just a tiny portion of a more significant fifteen-billion-lire public works plan to modernize Italy with funds dispersed throughout the country for roads, water lines, port improvements, land reclamation, and new government buildings. Completed works became part of Fascism’s success and a point of pride for allies in the United States. Fascio XXVIII Ottobre, the Pittsburgh-based pro-Fascist organization, acknowledged public works as part of its celebration of Italian progress, and the group lauded the number of projects completed in only five years of Fascist rule. These included “twenty-eight central hydroelectric stations, six railway lines, eighty-five streets, sixty new bridges, seventy-two aqueducts, fifty irrigation systems, seven telegraph and telephone installations, one hundred and twenty schools, one hundred and twenty-four sports centers, … thirty-nine public buildings for government offices, municipal offices and military establishments, fourteen retirement homes for workers, twenty-one hospitals, orphanages and shelters for the poor,” along with new theaters, repaired historical buildings, and war memorials.

The Fascist economic approach appeared to work. As Il Cittadino Italo-Americano editor Angelo Di Renzo commented in December 1927, the anti-Fascists had called Mussolini’s actions a “bluff,” but il Duce proved them wrong. Citing a Boston Post piece, Di Renzo asserted that Fascist methods succeeded to the point that “no other European nation surpassed Italy in political and economic progress.”

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228 “La Ripartizione dei 15 Miliardi per le Opere Pubbliche,” La Trinacria, 8 May 1925, 4.
so effective that Italy ceased to be an emigrant nation by 1929. Plentiful job opportunities caused more Italians to return from the United States than to immigrate to America.\(^2\) The conclusion was clear: “This phenomenon alone is enough to convince of the well-being brought to Italy by Mussolini’s regime.”\(^3\)

Fascist corporatism took on additional meaning after the Wall Street stock market crash of 1929 because Italy appeared to be solving unemployment while advancing as a nation. Newspapers reminded Italian Americans that while everyone suffered the consequences of the Great Depression, Fascist measures insulated Italians from the downturn’s worst effects, and they kept unemployment lower than in other industrialized nations.\(^4\) In the spring of 1931, Italian Americans learned that Mussolini’s government was completing massive, world-class public projects, including a 130,000-seat stadium in Rome, numerous hydroelectric plants, and the longest electric rail line in Europe, which stretched from Modane on the Franco-Italian border to Livorno.\(^5\) The following spring, \textit{il Duce} promised that his government would go further to ensure “more work and more help for the people of our Italy” during the slow winter months.\(^6\) Italy compared favorably to America’s continuously declining economy in 1931 and 1932.

\(^3\) “Gli italiani non emigrano piu’,” \textit{Il Cittadino Italo-Americano}, 20 April 1929, 1.
Successful economic interventionism required a new type of activist leadership. As mentioned in chapter two, when Mussolini and the Fascists ascended to power in 1922, Italian Americans held a conflicted view of the state. While they increasingly learned to admire government as part of their civic conditioning in the United States, their personal experiences with state apparatuses advised them to be highly cautious about concentrated power in the hands of officials such as A. Mitchell Palmer or even the president. After Mussolini successfully used the Matteotti Crisis in 1924 as an impetus for the foundation of a totalitarian state after 1925, Fascism offered a competing view about the powers invested in the national leader and the state’s role in people’s lives. As Italian Americans increasingly learned the value and perceived success of Fascist economic and labor policies, they adopted a favorable view of a powerful leader willing to enact such plans.

Many in the United States did not begin as devotees of Mussolini, but their views changed with reported successes. Until the Matteotti murder, Italian-American opinion was cautiously hopeful but not beholden to il Duce. Fascism served a purpose, it stopped unrest and provided stability, but it was unclear whether people could justify its emerging totalitarian tendencies. The debate about the future of Fascism and the place of Mussolini spilled into the press. The media reported derisively about Italian Parliament passing two thousand new laws “without discussion,” while concurrently proclaiming, “we are not fascists, but admirers … of strength when” such force and energy were to benefit the

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One October 1925 article alluded to opinions espoused by Innocenzo Vagnozzi, a notable left-leaning community leader in Youngstown, concerning fears about Mussolini’s dominance. The critique was that *il Duce* worked to limit the influence of Parliament, putting Italy on the road to dictatorship. The philo-Fascist rebuttal, however, justified some expansion of power. First, unlike Napoleon Bonaparte, who was nominated consul for life, Italian changes empowered not the man but the office. If Mussolini retired from his position, the powers did not follow him into private life but transferred to his successor. Second, the system needed to be judged by its outcome, whether the means justified the ends. The writer predicted that while Mussolini’s new regime “will appear aggressive and autocratic[,] it will bring major relief and benefits” to Italy, potentially a worthwhile trade. Indeed, this was the debate during the mid-1920s. Mussolini openly called for a purge of his opponents while promising new reforms and a regime responsive to people’s needs. Throughout the second half of the 1920s, the Fascists delivered relief and benefits – the growth of Italian agriculture, the stabilization of the lira, corporatism and new laws to help the working class, public works that provided jobs and raised the standard of living – in the minds of Italian Americans. Mussolini may have disempowered his opposition by questionable means, but this also allowed him to act and make significant changes.

As with corporatism and public works, sterilized media and Italian propaganda aided the acceptance of Mussolini’s totalitarian tendencies. To unite Fascists after the

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Matteotti Crisis, party leaders promoted the “cult” of *il Duce*, and it quickly consumed Italian culture and society.\(^{241}\) Mussolini underwent “deification,” and his asserted omnipotence and stamina went hand-in-hand with reports that he worked long hours to better Italy and obsessed with the minor details in the everyday operations of government.\(^{242}\) This reinterpreted form of leader also spread to the United States.\(^{243}\) According to reporting in the ethnic press, Mussolini was “the man of the moment” and a “superman.”\(^{244}\) He took on the connotations of Caesar with the rebirth of Rome, and “Providence” protected him in light of assassination attempts.\(^{245}\) *Il Duce* even gave a mother with her children at the beach money because of his paternalistic instincts.\(^{246}\) The propaganda became more pertinent by the early 1930s, including the belief that Mussolini worked vigorously to lead the nation. He had learned long before not to have extra seats in his office because it encouraged visitors and idle conversation. While others loafed, Mussolini labored.\(^{247}\)

Various Italian national events, such as a seven-hundredth-year commemoration of the death of Saint Francis of Assisi in 1926, became opportunities to praise *il Duce* in Italian-American communities. At Eagle’s Hall in Youngstown, newspaper editor Angelo

\(^{244}\) Carlo Caselli, “Quello che pensiamo noi,” *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, 31 October 1925, 1; “Rotary Speaker Sees Mussolini as ‘Superman,’” *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, 14 December 1929, 1;
\(^{247}\) William F. Ciccone, “‘No Seats for Idlers!’” *Unione*, 12 January 1934, 8.
Di Renzo applauded the new Italy and asserted that “Religion and State form[ed] the essence of Benito Mussolini’s politics.” Another commemoration in Cleveland included similar remarks. Bishop Joseph Schrembs proclaimed that France, the United Kingdom, and other nations wanted a leader like *il Duce*: “They are looking for a Mussolini, but they cannot find another Mussolini.” The devotion deepened in time because, in 1935, Italian Americans in Pittsburgh dedicated a plaque in honor of Saint Francis, which also featured Mussolini and a fasces, on the grounds of Help of Christians Church in the East Liberty neighborhood. At the associated ceremony for Cherubino Viola, the parish’s priest, speakers included the aforementioned pro-Fascists Charles F. Schisano and Dr. A. E. Abbate, the Pittsburgh vice-consul, and local politicians Micheal A. Musmanno and Frank J. Zappala.

In the process, Mussolini became inseparable from Italian successes, as though he alone created change. When Angelo Di Renzo penned an article celebrating the economic advances of Italy, he titled the piece “*Impronta Mussoliniana*,” meaning “Mussolinian Mark,” and gave credit for the descriptor of “*Mussoliniana*” to famed Italian journalist Luigi Barzini. Citing Mussolini’s personal influence became common, and this is why

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Italian Americans interviewed in later years equated *il Duce* with Italian advances, such as public works and schooling.253

By the time of the Great Depression, Italian Americans had absorbed new ideas about the place and function of government. Mussolini’s Fascist state showed the benefits of government involvement in the economy to secure a better standard of living for ordinary workers. Financial regulations, corporatism, and public works, underlined by a decisive leader who was willing to enact change, presented an alternative model to solve modern economic problems. As American politicians failed to address the depression in its early years, Italian Americans turned toward ideas borrowed from Fascist Italy to argue a new path toward economic revitalization.

**Moderated Fascism**

Most Italian Americans did not become devout Fascists because other influences moderated their commitment to the ideology. Returning to Francesco Biamonte’s letter to the editor discussed earlier in this chapter concerning American fears about Fascism in the United States, the observer asserted that the average Italian-American citizen “naturally still cherishes due regard for his motherland, but his loyalty is to the American constitution and to the American government and flag.”254 Italian Americans would not discard democracy for repressive authoritarianism. Like leftism described in chapter three, Fascism

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was not an all-or-nothing proposal. Angela Baccelli of Pittsburgh alluded to this during an interview about the period concerning her ethnic society: “Well there was pro and cons. Everyone had their little thing to say. Ones would say oh Mussolini did lots for Italy … [he] made beautiful schools, and beautiful autostrada [highways] and the railroads have never been as wonderful as they are now. And the other ones would say this and that, you know.”

Italian Americans celebrated certain aspects as described above. Economic interventionism, corporatism, public works, and a strong leader became constant themes in Italian-American discourse after the Wall Street crash of 1929, a story explained in more detail in chapter six. Most people were philo-Fascist, friendly but not devout. Some points of disagreement restricted their unconditional acceptance and kept them from becoming outright Fascists. While Fascist economic policy traits that appeared to address the working-class issues raised by the leftist took hold, lingering questions regarding the regime’s violence and subversion of values such as free speech and democratic representation cautioned full acceptance of Mussolini’s system.

Youngstown’s *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* put this sentiment into words in July 1926 during an attempt to describe its stance toward Fascism: “We are not, nor were we ever, cardholding fascists, but we do not cease however to be philo-fascists, as we have always been [philo-fascist] …, recognizing as a whole the reforms generated by fascism in the institutions of the State, all the efficiency of them and all the benefits caused to the Nation.” However, the newspaper also condemned the regime’s repressive actions, including the new restrictive press laws and the suspension of elections under the pretext of addressing an economic emergency. While the article ended with a line about the

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255 Baccelli, interview, 14.
newspaper’s “favorable dispositions toward fascism,” it was clear to readers in the United States that some aspects of the movement were better rejected than adopted.\textsuperscript{256} \textit{Il Cittadino Italo-Americano}’s response confirms the estimates presented earlier in this chapter by Gaetano Salvemini and Count Ignazio Thaon di Revel. Perhaps five to ten percent of people were committed, unwavering Fascists, but the vast majority remained somewhere in the middle, friendly to Fascism but certainly not beholden to it when Mussolini’s government crossed other beliefs.

The American civic values of representative government and freedom of speech moderated the adoption of Fascism. The belief stated above that Mussolini was a “superman” came from Frederico Santi, the maître d’hôtel of Cleveland’s Hotel Statler. During that same speech, he also wished that the United States could restrict communists from speaking, like in Mussolini’s Italy.\textsuperscript{257} Santi was part of a committed American pro-Fascist minority. His dedication eventually led to the federal government seeking to revoke his American citizenship during the Second World War. Evidence included Santi’s position as trustee in the Fascist League of North America during the late 1920s, his involvement in the Fascist-aligned Dante Alighieri Society, his numerous pro-Fascist speeches and

\textsuperscript{256} “La Battaglia Economica in Italia,” \textit{Il Cittadino Italo-Americano}, 10 July 1926, 1. The paper also took a philo-Fascist position in a 1928 response when \textit{Il Messaggero} of Steubenville, Ohio, attacked the Youngstown newspaper as anti-Fascist for its stance against the death penalty law in Italy. \textit{Il Cittadino Italo-Americano} responded that it was not anti-Fascist but had the freedom to voice such opinions. It was a matter of consistency; it had argued against the death penalty concerning the murder of a local Italian American by Irish Americans, and it had stood against the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti. \textit{Il Cittadino} willingly broke with Fascism when Mussolini crossed other long-held values and opinions. See C. Caselli, “Al Settimanale di Steubenville,” \textit{Il Cittadino Italo-Americano}, 10 November 1928, 1.

\textsuperscript{257} “Rotary Speaker Sees Mussolini as ‘Superman,’” \textit{Il Cittadino Italo-Americano}, 14 December 1929, 1.
distribution of literature, and his 1939 reception of the title of *Cavaliere* from King Victor Emmanuel III per the recommendation of Mussolini.²⁵⁸

By contrast, *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, more reflective of the community as a whole, argued in a 1931 article that communists had the right to speak.²⁵⁹ The editorial came as a response to an actual event. On Memorial Day 1931, communists assembled in Youngstown and planned to march even after the city denied them a permit. When mounted police tried to dissolve the group, thrown paving bricks hit one of the officers. The standoff turned into a melee between police armed with blackjacks and communists with knives. Authorities restored order, arresting seventy people, but a dozen on each side were wounded.²⁶⁰ While *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* argued that the government had the right to regulate public events and communist organizers made a poor decision in choosing Memorial Day for a rally, the paper also refused to fault either party. Instead, it noted that the skirmish was avoidable. The newspaper rejected painting all participants as radicals and claimed that most were merely upset about the economic crisis. These people had “the right to make their complaints heard, therefore the freedom of speech must not be prohibited.” As evidence, the paper noted that the same group arranged with authorities to

²⁵⁸ “Cites Soldier Son in Reply on Citizenship,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 9 January 1943, 1. To those familiar with Santi, none of this was a surprise as his activities and associations were open and known to the public over the years. See “Italian Vets Hail King and Peace,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 11 November 1929, home edition, 20; “Woman’s Club Plans Full Scheduled Week,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 4 October 1931, women’s magazine and amusement section, 6; “Italian Veterans to Dedicate Stone Block, Gift to Nation,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 3 June 1932, 5; “Hails Duce as Pacifist,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 14 March 1934, 2; “1,200 Hail Triple Italian Holiday,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 15 November 1937, 8. ²⁵⁹ “La Protesta Rossa,” *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, 6 June 1931, 1. ²⁶⁰ “Arrest Scores After Battles,” *Youngstown Vindicator*, 31 May 1931, A-1, A-4; “‘Invasion’ Is Mayor’s View of Red Session,” *Youngstown Vindicator*, 31 May 1931, A-1, A-4.
hold a public meeting days later, and this rally drew about four thousand people and spurred no incidents.261

This openness to freedom of expression, press, and debate allowed leftist ideology to continue to circulate within the community, which constantly blunted the worst excesses of Fascism. Carlo Tresca was never silenced and did not stop proselytizing. For example, in June and July 1929, he toured western Pennsylvania and eastern Ohio. These coincided with one of Fascism’s most celebrated accomplishments, the Lateran Accords and the normalization of diplomatic relations between Italy and the Catholic Church, which became one of Tresca’s topics.262 He spoke at Pittsburgh’s Kingsley Settlement House in East Liberty as part of a commemoration for Matteotti. A meeting at Braddock’s Moose Temple Hall had the theme “‘Fascism, Monarchy, Papacy,’ the three cancers of Italy.” His talk at Canonsburg’s Labor Temple Hall was likely similar given the topic: “The return of the Pope-king.”263 Other Pennsylvania stops, most of which addressed comparable subjects, occurred in Ambridge, Charleroi, Erie, Masontown, Uniontown, and Greensburg.264 His Ohio tour included two events in Cleveland (one of which was at the Italian American Brotherhood Club in Little Italy) to speak about “Monarchy, Fascism and Clericalism,” along with visits to Akron and Youngstown.265 Ideas still circulated in

261 “La Protesta Rossa,” Il Cittadino Italo-Americano, 6 June 1931, 1.
Tresca’s absence. During his tour, *Il Martello* received and printed short commentary and notes of solidarity from readers in Cleveland, Bedford, Ohio, Carnegie, Pennsylvania, Weirton, West Virginia, and Pittsburgh, showing that engaged subscribers still existed by the end of the decade.\(^{266}\) Additionally, just like earlier in the 1920s, Tresca was not alone in his efforts. In August, Felice Guadagni scheduled events in Cheswick, Braddock, Ambridge, and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.\(^ {267}\) Guadagni was a syndicalist who had been part of the Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee, authored *Il Martello*’s articles about the pair’s trial, and worked with Tresca and other radicals.\(^ {268}\)

The previous adoption of civic values and prolabor ideas from the political left caused most Italian Americans to refuse wholehearted acceptance of Fascism; instead, these influences colored the parts of Mussolini’s system that people found valuable and worth adopting. Areas of alignment deepened people’s commitment to a synthesis which, at its core, can be summarized as an activist government working on behalf of regular citizens. Most people rejected sections that appeared as antitheses, such as violence and repression of civil liberties. As the following chapter shows, it was within this milieu that Italian Americans began meeting to discuss domestic politics during the 1920s, a process that forced an ideological moderation and built a popular consensus in time for the New Deal.

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According to “Comunicati: Resoconto Conferenze Tresca,” *Il Martello*, 27 July 1929, 6, Akron was not included on the list of funds collected. The location, however, was on the itinerary, per “Conferenze Carlo Tresca.”


\(^{268}\) Pernicone, *Carlo Tresca*, 119–20, 164, 211.
Chapter Five

The Italian American Political Association and Grassroots Politics

In October 1928, the Youngstown Municipal Railway Company published an advertisement for its weekly pass in *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, the Ohio city’s local Italian-American newspaper. By offering quick, comfortable transportation at a low cost, the service targeted ethnic patrons using the Italian language and listing destinations common for immigrants and their children. These included stores, theaters, and churches, the usual stops for streetcar clientele. However, the advertisement also added locations or events that were specific to the Italian-American community, including night school (a reference to English-language and citizenship classes), the gymnasium at the YMCA, and “conferenze politiche” (political conferences or lectures).¹ Community outsiders, like the Youngstown Municipal Railway managers, understood the popularity of Italian-American political meetings enough to incorporate them in company advertising. Their observations were correct. The streetcar advertisement printed weeks before the 1928 general election highlighted a noticeable trend to period observers from outside the ethnic community: Italian Americans increasingly participated in American politics and grassroots political organizations.

The political club served as a nexus for the ideological currents described in the previous chapters, and it was within that space that Italian Americans forged collective

¹ Advertisement, Youngstown Municipal Rwy., *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* (Youngstown, OH), 12 October 1928, 6.
political beliefs. As documented in chapter two, the community increasingly turned toward civic engagement and citizenship. The dual forces of systemic prejudice and immigration restriction provided negative pressures to become politically engaged, while the positive influence of Americanization efforts encouraged voting as a requirement for good citizenship. However, as also seen in chapter two, these white ethnics had little in common with the Americanizers. Settlement house workers were primarily college-educated white Anglo-Saxon Protestants seeking to aid immigrants through self-improvement while maintaining the social order. By contrast, Italian Americans desired systemic change to address their ethnic, working-class concerns.

They self-identified first and foremost by ethnicity, so Italian Americans founded their own political clubs. Provoked by the rebirth of the Ku Klux Klan and other nativist impulses, they organized to have a voice in the political decisions that affected their lives. These groups’ goal was to provide a unified collective of voters, and they welcomed all Italian Americans regardless of background or previous views. Those who had experienced the two outside ideological influences described in chapters three and four, leftism and Fascism, mingled freely within these associations, aiding the moderation and synthesis of both currents into a new group ideology.

The local political club was the most overt manifestation of this intersection between political beliefs and action. While some historians have minimized these groups or presented them as insidious mechanisms of machine politics, these organizations actually played an essential community role for grassroots political engagement between the First World War and the start of the New Deal. Participants compared them to their mutual aid societies. Political clubs protected and advanced Italian-American interests by
providing strength in numbers. Members believed that by promoting the Italian-American vote as a bloc, they could elect representatives whose platforms fit their needs. Whenever possible, this meant supporting a member of their ethnicity. In the absence of such a candidate, backing went to those who had the ethnic community’s interests in mind, usually those who rejected nativist bigotry and appeared as allies to the new immigrants. The creation of the local bloc necessitated the merger of various political beliefs into one core ideology as members debated candidate platforms and offered endorsements.

The Italian American Political Association of Youngstown, Ohio, was one example of these clubs. As will be documented, dozens of grassroots political organizations existed throughout the region; the use of the Political Association is a practical decision and not an argument about its uniqueness. Celestino Petrarca, a member and occasional officer in the club, owned the local Italian-American newspaper, *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*. While most other political clubs received passing mentions of their significant events in the press, *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* ran regular notices and updates – events, meeting summaries, and candidate endorsements – from the Italian American Political Association to increase participation and membership.² Unlike other grassroots clubs, the Political Association left a written record. It also fits the very definition of the public sphere at work, being that political debate from within the club affected reporting in the newspaper. Additionally, many club officers were notable leaders in the local ethnic fraternal societies. The Italian American Political Association was a link that drew together two important ethnic institutions, the newspaper and the mutual aid societies, to disperse political thought.

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² The newspaper even recognized and honored this role at the time. See “Il Club Politico Italiano,” *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, 20 February 1926, 1.
Youngstown residents created their club in 1924 as a response to ethnic discrimination. The group had two primary purposes that worked in tandem: political education and the formation of a voting bloc to hold politicians accountable. Members feared deception, so they invited local politicians for speeches and then debated various candidates’ merits. The Political Association endorsed whoever appeared to have the community’s best interests in mind, and the group published slates that cut across party lines. To have more power to enact change, the Political Association sponsored outreach and public meetings. Unlike party organizations that operated under a noted personality, such as an ethnic ward boss, the Youngstown group adhered to democratic norms, including yearly elections that rotated in new leaders.

The Political Association and other clubs formed around ethnicity, not a party or previous ideology, and this allowed them to bridge divisions within the community. As explained in chapters three and four, historians have generally treated leftism (which assumed an anti-Fascist tinge during the 1920s) and Fascism as antithetical and mutually exclusive to each other. While this may have been true for the adherents, it was not for the influenced. The goal of ethnic uplift bound people into one deliberative body. Innocenzo Vagnozzi, for example, was a professed anti-Fascist and leftist who fought openly with other members of the Political Association. He often drew the ire of Il Cittadino ItalAmericano editor Carlo Caselli, who supported Fascist Italy and painted Vagnozzi as a communist. The debate, however, moderated both men. Vagnozzi praised Benito Mussolini’s personality and leadership, even while condemning Fascist repression. For all his denunciations of the left, Caselli repeatedly deplored working-class conditions and called for solutions. While neither man would have adopted the other’s label, they found
agreement in some areas. Within such settings, the disparate ideological influences within the community merged into one expression for domestic politics. Debate and consensus ground the edges and excesses of leftism and Fascism, and the moderated views came to inform Italian-American ideology.

**Italian-American Political Clubs**

As Italian Americans adopted the civic values described in chapter two, they increasingly focused on collective political action. Historians have noted this shared participation, but usually in the context of local political clubs mentioned in passing or linked to machine politics. This approach unintentionally diminishes the agency and power of this Italian-American engagement. In actuality, political clubs served important purposes and were not always entities beholden to local political bosses. They stood at the intersection of grassroots mobilization and political catering by politicians. As Italian Americans increased their knowledge of civics, gained citizenship, and registered to vote, community leaders fantasized about the possibility and potential of an Italian-American voting bloc. Rather than the products of machines, they were practical organizations that accepted party alliances to extract concessions seen as beneficial to the community and simpatico to its collective ideology concerning significant issues.

Political clubs were popular, but numerous scholars have only mentioned them in passing rather than ascribed more profound importance to the organizations. In this sense, they were merely one of many local institutions within the ethnic enclave. However, their geographical and numerical breadth suggests that they played a significant role in shaping Italian-American political ideology. Late nineteenth-century examples existed in Baltimore, Maryland, the Central Italian American Democratic Club, and Providence,
Rhode Island, the Italian Political Club, which catered primarily to middle-class, northern-Italian immigrants. A multitude of organizations appeared during the first three decades of the twentieth century in the following diverse cities: Baltimore, which hosted the Italian Democratic Association of the fourth ward, the Carraresa Democratic Club, the Italian American Republican Club, and the third ward’s Exeter Democratic Club; Portland, Oregon, which had the Italian-American Republican Club; San Francisco, California; Hudson, New York; Chicago, Illinois; Providence, which contained the Italian Protective Club and the Roosevelt Republican Club; New London, Connecticut, which saw the creation of the Italian American Citizens Association in 1931 to serve as an umbrella organization for previously founded political clubs; and New York City, where Italian Americans instituted new organizations and took over extant groups.

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These clubs became historically significant in some evaluations because they operated as political bases for local power brokers, therefore slotting them into machine politics. The Amerita Club of Pittsburgh was one example. Operated by John Verona, third ward alderman and later magistrate, the organization was part of the local Republican political machine. Italian Americans redeemed the assistance promised by Republican committeemen at the club until the Great Depression, which ended such activity because of insufficient funds.\(^5\) Chartered political clubs aided *Il Progresso Italo-Americano* owner Generoso Pope’s influence in New York City. Beginning in 1929, he and Paul P. Rao organized numerous Democratic clubs in Italian-American enclaves. Two years later, Pope and Rao regrouped the principal organizations under a new banner, the Italian American Democratic Clubs of Manhattan, and the following year, 1932, Pope and another associate, Jack Ingegnieros, founded the Federation of the Italian American Democratic Organizations of the State of New York to widen influence beyond the city.\(^6\)

There is a need to reevaluate the role of these political clubs. Instead of interpreting them as having political agency usurped by the local machine, the clubs and their leaders should be viewed as partners rather than the implied patron-client relationship. According to J. Joseph Huthmacher’s study of new immigrant groups’ politics during the interwar period, Italian Americans in Massachusetts sought “recognition,” a term the author used to mean new desires for ethnic political inclusion alongside previous party loyalty built through patronage. Dispensing jobs was not enough; white ethnics during the 1920s

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demanded that political parties put members of their communities on the ticket. They believed that inclusion in the political process brought respect and proved their capacity and worth as American citizens. When Massachusetts Republicans failed to offer recognition, many white ethnics turned to the Democrats.⁷

New York provided another example of political revolt. While Pope certainly had an outsized influence over Italian-American voters, club members retained the opportunity to break when a favored front-runner emerged that offered recognition. Many Italian-American voters dismissed Pope’s endorsement of Democrat James J. Walker and instead backed Republican Fiorello La Guardia’s failed bid for mayor in 1929. Even though Pope consolidated his ethnic political machine during the early 1930s, the Italian-American electorate’s energy for La Guardia’s victorious 1933 mayoral run forced Pope to remain silent in the race.⁸ Where interests were similar, power brokers and political clubs cooperated toward the same goals, but the latter was not beholden to the former.

This is not to claim that machine politics were inconsequential. Both Bruce M. Stave and Stefano Luconi have argued that the ability of the Democratic Party to provide patronage in 1930s Pittsburgh was a reason for its victory over the entrenched Republican establishment.⁹ However, machine politics were not inconsistent with Italian-American ideological preferences. As will be described in more detail in the next chapter, Italian-American voters desired an activist government that could improve their lives, one facet of

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which included the ability to provide jobs through public works. In this sense, government-funded work was not a bribe or reward for votes but a responsibility of all political leaders as long as jobs were open to Italian Americans, employed those in need, and resulted in projects beneficial to society.

It is best to think about these various political associations as symbiotic to the party system rather than solely exploited by politicians. Period sociological studies support the notion that these clubs had more agency and individualism than usually implied by historians, lending weight to a grassroots political movement. In Giovanni E. Schiavo’s 1928 assessment *The Italians in Chicago*, the ethnic group had two primary sources for “political education”: the Italian-American newspaper and local political clubs. These latter organizations numbered at least twenty, and while both Republican and Democratic clubs catering to Chicago’s Italian Americans existed, Schiavo also saw an unfolding evolution in political mentality from individualism to a group emphasis. In his opinion, there were signs of Italian Americans breaking away from ward bosses by the late 1920s. As people Americanized and learned English, they became “independent of the politician.” Without needing the local ward boss’s expertise for navigating needs, such as a pushcart license from the city, Italian Americans found themselves free to engage with politics less for personal benefits and more for the betterment of their ethnic community.¹⁰

Roy V. Peel’s 1935 work, *The Political Clubs of New York*, further suggested a grassroots political autonomy. In 1930, Italian Americans formed the largest number – 130 out of the 302 studied – of what Peel termed “nationality clubs,” which were political

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groups organized by ethnicity or race. He dismissed the common interpretation that the ward captain, usually an Irish American, managed other ethnicities via an unthinking go-between who prided himself on his ability to deliver a party-line vote. Actual workings were more complex:

After having visited scores of nationality clubs, the writer must confess not to have seen much of this dumb loyalty on the faces of nationality party workers. Most of them are cynical and skeptical, at least in conversation with impartial observers. But the men who undertake to organize their compatriots into separate subsidiary clubs have no intention of publicly disavowing their expressions of devotion to party principles. They have learned to play the game in the American way—with a few added refinements of their own.

Peel’s analysis that neighborhood organizers and groups adhered to party discipline only when beneficial to their ethnicity explains why Italian Americans were prominent in revolts across numerous assembly districts. These often occurred when the leader, usually someone backed by the Irish or German bloc that had de facto control, failed to represent the new ethnic community’s needs. Revolts of Italian Americans occurred in Manhattan, Brooklyn, the Bronx, and Hoboken, New Jersey. Turnovers were the result of community awakenings that created political instability concerning the old order.

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12 Peel, 263–64.

13 Peel, 264.

Political clubs appeared in William Foote Whyte’s *Street Corner Society*, which documented life in the Italian-American enclave of “Cornerville,” the North End of Boston, during the late 1930s. The “corner boys,” Whyte’s term for the young men at the bottom of the class hierarchy who mingled on street corners and in the associated establishments, such as clubrooms, poolhalls, and barbershops, accounted for the bulk of the political club membership. Typically, each association formed under a club boss, someone a step higher in the socioeconomic hierarchy, who juggled appeasing various corner boy cliques to build a base. The political clubs operated as a *quid pro quo* in which members supported the club boss or another figure to advance the cliques’ interests.\(^{15}\) The membership retained much power and autonomy, and Whyte concluded that “unless the boss takes pains to tie the cliques in closely with the nucleus of the club through consulting their leaders on matters of policy and giving recognition to the informal clique organization in prestige and favors, the club may break up.”\(^{16}\)

These sociologists observed how Italian Americans carved out a place in politics through collective responses. This point was made evident in an *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* article titled “Politics: The Great American Game.” The author admitted that voters operated within an arena erected by the parties, one in which the bosses picked the choices offered to the electorate. As the piece continued, “it is taken for granted by the bosses of all parties that you are too absorbed in your laborious daily trials … to give any serious attention as to what goes on inside and outside of the political lines, and … they feel that by nature most of you are extremely gullible.” The solution was to educate oneself

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\(^{16}\) Whyte, 207.
about the candidates, stay informed, and not be tricked by a few kind words the day before the election. Yet, they had an ambivalent, rather than a purely denunciatory, view of the party system. As expressed by J. R. Napoleon in Pittsburgh’s *Unione* newspaper in August 1933:

> By “party” is meant nothing more than a political machine. Some time ago a famous statesman proclaimed a government as being a necessary evil. Political parties or machines fall into the same category, for even though there may be some corruption and graft connected with them, … they manage to bring out the best qualified men for candidates in order to be able to draw the votes of the people.  

Napoleon argued that a properly working American system required the interdependence of political parties or machines and grassroots mobilization. Apathy created corruption. When only a minority of voters participated, parties elected poor candidates. When the masses turned out, parties ran qualified and capable people to better compete for votes.

The proliferation of political clubs before the New Deal was the natural consequence of this interpretation of machine politics. As “Politics: The Great American Game” concluded at one point: “Your vote alone is insignificant. But your vote added to the vote of the other voters at once becomes a crushing force, a dominant factor, and a driving power.” To have political influence, Italian Americans understood that they needed to organize voting blocs to stay informed and gain enough sway to extract concessions from the party bosses. Rather than view political clubs as creations by elites meant to control voters, most were grassroots formations to gain more agency for the community. One Bridgeport, Connecticut, resident’s story about creating his local political

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association was likely common. Members of his ethnic club talked about politics while playing cards, which led them to establish a political organization.\(^{21}\) These political clubs operated as counterweights to local bosses by keeping ordinary people informed, creating consensus for a voting bloc, and extracting small concessions from political machines through alliances.

Cleveland’s *La Voce del Popolo Italiano* was clear about this point in 1920. After gaining citizenship, which was the prerequisite for any political action, Italian Americans needed an organized bloc of voters unaffiliated with either political party. Strength in numbers could provide results.\(^{22}\) The desire for Italian Americans to engage as a unified community rather than a mess of individuals continued throughout the decade as newspapers reinforced the need for a voting bloc.\(^{23}\) Individuals also sought to group voting behaviors to receive recognition. When Maria Vitantonio, a secretary for Italian Consul Nicola Cerri, became the first female Italian-American notary public in Cleveland, one of only nine women in 1920, she told the judge at the ceremony that she planned to use her new status “to talk with all the Italian women in Cleveland … and help them to reason out for whom they shall vote at the coming election.”\(^{24}\) The community as a whole sought to unify its voters to have a voice in politics.

\(^{22}\) J. F. M., “Il dovere degl’Italiani,” *La Voce del Popolo Italiano* (Cleveland, OH), 20 March 1920, 1.
\(^{24}\) “First Italian Woman Made Notary Public,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer* (Cleveland, OH), 6 September 1920, all Ohio edition, 11; *Cleveland City Directory, 1921* (Cleveland, OH: Cleveland Directory Company, 1921), 2674.
It is necessary to look back at the political clubs that existed before the Great Depression to understand the Italian-American response to the New Deal. Rather than minor entities or symptoms of machine politics, these organizations allowed grassroots political growth, which primed the community to respond quickly and positively to a political realignment. Local ethnic leaders obsessed with forming and retaining a voting bloc as the only means to gain power in the American party system. This resulted in the proliferation of political clubs in the majority of towns with Italian-American residents. Bloc formation encouraged ideological consensus. The political club sought as many members as possible and, in the process, forged those with differing ideologies into one group. These organizations became the primary physical locations in which the public sphere shaped a New Deal-style ideology.

**The Italian American Political Association**

The Italian American Political Association of Youngstown, Ohio, provides an excellent example of the independent political club model that proliferated during the 1920s to form consensus and hold together a bloc of voters. Community leaders organized the Political Association as a response to ethnic concerns, especially discrimination. The rebirth of the Ku Klux Klan and its power to influence laws were impetuses for creating a political club as a rival and a possible check on nativist power. The Political Association members favored a collective approach to politics, and they sought consensus through debate and conversation. The organization consistently maintained the idea of strength in

25 Although Italian American Political Association is the most commonly used title, newspaper reports sometimes printed alternative names, such as the Italian American Citizen Political Club and the Italian-American Citizen Political Association of Mahoning County. This chapter uses exclusively Italian American Political Association for clarity.
numbers to offer a swing-voting bloc to any local politician that promised to support Italian-American interests.

Formed in 1924, the Italian American Political Association likely took inspiration from the older Italian American Citizen Club. Created in 1914 and named for its naturalization requirement for all admitted members, the Citizen Club may have followed the model set by other groups that concentrated on civic education and engagement rather than influencing voters’ decisions.26 Cleveland’s Hiram House, for example, hosted a similarly named group, the Italian American Citizenship Club, “organized for the study of political problems and altho [sic] there [was] some dissension in the club as to endorsements etc. still they stud[ied] for principles rather than personalities.”27 Other citizen clubs followed suit, concentrating on “principles rather than personalities,” civics rather than endorsements. The Hiram House group spawned two similar clubs in Cleveland, one at the Alta House settlement and another on the West Side.28 In Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania, the 1911 charter for the Italian-American Citizens Club of Jefferson County claimed that the group aimed “to furnish information to the members of said corporation concerning current political issues, and concerning public men and officials.”29 Other Italians formed the Center Township Italian-American Citizen Club of Indiana County, Pennsylvania, in 1921 to serve Homer City and surrounding communities. Its expressed goals were “to teach those who are already citizens how to use their ballots

28 Hiram House, 58.
properly … [and] to study political questions of the day to the end that Italian-American citizens may become versed in our [American] institutions and useful in our body politic.”

These clubs more aptly fit the civics education model described in chapter two. However, their intention to increase political engagement laid the foundation for subsequent clubs with more extensive and overt electoral aims.

Youngstown’s Italian American Citizen Club may have experienced a similar “dissension” to that which occurred in Hiram House’s Italian American Citizenship Club. In 1921, old members of the Youngstown group called a special meeting to reorganize and restart its work. The club continued operating over the next few years, including an effort to widen its influence by offering free admittance for the upcoming 1922 elections. It had some success, including the enrollment of twenty-five new members in January 1923.

The organization held meetings that spring at Gaglione’s hall in the heart of the Italian-American enclave of Smoky Hollow, suggesting that enough members regularly attended to necessitate the need for ample space. It is not clear whether the Italian American Citizen Club offered endorsements or remained confined to a civic orientation, but it certainly had many of the same goals as later political clubs. Members wanted unity to

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35 For example, the club advertised its meeting with the line “to discuss colonial affairs.” It is unclear what Italian-colonial affairs members discussed. See Advertisement, “The Italian-American Citizen Club,” *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, 20 January 1923, 6.
secure rights and respect from elected leaders proportionate to the amount of taxes paid by the community.36 This group eventually gave way to the Italian American Political Association during the mid-1920s.37

When those in Youngstown created their Political Association in July 1924, they envisioned a larger, more active organization than past groups. Assembling at the Duca degli Abruzzi Hall, only a few blocks from Gaglione’s, the first meeting included “talented speakers … [who gave a] report on our current political situation in America.” Organizers expressed the desire to elevate an Italian-American voice to achieve victory in the coming elections.38 This dual value of education and political action was evident in the group’s temporary name, the Italian American Citizen Political Club, which implied a merger of the percolating civic values held by older organizations with the desire for an Italian-American “colonial movement” to enact change.39

Upon inauguration, the Political Association had two aims: to fight discrimination and correct misinformation. The initial impetus for political participation in 1924 was defensive. The club’s supreme objective was to fight “Klanism,” a catchall term that included not only the Ku Klux Klan but any individuals, organizations, or laws that

37 The Italian American Citizen Club may have been the Italian Youngstown Citizens Club which dissolved in September of 1925, just as the Political Association gained stability. See Clarence J. Brown, Annual Report of the Secretary of State to the Governor and General Assembly of the State of Ohio for the Year Ending June 30, 1926 (Springfield, OH: Kelly-Springfield Printing, 1927), 113.
appeared to target Italian Americans because of their ethnicity. Provisional committee member Alberto Di Tommaso pointed to disunion as the cause of their problems. Division allowed for the passage of the Johnson-Reed Act, or the “Klan Bill,” as Di Tommaso called it, that closed American borders to Italian immigrants. He claimed that they would not forget similar acts of injustice, including Sacco and Vanzetti, the execution of Sam Purpera of Cleveland, and those killed in Louisiana. The last example likely referred to the spring 1924 state executions of six Italian Americans in Amite, an event denounced on the front page of the local ethnic newspaper. The successes of their perceived enemies against them required Italian Americans to gain citizenship and to vote in every election because, as Di Tommaso reminded the community, “for us it is [a] question of life, or of death, morally speaking.”

Since ethnic unity was the key to fighting discrimination, the organization sought to mitigate any possible disinformation that could have divided the Italian-American vote. An example arose shortly after the Political Association’s creation when a circular signed by an unknown “Italian Committee” endorsing James G. Hartwell for prosecuting attorney spread throughout the community. *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* condemned the act as a

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42 “Assassinio Legale di 6 Italiani ad Amite, La.,” *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, 10 May 1924, 1. Even the Associated Press release about the executions suggested an overreach of justice. The trial involved a botched bank robbery that ended in murder when an armed neighbor confronted one of the thieves. According to officials, “this was the first time six men had been hanged in the United States for the murder of one man.” Not only had just one man committed the murder, but the other five were blocks away in the getaway car at the time. See Associated Press, “Murder Gang Goes to Death,” *Wilkes-Barre Record* (Wilkes-Barre, PA), 10 May 1924, 2.
sham and reiterated the community’s need to stay vigilant and engaged. No Italian-American political club would have endorsed the “Klanista” Hartwell, who was associated with the same laws that painted Italian Americans as inferior people. This was not an overreaction; the local Ku Klux Klan had endorsed Hartwell only a few months before.

The first mass meetings of the Italian American Political Association were successful. The group advertised heavily in Il Cittadino Italo-Americano and reminded readers about the importance of the organization for ethnic solidarity. Some two hundred people registered as members for the first large, open meeting on 21 September 1924. The organization encouraged grassroots growth as “hundreds of admission applications were distributed among those present who promised to bring them back, duly filled.” Membership doubled during the next meeting the following week. While ninety of the admitted were unable to attend because of bad weather, the organization welcomed in person one hundred and twelve new members, and those in attendance voted for officers. Within a few weeks, the Political Association claimed more than a thousand registered

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44 “La risposta ad una circolare elettorale,” Il Cittadino Italo-Americano, 16 August 1924, 1.
48 “Italian-American Citizen Political Association,” Il Cittadino Italo-Americano, 4 October 1924, 1.
members, with others on the verge of inclusion.\textsuperscript{49} The group certainly tapped into a growing mass enthusiasm for political participation.

The club endorsed a slate that crossed party lines for the 1924 general election, thereby living up to its purpose of supporting the best candidate for Italian-American interests.\textsuperscript{50} For the presidency, members chose third-party Progressive Robert M. La Follette, thereby rejecting the pro-business, conservative candidacies of Republican Calvin Coolidge and Democrat John W. Davis. In place of the Klan-associated Hartwell for prosecuting attorney was Thomas J. Thomas, a Republican running on his experience as city solicitor and assistant prosecutor.\textsuperscript{51} For state senators, the Political Association endorsed a member from each party, Democrat William L. Sause and Republican J. Eugene Roberts, to fill the two seats allotted to Ohio’s twenty-third district.\textsuperscript{52}

\textsuperscript{49} “Italian-American Citizen Political Associatin [sic] of Mahoning County,” \textit{Il Cittadino Italo-Americano}, 11 October 1924, 1.

\textsuperscript{50} “Facciamo i conti,” \textit{Il Cittadino Italo-Americano}, 1 November 1924, 1. The included endorsement list described in this section was from “our Association,” almost certainly a shorthand reference to the Italian American Political Association because the following week mentioned the list put out by “the local italian political Association” (written with the same capitalized ‘a’ in Associazione) [see “Il Risultato delle Elezioni,” \textit{Il Cittadino Italo-Americano}, 8 November 1924, 1]. However, the first part of the article also included a reference to the Italo-American Citizen Club having endorsed a slate of candidates. It is not clear if this was the previously mentioned Citizen Club or an accidental shorthand mistake for the Political Association, which had previously gone by names like Italian American Citizen Political Club. It was most likely all a reference to the Italian American Political Association because the newspaper ceased mentioning the older organization by this time and extended ample coverage to the new political club.


splitting occurred for state-level representatives as Republican Mrs. C. J. Ott, Democrat H. P. Beckenback, and third-party candidate Joseph Gottlieb won the club’s backing. The trend continued on a local level as the group endorsed several diverse county candidates. Henry Young, a Democratic contender for county commissioner, ran on his experience as a four-times-elected township trustee and familiarity with public works projects, specifically roads. He promised a dollar worth of construction for every tax dollar spent, a clear repudiation of graft. John McNally, another Democrat for county commissioner, reminded Italian Americans of his grocery business and his relationships with many prominent members of their ethnic community. For good measure, he added that he was not a “member of any secret organization,” a coded reference to the Klan. Paul E. Lyden, candidate for sheriff, and Frank H. Vogan, who ran for county treasurer, were both Republicans. Peter J. Flynn, a probate judge candidate, received a glowing endorsement in Il Cittadino Italo-Americano with specific reasoning for support. Described as a man of character and friend to the foreign born, Flynn was nonpartisan, harbored no prejudices, and viewed “black, yellow[, and] white” men no different from each other. In short, as a judge, he would have been the antithesis of the Ku Klux Klan and other types of discrimination. The Italian American Political Association’s criteria for endorsement

53 Thad H. Brown, Annual Report of the Secretary of State to the Governor and General Assembly of the State of Ohio for the Year Ending June 30, 1925 (Springfield, OH: Kelly-Springfield Printing, 1925), 287.
54 Advertisement, “Henry Young,” Il Cittadino Italo-Americano, 1 November 1924, 2.
56 Advertisement, “Volete Voi Lavoro Stabile e Stabile Paga?,” Il Cittadino Italo-Americano, 1 November 1924, 8.
57 “Facciamo i conti,” Il Cittadino Italo-Americano, 1 November 1924, 1.
were ideology and platform, rather than a political party, which encouraged debate about merits and qualifications.

The results of the 1924 elections solidified the need for more organization. *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* blamed La Follette’s defeat on an American attraction to “political machines” and a fear of “possible surprises … [if] too daring programs” were enacted. Italian Americans had voted Republican in the past, but the party’s inability to separate itself from discriminatory acts, such as immigration restriction, left the ethnic group unaffiliated and more willing to judge local candidates on merits alone. While the loss on a national level encouraged negative reinforcement about needing the Political Association, some local victories, such as the elections of Thomas J. Thomas and Paul E. Lyden, offered a glimpse of future possibilities if the bloc remained united.\(^{58}\)

The Political Association’s underlying message was unity to secure Italian-American rights. As evidence, the group reminded potential allies of specific places where fellow Italian Americans had lost their rights because of disunion, such as in Herrin, Illinois, Niles and Steubenville, Ohio, and Follansbee, West Virginia.\(^{59}\) The Herrin reference was a notorious example of class and ethnic conflict in the coalfields of southern Illinois. After deadly confrontations between the United Mine Workers of America and company men in 1922, Protestant ministers and businessmen defused the class conflict by stoking fears about foreigners and calling for law and order. Italian Americans provided easy scapegoats and targets for simmering hostilities. In early 1924, Prohibition agents bolstered by deputized locals, many of whom were Klansmen, raided private homes


searching for alcohol. They harassed Italian-American residents, and victims reported cases of planted evidence and theft of personal property. The raiders were likely responsible for a wave of arsons.\textsuperscript{60} The other conflicts were closer to home. In Steubenville, Klansmen murdered two Sons of Italy members, and anti-Klan forces responded with their own violence.\textsuperscript{61} In Follansbee, across the Ohio River from Steubenville, there was a standoff between the Klan and the local Sons of Italy that ended peacefully thanks to a heavy police presence.\textsuperscript{62}

Niles was a different story. Minor confrontations between Klan members and Italian- and Irish-American protesters occurred throughout 1924. When the Klan proposed a parade on 1 November, Mayor Harvey Kistler permitted it and swore in scores of Klansmen as municipal police. Anti-Klan forces blockaded roads to stop the march, and both sides resorted to armed intimidation, beatings, and exchanging gunfire. Governor A. Victor Donahey ended the riot by declaring martial law and dispatching the Ohio National Guard.\textsuperscript{63} It was in this context that the Political Association urged ethnic unity and set a goal of having a five-thousand vote bloc to have “ten-thousand arms ready to refute

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{62} “Armed Police Prevent Klan-Italian Clash,” \textit{Akron Beacon Journal} (Akron, OH), 27 September 1924, 11.
\item \textsuperscript{63} William D. Jenkins, \textit{Steel Valley Klan: The Ku Klux Klan in Ohio’s Mahoning Valley} (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1990), 117–39.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
offenses and … affirm our rights.”⁶⁴ Creating a solid voting bloc was necessary to contest the Klan’s dominance over local politicians like Mayor Kistler.

Immediately after elections, political organizations typically assume a slower pace until the next round of primaries. However, the Political Association’s core members spent the months after the 1924 elections formalizing the group’s existence to create stability and permanence. They battled a lack of enthusiasm by some members. In February 1925, there were complaints about how some professionals, many of them lawyers, had wanted leadership positions, and after the club elections, they fell aside, “or they retired themselves on Youngstown’s Aventine, waiting for the events.”⁶⁵ There were, however, some members willing to push the Political Association forward, notably Alberto Di Tommaso.⁶⁶

Notwithstanding this criticism, the group continued to advance. There were monthly meetings in December 1924 and January 1925, from which new plans for permanence and expansion came.⁶⁷ Most important for the organization’s stability, the Political Association filed for incorporation with the state of Ohio on 9 January 1925.⁶⁸ The club distributed rule books in May.⁶⁹ To better integrate the dispersed ethnic enclaves in Youngstown, the group discussed holding future meetings across town in the Brier Hill

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neighborhood. Il Cittadino Italo-Americano offered additional suggestions, and since Celestino Petrarca was the newspaper’s proprietor and a vital member of the Political Association, the proposals carried extra weight. Above all, the idea that the organization would grow automatically was an “illusion.” Only by having active leaders willing to reach out to potential members would the Political Association succeed. Ideally, the group would have representatives for outreach in each of the seven city wards. The Political Association needed to work with local mutual aid societies, churches, and Catholic organizations in addition to the prominenti (the Italian-American community leaders). Finally, the club needed to invite Congressman Fiorello La Guardia to speak before it about “the necessity of the union of all the Italians in only one political group.” Members took some of these suggestions to heart. The Political Association sent an invitation to La Guardia. In July, the group hosted a summer picnic celebration at Brier Hill Park, complete with music and speeches. Giovanni Passarelli, the club’s president, opened the event, and prosecutor Thomas J. Thomas spoke about Americanization. Enrico Di Iorio’s Italian-language discourse summarized the community’s progress over the previous twenty years and urged unity to reach aspirations. Thomas was not the first public official to address the group.

72 “La Riunione dell’Associazione Politica Italiana,” Il Cittadino Italo-Americano, 14 February 1925, 1; “Per la Venuta dell’On. La Guardia a Youngstown,” Il Cittadino Italo-Americano, 21 February 1925, 1. It does not appear that La Guardia ever visited. The invitation likely had the same result that it did for the political association in nearby New Castle, Pennsylvania. La Guardia sent “a kind letter” but had to reject the invitation because he was too busy. See “La Grande Riunione della Lega,” Il Cittadino Italo-Americano, 5 September 1925, 5.
73 “Il Pic-Nic dell’Associazione Politica Italiana,” Il Cittadino Italo-Americano, 6 June 1925, 3; “La Grande Festa Italiana del 19 Luglio al Brier Hill Park,” Il Cittadino Italo-
Local judges George H. Gessner and J. H. C. Lyons presented at Political Association meetings in March and April.  

Between the Political Association’s formalization in 1925 and the midterm elections of 1926, its members met regularly to discuss concerns. Using the analogy that “to have a weapon in [your] hands without making use of it is the same as not having it,” the group encouraged the use of citizenship rights, voting in primaries and general elections, along with debate about endorsements. In June 1926, members met to discuss the Republican slate for the August primaries with a follow-up meeting in July. The Political Association held a final meeting on 8 August, two days before the primaries, that was open and free for any Italian-American citizen. The group distributed its lists of endorsed candidates, and club officials had information regarding registration and voting procedures. “Eminent Italian and American orators” spoke about the Italian-American vote. Meetings and efforts to strengthen Italian-American political solidarity and turnout continued into the general election.

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The Political Association served a gatekeeping function for the community. It encouraged younger people to become involved and for membership to talk about candidates rather than take them at their word. Associates sought to vet people and find consensus on a final choice. When Guido Bernardi ran for second ward councilman in 1927, *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* informed readers of his intentions but ended the article by asking: “What does the Italian Political Association say about this?” The implication was that success in attaining a local position depended on swinging the entire community’s weight behind a candidate, an act facilitated by an endorsement from the organization.

The Political Association took endorsements seriously. During the 1927 mayoral race, the organization created a five-person committee to research the candidates and suggest a favorite. The group split; three backed Judge Joseph Heffernan, and two recommended Arthur Williams, the city finance director. Attendees at the open meeting engaged in a vigorous debate about the candidates. At the suggestion of Enrico Di Iorio, the Political Association agreed to postpone an endorsement until the next meeting. The deferral gave members time to consider both men and gather additional information. They also justified their decision under the pretext that a closed session of members, rather than an event open to the entire community as before, aided consensus. Heffernan earned the

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81 *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* ran an ad for Bernardi before the general election that ended: “And we are for him, without hesitation!” See “Il Candidato Popolare Italiano del 2nd Ward,” *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, 5 November 1927, 5.
82 “La Riunione dell’Associazione Politica Italiana,” *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, 22 October 1927, 3. A typographical error lists Heffernan’s first name as George, rather than Joseph. Enrico Di Iorio’s name was spelled with the alternative D’Iorio.
endorsement, which was crucial for his victory. He defeated Williams by 343 votes, undoubtedly helped by the Political Association’s claimed seven hundred members.\footnote{“I Risultati Completi delle Elezioni della Città di Youngstown,” \textit{Il Cittadino Italo-Americano}, 12 November 1927, 2; “Italians Back Joe Heffernan,” \textit{Youngstown Vindicator} (Youngstown, OH), 31 October 1927, 1. Heffernan defeated Williams 14,369 to 14,026 with over 36,000 votes cast to all mayoral candidates.}

Previous Political Association leaders were not immune from a debate. When Thomas Antonelli, the group’s inaugural assistant secretary, and Vincent Buonpane both sought a judgeship on the municipal court in 1929, the organization proposed an accommodation between the two men, such as a straw vote, to present one candidate for the community. Buonpane accepted while Antonelli refused, an act that \textit{Il Cittadino Italo-Americano} editor Carlo Caselli believed would haunt him on election day.\footnote{“Italian-American Citizen Political Association,” \textit{Il Cittadino Italo-Americano}, 4 October 1924, 1; C. C., “Responsabilita’ Morale,” \textit{Il Cittadino Italo-Americano}, 3 August 1929, 1.} The pressure to choose one candidate was too great, so the club organized a vote during its annual festival.\footnote{“For the Purpose of Endorsement,” \textit{Il Cittadino Italo-Americano}, 31 August 1929, 1.} Buonpane surpassed Antonelli with 194 votes to 115.\footnote{“A Festa Finita,” \textit{Il Cittadino Italo-Americano}, 7 September 1929, 1.}

The 1928 election deepened a commitment toward engagement. That summer, \textit{Il Cittadino Italo-Americano} editor Angelo Di Renzo justified its place with the analogy that its relationship to the ethnic community was like “the lungs are to a human organism.”\footnote{A. Di Renzo, “La Catalessia dell’Associazione Politica Italiana,” \textit{Il Cittadino Italo-Americano}, 7 July 1928, 1.} The Sunday before the election, the group partnered with the Italian Al Smith Club to host a mass meeting of around a thousand people at the Duca degli Abruzzi Hall. The sponsors opened the floor to the court of appeals and state supreme court candidates Joseph Cook
and Dennis Dunlavy, and lawyer Edward Crudele of Cleveland spoke in Italian. While Al Smith’s significant defeat disappointed the community and the Political Association experienced some discord, members continued their work.

Once more, the Political Association remained committed between elections. Notably, this activism and desire for growth and engagement occurred before the Wall Street stock market crash of 1929, proving that a community desire for political involvement existed before the impetus of the Great Depression. From a core of about seventy dues-paying associates, the group pushed for growth. As Il Cittadino Italo-Americano stated in January 1929, the organization was “more necessary than ever.” The group sought to reach a growing number of Italian-American citizens, which the paper estimated to be around nine thousand throughout the county. The club held a membership drive, and the newspaper commented that the February meeting surpassed any in recent memory as “the Duca degli Abruzzi Hall was filled with old members and new” subscribers. The organization awarded bricklayer Domenico Gamberale a box of cigars

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89 “La Lotta non e’ Finita,” Il Cittadino Italo-Americano, 17 November 1928, 1; “Lo Scioglimento,” Il Cittadino Italo-Americano, 22 December 1928, 3. The reason for the discord is unclear. According to the 22 December article, some members pushed for a vote to dissolve the organization. However, this vote was not allowed under the group’s rules, which stated that as long as there were five members in good standing, then the organization would continue to exist. The Political Association had seventy in good standing, with many paid through the next year. The writer alluded to discouragement and heated words that led to calls for dissolving the group out of frustration. It is not clear, however, if this was because of Al Smith’s loss, personal issues, some other reason, or a combination of these factors.  
92 “Per il Club Politico,” Il Cittadino Italo-Americano, 2 February 1929, 2.  
for bringing in the most enrollees. By the following year, the organization had grown to a healthy three hundred members.

Between Al Smith’s defeat and Franklin Roosevelt’s election, the Political Association continued its functions as it had over the previous four years. It reaffirmed its place by reminding residents that it stood not for the individual but the “collective benefit” of the community. The 1930 anniversary celebration took place at Idora Park and drew an estimated seven thousand people. It was a festive atmosphere, complete with a band, sports games, and a queen’s crowning. More importantly, the event presented twenty candidates on stage and allowed them the opportunity to mingle and shake hands with attendees throughout the day. However, as Carlo Caselli wrote during a summary of the event, “all the candidates promise seas and mountains,” but after the election, the ambitious forget their pledges. The organization took words at face value. The Political Association continued to give the meeting floor to candidates, but vetting persisted as debate led to consensus for endorsements.

Changes in club leadership support the argument that these endorsements were genuine and fair. They were reflections of community sentiment. Unlike machine politics that operated under a ward boss, administration changes meant that members never intended their group to serve as a partisan political base for a couple of men. Initial

95 “Il Club Politico,” Il Cittadino Italo-Americano, 1 February 1930, 3.
elections in October 1924 put the following people into leadership roles: Giovanni Passarelli, president; Innocenzo Vagnozzi, first vice president; Cesare Amadio, second vice president; Alberto Di Tommaso, secretary; Thomas Antonelli, assistant secretary; Ciro Saulino, treasurer; and trustees A. Marino, Vincenzo Casciato, Alessandro Rossi, Michele Labbruzzo, Celestino Petrarca, Carlo Stella, and Nicola Colla.100 The club held new elections in December 1925 for the 1926 administrative year, which brought in several new people. Passarelli, Amadio, Antonelli, Saulino, Marino, Casciato, Rossi, Petrarca, and Stella all relinquished positions. Vagnozzi moved up to become president, Labbruzzo became first vice president, and Di Tommaso went from secretary to assistant secretary. Besides Colla’s return to his old position, new elects filled the remainder of the posts as follows: C. Crosetto, second vice president; A. Pompili, secretary; Filippo Carosella, treasurer; and trustees R. Marcovecchio, L. Conti, F. Zacconi, J. Masi, P. Candido, and G. Romano.101 Elections for 1927 saw similar changes as membership reelected Vagnozzi, Labbruzzo, Carosella, and Zacconi to their posts, returned Di Tommaso to secretary, demoted Crosetto to assistant secretary, brought back some old leaders from 1925 (trustees Amadio and Petrarca), and added new figures (trustees Vincenzo Chianese, Pellegrino Velardo, Nick Ferreri, and Pasquale Pietroniro).102

Subsequent elections followed similar patterns as members brought in new leadership and reaffirmed that the club was not beholden to one personality. For 1928,
newcomer Andrea Infante won the presidency, with G. Valentini serving as first vice president. Infante had not gone unchallenged. Celestino Petrarca sought the position and lost, but he congratulated Infante and remained involved. Petrarca was victorious for the 1929 administrative year, replacing Infante as president, who then became a trustee. Previous leaders gained new positions, such as Michele Labbruzzo as assistant secretary, while newcomer David Vergallito became first vice president. For 1930, Petrarca served as treasurer while Ralph Vitullo and Carlo Crosetto became president and first vice president. These three remained in their positions in 1931 while the second vice president and some trustees changed. Vitullo continued as president for 1932.

These men were promineti who used their positions within the community for prestige and networking. While a few gained government occupations beginning in the 1930s, this club was not an apparatus for machine politics in which the leaders had political positions from which to build support by doling out patronage to Political Association

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103 “L’Elezione Della Nuova Amministrazione Dell’Associazione Politica Italiana,” Il Cittadino Italo-Americano, 25 February 1928, 1. Petrarca was harsher to the membership, noting that 695 people were enrolled in the club, but only 40 attended the meeting. Although a fraction of the membership, this smaller group represented the committed core of the organization willing to meet during winter, months before any real political contests.
104 “Il Club Politico,” Il Cittadino Italo-Americano, 26 January 1929, 1. This newspaper issue was mistakenly printed as 1928.
108 Cannistraro, “Generoso Pope and the Rise of Italian American Politics,” 269–70. These men fit Cannistraro’s distinction between the old padrone leader and the new promineti figure. Unlike the padrone, who established power and respect by providing jobs and exploiting labor, these promineti built personal prestige by ingratiating themselves within the community through leadership roles.
members before the New Deal. Giovanni Passarelli was a local banker who had previously worked as a reporter in Rome, an editor for Cleveland’s Italian-language newspaper, a night school teacher, and a consular agent in Indianapolis, Indiana – where he also trained as a lawyer – before settling in Youngstown in 1909.\textsuperscript{109} Innocenzo Vagnozzi was a notary public, insurance salesman, and real estate agent.\textsuperscript{110} In 1931, the Ohio Grand Lodge of the Sons of Italy elected him Grand Orator, and he served alongside two other Political Association members, Ohio Grand Venerable Ciro Saulino and delegate Alberto Di Tommaso.\textsuperscript{111} Saulino worked as the Italian-American department head for the Sigmund Engel Steam Ship Ticket Agency, which offered numerous services, including travel ticket bookings, postal money orders, and assistance with immigration paperwork.\textsuperscript{112} Di Tommaso worked for Dollar Bank and provided help with travel documents and other paperwork.\textsuperscript{113} He was the point of contact for those investing in the Fascist loan program described in the previous chapter, and after 1937 he served as an acting Italian consular agent.\textsuperscript{114} Others were also bankers. Cesare Amadio worked at Dollar Bank in Struthers, Ohio, before becoming the Italian-American liaison for the L. B. Burger Travel Service in

\textsuperscript{111} “Sons of Italy,” \textit{Cincinnati Enquirer} (Cincinnati, OH), 24 September 1931, 10.
Youngstown. He served as venerable of the Loggia Operaia in Struthers. Filippo Carosella rose to become president of Union Savings Bank in 1926, an Italian-American institution, where he worked alongside Adolfo Pompili. Thomas Antonelli was a lawyer. He graduated from Yale University in 1916, studied Constitutional Law under former President William Howard Taft, and was a member of the Loggia Napoleone Colaianni. Celestino Petrarca, who arrived in Youngstown from New Kensington, a city northeast of Pittsburgh, just before the First World War, was the owner-director of the newspaper *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* from 1920 until 1934. After that time, he operated the Eagle Printing Company until retirement. Andrea Infante was the son of immigrants who grew up speaking Italian at home and worked as a pressman at a printing company while serving as Political Association president in 1928. He later became a life insurance agent by the mid-1930s. Vincenzo Casciato was a tailor during the 1920s who then added a dry

cleaning and pressing business. Michele Labbruzzo was a cobbler. Ralph Vitullo was a stock exchange clerk in 1930. Carlo Crosetto worked as a salesman, first for a macaroni company, then for an oil business, and later in grocery and wine retail and wholesale. Some of the minor figures held industrial or blue-collar jobs, including as a foundry laborer (Pasquale Pietroniro), a truck driver (Pellegrino Velardo), and a house painter (Carlo Stella).

Those who initially entered government employment were not in positions that aided the Italian-American community beyond the respect that the group gained for finally breaking into the political sphere. Ralph Vitullo was an example. If the Political

Association membership expected patronage from its leaders, Vitullo was a terrible choice for president in 1930. He stood for second ward councilman in the 1929 city elections and lost. In 1931, he became a claims investigator for the state’s Division of Workmen’s Compensation, one of three men assigned from Youngstown. Given his background as a clerk, he was qualified for the job. To Italian Americans, Vitullo’s appointment, along with the nomination of two other community members to positions, was a sign of political parity, not reward. The Political Association’s efforts to keep voters unified as a bloc finally paid dividends and spawned optimism that qualified group members could have equal opportunity for government employment. It was a celebration of ethnic advancement toward social and political equity.

The few who rose to elected positions did so in typical progressions and not always obligated to their declared party. William B. Spagnola, a member of the Political Association but not an officer, was also a rising star within the community. He became mayor of Youngstown as a Democrat in 1939. A 1922 graduate of the University of Cincinnati Law School, Spagnola began his public career as the third assistant city law director under Mayor Joseph Heffernan, an official opposed to graft, before Heffernan appointed him city police prosecutor in 1928. Italian Americans celebrated the decision as

130 Clingan Jackson, “Wins Race By 6,000 Plurality,” Youngstown Vindicator, 8 November 1939, 1.
an honor and acknowledgment that their ethnic community contained qualified individuals. Spagnola continued in the police prosecutor position under the next mayor, Mark Moore, before his own failed mayoral run in 1935.  

Most importantly, Spagnola appeared unbound to a political party. Although a Democrat, he spoke at a local Italian-American fraternal society in favor of D. F. Rendinell’s 1932 Republican primary run for county prosecutor. Spagnola stood as a true independent during his 1935 attempt at the mayor’s office. The lack of an official endorsement by the local Democratic Party establishment clearly showed that he was not aligned to its partisan interests. Spagnola finished second to the eventual winner, and he garnered three times the number of votes as the Democratic-endorsed candidate who placed third. In his concession remarks, Spagnola denounced the local Democratic political bosses by name and viewed his second-place finish as a “moral victory,” a sign that the people wanted an end to machine politics and the reorganization of the local Democratic Party. In 1937, Spagnola won a campaign for municipal judge, a sign that voters favored his independence.


132 “Parla un Democratico,” Il Cittadino Italo-Americano, 16 April 1932, 1.


Innocenzo Vagnozzi, Political Association president in 1926 and 1927, served as water commissioner under Mayor Spagnola, but he gained community prominence in his own right. Vagnozzi arrived in the United States with his widowed mother in 1904. At thirteen, he began working at his stepfather’s hotel in Latrobe, Pennsylvania, and he took English classes at the nearby Christ Mission settlement house. He gained working-class credentials, having been employed as a teenager in a steel mill and for the Pennsylvania Railroad before settling in Akron, where he worked in a clothing store and then operated a hotel. To aid his new career in real estate and insurance after arriving in Youngstown, Vagnozzi attended night school at the YMCA. He later studied finance, bookkeeping, and economics. Constituents in Youngstown’s second ward elected him to the city council in 1935 and 1937. Vagnozzi’s platform during those campaigns called for more equitable public utilities between the city wards and the fair treatment of customers, concerns that corresponded to his later appointment as water commissioner. 

The Italian American Political Association was not a product of machine politics but a grassroots organization of members who sought consensus to operate within the American party system. Devised initially to fight nativist-backed public figures who sponsored ethnic discrimination, the club never wavered from its goal of holding together a bloc of voters to swing elections and present one Italian-American voice. In the process, the Political Association primed an electorate to hear and consider various politicians and their viewpoints. Invitations to candidates and debates about club endorsements created a rational body politic willing to support individual ideas and platforms rather than party

alone. Organized around ethnicity, the Political Association contained a cross-section of the Italian-American community. The club was the physical place in which an Italian-American ideology formed.

**A Network of Political Clubs**

The Italian American Political Association of Youngstown was not unique, and dozens of similar clubs existed throughout the region before the start of the New Deal. Historians will never know the exact extent of partisanship with certainty for all these organizations. Some specified a nonpartisan nature, while others proudly allied themselves to the Democrats or Republicans. More important is the point that Italian Americans established political groups organized by ethnicity, which attests to a mass transition toward political engagement and the creation of political ideology from the bottom up and within the community. Organizing around ethnicity forced these groups to cut across socioeconomic and previous ideological lines. Even groups allied to a particular party by name willingly heard opposing politicians, especially if the guests’ platforms aided Italian-American rights.

Given the history of the Italian American Political Association, the proliferation of similar organizations is not a surprise as participants thought of political clubs as part of an interconnected network. As noted above, *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* had suggested in early 1925 that the Political Association needed outreach efforts to grow and prosper. The newspaper repeated similar recommendations in 1927. These included expanding the geographical reach of the club to neighboring Trumbull County, nominating ward leaders to serve as liaisons for specific districts of Youngstown, and holding occasional meetings in the surrounding communities of Girard, Hubbard, Campbell, Struthers, and Lowellville.
The newspaper proposed creating a committee and school to facilitate citizenship, appointing a press agent to write releases for the English-language newspapers, and chartering a paired organization for the associates’ female family members. A final recommendation was to increase outreach to other nationalities to create a broad coalition. ¹³⁷

Political Association members implemented some of these suggestions, especially the desire to expand influence and encourage others. When Italian Americans in Niles elected Joseph Campana to head their political club in May 1931, Innocenzo Vagnozzi was a guest speaker with the theme “Americanization and Citizenship.”¹³⁸ People in neighboring Girard formed a political organization in July 1931 and succeeded in electing M. Del Bene as an at-large councilman. In December, Ciro Saulino spoke to the Girard group about the “absolute need and the necessity of these Political Clubs.”¹³⁹ Within Youngstown proper, the Political Association worked alongside ward-level organizations, such as the Third Ward Italian American Political Club, which claimed two hundred members and offered an open floor to candidates in 1932.¹⁴⁰ William B. Spagnola was one of four speakers at a New Castle, Pennsylvania, Italian American Citizens League meeting.

¹³⁸ “Joseph Campana Is Elected to Head Citizens’ League,” Niles Daily Times (Niles, OH), 18 May 1931, 1. This source referred to the guest as “V. Vagnozzi of Youngstown.” This was a typographical error, as no “V. Vagnozzi” lived in Youngstown in 1931. See Youngstown Official City Directory, 1931, 910.
in 1933. They promoted “the benefits to be derived in such an organization, that all Italians should be citizens and as such should take an active part in the political life of the country.”

Other Italian Americans throughout the region also deemed political clubs necessary because scores of organizations proliferated before Franklin Roosevelt’s inauguration. Cleveland boasted around two dozen clubs formally incorporated with the state of Ohio between 1917 and 1932. Some included party markers that corresponded

141 “Italian-American Citizen’s [sic] League Meeting Is Held,” New Castle News (New Castle, PA), 7 August 1933, 8.
142 William D. Fulton, Annual Report of the Secretary of State to the Governor and General Assembly of the State of Ohio for the Year Ending June 30, 1917 (Springfield, OH: Springfield Printing, 1917), 43; Harvey C. Smith, Annual Report of the Secretary of State to the Governor and General Assembly of the State of Ohio for the Year Ending June 30, 1920 (Springfield, OH: Kelly-Springfield Printing, 1920), 55; Harvey C. Smith, Annual Report of the Secretary of State to the Governor and General Assembly of the State of Ohio for the Year Ending June 30, 1922 (Springfield, OH: Kelly-Springfield Printing, 1922), 47; Thad H. Brown, Annual Report of the Secretary of State to the Governor and General Assembly of the State of Ohio for the Year Ending June 30, 1923 (Springfield, OH: Kelly-Springfield Printing, 1924), 45–46, 48; Thad H. Brown, Annual Report of the Secretary of State to the Governor and General Assembly of the State of Ohio for the Year Ending June 30, 1924 (Springfield, OH: Kelly-Springfield Printing, 1925), 39, 42; Brown, Annual Report for the Year Ending June 30, 1926, 14; Clarence J. Brown, Annual Report of the Secretary of State to the Governor and General Assembly of the State of Ohio for the Year Ending June 30, 1927 (Springfield, OH: Kelly-Springfield Printing, 1928), 10; Clarence J. Brown, Annual Report of the Secretary of State to the Governor and General Assembly of the State of Ohio for the Year Ending June 30, 1928 and Election Statistics for the 1928 Election (Springfield, OH: Kelly-Springfield Printing, 1928), 15; Clarence J. Brown, Annual Report of the Secretary of State to the Governor and General Assembly of the State of Ohio for the Year Ending June 30, 1929 and Including the Report of the Corporation Department (Springfield, OH: Kelly-Springfield Printing, 1930), 18–19; Brown, Annual Report for the Year Ending December 31, 1931, 13, 16; George S. Myers, Annual Report of the Secretary of State to the Governor and General Assembly of the State of Ohio for the Year Ending December 31, 1932 (Cleveland, OH: Consolidated Press & Printing, 1933), 13, 16. Every attempt was made to restrict these listings to organizations that dealt with political issues to some extent. This primarily meant looking for markers within the groups’ names, such as civic, political, and citizens. The extent of political engagement likely ranged widely as some organizations operated as social groups in addition to political or civic ones.
with their affiliation, such as the Warren G. Harding Italian Republican Club (1921) and the Italo-American Democratic Club (1931). Other organizations were nonaligned and likely served civic and political purposes similar to Youngstown’s Political Association, such as the Progressive Italian Citizens Club (1921) and the Italian Political & Civic Club of Cleveland, Ohio (1923). In either case, partisan or nonpartisan, these local organizations encouraged Italian Americans to engage in the political process.

In some instances, founders of social groups intended their organizations to serve a political role. These clubs offered audiences for candidates during election season. This crossover explains why some groups listed their purposes as social and political when they incorporated, such as Società S. Angelo-Licata in 1917. Perhaps the best example of this trend in Cleveland was the Italian American Brotherhood (IAB) Club. Incorporated in early 1928 and numbering 1,100 members the following year, the IAB Club was primarily for social purposes, but it also welcomed local politicians. It sponsored a mass meeting supporting Al Smith in 1928 with guests ex-Senator Atlee Pomerene and Peter Witt, a

145 Fulton, *Annual Report for the Year Ending June 30, 1917*, 44. Compilers included the purposes of the incorporated in 1917, details that disappeared in later volumes.
146 Brown, *Annual Report for the Year Ending June 30, 1928*, 15; “Club Elects Lo Presti,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 22 December 1929, 17-A; Mairy Jayn Woge, “‘Mister Tony’ Can Still Deliver the Murray Hill Vote,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 23 September 1973, 4-A. According to founder Antonio (Tony) Milano, the IAB Club began as a beneficial society after life insurance companies rejected to cover him. Long-standing accusations tied Milano and the club to organized crime and the local Teamsters union. He denied the Mafia associations but admitted that the club once had gambling and that authorities targeted him for tax evasion. Either way, the IAB Club was a center for Italian-American political life in the area for decades.
former independent Cleveland city councilman. In early 1932, Democrat Ray T. Miller was a guest at an IAB Club dance. The group invited all three mayoral candidates – Ray T. Miller, independent Democrat Martin L. Sweeney, and Republican Harry L. Davis – to speak at its annual picnic in 1933. The 1935 picnic, estimated at 37,500 people, included comments by Alessandro L. DeMaio, a Republican from Little Italy and the president of Cleveland City Council, and short speeches by many other local government figures, including five judges, the chief and assistant police prosecutors, State Representative Marzel Levan, and the assistant city law director. The IAB Club also opened its facilities to groups from both political parties. The 1931 inaugural meeting of the 330-member Cuyahoga Italian Democratic Club occurred at the main IAB hall on Mayfield Road. The club’s auxiliary location in Richmond Heights was the site of an 800-person banquet to celebrate Republican Michael A. Picciano, the new chief police prosecutor. Social clubs intertwined themselves with politics.

Civic and political groups in Ohio existed beyond Cleveland and Youngstown, and Italian Americans organized clubs in other cities and towns. After the First World War,

147 “Smith Rally Monday,” Cleveland Plain Dealer, 2 November 1928, 6; David D. Van Tassel and John J. Grabowski, eds., The Encyclopedia of Cleveland History (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987), 1057.
149 “Italian Club to Picnic,” Cleveland Plain Dealer, 3 August 1933, 9. Although Davis attended, he did not speak. See “Sweeney to Back No Council Slate,” Cleveland Plain Dealer, 7 August 1933, 2.
151 “Democratic Club Elects,” Cleveland Plain Dealer, 20 January 1931, home edition, 25; Cleveland City Directory, 1931 (Cleveland, OH: Cleveland Directory Company, 1931), 26. Edward Crudele was a member of the club’s board of directors. As noted, he spoke at a Political Association event in Youngstown in 1928, another example of the intersection that these political clubs had throughout the region. See above, page 337.
152 “800 at Banquet in Honor of Picciano,” Cleveland Plain Dealer, 13 February 1934, 2.
A similar network of civic and political associations existed in Pittsburgh before Roosevelt’s inauguration. The Italian Republican Club began in 1915 with about sixty members.\textsuperscript{158} The less-overtly partisan Italo-American Political Club of Allegheny County, described as “the first of its kind in this section,” began in 1918 when three hundred people organized with the purpose “to array the Italian vote behind the best candidate and also to educate the Italian citizenry of this section in matters pertaining to politics.”\textsuperscript{159} Others formed the Italian Citizens’ National Association in 1919, intending to establish district branches from a central downtown Pittsburgh location. Membership requirements included citizenship, or at least filed first papers for citizenship, and good standing in the community. As former assistant district attorney Peter M. Cancelliere, one of the organizers, stated, “no Italian voter who qualifies as a member … will be led to the polls by the nose on election days. … He will vote according to his own judgment.”\textsuperscript{160} Notable Pittsburgh residents, such as Ercole Dominicis, the Fascist-friendly editor of La Trinacria, formed the Italian Voters’ League of Allegheny County, which admitted women as well as men, after a meeting in the McGeagh building on Webster Avenue in 1921.\textsuperscript{161}

A patchwork of neighborhood-specific clubs dotted the city. There was the Fifteenth Ward Italian Political Club with President Joseph Abbate.\textsuperscript{162} The Twentieth Ward

\textsuperscript{158} “Italian Societies,” \textit{Pittsburg Press} (Pittsburgh, PA), 1 August 1915, editorial section, 8.
\textsuperscript{159} “Pittsburgh Italians Form Political Club,” \textit{Pittsburgh Post} (Pittsburgh, PA), 28 January 1918, 2.
\textsuperscript{160} “Italian League to Help Teach Voters’ Duties,” Pittsburgh \textit{Gazette Times} (Pittsburgh, PA), 7 December 1919, 8.
Italian Civic Club met at the corner of Chartiers Avenue and Allendale Street in the western part of the city.\textsuperscript{163} Based in the twenty-seventh ward on the city’s northside, the Italian Women’s Political Club reached one hundred members before changing its name to the Italian Women’s Republican Club.\textsuperscript{164}

Other groups sought to extend across neighborhoods. The United Italian League of the Northside began as an organization to promote Americanization and citizenship to undermine Black Hand criminality in the community. Its goal was to spread throughout Pittsburgh.\textsuperscript{165} The group progressed from having local politicians address members, such as State Senator Morris Einstein and Police Magistrate Edward Hough in 1921, to a candidate endorsement meeting in 1931 that claimed thousands in attendance.\textsuperscript{166} The Roosevelt Civic Legion, a predominantly Italian-American organization of three hundred founded in 1931 and formalized the following year, was headquartered in the nineteenth ward but also included “district delegates” for the nearby town of Swissvale and Pittsburgh’s Beechview, Brookline, Oakland, South Side, and North Side neighborhoods.\textsuperscript{167}

\textsuperscript{163}“Notes of the Campaign,” \textit{Pittsburgh Post-Gazette}, 1 September 1931, 3.
\textsuperscript{165}“Death Knell of Blackhand Outrages Sounded Through United Italian League,” \textit{Pittsburgh Post}, 19 May 1921, 5.
\textsuperscript{166}“Attend League Meeting,” \textit{Pittsburgh Post}, 2 May 1921, 6; “League Backs Candidates,” \textit{Pittsburgh Press}, 17 August 1931, 32. The newspaper claimed a meeting of 5,000 in Moose Hall. It is unclear if this number was accurate. Many political clubs throughout this chapter packed hundreds into halls during special meetings. It is possible that this meeting was more of a rally with large numbers of people coming and going. Five thousand attendees was possible, but probably an exaggeration.
Italian Americans in smaller towns and cities throughout western Pennsylvania founded additional organizations. Residents of Butler instituted an early group, the Italian Political Club of Butler, in 1915.¹⁶⁸ Those living in McKees Rocks created the Italian-American Citizens’ Republican Club of McKees Rocks and Stowe Township in 1915 “to wage an aggressive campaign for the Republican candidates at the coming primaries and general election.”¹⁶⁹ The Italo-American Political Club of Bridgeville, established in 1916, and Monessen’s North Italian Political Club promoted American citizenship.¹⁷⁰ Connellsville was home to the Lincoln Club, a predominantly Italian-American Republican organization.¹⁷¹ Those living in and around Homer City instituted the Center Township Italian-American Citizen Club of Indiana County to teach voting and “study political questions of the day.”¹⁷² The communities of New Kensington and Arnold sponsored the Italian-American Mutual Educational Society, which denounced Philadelphia-based, state political leader William S. Vare for trying “to tighten monopolistic bossism” in Pennsylvania.¹⁷³ The Italian Political Club of Coraopolis hosted a 1928 dinner with guests Congressman Guy E. Campbell and State Senator Frank J. Harris.¹⁷⁴ About ninety-five residents of Derry organized the Italian Civic Association in time to endorse candidates for

¹⁶⁸ “Italian Club Banquet,” Butler Citizen (Butler, PA), 26 January 1915, 5.
¹⁷¹ “Italian Citizens Will Hold Hoover Rally Next Week,” Daily Courier (Connellsville, PA), 23 October 1928, 1.
¹⁷² “Italians Form Organization,” Indiana Evening Gazette (Indiana, PA), 9 August 1921, 1.
the 1931 elections.\footnote{175}{“Italians Have Meeting,” 
_Latrobe Bulletin_ (Latrobe, PA), 2 November 1931, 11.} By August 1932, the Italian-American Citizens Political Club of Monongahela was hosting notable politicians. The group’s bicentennial celebration for George Washington’s birthday, held at the Italian Citizens Club building on Main Street, included two county judges and numerous other politicians and candidates such as Congressman Henry W. Temple and his Democratic rival.\footnote{176}{“County Officials Guests at Bicentennial Program of Italian Political Club,” _Daily Republican_ (Monongahela, PA), 27 August 1932, 1–2.} Other political clubs existed in Swissvale, Canonsburg, Clearfield, Brockway, and Turtle Creek.\footnote{177}{“Mass Meeting Tonight,” _Pittsburgh Press_, 14 April 1932, 6; “Italians Serenade Burgess and Others,” _Daily Notes_ (Canonsburg, PA), 12 April 1915, 1; “Clearfield Italians Indorse Alter,” _Pittsburgh Gazette Times_, 8 May 1922, 2; “Italian American Club,” _Brockway Record_ (Brockway, PA), 4 November 1932, 1; “Teit Elected,” _Pittsburgh Press_, 3 January 1932, east communities news section, 1; “Taxpayers’ Rally in Turtle Creek,” _Pittsburgh Post-Gazette_, 21 February 1933, 13.}

A vibrant network of Italian-American political clubs flourished throughout western Pennsylvania and eastern Ohio. Not every organization operated in the exact mold of Youngstown’s Italian American Political Association, but a significant number adopted similar methods and procedures. They invited and vetted candidates, and members discussed the advantages and qualifications of each person. Organizations sought to reach as many neighbors as possible. Using Italian-American identity as the criterion for membership, the groups mixed people of various classes, community status, and previous political beliefs. Clubs created relationships between each other, putting their leadership in direct contact and encouraging unity across multiple enclaves. The inclusion of all these Italian Americans and their commitment to candidates who professed ideas beneficial to the whole community necessitated adopting a mass ideology.
Bridging the Ideological Divide

An overarching Italian-American identity, along with a belief in American democratic values, helped bridge the leftist-Fascist divide to create a new ideological synthesis. *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* reaffirmed the importance of ethnic solidarity when it responded to conversations about creating a local Fascist organization in 1925. The newspaper reminded readers about the role that the mutual aid societies and the new Italian American Political Association played in advancing their interests. Squabbles regarding Fascism needed to remain in Italy. Instead, those now residing in the United States “should not be fascists, nor antifascists, nor monarchists, nor socialists, at least in public, but only Italians, squeezed together in only one pact of brotherhood and of solidarity, aimed only at the gradual rising of our communities and of our race in general.”\(^{178}\) The primacy of Italian-American advancement allowed people from across the political spectrum concerning leftism and Fascism to mingle and create a new domestic synthesis of ideas applicable to problems in their own lives.

Nowhere was this clearer than in the Italian American Political Association. Rather than restrict membership, the club welcomed those with diverse backgrounds, including participants who openly expressed leftist and Fascist thoughts. The process of merging these disparate people, who stretched across the ideological spectrum between the two extremes, into one bloc willing to support a particular slate of candidates moderated members. Public debate forced them closer to consensus. Those identified by their ideological rivals as antithetical to their own beliefs often found common cause, such as when anti-Fascists agreed that Mussolini was a strong leader and a man of action, and the

\(^{178}\) “Un po’ di buon senso…,” *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, 4 April 1925, 1.
Fascists saw some benefits of leftist economic ideas. These were outspoken people who wrote their opinions in the community press for all to see, so they were not afraid to raise their voices in closed meetings and private conversations. Importantly, these debates, which sometimes turned nasty, did not lead to ostracism. People who disagreed and argued profusely about Fascism and leftism later found themselves together as notable speakers and guests at events, and they concurrently held elected offices in various Italian-American organizations. Those with vastly different views about Mussolini and his system occasionally agreed with their ideological rivals, a clear indication that mixed-group engagement blunted some of the most divergent parts of their opinions.

Innocenzo Vagnozzi, who served as Political Association president in 1926 and 1927, and later as second ward councilman in 1935 and Mayor William B. Spagnola’s water commissioner, was an anti-Fascist leftist. Before his leadership in the Political Association, Vagnozzi was already a notable personality within the local community. He was an official in the Ohio Grand Lodge of the Sons of Italy for the administrative period 1921–1923, and the members of the Loggia Napoleone Colaianni elected him grand delegate for their organization in 1925.\footnote{179} His popularity in the community was partly due to his willingness to denounce prejudice and discrimination, such as in a 1924 open letter in which he announced a desire to debate the Ku Klux Klan about its principles regarding American values.\footnote{180}


Vagnozzi made no secret where he stood on the Fascism issue, and the members of the Political Association certainly knew his ideology before electing him their leader. When Nicolangelo D’Orsi, another member of the Political Association, announced the creation of a new local *fascio* (Fascist group) in Youngstown in late 1924,\(^1\) Vagnozzi responded with a tongue-in-cheek question – “I ask the concerned parties to tell me at least a reason, for which the formation of such association is useful and necessary”\(^2\) – clearly trying to goad D’Orsi into a public debate.\(^3\) During a talk before the Girard Kiwanis club about the history of Italy and the Roman Empire, Vagnozzi argued that “physical force and brutality can never bring about a permanent good and if this world’s problems are to be solved it will be through a theory of union and the practice of universal brotherhood,” a likely allusion, given the timing of the statement, to the Matteotti Crisis in Italy.\(^4\) One 1925 article defending Mussolini specifically targeted Vagnozzi. Arguing that Mussolini’s ascension to power was similar to Napoleon Bonaparte’s in that “the end justifies the means” in the context of saving a nation as a whole, the opinion’s author denounced Vagnozzi’s alternative views. The writer contended that Vagnozzi “was not an exact chronicler” and instead interpreted events through his own prism of ideas.\(^5\) Vagnozzi

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\(^4\) “Member Sons of Italy Talks to Girard Kiwanis,” *Youngstown Vindicator*, 6 August 1924, 4.

responded to the unsigned article that he could not in good conscience dismiss the brutality that accompanied Fascism. While Vagnozzi was certainly an anti-Fascist, he did not lack leftist credentials. When Arturo Calvani visited Youngstown in March 1922 to lecture about Sacco and Vanzetti, an event mentioned in chapter three, the fundraising effort involved Vagnozzi. In 1929, he responded to a local pastor’s speech denouncing Bolshevism by commenting in an open letter: “Inasmuch as most of us are under the impression that Bolshevism has no ideals, I should like to have the Reverend give us a clear idea of that doctrine.” It was an attempt to show the fearmongering by those who used such terms but were ignorant about their meaning. By 1930, some of his adversaries in the Italian-American community were implying that he was a communist. This slander may have been a stretch, but he indeed found commonality with the left. In June 1935, for example, Vagnozzi spoke at a Youth Congress symposium at Youngstown’s Central Auditorium. The group hosted addresses from all sides, including Republican, Democratic, communist, and socialist, which Vagnozzi represented. During his talk, he opposed the profit motive and “urged complete socialization, or public ownership,” based on Christian principles, using the analogy of government-owned city streets being in the public’s interest compared to the alternative of forcing toll payments for usage. Two months later, he spoke in Niles during

189 “Protestiamo!,” Il Cittadino Italo-Americano, 8 February 1930, 1.
an event titled “The Truth About Russia,” appearing alongside union leader C. H. McCarty, who had just returned from a tour of the Soviet Union. The topics covered: “Trade Unions, Social Insurance, Old Age Pensions, Vacations with Pay, Workers Homes and Mothers in Industry.” This perceived radicalism earned him a reputation. A copy of the 1935 Youth Congress speaker list purportedly showing the attitudes of the Youngstown Sheet and Tube Company annotated Vagnozzi’s name with the penciled remark, “one of the most dangerous radicals in Youngstown.”

Innocenzo Vagnozzi’s combative nature concerning Fascism and his open leftist leanings did not stop him from retaining a position of respect within the Italian-American community. Even as he debated others in the ethnic press about Fascism, Vagnozzi served alongside and attended events with more Fascist-friendly individuals, such as fellow Political Association members Ciro Saulino and Alberto Di Tommaso. At times, his activism caused friction. When he remained seated for the Fascist anthem during a 1932 event, Vagnozzi brushed aside criticism about his actions and refused to see them as misconduct. Others questioned whether it was appropriate for a Sons of Italy official (Vagnozzi was Grand Orator) to snub the Italian government. Nevertheless, membership

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191 Advertisement, “The Truth About Russia,” *Niles Standard*, 2 August 1935, 4. Vagnozzi was listed incorrectly as “V. I. Vagnozzi, of Youngstown.” This was a typographical error as the 1935 Youngstown city directory listed no V. I. Vagnozzi. See *Youngstown Official City Directory*, 1935–36, 817.
192 *Violations of Free Speech and Rights of Labor: Hearings before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Education and Labor United States Senate*, 76th Cong. 15962–15963 (1939) (The 1937 “Little Steel” Strike in Youngstown, Ohio, Exhibit 6788).
knew that he was an anti-Fascist, and it had tolerated similar behaviors in past years. When Grand Venerable Saulino asked for Vagnozzi’s resignation, the Grand Orator refused. State-level leaders did not find consensus for his removal.195 Tacit acceptance of Vagnozzi did not change over the years, and in 1940 he spoke alongside the Italian consular representative at a Sons of Italy event.196 The same was true for local politics. Even though he won the position of second ward councilman as a Democrat in 1935, Mayor Lionel Evans, a Republican-endorsed candidate who gained his office in the same election by winning every ward except for Vagnozzi’s second, still allowed the Italian American to serve on the mayor’s 1937 committee on city charter amendments.197 Vagnozzi’s politics never precluded him from operating within the Italian-American community or the American body politic.

Vagnozzi was not an inflexible ideologue. While he occasionally debated some Italian Americans who viewed him as a radical, his engagement with others in the Political Association and ethnic organizations moderated his politics. For example, the point made previously about Vagnozzi being a potential communist came from a response to a speech that he made about Benito Mussolini at the local YMCA in 1930. An open letter signed by over a dozen notable men from the community, including fellow Political Association leader Vincenzo Chianese, denounced the talk and the articles printed about it in the English-language newspapers. Believing that Vagnozzi “discredit[ed] the Italian name,”

196 “Cherish Heritage, Sons of Italy Told,” Cleveland Plain Dealer, 13 May 1940, 11.
they rejected the newspapers’ references to the man as an Italian-American leader because “99 percent [of Italian Americans in Youngstown] are not communists,” and Vagnozzi, therefore, did not speak for them. Signatory Carlo Caselli, editor of *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, offered additional criticism. Vagnozzi espoused “subversive and anti-Catholic doctrines” and undermined the goals of the Sons of Italy to uphold patriotism and Italian brotherhood. Vagnozzi’s actual words, however, were much less inflammatory. While the speaker predicted the eventual fall of Mussolini’s regime because it was “built on false foundations,” he also “admitted the strong qualities of the Italian leader, speaking of him as being the son of a blacksmith, but having the most brilliant mind, fascinating, a penetrating speaker, a magnetic person and irresistible.”

Had Vagnozzi only operated within smaller circles of like-minded individuals, he likely would have developed into an all-out partisan condemning every aspect of Fascism. Instead, his experiences with ethnic organizations, such as the Political Association, filled with diverse views about circulating ideologies, dulled extremes. In this sense, the anti-Fascist, leftist Vagnozzi had learned to appreciate some of Mussolini’s leadership qualities from fellow community members, even as he disagreed with other parts of the regime, such as its brutality.

Nevertheless, for every individual who approached the Political Association from the ideological left, another joined with more friendly perceptions of Fascism. Cesare Amadio, who served as the inaugural second vice president in 1924, was similarly popular

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amongst his peers for his poetry condemning nativism.\textsuperscript{199} However, while Vagnozzi fought against Fascism, Amadio defended the regime. He attended Tresca-associate Luigi Quintiliano’s 1924 lecture in Youngstown. Afterward, he publicly denounced the speaker and most of the attendees – whom he viewed as subversives, anarchists, and socialists – for their negative views about the Fascist state.\textsuperscript{200}

Ciro Saulino, the Political Association’s first treasurer and later Grand Venerable for the Ohio Sons of Italy, had a similar acceptance of Fascism. In 1929, for example, Saulino was one of the guests of honor at a Cleveland Armistice Day celebration alongside Vincenzo Vedovi, president of the Italian War Veterans, and G. T. Romano, the secretary of the Cleveland Fascist organization.\textsuperscript{201} The War Veterans, including the local Cleveland organization and national leader Vedovi in particular, had a long history of working hand-in-hand with Fascists, both domestically and in Rome.\textsuperscript{202} Saulino’s willingness to join such circles of people becomes more apparent in the context of a joke printed in \textit{Il Cittadino Italo-Americano} the previous autumn. Answering the question of why a consular agent had not appeared at the local Columbus Day banquet, the paper responded in jest: “They have


\textsuperscript{202} Gaetano Salvemini, \textit{Italian Fascist Activities in the United States}, ed. Philip V. Cannistraro (New York, NY: Center for Migration Studies, 1977), 118–22. The War Veterans incorporated in the state of New York in June 1929, during which time Vedovi became a member of the board of trustees. Vedovi served as an acting president during the three previous years.
little fondness for Fascism … [and] they feared that Mr. Saulino attending as Venerable of
the Loggia [Napoleone] Colaianni and then consular representative, would have had the
right to double portions – They avoided this for fear of abdominal cramping.”

Local readers knew that Attilio Rosapepe, not Saulino, was their local consular representative,
but in Rosapepe’s absence, Saulino was the next logical person to represent Fascist Italy.

His position as Grand Venerable further endeared him to Fascist circles, and Saulino was
one of the speakers at the 1931 ceremony during which the Italian government conferred a
knighthood on Dr. Giovanni A. Barricelli. Saulino received the same honor shortly
before his death in October 1932, an indication that Italian Fascists deemed his work in the
United States acceptable to the regime.

While many Italian Americans were favorable to Fascism, most were not
particularly devout or fanatical. Affinity appeared more nationalistic than purely
ideological, making those who entered the Political Association as philo-Fascists as
flexible at times as the leftist Vagnozzi. Alberto Di Tommaso, the Political Association’s
secretary or vice secretary at various times, offers a good example. As mentioned in chapter
four, Di Tommaso passed a Fascist-friendly letter sent from a cousin in Italy to the local
Italian-American newspaper in 1924. Di Tommaso’s own path followed Saulino’s rise
in the Sons of Italy closely, first taking over the latter’s position as head of the Loggia
Napoleone Colaianni and then achieving a leadership position within the Ohio Grand

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Lodge as assistant grand venerable.\footnote{208} His commitment to Fascist Italy was sincere enough to obtain him the role of acting consular agent for Youngstown during the late 1930s.\footnote{209}

Di Tommaso was not a fanatical Blackshirt supporter. After Ciro Saulino won the position of Ohio Grand Venerable, Di Tommaso and other Political Association members, including Vagnozzi, Stella, Colla, Petrarca, and Labbruzzo, formed an event committee to celebrate the occasion.\footnote{210} During this December 1929 banquet, which included ex-Grand Venerable Barricelli and Youngstown Mayor Joseph Heffernan among the five hundred guests, an argument erupted concerning the playing of the Fascist anthem.\footnote{211} Di Tommaso, as toastmaster, dismissed calls from a few rowdy, pro-Fascist guests demanding the song. Although his action caused some resentment and accusations of anti-patriotism, he justified his decision by arguing that playing the Fascist hymn was out of place and unacceptable. The band had performed the Royal March, the authentic Italian national anthem, and they had not scheduled the Fascist alternative as part of the program. Rather than concede to a few unruly individuals, he stuck to the purpose of the banquet and respected the ideological diversity of those present.\footnote{212} Di Tommaso’s promotion of Fascism apparently had limits.\footnote{213}

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\item \footnote{210} “Banchetto in Onore del Grande Venerabile O. F. d’I dell’Ohio,” \textit{Il Cittadino Italo-Americano}, 16 November 1929, 1.
\item \footnote{211} “Banchetto in Onore del Grande Venerabile O. F. d’I dell’Ohio,” \textit{Il Cittadino Italo-Americano}, 7 December 1929, 1.
\item \footnote{213} Similarly, in 1935 during the buildup to the Ethiopian War, Di Tommaso reminded a local audience after hearing a pro-war talk by a former Italian First World War captain
\end{itemize}
Fellow Political Association member Raffaele Marcovecchio defended Di Tommaso, and he lent his own nuanced critique of Fascism to those who attacked the toastmaster. True devotees of Mussolini knew that *il Duce* “imposed silence … [on Italians] for the collective good of our homeland.” Marcovecchio reasoned that if Mussolini resorted to such methods to discipline his people, then his followers in the United States should have had no complaints about Di Tommaso demanding silence at an event.

Di Tommaso was not unique, and Carlo Caselli, the editor of *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, also benefited from the moderating effects of community interaction. Although Caselli was not a Political Association leader, he attended its events, was a notable local personality, and interacted with the people described previously. Unlike many Italian immigrants, Caselli arrived in the United States with a formal education in civil that the “speech was given not to antagonize or excite, but to explain the situation so Italians could explain their country’s side of the story.” This response made by Di Tommaso, who by this time was a consular agent, attests to the moderating influence even on those whose job it was to present Fascist Italy positively. See “Asserts Italians Seek Co-operation with Ethiopia,” *Youngstown Vindicator*, 30 September 1935, city edition, 3.

214 Raffaele Marcovecchio was almost certainly R. Marcovecchio, an inaugural leader in the Political Association. No other R. Marcovecchio lived in Youngstown at the time. See *Youngstown Official City Directory*, 1927–28, 979.


216 It is unclear whether Caselli was a member of the Political Association. He was not in a leadership position, nor was he listed as a current dues-paying member like Spagnola. However, considering his interest in politics and role as an editor of a newspaper that frequently commented about the Political Association, it is not unreasonable to believe that Caselli may have forgotten to renew his membership on time. He attended Political Association events, including the 1930 and 1931 annual picnics. In fact, Caselli introduced the speakers during the 1930 event. See “Il Club Politico,” *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, 29 December 1928, 2; “7,000 Italians at Picnic,” *Youngstown Vindicator*, 21 July 1930, city edition, 7; “La Festa della Politica Asso.,” *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, 5 September 1931, 1.
engineering from the University of Naples.\textsuperscript{217} He was more interested in literature and journalism than in numbers, and he found employment at Matilde Serao’s \textit{Il Giorno} from 1907 to 1910. Additionally, from 1908 to 1910, he worked for a humor publication through which he befriended many notable Neapolitan artists, such as Libero Bovio. After a stint in the civil engineering department of the Ministry of Public Works in Calabria, Caselli immigrated to the United States for personal reasons, or in his words, because of “some errors of [the] female type.”\textsuperscript{218}

Caselli initially worked as a New York City journalist before going to Youngstown.\textsuperscript{219} He was associated with \textit{Il Cittadino Italo-Americano} as an editor and humor columnist off-and-on from at least 1920 until October 1931, when the paper removed his name from the masthead.\textsuperscript{220} Financial trouble due to the Great Depression was the most likely reason for his exit. Staff had reduced the paper to four pages by this time, and no new editor appeared alongside owner-publisher Celestino Petrarca’s name.\textsuperscript{221} The editor’s departure was likely a mutual decision because he contributed a poem and a letter that expressed positive sentiments toward Petrarca the following year for the newspaper’s

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\textsuperscript{217} “Carlo Caselli, East High Teacher of Italian, Dies,” \textit{Youngstown Vindicator}, 10 November 1937, 6.
\textsuperscript{219} “Carlo Caselli, East High Teacher of Italian, Dies,” \textit{Youngstown Vindicator}, 10 November 1937, 6.
\textsuperscript{221} Masthead, \textit{Il Cittadino Italo-Americano}, 10 October 1931, 2.
\end{flushleft}
thirtieth anniversary. Caselli was also a representative for Cleveland’s *La Voce del Popolo*, servicing the Youngstown area and parts of Pennsylvania and West Virginia when the paper became a daily. The Italian government honored his work as a high school Italian-language teacher in 1935.

Like other Political Association members, Caselli ingratiated himself with the Italian-American community. He became an officer in the Duca degli Abruzzi society during the mid-1920s. Caselli served as the banquet master of ceremonies when the organization merged with the Cristoforo Colombo lodge in December 1930, and he was elected president of the combined Duca degli Abruzzi-Colombo society in 1932 and 1933. In 1932, he chaired the speeches portion of the local Columbus Day celebration, and he was elected an honorary chairman of the local Italian veterans organization’s parade alongside his sometimes rivals William B. Spagnola and Innocenzo Vagnozzi.

Ideologically, Carlo Caselli presented himself as a pro-Fascist. In fact, it was Caselli who often targeted and denounced Vagnozzi’s anti-Fascist views in the newspaper.

223 “La Voce del Popolo di Cleveland Ohio,” *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, 16 September 1922, 6. This was most likely *La Voce del Popolo Italiano*.
When Vagnozzi questioned the above-described unsigned 1925 pro-Mussolini article that attacked him, Caselli took credit. He derisively responded that it was him – a forty-three-year-old short Neapolitan with graying hair and a big nose – and reminded readers that Vagnozzi forgot to list the good aspects of Fascism, including the growing prestige of the nation. Caselli was also a signatory to the letter slandering Vagnozzi as a communist after the latter’s 1930 YMCA speech criticizing Mussolini. He included an additional self-penned denunciation of Vagnozzi’s “subversive and anti-Catholic doctrines.” Others also faced the editor’s wrath. Caselli forcefully denounced Di Tommaso for rejecting the impromptu playing of the Fascist hymn during the 1929 banquet controversy. Enrico Di Iorio, a physician and Political Association member, suggested that the editor was too excitable. He believed that Caselli lacked professionalism and should have been “impartial and calm in his comments” for the good of the community.

Notwithstanding such critique, Caselli moderated his commitment to Fascism, similar to others. While defending Mussolini in 1925, Caselli followed a similar interpretational trend, as noted in the previous chapter. He refused to offer any excuse for the violent elements of the Fascist Party that assassinated Giacomo Matteotti, calling them “fanatics” and “maniacs.” However, Mussolini and his strong leadership were necessary to

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solve Italian problems.\textsuperscript{232} Furthermore, the editor talked like a leftist at times. He conveyed notions of working-class grievances about capitalists wrongfully exploiting honest laborers.\textsuperscript{233} He even defended the Soviet Union for its industrialization program, remarking that the communist government benefited workers and Russian economic successes impressed even Wall Street capitalists.\textsuperscript{234}

Differing allegiances concerning Fascism and leftism did not stop these people from working together on domestic political issues and supporting consensus candidates. During the 1925 newspaper tussle between Caselli and Vagnozzi concerning Fascism, William B. Spagnola entered the fray to defend Vagnozzi and declare that Caselli and other Italian-American newspaper editors were too defensive and reverent of Mussolini.\textsuperscript{235} Nevertheless, Caselli praised Spagnola’s legal work only months later concerning Antonio Martini, a sixteen-year-old from Girard whom Earl Stambaugh had shot for stealing cherries from his garden. Caselli condemned Stambaugh’s actions as “summary justice” unwarranted against a hungry boy who had meant no harm. When the jury acquitted Stambaugh, which according to Caselli was because of prejudice, the editor asked the community to provide financial support to Spagnola and fellow lawyer J. Julius to continue their work on Martini’s behalf.\textsuperscript{236} Likewise, Caselli was the Italian-language speaker when Spagnola chaired a pro-Al Smith meeting in October 1928 for Italian Americans living in

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item [\textsuperscript{232}] Carlo Caselli, “Quello che pensiamo noi,” \textit{Il Cittadino Italo-Americano}, 31 October 1925, 1.
\item [\textsuperscript{233}] C. C., “Si Specula Sulla Necessita’,” \textit{Il Cittadino Italo-Americano}, 4 April 1931, 3.
\item [\textsuperscript{234}] C. C., “Programma e Non Colore,” \textit{Il Cittadino Italo-Americano}, 25 April 1931, 1.
\item [\textsuperscript{236}] Carlo Caselli, “Alla Colonia Italiana,” \textit{Il Cittadino Italo-Americano}, 27 March 1926, 1.
\end{itemize}
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the Brier Hill neighborhood. Those who found themselves disagreeing about Fascism put aside differences to cooperate on mutual Italian-American domestic interests.

A political club was a nexus for the creation of a popular ideology. Members who held vastly different beliefs about developments in Italy and leftist politics joined one organization and remained active in that group despite their disagreements. They valued ethnic advancement in the United States, and they overlooked each other’s personal opinions. The nature of debate and discussion about candidates and domestic politics created a merger of disparate beliefs. Where they found commonality, ideas strengthened each other to form a new Italian-American ideology. From this foundation, the community awaited a leader willing to break the conservative paradigm and offer an alternative vision for the United States that aligned with the new ideological synthesis.

Chapter Six

The Coalescence of the Coalition

Italian Americans Discover Democratic Allies

In December 1933, the Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Italian-American newspaper Unione made its partisan position clear to readers: “We align ourselves politically on the side of the new democracy, the party of [Franklin] Roosevelt and the ‘New Deal.’” The announcement was optimistic about the place of Unione “as crusaders” for this cause because the news staff had “confidence in the sincerity of this leader and his party.” However, the paper also made it clear that this support was conditional: “If we lose that confidence, we shall abandon our loyalty.”1 About a month later, Unione reaffirmed its commitment to the New Deal. Proclaiming that “President Roosevelt has risen to the expectations of the people,” the newspaper remarked that while so much had been accomplished in only ten months of the new administration, there was still much work remaining. Congress needed to put aside “politics, personal ambitions, [and] animosities” to continue relief plans for Americans. For its role, Unione sought to spread Roosevelt’s New Deal ideology, a “philosophy … of economic cooperation … [in which] industry,

1 “A New Deal for ‘Unione,’” Unione (Pittsburgh, PA), 1 December 1933, 1. See also “Nuova Vita per l’‘Unione,’” Unione, 1 December 1933, 1.
business, capital, labor, cease to be independent branches of human endeavor, and they become sectors in a coordinated whole.”

*Unione*’s shift toward supporting the New Deal marked a significant political realignment based on the emergence and triumph of a new ideology that reshaped the paradigm. After a decade of pro-business, conservative presidential administrations and Congresses, the New Deal reinterpreted the place of government in the economy and people’s lives. It revived and enlarged the Progressive era’s fervor for business and financial regulations. It then continued by widening the scope of government to include massive employment programs, federal investments in public works, social safety net provisions, and protections for workers.

From a partisan party perspective, *Unione*’s endorsement was a clean break from past allegiances. The newspaper had been Republican, and it even supported Herbert Hoover for reelection in 1932. However, this commitment is ideologically misleading. A deeper look at *Unione*’s positions foreshadowed realignment. The newspaper justified its pro-Hoover stance not by defending laissez-faire capitalism; instead, the Republican leader was the victim of an economic depression that would have ruined any president and “Hoover recognized … that there is much to perfect and change in the mechanisms of the economic, legislative and financial systems of the country.” *Unione* repeated remarks from Italian-American newspapers in Boston and New York state that the Republican Party’s new platform coupled with Hoover’s reelection would revive the economy. The Pittsburgh

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2 “We Salute You,” *Unione*, 5 January 1934, 1.
4 “Sotto la stessa Bandiera,” *Unione*, 4 November 1932, 1.
source included those party planks as evidence, many of which – protecting bank deposits, more funding for public works projects, aid to the states for their unemployment programs, and allowing individual states to decide their Prohibition laws – later became hallmarks of the New Deal.\(^5\) As the newspaper explained after Hoover’s resounding defeat, the 1932 presidential election was a protest vote against a Republican Party that had failed over the previous decade.\(^6\) In this sense, *Unione* and its readers were searching for a party with a program that resembled the New Deal, not conservative economics and limited government. What people did not realize in 1932 was that Franklin Roosevelt would champion Italian-American political desires throughout his presidency.

Italian Americans became New Deal Democrats because Franklin Roosevelt and his party appropriated the ethnic group’s political ideology that it had developed over the previous decade. In this project’s introduction, Angelo Di Renzo, editor of Youngstown’s *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, laid out a future vision for the United States. Seeking to address unemployment and the unequal distribution of wealth, he listed multiple recommendations, including a strong industrial union movement, new government social safety net programs, and more public works projects.\(^7\) In sum, Di Renzo advocated for a strong, intercessional federal government. Once the New Deal shifted American governance toward a parallel model, Italian Americans offered their firm support.

The Great Depression hastened and crystalized change rather than caused a reevaluation in Italian-American beliefs. The Wall Street stock market crash of 1929 and


subsequent economic depression collapsed two barriers that worked in tandem to
discourage Italian-American political engagement: voter suppression and a lack of
appealing candidates. From large cities to small towns, entrenched politicians and their
business allies relied on fear to keep many in-line. As shown in chapter five, Italian
Americans spent the 1920s organizing into political clubs. They formed potential voter
blocs, but these organizations did not eliminate risk. During a time when most candidate
choices were within the same economically conservative paradigm, rejecting the political
status quo was not worth the potential punishment, which included job loss and
blacklisting. Economic collapse and mass unemployment made these methods moot.

The failure of national politics to address Italian-American concerns encouraged
apathy. Before Roosevelt, grievance, rather than optimism, motivated voters’ decisions.
Italian Americans who went to the polls most often did so to vote against the inferior
candidate. Even during the 1928 election, usually viewed as a precursor to the realignment
of the 1930s, Italian-American newspapers spent much of their space defending Al Smith’s
identity rather than expressing optimism about his ideology and plans. Supporting the
working-class-raised, Irish-Catholic Smith was a protest of ethnic discrimination and big-
business dominance in America. This negative motivation, a repudiation of Republican
failures rather than a vote of confidence in a Democratic platform, continued during the
1932 election.

As Unione made clear, these sentiments changed in 1933 because Franklin
Roosevelt addressed issues vital to the community. The New Deal fused together attributes
of civic nationalism, leftism, and Fascism as described in the previous chapters. Rather
than converting Italian Americans to a new philosophy, Roosevelt’s New Deal merged
onto the road in which Italian Americans were already traveling; his program put their percolating ideas into practice. First, the reemerged Democratic Party answered criticism about citizenship rights. The New Deal opened the door to white-ethnic political engagement because it was responsive to the democratic majority and encouraged the rise of Italian-American politicians. Second, the New Deal governed using an activist model that borrowed from Fascism while addressing leftist grievances. An empowered national leader in the model of Benito Mussolini spurred the federal government toward economic interventionism, and the National Recovery Administration (NRA) became a domestic interpretation of Italian corporatism. The Second New Deal further solidified Italian-American support because it solved the NRA’s failure to raise labor to coequality with capital. New acts after 1935 gave the federal government more authority to intercede. The labor provisions promised by the NRA, such as maximum working hours and unionization, continued as stronger, more enforceable laws.

**The Catalyst of the Great Depression**

The Great Depression was a catalyst, but less for ideological change and more for finally collapsing the obstacles blocking Italian-American electoral potential. As noted in chapter one, many Italian Americans lived a precarious economic existence throughout the 1920s. The Depression of 1920–1921 hurt many in the community. Employment opportunities increased by mid-decade, but many still lacked financial stability. The unskilled labored for poor wages in the coal and steel industries. Pick and shovel laborers and skilled construction tradesmen often experienced seasonal downtime when winter curtailed activity. Upwardly mobile businessmen and professionals succeeded or failed alongside the Italian-American clientele that they served.
The Great Depression amplified this financial instability. Between 1929 and 1933, American gross national product fell by half. The iron and steel industry operated at only forty percent of its pre-depression output, a rate detrimental for a region centered around heavy industry.\footnote{David M. Kennedy, Freedom from Fear, Part I: The American People in the Great Depression (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004), 163.} Job loss skyrocketed. In January 1931, one in three Italian Americans in Pittsburgh were unemployed.\footnote{Stefano Luconi, Little Italies e New Deal: la coalizione rooseveltiana e il voto italo-americano a Filadelfia e Pittsburgh (Milan, Italy: FrancoAngeli, 2002), 99.} Even this statistic was misleading. In addition to those without work, a comparatively large group of people experienced reduced hours. Governor Gifford Pinchot reported in 1932 that only two-fifths of workers in Pennsylvania had full-time employment.\footnote{Kennedy, Freedom from Fear, Part I, 166.} Economic considerations had shaped Italian-American political ideology throughout the 1920s. However, the scope of the Great Depression brought more urgency to the matter and allowed for the rapid deterioration of barriers that previously hindered Italian Americans from fully voicing their views at the ballot box.

As explained in chapter two, Italian Americans increasingly believed that civic engagement offered them political agency in the abstract. Nevertheless, a variety of factors before the New Deal generally kept them from realizing their potential. While they theoretically were free to vote as they wished, formal and informal means of voter suppression lessened the power of the nascent voting bloc. Economic pressures, including poll taxes in Pennsylvania, the fear of job loss by the political machine or employer, and potential blacklisting, kept many in-line. When they were free to choose, the options presented to them often did not fit their ideological preferences, forcing a vote between two unfavorable choices. Italian Americans understood the potential power of political
agency, but they concurrently experienced disillusionment with the system before the New Deal. The political clubs described in chapter five sought to change this, but even their leadership admitted occasional frustration in candidates who voiced their concerns about the voters during election season and then disregarded them for the remainder of the year. People sought politicians who fit their own ideology, but they were few. The entrance of Italian Americans into the New Deal coalition occurred because barriers began to collapse, which turned disillusionment into cautious optimism.

The first prerequisite to Italian-American political engagement was citizenship and voter registration. Only once a large enough electorate existed did the voting bloc have the ability to influence elections. The ethnic press ran consistent reminders to register and vote, and these were often detailed and sometimes included specific reasoning why citizens needed to express their rights.\(^\text{11}\) This drive had some impact. Il Cittadino Italo-Americano celebrated the extraordinary numbers who registered in 1928, including in “neighborhoods where the foreign element [was] plentiful.”\(^\text{12}\) However, even though political engagement increased, numerous barriers still existed that blunted the full power of the Italian-American electorate.

One potential obstacle was the poll tax, which existed in Pennsylvania until residents voted to amend the state constitution in 1933.\(^\text{13}\) According to Joseph Guffey, later

\(^{11}\) “Registratevi,” La Voce del Popolo Italiano (Cleveland, OH), 16 October 1920, 1; “Registratevi,” La Voce del Popolo Italiano, 15 October 1921, 1; V. D., “Registrazione,” Il Cittadino Italo-Americano, 29 August 1925, 5–6; “I Giorni di Registrazione,” Il Cittadino Italo-Americano, 2 October 1926, 2; “Italiani Registratevi Pel Vostro Bene,” Il Cittadino Italo-Americano, 6 August 1932, 1; “Registrazione,” Il Cittadino Italo-Americano, 1 October 1932, 1.

\(^{12}\) “Esercitiamo il nostro diritto,” Il Cittadino Italo-Americano, 6 October 1928, 1.

a Democratic senator from Pennsylvania, the abuses of the system astonished him. Pittsburgh required either a property tax receipt or a fifty-cent poll tax payment before voting. Poor voters could not meet the requirements, and the law prohibited political parties from paying these taxes. Instead, Guffey discovered men “aging” blank tax receipts, dancing on them so that they appeared used. Democrats and Republicans commonly distributed aged receipts to ward leaders for their loyal voters.14 Such fraud fit the model used by political bosses in Pittsburgh and Philadelphia who desired a low turnout of the masses and high engagement from select groups that they controlled.15 Ethnic newspapers reminded Italian Americans of the tax requirement before elections, but there was a feeling of hypocrisy since the United States was supposedly a democratic society.16 As one man wrote, Americans compared Fascist Italy unfavorably to “America’s ‘free’ institutions, ‘free’ country, ‘free’ press and ‘free’ everything else,” but this was an illusion because “even voting in this ‘free’ country cost ‘half-a-buck.'”17

In 1933, John R. Napoleon, writing in Unione, scolded those who waited: “People who continually neglect to pay their Poll Tax until the last minute are not very good citizens. They must not have the interest of their government at heart.” However, while

arguing that “the obtaining of your tax receipt also displays your civic pride,” Napoleon admitted that “it is true, of course, that some people are not in the position to pay their taxes.”¹⁸ The writer was optimistic in his assessment. Others noted the potential negative impact that the poll tax had on poorer voters.¹⁹ Even Republican allies admitted before the 1932 election that the tax would help Hoover by suppressing turnout among the unemployed who would have voted against the sitting president in protest.²⁰ Although it is difficult to quantify the effect of the poll tax on Italian Americans, it is worth noting that only 29 percent of Pennsylvania’s population voted in 1932, which compared unfavorably to the neighboring states of Ohio (39 percent), New Jersey (39 percent), and New York (37 percent). Turnout increased significantly in 1936, after the end of the tax requirements for voting.²¹ For the working class, which included many Italian Americans who lacked property, paying an additional tax for the privilege to choose between often subpar candidates was not an appealing option.

Various forms of voter suppression caused Italian Americans to reconsider their ballot choices or avoid the polls altogether. Intimidation and vote stealing were common

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¹⁸ John R. Napoleon, “Hurry It’s Getting Late,” Unione, 25 August 1933, 8.
²¹ Poll Taxes: Hearings before a Subcommittee of the Committee on the Judiciary of the United States Senate on S. 1280, 77th Cong. 286–287 (1941–1942) (Statement of Henry H. Collins, Jr., Bryn Mawr, Pa., Exhibit 10). The numbers of the four states in 1936 were as follows: Pennsylvania (41%), Ohio (45%), New Jersey (42%), and New York (43%).
in Italian-American neighborhoods.\textsuperscript{22} For example, in Cleveland’s Little Italy, located in the nineteenth ward, voting in 1928 was not without controversy. As urban political power in metropolises such as Cleveland depended on the ability of the machine bosses to deliver the vote, the potential of the Italian-American electorate caught their attention. A peaceful yet unethical attempt to transfer the Italian-American precincts of the nineteenth ward to the twenty-fifth ward to dilute the group’s power had already failed during the 1921 redistricting.\textsuperscript{23} In November 1928, political partisans turned to more violent means to upset free voting. During one Republican rally at the Mayfield Theater attended by local political boss Maurice Maschke, a tear gas bomb – supposedly set by Democrats who warned Maschke and others not to campaign in the district – disrupted the gathering. Although no one was hurt, the bomb, which “let go with a sound like a bursting automobile tire,” forced a temporary evacuation while organizers cleared the fumes.\textsuperscript{24} On election day, Maschke demanded police protection for the ward after telling the board of elections that “hired gunmen are planning to steal the election for the Democrats … [and] these gunmen have gone into election booths and are intimidating the voters.” A reporter at the scene “found a highly charged atmosphere” with various irregularities. People illegally campaigned within one hundred feet of the polls, and others lounged nearby with “their hands sunk


\textsuperscript{23} “Foresee Norwood as U.S. Marshal,” \textit{Cleveland Plain Dealer} (Cleveland, OH), 19 July 1921, all Ohio edition, 10.

\textsuperscript{24} “Tear Bomb Fails to Rout Maschke,” \textit{Cleveland Plain Dealer}, 5 November 1928, 1.
deep in their pockets and eyeing all [campaign] banners.” Unnamed people cryptically told electors entering the polling station to “vote right.”

These allegedly Democratic threats cannot be validated with certainty as Maschke had a history of unethical practices. After having first come to power in 1909 for his role in defeating reformist Mayor Tom L. Johnson, Maschke consolidated his power during the 1920s by subverting the city-manager plan (which ironically had sought to lessen the influence of machine politics), including an agreement with the Democratic leader to split patronage sixty-forty in Republican favor. Only two days after the controversy in the nineteenth ward, the Akron Beacon Journal’s editorial section denounced Maschke as “the evil genius of Ohio Republican politics” who could steal votes “with a reckless shamelessness that put to blush the notorious ballot thefts of Cincinnati.” However, he was too intelligent and clever to be linked personally to the actions of his henchmen. On some accounts, the Beacon Journal was correct. Although the public heard reports of voter fraud during the August primaries by the November 1928 general election (the Ohio secretary of state had dismissed the entire Cuyahoga County Board of Elections as a response), the following months provided more clarity. According to Edward C. Turner, who by this time was the former Ohio attorney general for about a month, “Maschke’s influence was

25 “Maschke Calls on Board to Stop Gunmen in 19th,” Cleveland Plain Dealer, 7 November 1928, 3.
so potent in the Nineteenth Ward that, with the exception of Senator [Theodore E.] Burton and a part of the legislative ticket, all the cheating, stealing and ballot box stuffing which we found in that ward was done for Mr. Maschke’s slate of candidates.” This included “more than 470 erasures of X marks” on ballots from precinct G, a heavily Italian-American section. The fact that Democrats believed they had a good chance at winning the ward, while the final count provided a two-to-one victory for Hoover, further suggests interference.

Maschke’s power declined after 1928, but he remained Republican county chairman until 1933, including through a notorious embezzlement trial that ended with an acquittal ruling by a three-judge panel in 1932. Whether or not the Democrats were really to blame for voter intimidation, as Maschke claimed, is not the issue; the actual significance of these events in the nineteenth ward is that they threatened citizens and undermined fair elections. These methods scared potential voters into staying home, convinced them to vote against their interests, or even changed their votes after they had cast them. Italian Americans were not free to vote as they wished until the collapse of the political machine.

Italian Americans living outside Cleveland’s nineteenth ward also faced intimidation, unfair practices, and possible repercussions that undermined fair elections. In 1927, Il Cittadino Italo-Americano reported that three Italian-American men physically

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30 Ralph J. Donaldson, “Hoover Has Landslide in County, Chance in City,” Cleveland Plain Dealer, 7 November 1928, 1, 12.
assaulted Celestino Petrarca, the newspaper’s director and a noted member of Youngstown’s Italian American Political Association. The attack was without provocation, and Il Cittadino’s only theory was that the men were upset about the previous month’s election in which Petrarca strongly supported Democrat Joseph Heffernan in the mayoral race.32 The following year, while Cleveland experienced significant fraud, the board of elections in Youngstown dealt with numerous improprieties. Although the Youngstown Vindicator reported “very little trouble” considering the high turnout, there were still accounts of some polling places opening early or late and many complaints regarding anonymity. The ballots had attached stubs with registration numbers, which poll workers were to remove and collect separately to ensure a secret vote. Some neglected to do this, requiring intervention by election officials.33 This failure to follow procedures may have been accidental, but any loss of secrecy played into fears. As resident Nicola Criscione explained years later in an interview, “in the olden days you voted as your bosses and your superintendent or your owner said,” and failure to adhere meant losing one’s job.34 The risk of rejecting the endorsed candidate was too high if the employer discovered the vote. As Criscione continued, elites found other ways to rig the elections. In one case, an Italian-American candidate running for city council lost by a slim margin. A group of Italian-American railroad workers had planned to vote for the man after their shift. On their way to the polls, a “wreck whistle” sounded, informing them that there had been an accident in

33 Ernest N. Nemenyi, “Half of Vote Already Is In,” Youngstown Vindicator, 6 November 1928, 1, 4.
34 Nicola Criscione, interview by William Jenkins, transcript, 8 May 1984, 10, Youngstown State University Oral History Program: Ku Klux Klan Project: Personal Experiences, O. H. 311, Maag Library, Youngstown State University, Youngstown, OH.
the yard and all employees needed to return immediately. There was no train wreck, and
Criscione believed someone might have sounded the alarm intentionally to keep the
candidate from winning.\textsuperscript{35}

Employers pressured workers to vote for pro-business Republican candidates
throughout western Pennsylvania. While occupational diversity gave some Italian
Americans in Pittsburgh the opportunity to break away and vote for Al Smith in 1928, this
was impossible in many small communities dominated by one industry. Bosses in company
towns, such as Vandergrift, home of the American Sheet and Tin Plate Company, and
Windber and Carrolltown, built around coal mining interests, threatened to fire Italian-
American workers if they refused to vote for the approved candidates.\textsuperscript{36} Pro-Republican
company foremen kept Indiana County red until 1934.\textsuperscript{37}

Political repression was especially harsh in Aliquippa, where the Jones and
Laughlin Steel Corporation (J&L Steel) controlled the local government tightly. To retain
employment at the mill, workers had to vote Republican.\textsuperscript{38} As one man claimed, they lived
“under the domination of the Republican Party” and were fearful about speaking out since
the company had informants and worked hand-in-hand with the police.\textsuperscript{39} Residents

\textsuperscript{35} Criscione, 14–15.
\textsuperscript{36} Luconi, “Testing the ‘Smith Revolution’ Among Italian American Voters in
Pennsylvania,” 29–32; Stefano Luconi, “Oral Histories of Italian Americans in the Great
Depression: The Politics and Economics of the Crisis,” in \textit{Oral History, Oral Culture,
and Italian Americans}, ed. Luisa Del Giudice (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan,
2009), 32–33.
\textsuperscript{37} Stefano Luconi, “The Immigrant Editor as Ethnic Political Broker: Francesco Biamonte
and the Italian American Community in Indiana County, Pennsylvania,” \textit{Italian
\textsuperscript{38} Lisa McGirr, \textit{The War on Alcohol: Prohibition and the Rise of the American State}
\textsuperscript{39} Dominic Del Turco, interview by unknown, transcript, n.d., 14, box 2, folder 45,
Beaver Valley Labor History Society Collection, 1909–1981, AIS.1981.08, Archives &

recounted stories of intimidation and punishment before the fall of the political machine. Rumors claimed that the local high school football coach lost his job and was forced to leave town after running for tax collector as a Democrat in 1924. Bert Iacobucci remembered that authorities also arrested a barber named Joe Rossetti for campaigning for Al Smith in 1928. Ormond Montini likely remembered the same man, only in his telling Rossetti was not a barber but a fired J&L Steel employee who ran a nightclub and sought to start a Democratic Party organization in Aliquippa. When unknown people destroyed his club, locals suspected it was another attempt to force Rossetti to leave town. During the 1932 election, Iacobucci’s brother Caesar and another man, Giulio, rented a donkey, the symbol of the Democratic Party, to parade down Franklin Avenue, the main thoroughfare, a clever snub to the Republican establishment. J&L Steel blacklisted both men.

It was only after this intimidation began to collapse that people were able to express their politics freely. The Great Depression and the arrival of the New Deal struck down

Special Collections, University of Pittsburgh. The finding aid listed his name as Dominic Del Turco, while the transcript spelled it Domenic DelTurco. For consistency, the finding aid spelling is used. Bert Iacobucci, interview by unknown, transcript, 23 October 1979, 33, box 2, folder 49, Beaver Valley Labor History Society Collection, 1909–1981, AIS.1981.08, Archives & Special Collections, University of Pittsburgh; Bert Iacobucci, interview by unknown, transcript, 5 December 1979, 18, box 2, folder 49, Beaver Valley Labor History Society Collection, 1909–1981, AIS.1981.08, Archives & Special Collections, University of Pittsburgh. Ormond Montini, interview by unknown, transcript, 2 August 1978, 7–8, box 2, folder 55, Beaver Valley Labor History Society Collection, 1909–1981, AIS.1981.08, Archives & Special Collections, University of Pittsburgh. In Montini’s transcript, the spelling of the name is Russetti, not Rossetti. This discrepancy was most likely because of transcription from the audiotape. Bert Iacobucci, interview, 23 October 1979, 34–36.
barriers erected by political machines, and Italian Americans voiced their true opinions as fear subsided. As Montini implied in his interview, the movement to support the Democrats started around 1928 with Al Smith, but it did not take off because of the repression. Only those not employed by the company risked being political in public. This was why people like Aliquippa’s barbers were the most active concerning political causes. As independent businessmen, an employer could not extort them for votes.

The Great Depression lessened the fear of J&L Steel since blacklisting no longer carried much weight during a time of mass unemployment. Tony Riccitelli, who got a position in the tube mill in 1929, used his jobless status during the 1932 election as an opportunity to reject Republican candidates. He was only twenty years old, but he convinced a local Republican to vouch for him as the man assumed that Riccitelli planned to vote Republican. Barriers to registration collapsed when the local political machine thought it was in its interest. But as Riccitelli made clear, the shift to overtly supporting Roosevelt took several years because those still employed in 1932 refused to risk their jobs.

A lack of candidates fitting the desired Italian-American political ideology strengthened apathy. Supporting a mediocre nominee as a protest was not a valid justification to risk one’s livelihood. Nino Colonna was another underage Aliquippa resident whom J&L Steel registered to vote for the company’s approved ticket in 1929. With no suitable choices on a pro-business Republican ballot, he wrote in curse words

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44 Montini, interview, 30–31.
45 Iacobucci, interview, 23 October 1979, 51.
46 Tony Riccitelli, interview by unknown, transcript, 9 November 1978, 2–3, 6–9, box 2, folder 56, Beaver Valley Labor History Society Collection, 1909–1981, AIS.1981.08, Archives & Special Collections, University of Pittsburgh.
rather than capitulate. Others whose families depended on their employment lacked Colonna’s youthful militancy. Risking a job to snub the Republican establishment without a viable political alternative was not an attractive option. The potential repercussions were too high to risk making a statement.

However, the years prior to the New Deal were not a time of complete political inaction. When a viable, acceptable candidate stood for election, many Italian Americans crossed these barriers and offered support. Returning to Joseph Heffernan’s election to mayor of Youngstown in 1927, a victory that may have been the reason for the assault on Celestino Petrarca, the candidate had widespread Italian-American support. He received endorsements from the Italian American Political Association and a group of Italian-American Catholic women. After his narrow win by a few hundred votes, Il Cittadino Italo-Americano asserted that the mayor-elect’s “victory was undoubtedly a real victory of the people” as he was a man not beholden to business or Protestant religious crusaders, and he cared about and respected lesser groups like the Italian Americans.

Heffernan fit many attributes sought by Italian-American voters. Having spent much of his youth traveling the United States, he had working-class credentials, including jobs in a local steel mill, as a cook on an Ohio River steamboat, as a rivet heater in an

47 Nino Colonna, interview by unknown, transcript, 9 October 1979, 6–7, box 2, folder 43, Beaver Valley Labor History Society Collection, 1909–1981, AIS.1981.08, Archives & Special Collections, University of Pittsburgh.
49 “I Risultati Completi delle Elezioni della Città di Youngstown,” Il Cittadino Italo-Americano, 12 November 1927, 2. Heffernan defeated his nearest opponent 14,369 to 14,026 with over 36,000 votes cast to all mayoral candidates.
Oklahoma oil field, and as a hotel clerk in California. Heffernan spoke the language of working-class grievance. While campaigning for Al Smith in 1928, he described the United States as a struggle between democracy and the people against capitalists and their greed. Republicans failed to help workers, and while the entire party may not have been “thieves,” far too many found a home under its banner. During his previous tenure on the municipal court, Heffernan ruled fairly and earned the affectionate titles of “Judge Joe” and the “Humane Judge.” Concerning Prohibition, he applied the law based on class and intent, punishing commercial bootleggers while imposing only small fines against the poor for possessing “a small bottle of liquor, or homemade wine.” As mayor, he temporarily suspended an overly aggressive vice agent. He brought William B. Spagnola into his administration as a third assistant law director, a sign of respect for the Italian-American community. After improprieties arose concerning wrongfully paid vacations for the city water department employees, Heffernan dismissed the water commissioner, an act that viewed as protecting the larger public of poor taxpayers. He became associated with notable local public works, including a grade elimination project

51 George M. DePetit, “Why Judge Heffernan Is a Real Judge” (election handbill, n.d.), box 1, folder 8, Joseph L. Heffernan Papers, 1922–1940, RG 77/7, Archives & Special Collections, William F. Maag, Jr. Library, Youngstown State University, Youngstown, OH.
52 “Un discorso politico dal nostro Sindaco all’East Side,” Il Cittadino Italo-Americano, 1 September 1928, 1.
53 DePetit, “Why Judge Heffernan Is a Real Judge.”
54 Joseph L. Heffernan to Vic Donahey, letter, 23 August 1925, box 1, folder 4, Joseph L. Heffernan Papers, 1922–1940, RG 77/7, Archives & Special Collections, William F. Maag, Jr. Library, Youngstown State University, Youngstown, OH.
57 “Il Sindaco ha fatto bene,” Il Cittadino Italo-Americano, 15 September 1928, 1.
to build bridges over railroad tracks north of the central business district and the opening
of a new park in the Italian-American enclave of Brier Hill. Finally, Heffernan had an
independent streak and was willing to break from the local party apparatus when
necessary. Many of these attributes – community respect, acknowledgment of working-
class issues, and emphasizing policies and projects that would help their lives – were
political positions that Italian Americans sought over the decade before the New Deal.

Heffernan himself acknowledged this new base of voters. In an interview toward
the end of his life, he believed “that we at Youngstown formed in 1927, a coalition which,
on a small scale, was a prototype of the national coalition formed by Roosevelt in the
campaign of 1932.” Furthermore, he was adamant that he “could not have been elected
without strong support by them,” the white ethnics, including Italian, Czechoslovakian,
and Jewish Americans. Heffernan inspired disillusioned Italian Americans, proving that
once someone with the proper credentials and ideology arose, then that candidate could
enroll the group into a new political base.

**New Deal Realignment**

Most scholars assert that the 1928 Herbert Hoover-Al Smith election was the
beginning of a political realignment that ended with white ethnics, including the Italian

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Lavoro del Passaggio a Livello a Youngstown,” *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, 20 October
September 1928, 2.
59 “Mayor Denies Bolting Party,” *Youngstown Vindicator*, 1 September 1928, 1–2; “Dopo
60 Joseph L. Heffernan, interview by Hugh G. Earnhart, transcript, 2 May 1974, 22,
Youngstown State University Oral History Program: Mayors Project: Political
Experience, O. H. 4, Maag Library, Youngstown State University, Youngstown, OH.
61 Heffernan, 76–77. See 79–22, 76–80 for Heffernan’s description of this coalition,
which also included African Americans.
Americans, firmly in the New Deal camp of the Democratic Party. Samuel Lubell famously wrote in The Future of American Politics that “before the Roosevelt Revolution there was an Al Smith Revolution.”

Smith, not Roosevelt, began the reordering of the party coalitions that ushered in two decades of Democratic presidential power. Subsequent political scientists have repeated Lubell’s thesis that some realignment toward a New Deal coalition began before Roosevelt. The assertion that realignment started before the 1932 election became the standard interpretation. The debate shifted to not when realignment occurred but whether it was due to a mass conversion of voters from one party to another or a mobilization of the previously nonvoting or unaffiliated.

Concerning the topic of Italian-American ideology, this debate about the statistics – registrations, returns, and turnout – ignores the mood of the community. The approach tells how people voted but provides little clarity about their motivation, feelings, and reasoning. First, many Italian Americans failed to see Democrats like Al Smith as representative of the party. The triumph of New Deal Democrats by the mid-1930s created...

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63 Lubell, 34–35.
the retrospective illusion of a party moving toward a liberal consensus throughout the 1920s. In arguing his “Theory of Critical Elections,” political scientist V. O. Key, Jr. merged returns from Robert M. La Follette’s third-party Progressive run in 1924 with those of Democrat John W. Davis as evidence for an earlier transition of New England voters. Perhaps some supporters did feel that Democrat Burton K. Wheeler of Montana, who became La Follette’s running mate after he condemned the conservative wing of his party, was the best hope for a Democratic New Deal-style liberal insurgency after the Progressive leader’s death in 1925. In contrast, Italian Americans specifically named Republican Fiorello La Guardia as La Follette’s “right-hand man” and the possible heir to the movement. They never closed the door to an ideologically aligned president arising from the Republican Party.

Furthermore, election returns alone failed to tell the whole story. As Stefano Luconi argued, Italian-American realignment toward Al Smith and the Democrats was an “urban phenomenon” as pressures to vote Republican in small towns hid the electorate’s true feelings. Voting likely fit the model expressed by James L. Sundquist in which uneven patterns of mobilizations and conversions brought people into the Democratic Party during the 1930s. An extreme example supporting Luconi’s point occurred in Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania, home to small towns and mining communities named in this and previous chapters such as Greensburg, Vandergrift, Irwin, and New Derry. Between 1932

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and 1938, the county’s total number of registered voters declined while Democrats still made substantial gains.\textsuperscript{70} The issue with these statistical generalizations is that they tell how people voted but not why. Numbers also obscure levels of enthusiasm and commitment. Many probably favored Al Smith, and even Roosevelt in 1932, but not enough to risk their jobs.

From an Italian-American perspective, the elections of 1928 and 1932 were rebukes of the status quo with voters driven by grievance rather than potential gains.\textsuperscript{71} A protest vote does not itself create a lasting coalition. As W. Phillips Shively wrote in “A Reinterpretation of the New Deal Realignment,” before “the introduction of the New Deal there was no basis for a permanent shift in voting on economic grounds. The most that might have been sustained was short-term protest voting, of the sort which presumably occurred in 1932.”\textsuperscript{72} Without a substantial platform that met voters’ approval, the elections of 1928 and 1932 were times of shifting allegiances based on aggravation and protest. In 1928, these involved ethnic and religious defenses, while 1932 was a rebuke of Republican economic policies.\textsuperscript{73} Only after the New Deal began in 1933 were Italian Americans given the opportunity to vote against conservative and bigoted politics, their driving reasons before 1932, and for a platform, beyond the Prohibition issue, that they found acceptable.

\textsuperscript{70} Sundquist, \textit{Dynamics of the Party System}, 230–35.

\textsuperscript{71} Realignment is something that political scientists and historians have noted in hindsight. Had a more conservative Democrat run in 1932 and won, such as the 1924 presidential nominee John W. Davis or Franklin Roosevelt’s own vice president, John Nance Garner, who famously broke with FDR during their second term, this realignment would likely not have happened. Only once someone in the mold of Al Smith followed and built upon his constituency was there the creation of a new and lasting coalition.


\textsuperscript{73} McMichael and Trilling, “The Structure and Meaning of Critical Realignment,” 46.
Once Roosevelt and the New Dealers adopted much of the ideology already favored by the Italian Americans, the group became a devout constituency.

The 1928 election was a fight about what Al Smith represented, not his ideological preferences. Smith offered voters a few positives, namely the promise to end Prohibition. Nevertheless, Italian Americans justified their support as a repudiation of conservative Republican policies rather than an optimistic acceptance of the Democratic platform. Even before the 1928 election, grievances against typical Republican positions on immigration restriction, Prohibition, nativism, and corporate interests pushed Italian Americans away from the party. It was evident by the mid-1920s that conservative pro-business leaders, like Calvin Coolidge, subverted the more liberal, progressive wing of the party. Italian Americans heavily critiqued the Republican notion of prosperity as a façade. While the business class thrived, ordinary people suffered. Angelo Di Renzo pointed out the similarities between Coolidge’s message of economic prosperity and the mythical phoenix: “Everyone talks about it and nobody knows where it is.” He did not dispute Coolidge and Treasury Secretary Andrew Mellon’s claim that the United States grew richer during the preceding years. Instead, he reminded readers that the two political leaders refused to

75 The lack of appropriate Democratic candidates was an issue. As Joseph Heffernan bemoaned in a private letter to Newton D. Baker in November 1926, “Calvin, the Nothing. Still what have we by contrast to offer?” See Joseph L. Heffernan to Newton D. Baker, letter, 24 November 1926, box 1, folder 5, Joseph L. Heffernan Papers, 1922–1940, RG 77/7, Archives & Special Collections, William F. Maag, Jr. Library, Youngstown State University, Youngstown, OH.
76 “Commentari della settimana: Cleveland, Ohio,” Il Martello (New York, NY), 21 June 1924, 3. The leftist Il Martello believed that Coolidge served Wall Street and not the people, an assertion not much different than the argument made in mainstream Italian-American newspapers.
acknowledge that the vast majority of that new wealth remained with the industrial and commercial powers at the top, rather than trickling down to the average person.\textsuperscript{77}

Italian-American criticism did not change when Coolidge left office. *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* rebutted the president’s last State of the Union message in which he claimed that his financial policies “brought to the Nation wealth and prosperity.” America’s success may have convinced economic theorists and financiers, but average people “in these last years had to substitute the word prosperity with depression.” Workers experienced an affordability crisis as tax requirements and the rising cost of necessities exceeded their pay.\textsuperscript{78} Leaders built the American economic recovery of the mid-1920s on a shaky foundation. In one vivid analogy, Coolidge acted like an optimistic doctor at the foot of a patient’s deathbed, reassuring the person, a metaphor for the working class, that improvement – prosperity – was happening.\textsuperscript{79} Coolidge’s death in January 1933 brought no end to the antagonism. *Unione* editor Al Tronzo remarked that the timing of the former president’s passing was appropriate; it kept alive the myth of his economic achievements before they were wholly refuted, and it promised him a place as “the patron saint of brokerage firms and banks.”\textsuperscript{80} Even before the Wall Street stock market crash, Italian Americans believed that the conservative Republican economic platform failed their community and most Americans.

\textsuperscript{78} “Mala fede o eccesso di Bonta’,” *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, 2 February 1929, 1. Bold in the original.
\textsuperscript{80} Al Tronzo, “The Pessoptimist,” *Unione*, 13 January 1933, 8.
The nomination of Al Smith to represent the Democratic Party against Herbert Hoover created the intersection of two impetuses for Italian-American political engagement. First, these voters turned out because of the simmering anger about Coolidge’s Republican Party harming workers. Second, supporting the Irish-Catholic Al Smith became akin to defending themselves from discrimination. *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* was clear about this point: “Why are we Democrats in this election? Because we are guided by common sense – Because we defend our honor. The Italians especially, today, represent the biggest target of the Klanist scoundrel and of the inept and malicious Nordics.”81 The focus for Italian Americans was what Smith stood against, rather than for, which made him the clear winner in the campaign but not someone who provided solutions to most of their problems.

Backing Al Smith was equivalent to defending themselves as white ethnics and Catholics. As Joseph Heffernan commented, “he was to them [immigrants and their children] more than a political leader; he was the personification of their own struggles and aspirations.”82 Smith was the embodiment of the masses of non-Protestant new immigrants who, as detailed in chapter two, came to accept the basic tenets of American civic nationalism. Italian Americans projected themselves onto Smith because his candidacy represented the principle that one’s birthplace in society did not matter and opportunity was open to all people.83 Nevertheless, he could not escape the prejudicial stereotypes

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82 Heffernan, interview, 77.
hurled at him by opponents, including socialistic tendencies, rumors of drunkenness, and jokes about the suitability of his wife as a potential first lady.\textsuperscript{84}

A Smith victory would have meant the fulfillment of the promise that all people, regardless of national origin or religion, had equal opportunity in the United States. Unfortunately, critics’ attacks compelled Smith and his allies to respond. The presidential contest became a debate about identity politics and ethnic-religious grievance rather than about any reasoned ideology. A spring 1927 open letter that received wide dispersion across the United States gave people a taste of the coming conflict and anti-Catholic shaming. Charles C. Marshall, a retired attorney and prominent Episcopalian, raised questions about a possible Smith presidency by arguing that no Catholic could fully separate himself from his religion to govern the United States.\textsuperscript{85} Smith’s response made the front page of the ethnic press. He defended himself at length and stated his belief in the separation of Church and State. He cited his record as proof, including the nineteen times he swore an oath to defend the Constitution.\textsuperscript{86} Still, the religion issue put Italian-American voters on the defensive. While the Italian-American press raised questions about Republican assertions of prosperity, the need to defend the Catholic Smith dominated the discussion.\textsuperscript{87}

\textsuperscript{84} Handlin, \textit{Al Smith and His America}, 129–30.
\textsuperscript{86} “‘La Chiesa non ha alcune potere negli affari di Governo in America,’” \textit{Il Cittadino Italo-Americano}, 23 April 1927, 1.
Supporting Smith meant repudiating the Republican Party, which Italian Americans increasingly viewed as an organization of bigots and beholden to the almighty dollar and big business. By the end of September 1928, a belief circulated that Hoover would win because of his commitment to big money interests that decided the election.88 One late October article explained the real motivation behind the election: “It is not the drink, it is not religion, it is the dollar. The Republican Party[, the] true expression of capitalism[,] is never satisfied of the blood of the victims.”89 Il Cittadino Italo-Americano editor Carlo Caselli dismissed Hoover’s platform in its entirety, proclaiming that “it deserves no consideration” because its most salient point was the enforcement of Prohibition, a farcical commitment considering the nation’s needs. The nominee admitted that alcohol was not harmful in moderation, but he was too ambitious to challenge Prohibition. The editor painted Hoover as “una marionetta” (a puppet) who bent to the will of others.90

Al Smith offered Italian Americans a few convincing social issues to justify their vote, namely an end to Prohibition and more respect to immigrants, the working class, and Catholics, but the community lacked any real idea of his specific economic ideology.91 Republicans dominated the national conversation and forced Italian Americans to debate their talking points rather than envision a Smith presidency beyond a condemnation of

_Cittadino Italo-Americano_, 1 September 1928, 1; “Senza Sale e Senza Pepe…,” _Il Cittadino Italo-Americano_, 8 September 1928, 1.
89 “Il Popolo Vuole!,” _Il Cittadino Italo-Americano_, 27 October 1928, 1.
conservative politics. In other words, Italian Americans came to support Smith more out of anger to address grievances related to pro-business Republican politics, discrimination, and upholding American civic ideals than out of optimism for a new platform.

After assuming the presidency, Hoover alienated Italian-American voters. Continuing the previous analogy of Coolidge as a doctor watching a patient die, the duty now fell to Hoover. Italian Americans wished him to succeed for the general good of the country, but this did beg the question: “What will he do? Will he be able to devise new means to cure the tuberculosis of his Nation’s commerce?” Hoover adhered to Coolidge’s remedies, so he failed the ideological test for Italian-American approval of his governance. First, he offered no resolution to the Prohibition issue. After taking office, he planned to defer to the courts, which to Italian Americans appeared a dereliction of leadership when the real solution was a plebiscite and direct legislative action. Instead, he allowed the continuation of an issue that tore Americans apart and was antithetical to their supposed values. While men like Professor William Starr Myers at Princeton University attacked Benito Mussolini as a despot, the ethnic press called for self-reflection before condemning

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92 This lack of policy discussion was related to the nature of the campaign. As the Youngstown Vindicator remarked the Saturday before the election, “not in 50 years has a candidate for President talked so little as Mr. Hoover has since his nomination.” Furthermore, “on the street, on trains, in factories and mills and offices the subjects most talked of by men and women for now three months have been prohibition, Smith’s religion, farm relief and in some localities the water power trust, but Mr. Hoover has steadily refused to discuss the first two of these and has completely subordinated the third and fourth to talk of the tariff and prosperity.” Ordinary people could not debate the merits of the candidates’ plans when Hoover remained silent and Smith spent much of his time defending his background. See “Never Before,” Youngstown Vindicator, 3 November 1928, 6.


94 “Ubi jus incertum, ibi jus nullum,” Il Cittadino Italo-Americano, 16 March 1929, 1.
others: “What does the Government of Washington do, which for 11 years [has oppressed] a mass [of citizens], imposing with violence and abuse a law against every sense of civility, … [a law that] chokes the liberty of the people?”

Hoover’s financial policy also failed to gain Italian-American backing because it copied Coolidge’s approach. In the spring of 1929, months before the Wall Street crash brought the reality of financial hardship to millions, *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* was already voicing the opinion that the government’s economic strategy brought misery to the laboring masses. It bluntly told readers that America was in a “state of financial depression” as regular people were either out of work or crunched by an affordability crisis in which wages failed to match rising costs. Continuing with remarks that would become more common in subsequent years, editor Caselli proclaimed that “the capitalist soaks up the national wealth, while the worker languishes.” For this reason, he called for people to go beyond mutual aid societies and form a mass organization to reclaim their rights and hold the government and the financial interests accountable. A peaceful, mass rebellion needed to occur before conditions sparked a reaction that would rival “the terror of 14 July 1789,” the Storming of the Bastille during the French Revolution. Caselli continued his point the following week by proclaiming that Hoover was merely the figurehead for the capitalist control of the government while repeating the need for a mass organization that would include workers of every social class and every race to challenge the hegemony.

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95 “L’Ingenuita' Presenziale,” *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, 23 March 1929, 1. The reference to eleven years was likely dating Prohibition to the proposal of the Eighteenth Amendment and the movement to ban alcohol before the official national enactment in 1920.
Street crash of 1929 amplified the message’s urgency, but it did not change the rhetoric as newspapers still condemned capitalists and Hoover.99

In the days leading up to the 1930 midterm elections, Il Cittadino Italo-Americano reinforced the importance of Italian Americans voicing their opinions at the ballot box and suggested that the economic crisis would help illuminate candidate choices, guiding voters’ decisions.100 The Great Depression forced a debate about economic issues and the plight of the working class. No longer could wealthy interests shape the political discussion solely around such topics as Prohibition while waffling on economic ideology. It was easy for some to support Hoover during times of “prosperity,” but with mass unemployment now unignorable, the economic considerations which had been percolating within the Italian-American community found their way to the forefront of the national political conversation. The Republican midterm defeats became the overt manifestation of “the just resentment of a slave people, oppressed by the tyranny of the dollar.”101

Hoover committed himself to a different approach when he realized that Republicans needed to adopt alternative methods or suffer further losses. New interventionist plans and the proposal of a more activist federal approach were moves in the right direction but not the perfect solutions. Italian Americans viewed work-relief plans as late in arriving and too narrow in scope. Il Cittadino Italo-Americano returned to its doctor analogy, claiming that this was like injecting the patient with ether when more radical methods were necessary. Instead, it was time to stop the prolonged suffering and

100 “Martedì 4 Novembre,” Il Cittadino Italo-Americano, 1 November 1930, 1.
101 “Condizione Imbarazzante,” Il Cittadino Italo-Americano, 8 November 1930, 1.
change physicians. Americans needed structural transformation rather than a means to dull only the worst effects of a slow economic death. There was some value in Hoover’s approach concerning the Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC), which foreshowed the potential of federal intervention to come under the New Deal, but it was not enough. Italian Americans, like others, observed firsthand the effects of the RFC as its loans helped reopen local businesses, like banks. The approach gave those in Youngstown confidence in their recapitalized financial institutions. However, as a whole, Hoover’s methods fell short. The government bailed out industry and banks rather than helped regular people.

Aid meant ostensibly to help the nation only confirmed suspicions about Hoover’s ties to big business. While Mussolini’s government created buildings, new lakes, and other projects that appeared to benefit the people, local aid in some places was another example of working-class exploitation that Hoover was uninterested in stopping. For instance, Italian Americans in Aliquippa questioned arranged local relief because it appeared tied to the Jones and Laughlin Steel Corporation and local businessman Paul M. Moore. Originally an employee of J&L Steel, Moore arrived in the area in 1906 to plan and arrange the building of the Aliquippa Works for the company. He later served in local government.

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106 Il Penteruolo [sic], “Punti e Spunti,” *Unione*, 15 April 1932, 2.
and started his own contracting business that profited from deals with the corporation.\textsuperscript{107} Dominic Del Turco was one employee who sought local relief. Officials sent him to Moore’s farm, where workers cut down trees and built roads. His compensation was a dollar a week and food vouchers redeemable for groceries. According to Del Turco, the local Republican administration worked hand-in-hand with J&L Steel to distribute work on the properties of area elites, like Moore.\textsuperscript{108} Joe Di Ciero faced a similar experience, except after applying at Moore’s store for relief, officials assigned him to pull roots at a local golf course.\textsuperscript{109} Tony Riccitelli asked why Moore and entities connected to him distributed relief food supplied by the government, but his J&L Steel boss fired him – Riccitelli was working only irregularly by this time – for being “too damn smart.”\textsuperscript{110} Besides many projects bringing little civic or community value, the work payments were tainted as people, including Di Ciero and his wife, remembered receiving staples like flour filled with worms.\textsuperscript{111}

These early Depression experiences amplified the previous Italian-American distrust of pro-business Republican policies, ensuring that Hoover would not receive much support in the 1932 presidential race. \textit{Unione} noted that Hoover had no popular backing at


\textsuperscript{108} Del Turco, interview, 27–28.


\textsuperscript{110} Riccitelli, interview, 5–6.

\textsuperscript{111} Di Ciero, interview, 18; Iacobucci, interview, 23 October 1979, 37; Montini, interview, 20.
the beginning of the election year as three-quarters of people were averse to his governance and the other quarter were politically indifferent. Anger reigned concerning the state of the American economy, Republican mistruths and inability to accept reality, and the president’s poor treatment of the Bonus Army. In one instance, disillusionment with Hoover’s United States became comical. *Unione* printed lyrics set to the tune of “Where Do You Work-a, John?,” a humorous novelty song about working for the Delaware-Lackawanna Railroad expressed in the accented English of a recent immigrant. In the parody version, “Wattsa Matter Tony?,” the narrator explained why he needed to return to Italy:

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Sedda Tonee, when election comma,
Myya bossa sedda to me:
“Iffa you wanta pro-sper-a-tie
You votta for Huvaree.”

Soa, Iyya votta for Huvaree
Anda da Demm bossa fire me
Soa, I no canna push
On da Railroad Companee.
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Italian Americans did not support Hoover, but hostility to the sitting president did not translate into wholehearted acceptance of his Democratic rival.

The issue was that no one seemed sure about the Democratic platform beyond a few points. As historians have argued, Franklin Roosevelt’s 1932 run for the presidency

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was light on specifics and plans, a characteristic not lost on Italian Americans.\textsuperscript{116} Roosevelt’s nomination brought a muted, matter-of-fact response.\textsuperscript{117} His own words failed to offer faith in his potential governance. As one editor noted concerning an August address, the candidate denounced Hoover but offered only superficial remedies with no concrete economic program that would address the core of American financial troubles.\textsuperscript{118} A month before the general election, \textit{Il Cittadino Italo-Americano} summarized and concurred with Frank Kent of the \textit{Baltimore Sun}. He argued “that this (presidential) campaign will not be very enlightening to the thinking voters,” as both sides deferred policy discussion.\textsuperscript{119} Without a clear vision, people lacked enthusiasm.\textsuperscript{120}

Furthermore, as conscious as they were about the Republican Party kowtowing to big business, Italian Americans recognized that the Democratic Party had its share of nativist politicians. For example, Senator J. Thomas Heflin of Alabama had a long history of denouncing Italian Americans as foreigners, Catholics, and eventually Fascists.\textsuperscript{121} Italian Americans knew his Klan affiliation and racial views, and their press suggested that the raving senator belonged in a mental institution.\textsuperscript{122} One article referred to him as “\textit{l’asino}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[120] PAT, “This Week,” \textit{Unione}, 7 October 1932, 4.
\end{footnotes}
“incappucciato” (the hooded ass), a clever reference to his stupidity, political party, and ties to the Klan. Hefflin lost his seat in the 1930 election, but the future direction of the Democratic Party was unknown in 1932, and his specter still lingered as a symbol of prejudice even after his departure.

Perhaps the simplest explanation for Hoover’s loss in 1932 came from Bert Iacobucci in Aliquippa: “People got tired of Hoover.” It was a protest vote. As Al Tronzo wrote weeks before the Democratic National Convention presented voters a candidate:

“Give the Democrats a break. … Vote for a Democratic president, be he who he may, and give the Jackass a chance to lead us to that corner around which prosperity, they say, lurks. … And if it doesn’t give you a job, at least you’ll have the satisfaction of knowing that the party that gave you a four year holiday will also be walking the streets[…] … Anyway, make it one helluva protest vote; and above all demand that your representatives represent and not dominate you.”

Roosevelt’s victory in November elicited relief, but little enthusiasm, as Italian Americans equated the Democratic triumph to Republican errors.

Franklin Roosevelt and the Democrats promised an end to Prohibition and gave vague reassurances that they would implement a “New Deal,” but the details were yet to be known. As *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* stated during the lame-duck period after the election, the alcohol issue preoccupied politicians and the press, but “pane e lavoro” (bread

125 Iacobucci, interview, 23 October 1979, 36.
and work) appeared to be the more pressing concerns. Unfortunately, the campaign failed to address these needs clearly. The notion of change got Roosevelt into office, but his policies – his tackling of the pane e lavoro, bread and butter, issues – caused Italian Americans to reward him and his allies with confidence in their governance and ultimately reelection.

**New Deal Confluence**

Days before the 1932 election, Unione editor G. A. Lopez asserted that the outcome was to be a protest against the sitting president, not an affirmation of his challenger, because people had no political options that were counter “to the dominant capitalism in its two manifestations: Republican and Democratic, two branches of a same trunk that threatens ruin.”

Educated commentators like Lopez did not foresee that Franklin Roosevelt would move the Democratic Party in a new direction and reshape the political paradigm. As political scientist Samuel Lubell stated, “it would be a mistake to regard the Roosevelt coalition as strictly a product of the depression. … It was not the depression which made Roosevelt the champion of the urban masses but what he did after he came to the Presidency.” Roosevelt fulfilled the ideological preferences of the Italian-American electorate, thereby gaining its support. As the New Deal unfolded, it dealt with decade-long issues of concern for the community and satisfied Italian Americans by adopting many of the same solutions that the ethnic group discussed over the previous years. The New Deal appropriated their political preferences.

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129 “Ma è poi Vero che il Popolo Vuole la Birra?,” Il Cittadino Italo-Americano, 26 November 1932, 1.
Italian Americans combined influences from civic nationalism, leftism, and Fascism to create a new ideological amalgamation that resembled the New Deal. First, they desired a true democracy, which they viewed as the fulfillment of civic ideals. Native-born Americans told the ethnic group that American values included principles such as a government representative of all people and equality for all citizens, but leaders failed to uphold these values throughout the 1920s. Second, leftists bequeathed ideas about workers’ rights and mass unionism. Leftist cynicism about American politics failing to address ordinary people’s grievances reinforced the need to fulfill civic equality. Third, Fascism offered a model worth imitating. Those in the United States spent the better part of a decade admiring Fascism’s ability to enact structural changes in Italy. Their observations made them comfortable with an activist government. The more that Mussolini meddled in the Italian economy – manipulating the currency, regimenting Italian agriculture, and finally implementing corporatism – the more successful the Italian model appeared next to the failing United States. They believed the propaganda that the Fascist state delivered working-class benefits. While leftists had previously feared the state because of its role in repressing workers’ voices, Fascism showed that the government could collaborate with labor. Italian Americans came to embrace government intervention, including corporatism, massive public works programs, and an empowered leader willing to break norms for the nation’s benefit.

As the New Deal unfolded, it delivered on Italian-American desires. The Democratic Party opened opportunities for Italian-American political engagement. Disillusionment turned into excitement as the New Deal tore down barriers to white-ethnic politicians and allowed qualified community members to rise. It was symbiotic; Italian-
American voters felt that the New Dealers respected them as a constituency, and they, in turn, backed the realigned Democratic Party.

Fascism lent ideas concerning an activist state. Mussolini solved crises during the 1920s by consolidating power as a national leader and then reshaping the government to become interventionist concerning the economy. When the Great Depression devastated American businesses, the natural response was to seek a domestic Duce willing to act and prod Congress toward economic interventionism. Roosevelt became that figure, and Italian Americans compared him to Mussolini. They celebrated the New Deal’s National Industrial Recovery Act because it mimicked parts of Italian corporatism. In addition to funding massive public works, the NIRA’s National Recovery Administration theoretically offered class collaboration with concessions to labor, most notably unionization in section 7(a), maximum working hours, and minimum wages. While conservatives criticized the NRA for violating free-market norms, Italian Americans decried the act as not having gone far enough.

As Roosevelt’s New Deal developed and unfolded, its doctrine moved closer to Italian-American political wishes, consolidating the community’s support. They had built their interpretation of Fascism on a leftist foundation, which meant that the measure of success for an activist government and leader was the ability to mediate capital and labor and raise the working class to parity. The NRA promised but did not fulfill this goal. Instead, the Second New Deal enshrined the NRA’s lax labor provisions as enforceable laws. The Second New Deal delivered most of the suggestions raised years prior by Angelo Di Renzo. The editor had called for industrial unionism and the end of strikebreaking. New Dealers strengthened the NRA’s section 7(a) into the Wagner Act, and a more powerful
National Labor Relations Board guaranteed fair collective bargaining. Di Renzo suggested social safety nets such as pensions and unemployment insurance, which became the 1935 Social Security Act. Finally, the NRA’s hours and wages provisions, which were meant to solve the issue raised by Di Renzo about automation and the need to redistribute wealth, continued in a limited form in the 1938 Fair Labor Standards Act. Italian-American political beliefs and the New Deal coalesced into one ideology.

The first intercession made by the New Deal involved the fulfillment of civic ideals. As described in chapter five, a driving force behind the rise of political clubs was the belief that Italian Americans lacked a voice in governance. Many political representatives and power brokers resented the group’s political engagement, even though the act of becoming informed and involved was at the core of American democracy. In 1925, the Italo-American Civic League of New Castle, Pennsylvania, mobilized voters for the fall elections. The organization endorsed a slate of candidates, and it arranged multiple meetings throughout Lawrence County, including in the seat, New Castle, and in Mahonintown, Wampum, and Brent. Those involved understood the potential reaction. In justifying its place, the Civic League pointed to discrimination and that other peoples, including German, Irish, and Jewish Americans, had more representation in government than the Italians. As one article pointed out before the primaries, the school district in the small community of Hillsville, Mahoning Township, consisted of around one hundred and fifty Italian-American families, and the ethnic group contributed sixty percent of...
enrolled schoolchildren. It was logical to run a trusted representative for the school board of directors.\textsuperscript{134} The Civic League organized against this “tyranny” with its best weapon, voting.\textsuperscript{135} These efforts attracted opposition, including a half-page advertisement printed in the local newspaper the day before the general election that attacked the group as conspiratorial. It implored voters to choose candidates “who [did] not owe allegiance to the Citizen’s League or to the Italian-American League or to any other league or to any other special interest.”\textsuperscript{136} The leader of the Civic League, N. De Mita, pastor at St. Vitus Church, defended the group stating, “we just demanded what every citizen is entitled to – a square deal – regardless of color, creed or nationality.” De Mita justified his position by noting that one-sixth of the city of New Castle was Italian American. They paid taxes and owned homes, and he asked rhetorically, “is it not fitting that they should unite together to improve their condition as citizens of the country? Should they not with this purpose in view reasonably expect, not the adverse criticism, but rather the co-operation and encouragement of their fellow citizens?”\textsuperscript{137} Political power and control were the issues at stake, and those who currently had them were unwilling to share them with a new group.

Those in Youngstown expressed this clearly with the belief that Italian-American candidates failed because they were not part of the “clique.”\textsuperscript{138} During the 1932 spring

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\textsuperscript{135} V. D., “In Guardia,” \textit{Il Cittadino Italo-Americano}, 12 September 1925, 1.
\textsuperscript{136} “Shall the League Control?,” \textit{New Castle News} (New Castle, PA), 2 November 1925, 14.
\end{flushright}
primaries, Domenico F. Rendinelli, Americanized as D. F. Rendinell, sought a place on the Republican ticket for county prosecuting attorney. The ethnic newspaper painted him as “one of the most brilliant lawyers” in the city, and he was a candidate who could have united the “foreigners” of various origins. Born in Youngstown, Rendinell attended local public schools before graduating from the University of Michigan in 1910. He returned home and practiced law for two decades with a specialty in criminal defense. The ethnic press had followed his career for years, and his election to vice president of the Mahoning County Bar Association in 1930 showed the earned respect of his colleagues. Community figures came to his side, including Cesare Amadio, who believed that Rendinell’s candidacy was an important step “in the march towards our emancipation from a servility that no longer has reason to exist.” Rendinell campaigned on fairness before the law, and many of his planks included means to lessen discrimination, including: “the exclusive selection of the members of the grand jury from the jury wheel, in the presence of the press”; guarantees that defense counsel received all investigation materials before the trial; no “third degree” (coerced confession) nor any “conferences … with a person

141 “Per l’Affermazione Politica degli Italiani: Domenico Rendinelli,” Il Cittadino Italo-Americano, 5 March 1932, 1.
confined in jail except in the presence of his counsel”; the administration of justice “fairly
and impartially regardless of race, creed or color”; and the promise not to use the office for
the creation of a political machine.\footnote{146}{“Domenico F. Rendinelli,”  \textit{Il Cittadino Italo-Americano}, 9 April 1932, 1.} Rendinell lost the five-way primary, receiving 4,456
votes.\footnote{147}{“How Mahoning County Voted,” \textit{Youngstown Vindicator}, 11 May 1932, city edition, 3.}

To Italian Americans, Rendinell’s candidacy failed because Republicans refused to
support him and Democrats sought to split voters. Rendinell was not part of the Republican
“clique.”\footnote{148}{“Le Elezioni Del 1932,” \textit{Il Cittadino Italo-Americano}, 14 May 1932, 1.} The Mahoning County Republican Central Committee endorsed three of the
five candidates for prosecuting attorney; it did not include Rendinell.\footnote{149}{W. P. Barnum, “Whom Shall We Nominate?,” \textit{Youngstown Vindicator}, 8 May 1932, A-4.} According to one
letter to the editor, it was not “a big surprise” that the candidate received “little
consideration” from county Republican leader W. P. Barnum.\footnote{150}{Ralph Masto, “Domenico F. Rendinelli,” \textit{Il Cittadino Italo-Americano}, 12 March 1932, 1.} Furthermore, the
Democrats enticed around two dozen Italian Americans to stand for precinct
committeemen, which hurt Rendinell by keeping people from voting in the Republican
primary. According to \textit{Il Cittadino Italo-Americano}, trading these small honorary positions
for a chance of getting a qualified member of the community elected to a county office was
a mistake.\footnote{151}{“Are Political Machines Pulling the Wool Over the Eyes of the Voters of Foreign
Extractions,” \textit{Il Cittadino Italo-Americano}, 9 April 1932, 1.} The newspaper warned them not to be misled by old tricks and called on them
to vote in the Republican primaries to ensure that Rendinell advanced to the general

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[146]{“Domenico F. Rendinelli,” \textit{Il Cittadino Italo-Americano}, 9 April 1932, 1.}
\footnotetext[147]{“How Mahoning County Voted,” \textit{Youngstown Vindicator}, 11 May 1932, city edition, 3.}
\footnotetext[148]{“Le Elezioni Del 1932,” \textit{Il Cittadino Italo-Americano}, 14 May 1932, 1.}
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\footnotetext[150]{Ralph Masto, “Domenico F. Rendinelli,” \textit{Il Cittadino Italo-Americano}, 12 March 1932, 1.}
\footnotetext[151]{“Are Political Machines Pulling the Wool Over the Eyes of the Voters of Foreign
Extractions,” \textit{Il Cittadino Italo-Americano}, 9 April 1932, 1.}
\end{footnotes}
The community tried to get Rendinell on the fall ticket. Various ethnic organizations either discussed his candidacy or allowed him the floor for a speech, including at the Italian American Political Association, the Loggia Napoleone Colaianni (where Democrat Police Prosecutor William B. Spagnola offered his endorsement), Società Maria S. S. del Carmine in Lowellville, Ohio, and Youngstown’s Third Ward Italian American Political Club. Famed Pennsylvania lawyer, and later state attorney general, Charles J. Margiotti made a last-minute appeal for Rendinell in the Brier Hill neighborhood of Youngstown. Their efforts fell short.

The New Deal fulfilled Italian-American desires for political parity, respect for the community, and upholding civic values. A few weeks after Roosevelt’s massive reelection victory in 1936, Pittsburgh’s *Unione* remarked about the significant changes that had taken place: “The Democratic Party for several years has lightened itself of all the dead weights, has made the most of the young, opening to them the doors of all the offices and of all the jobs and our young people have thrown themselves with bersaglierie’s pace to the conquest[, and this was] … facilitated by the Democrats.”

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155 “Il Valido Contributo e la Solidarieta’ dei Nostri Connazionali nelle Ultime Elezioni,” *Unione*, 27 November 1936, 6. Printed as page 6. This was most likely a typographical
proclaimed, “the Democratic victory is also [an] Italian victory.” There was a feeling of respect as the reformed party emphasized its commitment to ordinary people, especially the working class. After years of complaints about politicians making promises at election time and then neglecting the community for the rest of the year, Italian Americans became a constituency of genuine concern as the Democratic Party offered a home for new ethnic politicians. These facets of the New Deal – caring about ordinary people, delivering on promises made to them, and allowing Italian-American politicians to cooperate as partners in that endeavor – flipped Pennsylvania Democratic for the first time in eighty years.

The Democratic Party had trended toward more engagement with Italian Americans, but the New Deal accelerated that movement significantly. There had been some gains before Roosevelt. Youngstown’s Mayor Joseph Heffernan, for example, appointed William B. Spagnola to the position of municipal police prosecutor in 1928, and the ethnic press was still celebrating the honor and Spagnola’s work the following year.

In Cleveland, Cuyahoga County Prosecutor-elect Ray T. Miller hired Frank D. Celebrezze as an assistant prosecutor in December 1928. Youngstown’s Italian American Political

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error and was meant to be page 3. Bersaglierie’s pace was a reference to the elite Italian military unit known for its mobility and fast march.

156 Chas. F. Schisano, “La vittoria Democratica e anche vittoria Italiana,” Unione, 6 November 1936, 1.
158 “46 Stati per Franklin D. Roosevelt,” Unione, 6 November 1936, 1, 8.
Association praised the governor’s nomination of Ralph Vitullo to the Division of Workmen’s Compensation and M. Melillo’s appointment as an assistant fire marshal in 1931.\textsuperscript{161} However, the New Deal unleashed a new respect and parity that had not existed before. In 1936, \textit{Unione} celebrated the ten victorious Italian-American state lawmakers that it had endorsed and the over a dozen elected in total.\textsuperscript{162} These included eight Democrats from western Pennsylvania, many of whom first gained their seats in the 1934 midterm elections: Representatives Frank J. Zappala, Al Tronzo, and Joseph F. Piole of Alleghany County; Representative Eugene A. Caputo, Beaver County; Representative Russell Marino, Washington County; Representative Philip Lopresti, Cambria County; Senator Anthony Cavalcante, Fayette County; and, Senator John H. Dent, Westmoreland County.\textsuperscript{163}

William B. Spagnola offers a clear example of the changes brought over a decade and a level of advancement that would have been unthinkable to Italian-American voters during the mid-1920s who fought against revived nativism. He continued his position as municipal police prosecutor under the next mayor before a failed mayoral bid of his own

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{161} “Il Club Politico,” \textit{Il Cittadino Italo-Americano}, 2 May 1931, 1; Clarence J. Brown, \textit{Annual Report of the Secretary of State to the Governor and General Assembly of the State of Ohio for the Year Ending December 31, 1931} (Cleveland, OH: Consolidated Press & Printing, 1932), 544.
\item \textsuperscript{162} “46 Stati per Franklin D. Roosevelt,” \textit{Unione}, 6 November 1936, 1, 8; “Il Valido Contributo e la Solidarieta’ dei Nostri Connazionali nelle Ultime Elezioni,” \textit{Unione}, 27 November 1936, 6, 8. Printed as pages 6 and 8 but referred to as pages 3 and 6 in the article.
\end{itemize}
in 1935. However, two years later, he won a municipal judgeship, followed by his election to mayor in 1939. For those who had conversed with Spagnola at the Italian American Political Association or one of the many local ethnic-society functions over the years, there was a community pride in seeing the man seated in Franklin Roosevelt’s car when the president visited the city in October 1940. Described by the press as “the largest [crowd] Youngstown has ever assembled,” estimated at around 125,000 people who thronged five miles of streets, Spagnola welcomed the president with a handshake and rode with the executive to tour a nearby steel mill. Roosevelt twice urged Spagnola to visit him at the White House to discuss unemployment. The chief executive even offered some humor. After being hit in the face with confetti from the enthusiastic crowd, Roosevelt, with a grin and a wink to Spagnola and Congressman Michael J. Kirwan, “jokingly remarked the only thing he has against Italians is that they invented confetti.”

As Italian Americans increasingly felt that they were part of the political system, they believed that the government became more responsive to their needs. Fascism had demonstrated the advantages of a government willing to push norms, activism that benefited regular people in times of crisis. As Di Renzo’s 1928 assessment from the introduction noted, the American government needed to offer novel solutions to unemployment and become interventionist. After the Wall Street crash, these ideas took on

164 See above, pages 344–345.
166 “FDR Invites Spagnola to Unemployment Parley,” Youngstown Vindicator, 12 October 1940, city edition, 1.
new urgency. *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* editor Carlo Caselli asserted in early 1931 that people desired not relief but structural changes. Pointing to the minute funding allocated to temporary public works projects thus far and the trend of modern industry employing more mechanization that subverted labor, he concluded, “the reforms should be radical.” It was not enough to treat the symptoms; the United States needed to address the causes of economic instability and inequality.¹⁶⁸ As mainstream politics obsessed with Prohibition, Italian Americans sought answers to more significant issues. The talk about the Eighteenth Amendment, Prohibition, obscured conversation concerning the Sixteenth Amendment, the federal income tax. In a nation that had permitted thousands of millionaires at the expense of the starving masses, the federal government had the power to intervene. As an April 1932 article contended, it was “the duty of this government, as prescribed by the Constitution[,] to guarantee labor and this interpreted means a job.”¹⁶⁹

There was a condemnation of inaction before the New Deal. Congress formulated new excise taxes, but these were not systematic changes.¹⁷⁰ Hoover promised that if reelected, he would serve for a one-dollar salary, but this type of “cheap publicity by the Republican National Committee” was not what the average American wanted because “what he most desires now is action.”¹⁷¹ The Republican National Convention only heightened criticism.¹⁷² *Unione*’s financial writer, Edward W. Castaldi, shifted the blame for the Great Depression from the banks to the government. Inaction was a political game

as neither party in Congress wanted to concede. The solution was to lock members in session and force them to act.\textsuperscript{173} As another opinion writer explained, Americans obsessed with the plan handed down by the founding fathers: “No existing laws can be scrapped, no new and revolutionary ones adopted. … [Government] is inefficient in that it does not allow for changing times, ideals, philosophy and necessarily the people themselves.”\textsuperscript{174} The problem with the system before the New Deal was that few elected officials believed in the interventionist ideology of which Italian Americans were now proponents. While Mussolini acted to solve Italian financial instability, Hoover and other American politicians demurred when presented with a crisis.

Franklin Roosevelt rejected the old leadership style and redefined the presidency. Before Roosevelt expanded the role of the chief executive, Italian Americans suggested moving toward a more powerful leader in the mold of Mussolini. When discussing the Great Depression during the summer of 1932, \textit{Il Cittadino Italo-Americano} remarked that American laws did not fit the needs of the people and current governance was not possible using the methods of the past. The United States was an “antiquated democracy,” and the newspaper asserted, “one wants a dictator, one wants a Mussolini,” a leader who could address problems.\textsuperscript{175} Embracing complete totalitarianism was a stretch. As described in chapter four, even proponents of Fascism balked at giving up American civil liberties, but they viewed adopting a more powerful leader favorably.

Mussolini’s rule primed people to accept Roosevelt’s cult of personality and methods that appeared high-handed to his detractors. Within weeks of taking office,
Roosevelt operated “with lightning-like suddenness” and “quick action” to tackle the financial crisis.  

176 Italian Americans approved of Roosevelt declining to attend the famed 1933 Chicago Exposition to continue working in Washington.  

177 The press occasionally printed presidential agendas to confirm the herculean efforts of the new leader.  

178 When Americans honored Roosevelt’s birthday, radio allowed him “to be present, in spirit, at all these celebrations.” The leader found a place alongside George Washington and Abraham Lincoln “because, if Washington founded the American Nation and Lincoln united it and made it powerful, Franklin D. Roosevelt saved it from imminent destruction and from chaos!!” His talk “of social Justice, of [a] New Era, of the forgotten man” caused the people to vote for a “peaceful revolution.”

179 Within months, the United States government appeared to operate “under a very mild dictator.” According to one opinion writer, this was acceptable because it now forced Congress to investigate improprieties by the wealthy elites. Noting that Mussolini, Joseph Stalin, and Adolf Hitler did not have these superrich persons under their rule, the author concluded that “if liberty and ‘rugged individuals’ produces [J. P.] Morgans and breadlines, then I’ll try a dose of fascism or communism – and Democracy be damned!”

180 As Al Tronzo pointed out, these inquiries only developed because Congressmen needed something “to occupy their minds while Roosevelt [was] brandishing the big stick in his
speedy programs of social and political reforms.”

This strong, activist leader only fulfilled what they had wanted. Castaldi claimed in *Unione* that the people had demanded a Mussolini figure for years, “but instead of a Mussolini came Roosevelt, who, conscious of the fact that Mussolini was so ardently wanted in this Nation, began to govern with mussolinian methods, imposing on the Congress his will.” Politicians and others who had previously called for these methods now condemned Roosevelt. Fortunately, the president continued with his actions, which the people favored.

Months into Roosevelt’s presidency, the celebratory rhetoric echoed that printed over the previous decade about Mussolini. In one August 1933 editorial, the Fascist leader’s name could have replaced that of Roosevelt. The United States was in a time of crisis, on the verge of revolution, but then “the reaction came, … it reunited everyone in a single vote, a single will, a single iron determination, to choose the Man of the moment, … Roosevelt, the President of the people.” This new leader and his supporters ushered in “a RADICAL CHANGE OF DIRECTION IN THE POWERS OF THE STATE,” shifting the system from one that favored wealth and privilege to a government that respected working people. The author asked rhetorically if this was the path toward dictatorship, and he concluded that many of the new ideas and changes came from “Roosevelttian will that is, in short, the will of his people.” The president was potentially leading “a new Revolution for the United States of America.” If not, at a minimum, he ushered in “A NEW ERA FOR THE AMERICAN NATION … [and] better fortunes for all.”

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This reimagined role of the president and government did not frighten Italian Americans because a decade of Fascism in Italy had primed them to accept this activist leadership style. Conservative politicians and elites, such as the dissociated Democrats who formed the American Liberty League in 1934, warned of tyranny, the usurpation of power from Congress and the states, and the move toward communism and Fascism. By contrast, Italian Americans welcomed this move and did not view it as antithetical to democracy. When *Unione* adopted the NRA’s Blue Eagle emblem in August 1933, for example, the newspaper spoke positively about presidential leadership and “the courage of Franklin D. Roosevelt which – above all – reassured that basic faith of ours in the imperishable vitality of the principles of American Democracy.” Another *Unione* contributor, S. V. Albo, addressed the issue of constitutionality in early 1934. Like many who had attended public schools as a child, he admitted to possessing “an admiration amounting almost to idolatry” concerning the Constitution, but he asked people to “cast aside the taboo of constitution worship” and understand “that no document made by man can be made for all time and is sacred beyond all adaptation to new needs.” The people rejected reactionaries, and they now had “a leader with the courage to dare ‘renovate life and our social state’, a President Roosevelt.” Rather than rebuking this new leadership style, Italian Americans embraced it, and the community’s politicians advertised their

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185 “We Print the Emblem of the N. R. A.,” *Unione*, 18 August 1933, 2.
186 S. V. Albo, “‘Renovating Our Social State,’” *Unione*, 12 January 1934, 1.
candidacies as supportive of the New Deal and, as one put it, “the benevolent hand of our
President.”  

The example set by the Fascist state encouraged additional government activism. Scholars have failed to agree on one definition of corporatism, in part because theory never matched reality. Cooperation between industry and labor in Italy was a sham. Italian Americans, as period observers, failed to recognize this. As noted in chapter four, their definition of the Italian model had come from propaganda. Fascist corporatism was a system that provided equality to the working class by merging a type of state-mediated syndicalism into the system, therefore guaranteeing rights and concessions to workers. Italian Americans had approached the interpretation of Fascism and corporatism from the left, and they concluded that government involvement in the economy was not only favorable but necessary.

Direct references to Fascism as an economic model continued as the depression unfolded. As Castaldi argued in Unione, the trade union movement failed average workers. The American Federation of Labor borrowed methods from the British trade unionists, while the organization should have studied and copied the system in Italy. Fascist legislation to balance capital and labor worked and was worthy of American replication. He continued the story of Italian interventionist successes during the general election of

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187 “Attorney Columbus Candidate for Congress,” Unione, 2 March 1934, 1. See also Al Tronzo, “Al Tronzo, Democratic Candidate from the First Legislative District Announces His Platform,” Unione, 13 April 1934, 1, 6.


1932. In the penultimate issue of *Unione* before the Hoover-Roosevelt contest, Castaldi summarized *il Duce’s* actions concerning the lira’s stabilization and reviving the Italian economy. The Italian currency was a “Cinderella,” poor and neglected but only in need of a little help and magic. Mussolini proved naysayers wrong with his aggressive methods.\(^{191}\) The implication was that the Italian model offered economic solutions.

In Italian-American minds, the system’s goal was to improve the economy as a whole while also rebalancing the social classes. This meant providing help for workers while avoiding open conflict. As far back as the summer of 1928, their press had cited the Italian Fascist example as a model to avoid class struggle and unrest by utilizing an arbitration court or tribunal. State intervention was necessary, and the best solution was to bring representatives of government, workers, and employers together to find consensus.\(^{192}\) However, because working-class grievances from the left also informed their ideology, there was a general mistrust of big business, banks, and elites, along with a feeling that ordinary people, labor, needed more concessions than capital for equilibrium.\(^{193}\) Statistics deceived the public. For example, various companies still showed a profit during the depths of the depression. This was due to shady accounting and business practices because revenues had not rebounded. Wage cuts and unpaid overtime took the balance sheet from red to black and allowed for dividend payments to investors. The response from the Italian-American press was the belief that “wages should not be cut nor jobs sacrificed to

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\(^{191}\) “Mussolini… Finanziere!,” *Unione*, 28 October 1932, 2.
accumulate profits. A living wage for the workers is the first charge on industry and until
that claim is met, no profits should be taken.” Furthermore, statistics about the cost of
living and wages were nonsense because they failed to account for “real pay,” which was
the actual money taken home by workers after accounting for cuts like reduced hours.

During the first few months of the new Democratic administration, Italian
Americans noticed that the government was indeed moving toward an interventionist
Fascist model. Under Roosevelt, Congress gained “a new spirit of action” as it quickly
addressed problems in banking and finance, low agricultural prices, and the need for
jobs. The Italian-American press reported about the flurry of early New Deal legislation,
including the end of Prohibition, the Bank Holiday and the printing of billions of dollars to
distribute via the regional Federal Reserve banks, tariff adjustments, the Home Owners
Loan Corporation Act, the Securities Act to protect investors, and farm relief measures.

Nevertheless, Italian Americans awaited more intervention. Mussolini’s model during the
1920s directly put the government’s hand in the economy through tasks like reevaluating
the lira and then providing legal protections for workers. Concerns about these early
American measures turned to the possible repercussions of monetary expansion.

194 “A Farce at the Expense of the Public,” Il Cittadino Italo-Americano, 16 April 1932, 1.
195 “La Paga in Danaro e la Vera Paga Degl’Operai,” Il Cittadino Italo-Americano, 28
May 1932, 2.
197 “Il Trionfo della Birra!,” Unione, 17 March 1933, 1; “Verso un nuovo riordinamento
Bancario,” Unione, 17 March 1933, 1; E. W. Castaldi, “Note Finanziarie,” Unione, 14
April 1933, 2; “Come i Proprietari di Case Riceveranno gli Aiuti dal Governo,” Unione,
26 May 1933, 2; “Aiuto ai proprietari di piccole case per pagare le Ipotecche,” Unione, 21
July 1933, 3; “Per Proteggere gli Investitori,” Unione, 26 May 1933, 2; “La Crisi
Agricola Risolta con il ‘Farm Relief Bill,’” Unione, 9 June 1933, 1.
198 Edward W. Castaldi, “Note Finanziarie,” Unione, 28 April 1933, 2; Edward W.
Castaldi, “Note Finanziarie,” Unione, 5 May 1933, 2; “Il Pro e il contro l’Inflazione,”
Unione, 9 June 1933, 3.
Columnist Albert C. Esposito remarked, “what I believe to be Roosevelt’s first mistake is the inflation program,” arguing that some governmental measures could create a “big sting for the average man” if wages stagnated and commodity prices grew.\(^{199}\) The New Deal began well, but Italian Americans awaited more direct intervention comparable to Fascism.

The National Industrial Recovery Act caught Italian Americans’ attention more than any other early New Deal legislation because it was a domestic interpretation of corporatism. The law consisted of two significant parts. Title I established the National Recovery Administration to regulate private businesses through negotiated industry codes. Title II created the Public Works Administration (PWA) to infuse federal money into the pockets of American workers through major civil works projects.\(^{200}\) In May 1933, Italian Americans noticed the parallels to Fascist Italy. For years, legislators had turned away from the problems associated with capital and labor as factories and plants mechanized, but it was time to find equilibrium. As Castaldi wrote in *Unione*, “in Italy, Fascist Legislation has already for a very long time put under its control the industrial production of the Nation; in America, Franklin D. Roosevelt is proceeding along Mussolini’s footsteps … concern[ing] capitalist exploitation.”\(^{201}\) This was not hyperbole. The NRA pioneered a new method of regulation, and many period Americans viewed it as a domestic interpretation of Fascist corporatism.\(^{202}\) Italian Americans were justified in believing that this new


\(^{202}\) Whitman, “Of Corporatism, Fascism, and the First New Deal,” 747–51. Whitman also noted on page 755 that “in its day-to-day practice, the NRA bore few resemblances to the corporatism of the fascist world.” As described in chapter four, the belief that the New Deal used Fascist models may not have been factually accurate in hindsight. However,
program may have provided the key points of Fascism that they had come to appreciate – a balance between capital and labor, raising and delivering true equality to the working class, the ability for an activist state and leader to intervene and guarantee that balance – as described in chapter four.

Public works projects were a direct means of aiding Americans. After years of observing Fascist Italy’s public works in the press and through speeches, Italian Americans came to believe in their value of employing those in need while improving the nation. This sentiment existed even before the Great Depression. For example, as mentioned previously, one attribute that Italian Americans in Youngstown celebrated about Mayor Joseph Heffernan’s tenure was infrastructure improvement, most notably a railroad grade elimination discussed for forty years. According to Il Cittadino Italo-Americano in 1928, the project meant potential jobs for those “many workers, … enjoying the Republican Presidential prosperity[, who] stay at home without work.” They valued work relief because it was a fair exchange of payment for services. Almost a year after the Wall Street crash, the newspaper reported that the suffering community was too proud to beg for help. Those interviewed years later noted this sense of pride. Samuel Sciullo, a child commentators like Castaldi told Italian Americans that these economic approaches were similar. This interpretation became the perceived truth within the community.

204 “Ai Contrattori di Youngstown,” Il Cittadino Italo-Americano, 8 September 1928, 2.
during the Great Depression, pleaded with his mother to sign a voucher for him to receive free shoes through a school program after his pair split apart and leaked. His mother acquiesced after first refusing and then crying about the shame of accepting such charity. In Sciullo’s words, “it was the first time we ever got anything that we took.” Employment in public works offered a clear distinction between the acts of taking and earning, or as Sciullo elaborated, the difference between relief (which he compared to then-current views about welfare) and “the dignity of working.” As a former Works Progress Administration employee asserted, “the government … gave the American people a job.” Italian Americans perceived public works much differently than charity or dole. This philosophy matched the new Roosevelt administration, which knew that direct relief, such as providing free food, was cheaper, but it funded public projects because they offered dignity to workers and long-term investments in communities.

The New Deal appeared to break with precedent. The ethnic press noted the scope and substantial funding allocated to new projects, including roads, airports, post offices, and ports and waterway improvements, such as on the Columbia and Tennessee Rivers.

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208 Sciullo, 5.


210 Leighninger, Jr., Long-Range Public Investment, 36.

The emphasis on building appeared similar to Fascist Italy, and people did not miss the comparison. For example, when Italian-American readers of Unione learned that the NIRA allocated 3.3 billion dollars to employ three million men, a photograph of Littoria, Italy, appeared immediately below the article. The city was the centerpiece of the Fascist project to drain the Pontine Marshes south of Rome and use the new land for cultivation.212

This Italian-American desire for Fascist-type, large-scale public works continued in subsequent years. The Civil Works Administration (CWA), created as a temporary program for smaller, local projects, failed to deliver permanent results. As Unione contributor Frank Cesario wrote in January 1934, he appreciated jobs for the unemployed, but he did not understand why the government could not assign “real projects[,] not artificial ones.” Men were “leveling the mud on a sloppy unpaved street” while citizens clamored for long-lasting civic improvements.213 The problem laid with bureaucracy. The Hoover administration delayed federal works funding because it argued for local and state primacy and against running national deficits and competition with private business.214 The CWA was an emergency measure to provide mass employment for the winter of 1933–1934. This urgency forced director Harry Hopkins to graft the federal agency onto state

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212 “Gli stranieri che potranno lavorare nel progetto di Lavori Pubblici che impieghera’ 3,000,000 di uomini,” Unione, 4 August 1933, 3; “Reclaiming the Pontine Marshes in Italy,” Unione, 4 August 1933, 3. Another example worked in reverse. On opposing newspaper pages, Italian Americans read about a series of public works in Italy and the Italian colony of Eritrea while presented a photograph of Americans employed in projects on Profit Island, in the Mississippi River. See “Grandi Lavori Pubblici in Italia e nelle Colonie Africane,” Unione, 12 January 1934, 6; “I Grandi Lavori Pubblici nello Stato Mississippi,” Unione, 12 January 1934, 7.


and local relief organizations to quickly disperse funds, but this lessened oversight. To rapidly employ millions and not conflict with the PWA’s long-term projects, organizers favored small assignments that required little planning, ones that they could start and end immediately.\footnote{James N. J. Henwood, “Experiment in Relief: The Civil Works Administration in Pennsylvania, 1933–1934,” \textit{Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies} 39, no. 1 (January 1972): 59–67, http://www.jstor.org/stable/27771993; Schwartz, \textit{The Civil Works Administration}, 39–46.} New Dealers addressed Cesario and others’ critiques by creating the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in 1935, which was broader in scope than the CWA and more aligned with the PWA concerning the long-term impact of its construction projects, which numbered “over 480 airports, 78,000 bridges, and nearly 40,000 public buildings.”\footnote{Jason Scott Smith, \textit{Building New Deal Liberalism: The Political Economy of Public Works, 1933–1956} (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 2.} As the New Deal progressed, public works became analogous to the types celebrated in the Italian-American press about Fascist Italy.

Title I of the NIRA, which created the NRA, caught Italian-American attention more than the public works provisions.\footnote{Muzio Frediani, “National Recovery Administration,” \textit{Unione}, 25 August 1933, 1. \textit{Unione} director Muzio Frediani recognized that some readers were “in partial linguistic isolation” and promised to provide detailed and accurate information about the NRA. The newspaper followed through and spent the majority of its columns that involved domestic politics discussing the NRA and related topics.} From the plan’s language, they understood it as corporatism, which, having approached Fascism from the left, meant the government’s reorganization of the economy to balance labor and capital, akin to upholding the working class. Early summaries of the NIRA described the law as “provid[ing] for the government control of the 700 industries of the U.S., by investing them with public interest.” The NRA would accomplish this via “voluntary trade codes which [would] reduce working hours, fix
wages, ration production, and regulate competition[,] … subject to executive approval.”

An in-depth description of the NRA and codes concentrated on what this meant for labor. The textile code, for example, gave employees a forty-hour workweek and minimum pay (thirteen dollars per week in the North, twelve dollars per week in the South). The law conceded trade associations for industry, organizations that antitrust legislation previously targeted as illegal; however, labor gained the right to organize, which Italian Americans viewed as paramount.

Closer to this project’s geographical area of inquiry, Charles Schisano interpreted the meaning of the new NRA codes for the miners who populated many towns throughout western Pennsylvania. The specific rights gained by employees were extensive: shorter hours and better pay; the protection of unions; guarantees of cash or check payments and the abolition of company scrip; the prohibition of forced residence in company housing and forced use of company stores as conditions of employment; and the elimination of child labor. When the ethnic press ran columns about the NRA, it most often included information and answers concerning labor rights, such as working hours, minimum pay, age restrictions for employment, and how to file complaints against employers. This perceived equalization of labor and capital is why one Unione writer used the analogy that work programs were an “ointment,” but the NRA had the potential to be a “surgeon’s

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219 “La Legge del ricupero Industriale messa in pratica,” Unione, 11 August 1933, 3.
knife.” The agency brought the structural change necessary to address the cause of the national ailment, not only the symptoms.

There was considerable enthusiasm for and engagement with the program from the ethnic community. John Cuda, a wholesale grocer operating in Pittsburgh’s Strip District, announced that he would answer Roosevelt’s appeal to support the NRA, and his company made the first local Blue Eagle honor roll list. The Pittsburgh NRA’s Foreign Language Speaking Committee included representatives from the various ethnic presses, and the organization appointed Unione’s Charles F. Schisano as its chairman in August 1933. Top-down efforts for involvement with ethnic groups merged with grassroots participation from the bottom-up. Frank Casper, the Hiram House worker featured prominently in chapter two, organized a pro-NRA rally of more than six thousand Clevelanders, “which demonstrated the unanimity of support for the NRA” in the local community. Italian-American women played a role. Mrs. Samuel F. Molinari led a group that canvassed Pittsburgh neighborhoods to explain the NRA and calm inflation fears. She also spoke at the Carnegie Library in East Liberty during a pro-NRA informational event attended by numerous female representatives of various local ethnic lodges and societies.

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222 Premo J. Columbus, “I Scribble Away,” Unione, 12 January 1934, 8.
223 “La Ditta John Cuda Inc. Risponde all’Appello del Presidente,” Unione, 4 August 1933, 2; “First Pittsburgh Firms to Join ‘Blue Eagle’ Parade Get Places on Honor Roll,” Pittsburgh Press, 5 August 1933, 7.
225 “6,000 Here Unite in Rally for NRA,” Cleveland Plain Dealer, 8 September 1933, 6.
227 “Un Comitato di Signore Italiane per il N. R. A.,” Unione, 6 October 1933, 2.
Since Roosevelt appeared to be operating in the mold of Mussolini concerning economic improvement and bringing balance to capital and labor, there were calls for workers to cooperate with him because he was an ally and fair arbitrator. A good example involves the mine workers in southwest Pennsylvania, many of whom had spent the summer of 1933 agitating for NIRA’s promised union recognition. In August, Roosevelt intervened to craft a settlement between employers, the leaders of the United Mine Workers of America (UMW), and the NRA. Labor concessions did not include union recognition; Roosevelt left it for the subsequent NRA discussions. Some UMW locals rejected the agreement, and thousands of rank-and-file members remained on the picket lines. Roosevelt created the Pennsylvania Coal Arbitration Board to handle their grievances, and Unione echoed the agency’s message to stay calm and allow the NRA to operate as intended. Thousands remained out on strike even after the signing of the new coal code in late September. Schisano understood their reluctance. He had seen the terrible conditions firsthand when he spent two years as the director of welfare work for a coal

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228 Chas. F. Schisano, “Calma, Pazienza e Fede,” Unione, 25 August 1933, 1. Schisano asked people to have faith in Roosevelt but not be carried away by enthusiasm because fixing the economy would take time. He used the analogy of sowing uncultivated lands. It would take time for the seeds to produce, but the idea was that the United States was trying to fix the problem.


concern in Fayette County, south-southeast of Pittsburgh.\(^{232}\) There had been a fifty-year “tradition of true CZARISM, of TYRANNICAL and INHUMANE AUTOCRACY” in the coalfields, justifying the workers’ hesitancy to trust operators.\(^{233}\) However, he also believed that the NRA’s purpose was worthwhile and hoped that Roosevelt would take the next step, “a law … to guarantee the agreements between operators and miners.”\(^{234}\) Most employees likely concurred with Schisano’s assessment because, as he remarked on 13 October, after some of the continuing strikes turned violent, no Italian names appeared on the lists of those arrested or hurt.\(^{235}\)

Italian-American dissatisfaction with the NRA stemmed not from beliefs that the plan had been too radical and harmed individual liberty, the critique from conservatives, but that the intervention had not gone far enough. Schisano remarked early in the NRA’s history that unrest in area mills came “from some not malicious but ill-informed agitator” who misunderstood the codes and what they meant for the working class.\(^{236}\) As a columnist, he was too well-informed about the goals of the NRA and not enough about its implementation. There was a disconnect between the provisions and the reality experienced by the workers. Parity between capital and labor guaranteed by the government was necessary for the system to work; however, the government seldom punished businesses

that evaded their responsibilities.\textsuperscript{237} As Al Tronzo stated, “the business men of America are cheating on Uncle Sam. They are trifling with the bird [the NRA Blue Eagle]. They think that it’s a huge joke.” The issue was not the theory of economic cooperation and government intervention, but that business “accepted it in bad faith, and worked out loopholes in order to defraud.”\textsuperscript{238} By early 1934, \textit{Unione} joked that even sweatshops had adopted the Blue Eagle, and they paid six cents per hour to sew NRA labels onto garments.\textsuperscript{239}

The NRA failed in practice. The “loopholes” described by Tronzo allowed companies to skirt provisions, such as section 7(a), the right to unionize. Many businesses only recognized company-run unions, ranging from as small as the Hazelwood and Grand Theaters in Hazelwood, Pittsburgh, to the multiplant steel concerns – Republic, United States Steel, Jones and Laughlin – that dotted the region.\textsuperscript{240} As historian Daniel Nelson pointed out, a few company unions during this period operated for their employees’ benefit,

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237 Jason E. Taylor, \textit{Deconstructing the Monolith: The Microeconomics of the National Industrial Recovery Act} (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2019), 107–27. The law allowed the Department of Justice and the Federal Trade Commission to arrange trials to fine and jail those who broke the codes, but Roosevelt decided early in the NRA’s implementation to rely on public pressure via possible boycotts of those who rejected the NRA and its Blue Eagle. The NRA eventually brought a few cases forward for litigation, but they were a fraction of the number of complaints received. The NRA Compliance Division primarily relied on “adjusters” who sought voluntary fixes from the offending entities. This practice resulted in lax code enforcement because the Compliance Division lacked enough staff to handle the volume of violations during the long bureaucratic process.

238 Al Tronzo, “Merchants Do Their Part?,” \textit{Unione}, 25 August 1933, 8.


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but “in most instances the new company unions of 1933-37 [created as a response to the NIRA] were probably the sinister institutions that critics made them out to be.”241 Censorship and propaganda had presented Italian Americans with an unrealistically successful image of Fascist corporatism. By contrast, they experienced the shortcomings of the NRA, and this familiarity conditioned their views and explains two letters sent to Roosevelt from Italian-American steelworkers in Aliquippa. The first, dated August 1934 and written in Italian, informed Roosevelt about how the company wanted to hold them in “slavery,” but they sought union recognition to gain “a little more freedom.”242 A second letter, dated November and written in English, reiterated that they were trying to form a union and asked bluntly, “I wish to know, if this organization is upheld by the government, and if it’s favorable for the class of workingmen, to join same. I will greatly appreciate your advice.”243 Competing narratives only created confusion. Italian-American workers had come to trust Roosevelt and their ethnic press that supported the NRA in principle, but there was a growing dissonance between intentions and reality.

The Second New Deal

Had the National Recovery Administration expired and disappeared, and Franklin Roosevelt returned to business as usual, then Italian Americans would have viewed the New Deal favorably but perhaps not enthusiastically. Instead, Democrats dominated the

242 Frank Marchione to Franklin D. Roosevelt, letter, 17 August 1934, box 1, folder 38, Beaver Valley Labor History Society Collection, 1909–1981, AIS.1981.08, Archives & Special Collections, University of Pittsburgh.
243 L. Marchione to Franklin D. Roosevelt, letter, 30 November 1934, box 1, folder 38, Beaver Valley Labor History Society Collection, 1909–1981, AIS.1981.08, Archives & Special Collections, University of Pittsburgh. Underlined in original.
1934 midterms, and Roosevelt won a landslide reelection in 1936 with the help of Italian-American voters.244 This consolidation of the Democratic coalition was because the Second New Deal, the more controversial legislation passed after the 1934 midterm elections, once more appropriated Italian-American ideological preferences by doubling down on government intervention favorable to working people.

In early 1935, Paul Block, the publisher of the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, printed a lengthy, bold-type evaluation titled “The New Deal After Two Years.” Point by point, Block excoriated the government’s actions. The New Deal ballooned the national debt and government bureaucracy, created state control of the stock market via the Securities and Exchange Commission, gave the administration “tremendous supervisory authority over” most significant industries, including mining, energy, transportation, and communications, and transferred power from Congress to the executive branch.245 Roosevelt disregarded federalism and “enacted measures which put us so close to the borderline of fascism that it would not require much more to render American independence and freedom a thing of the past.”246 In Block’s view, “the heritage of this country is individualism with freedom – not state socialism, fascism nor a mixture of the two.”247 Except for the debt issue, the New Deal features that Block described as detrimental to American politics appealed to Italian Americans, and they favored further government involvement.248

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244 Kennedy, Freedom from Fear, Part I, 216, 284–86.
248 Italian Americans were uncomfortable with massive deficit spending. Similar to what Mussolini had supposedly accomplished in Italy, they sought long-lasting reform of
The issue with the NRA was lax enforcement. Italian Americans already understood from Fascist Italy that real change needed to come from legislative intercession, not optional adherence. Hugh S. Johnson, the NRA’s director, insisted, “we are not trying to force anybody into the line-up” to participate in the program and receive the Blue Eagle. The consumer’s choice to patronize NRA code-compliant businesses was the reward. Where Italian Americans differed was in Johnson’s opinion that “if there is one thing certain in this great national game of ours[,] it is that nobody can legislate the country out of its troubles.”

To continue the director’s sports metaphor, Italian Americans wanted the government not as an observer to the game but as a referee. The NRA’s real-world implementation failed, but Italian Americans still desired that the government address the issues that the agency sought to remedy.

The Supreme Court struck down the NRA in May 1935. It is best to think of the organization as columnist Frank Cesario did early in its implementation, “a good start.” Unione credited Roosevelt and the NRA for increasing union membership among the miners and pressuring owners to negotiate with labor. The NRA’s promises did not

spending and monetary policy, rather than simply “priming the pump” with vast sums of money and then returning to business as usual. They wanted the wealthy to pay more taxes, but they also supported government efficiency, the reduction of duplicate bureaucratic positions, and fairly bid government contracts to lessen the tax burden on regular Americans. See “Il Ritorno Della Prosperita’?,” Il Cittadino Italo-Americano, 21 May 1932, 1; “Make Taxes Fit Income,” Unione, 26 May 1933, 8; “It’s Time to Deliver,” Unione, 9 June 1933, 8; Frank Cesario, “The Rambler,” Unione, 9 June 1933, 8; “Avviso ai ‘Nostri’ Legislatori,” Unione, 2 March 1934, 2; Premo J. Columbus, “I Scribble Away,” Unione, 2 March 1934, 8.

251 “Union Membership Goes Up!,” Unione, 14 July 1933, 8; “Vertenza Mineraria,” Unione, 23 February 1934, 2; “Una Grande Vittoria Proletaria!,” Unione, 2 March 1934, 1.
always match reality; nevertheless, its prolabor provisions were necessary goals. The solution was to take another step. As Cesario concluded, the government needed to go further: “Shorter hours and a living wage is the answer to the depression. At present the government is merely supervising this new system, but I believe that we of the younger generations will live to see the government take hold of the reins themselves. Business and industry can no longer be let loose, the government must step in.”

The federal government followed through with labor-friendly regulation, albeit not with one encompassing NRA-style program, but with a series of laws that provided more permanence and enforcement to the working-class provisions that had been theoretically proposed but not always carried out.

From this perspective, the sections of the defunct NRA praised by Italian Americans evolved into new laws rather than marked a clean break in New Deal policy. Roosevelt himself expressed this idea when he pushed for an NRA “skeleton organization” after the Supreme Court decision. The program would instead carry forward via targeted, enforceable laws passed by Congress. Coal miner Richard Furgiuele offered no demarcation between the First and Second New Deal in his oral history when he explained

253 Some historians marked this division as the First New Deal (regulatory in nature) and the Second New Deal (the implementation of more lasting policies and foundations for a welfare state). Others, such as Katznelson, believed the break was minimal. This project follows the latter argument and views the division as an evolution in which the regulatory provisions favored by Italian Americans found permanence in law. See Ira Katznelson, Fear Itself: The New Deal and the Origins of Our Time (New York, NY: Liveright, 2013), 247–48.
that the law allowed unionization and the fair weighing of coal for payment.255 Even though his interview was over sixty years after the events, Furgiuele was correct that the NIRA theoretically permitted unionization in section 7(a) and that the bituminous coal code required a fair weight check.256 In his explanation, there was no break in what the NRA gave workers because the fair weight requirement continued even after Furgiuele followed the rest of his family into the mines in 1936.257 People living through this period viewed the NRA’s labor provisions as evolving because they continued in other forms. Lawmakers modeled the Guffey-Snyder Coal Act of 1935 after the defunct NRA’s bituminous coal code to continue government involvement in the industry. Even after the Supreme Court invalidated the 1935 law for the same price-fixing features that it had objected to in the NRA’s code, most of the terms returned in the Guffey-Vinson bill passed in 1937.258 As Washington, DC columnist William Bruckart claimed concerning the revived law, many people “believe that in passing the Guffey-Vinson bill … our government has taken a step which is very close to, even actually a step toward, fascism in America. It is an action so near to the policies of fascism in Italy that close students of the Mussolini plan say they can hardly discern any distinction.”259 Bruckart presented the law negatively, but to Italian

257 Furgiuele, interview, 9, 15–17, 22.
Americans who had prized replicating the Italian model even before the New Deal began, this amounted to a policy progression.

Parallel New Deal legislation delivered other outcomes that the NRA had promised. The Supreme Court struck down the codes because they fixed prices and encouraged cartels, but the New Deal still intervened in entities considered to be in the public’s interest, notably utilities. Before Roosevelt’s election, Italian Americans complained about costs associated with necessities like gas and public transportation fares.260 The Great Depression heightened concerns. In 1932, Unione columnist Al Esposito urged his readers to write to the Pennsylvania Public Service Commission and demand reform. The ten-cent monthly electric rate reduction, the utility companies’ response to consumer outrage, was a pittance for what amounted to a profitable monopoly.261 Reining in public utilities became a talking point for those seeking office, including Al Tronzo.262 The New Deal responded with the Wheeler-Rayburn Act, formally the Public Utility Holding Company Act of 1935, which established new regulations. These included registering all interstate utility holding companies with the Securities and Exchange Commission and examining dividends and contracts. The Federal Power Act of 1935 regulated interstate electric transmission. The

262 “A Vote for McNair is a Vote for Roosevelt,” Unione, 3 November 1933, 2; Al Tronzo, “Al Tronzo, Democratic Candidate from the First Legislative District Announces His Platform,” Unione, 13 April 1934, 1, 6.
law authorized the Federal Power Commission to establish fair rates after considering a utility company’s accounts.  

Subsequent legislation answered Frank Cesario’s desire for a more activist government, and they followed the suggestions made by Angelo Di Renzo in his 1928 article. Perhaps the New Deal did not bring the class collaboration Di Renzo favored after the NRA failed in practice, but the Wagner Act addressed some of his other critiques, including the need to protect unionization from being undermined by scab labor and for collective bargaining to spread beyond the skilled trade unions. His recommendations for old-age pensions and unemployment insurance found a place in the Social Security Act of 1935. The 1938 Fair Labor Standards Act addressed Di Renzo’s proposal to limit underage employment and working hours. The Second New Deal fulfilled many of the labor advances first promised by the NRA.

Most important was the National Labor Relations Act of 1935 (Wagner Act), which allowed employees to vote freely on a union and entrusted the National Labor Relations Board to uphold fair practices. During labor unrest in the automobile industry in the spring of 1934, Roosevelt interceded to stop a potential industry-wide strike. The consequences of this action resonated across economic sectors because workers saw their agency reduced to the advantage of business. As Edward W. Castaldi commented, government mediation avoided an economy-crippling walkout, but Roosevelt’s actions aided the automakers.

legality of company unions was undecided, and the decision undermined “the spirit of the N. R. A.” and its codes.266 There was no capital-labor equilibrium without free unionization, and this is what the Wagner Act intended to correct.

The automobile industry was not unique. Perhaps the clearest example emerged from the struggle between workers and management at the J&L Steel mill in Aliquippa, a conflict that formed the basis for the 1937 Supreme Court decision to uphold the Wagner Act. Concurrent to unrest in automotive plants, turmoil in steel prompted Roosevelt to create a separate entity to investigate labor practices in that industry.267 The government’s Steel Labor Board also failed to bring promised balance. As workers sought their collective bargaining rights as promised by the NIRA’s section 7(a), J&L Steel intimidated organizers and arrested unionization. In fall 1934, the Steel Labor Board heard testimony from workers before dismissing their complaint the following January after the company promised to stop the harassment. J&L Steel reneged and fired multiple union activists.268

The Wagner Act restored the balance between labor and capital by backing government intercession with the force of law.269 The empowered National Labor Relations

266 Edward W. Castaldi, “Note Finanziarie,” Unione, 13 April 1934, 2.
267 Roger Daniels, Franklin D. Roosevelt: Road to the New Deal, 1882–1939 (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 166, 194. There had already been a National Labor Board to accompany the NRA, but it was ineffective.
269 Gross, The Making of the National Labor Relations Board, 1 (1933–1937):1–3, 77–79, 123–25, 156–70; James A. Gross, Rights, Not Interests: Resolving Value Clashes under the National Labor Relations Act (Ithaca, NY: ILR Press, 2017), 11–15, 18–20. The final Wagner Act National Labor Relations Board became, in Gross’s interpretation, “quasijudicial.” The previous National Labor Board and first National Labor Relations Board evolved toward viewing their goals as less about mediation and more about upholding labor rights to bargain equally with industry. The inability to enforce provisions such as 7(a) hampered these earlier agencies. The Wagner Act NLRB reorganized itself with new law divisions meant to litigate its decisions before the courts to ensure compliance.
Board (NLRB) reviewed the retaliatory dismissals and forced J&L Steel to rehire the men with back pay, including Italian-American organizers Angelo Razzano, Dominic Brandy, and Angelo Volpe.\textsuperscript{270} The NLRB opened the door to industrial unionism, an idea that had been circulating in the Italian-American community for over a decade. As another participant, Dominic Del Turco, explained when asked if the union leaders campaigned before the final vote, “they didn’t have to. All they [the workers] had to do was [mark] yes or no, whether they wanted the union or not. It was supervised by the N.L.R.B. The federal government was in charge of it. On there they had, ‘do you want a union or not.’ It was that simple.”\textsuperscript{271}

Government involvement was essential to secure that right, even if participants were ill-informed about the mechanisms of the law itself. Guido Ferrari was an employee at D. L. Clark Company, a confectionery manufacturer in Pittsburgh, when his boss fired him and others in 1934 or 1935 for talking about unionization. Ferrari and his coworkers went to a government office and spoke to a man who straightened everything out. He arranged for Clark Company to rehire the group with a probationary period of a year to year and a half, after which time they could vote freely to organize. The labor board certified their union, Bakery and Confectionery Workers Local 12, in 1936.\textsuperscript{272} The government supported their choice. As Joseph Meranto of Youngstown stated: “Roosevelt was doing a great job … He formed the unions, I mean he didn’t form them, we formed

\textsuperscript{270} Casebeer, “Aliquippa,” 658–65, 678.
\textsuperscript{271} Del Turco, interview, 19.
\textsuperscript{272} Guido Ferrari, interview by Nicholas P. Ciotola, transcript, 5 November 1998, 32–34, box 1, folder 2, Beneficial Society of North Italy Oral History Collection, 1928–1998, MSS 597, Detre Library and Archives, Senator John Heinz History Center, Pittsburgh, PA.
the unions, but he helped out with that Wagner Act.”273 The New Deal delivered what they sought: a government that acted as a partner to create and protect workers’ organizations for fair bargaining.

The Social Security Act of 1935 provided both old-age pensions and unemployment insurance. Even as optimism in the NRA declined, Italian Americans continued arguing for a new, moderate social safety net. Unione contributor Al Tronzo, now running for a statehouse seat in spring 1934, echoed Di Renzo’s call from 1928 by supporting pensions for the elderly and unemployment insurance.274 Months later, Unione discussed the issue in philosophical terms: “We have reached a point in which we must absolutely abandon the old and antiquated principles and leave behind all the old theories of an exceeded individualism.” Remarking that multiple states had approved pension plans over the previous year, Unione believed it was only a matter of time before Congress enacted a national program.275

Italian-American commentators favored Roosevelt’s approach because it was moderate. Unione contributor Adam Di Vencenzo described the more generous Townsend Plan, which proposed two-hundred-dollar monthly stipends to the elderly, as “a wonderful plan but you and I know that it is simply out of the question” because of the level of taxes required to fund it.276 Pennsylvania state politician Frank J. Zappala described the Townsend Plan as “absurd” in a speech to the Star and Crescent Old Age Pension Club in

273 Joseph Meranto, interview by Dolores Z. Margiotta, transcript, 21 May 1976, 19, Youngstown State University Oral History Program: Depression: Personal Experience, O. H. 964, Maag Library, Youngstown State University, Youngstown, OH.
274 Al Tronzo, “Al Tronzo, Democratic Candidate from the First Legislative District Announces His Platform,” Unione, 13 April 1934, 1, 6.
275  “Urgenti Previdenze Sociali,” Unione, 16 November 1934, 1.
276 Adam Di Vencenzo, “As We Go,” Unione, 14 February 1936, 6.
Pittsburgh; however, he supported “a reasonable pension” and amendments to add medical care for the aged.\textsuperscript{277} Social insurance was a collective responsibility in which moderate allowances would protect and aid people who did not previously receive such benefits. The Italian-American press concluded that one reason for Democratic victories in 1936, to which the ethnic group contributed significantly, was that the masses voted against Republican attacks on social security.\textsuperscript{278} This defense was even in light of their new tax requirements when their economic positions were far from secure. The law stipulated for payroll tax deductions to begin on 1 January 1937 and disbursements in 1940.\textsuperscript{279} Additionally, workers knew about triennial tax increases for the program scheduled until

\textsuperscript{277} “L’Onorevole Frank J. Zappala per la pensione ai vecchi,” \textit{Unione}, 20 March 1936, 1.
\textsuperscript{278} “46 Stati per Franklin D. Roosevelt,” \textit{Unione}, 6 November 1936, 1, 8; “Il significato delle elezioni,” \textit{Unione}, 13 November 1936, 1.
1949. Italian Americans favored Roosevelt’s Social Security Act as a moderate and fair compromise.

The 1938 Fair Labor Standards Act codified the NRA’s ideas of limited hours and minimum pay. During the 1920s, the typical employee worked around fifty hours per week. Those in the steel industry labored more than the average. They gained some relief in 1922 when most mills agreed to switch from twelve- to eight-hour shifts, but many employees, especially the unskilled, continued to put in long hours. Common laborers assigned to the blast furnace, Bessemer converter, and open-hearth furnace departments in the Pittsburgh district, which included western Pennsylvania and Youngstown, averaged, respectively, 61.2, 55.7, and 59.9 hours per week in 1924. Bert Iacobucci, the Aliquippa resident mentioned earlier, worked as both a coal miner and steelworker during the 1920s. He preferred laboring in the mines because the eight-hour workdays were substantially better than the eleven- or twelve-hour shifts he had in the mill.

The NRA meant to fix this and the new problems created by the Great Depression, such as businesses slashing wages and forcing overtime on workers who had no agency during a time of economic turmoil. The NRA failed to correct hours and wages despite

283 Bureau of Labor Statistics, United States Department of Labor, 12, 27, 43, 58.
Roosevelt publicly declaring that the agency would target “chisellers,” employers who disregarded the labor provisions of the NRA codes.  

Nevertheless, Italian Americans still desired government intervention about the issue. When Cesario asserted that the NRA was a “good start” and Americans needed more government involvement, he specifically stated that “shorter hours and a living wage is the answer to the depression.” The Roosevelt administration agreed, and the president incorporated the idea of continuing these provisions from the defunct NRA into his party platform for his 1936 reelection. The 1938 Fair Labor Standards Act banned child labor and took into account the lessons learned from the NRA codes to enact stepped provisions for hours and wages. The law set the standard workweek at forty-four hours, which later tapered to forty-two and then finally forty hours in late 1940. It guaranteed paid overtime at one and a half times the employee’s regular hourly rate. A twenty-five-cent minimum wage increased to thirty and finally forty cents per hour in 1945. These provisions did not negotiate higher pay and better hours for all workers, but they set a floor from which labor could bargain.

Congress passed these laws separately, but the unfulfilled labor promises of the NRA and its codes inspired them. They were part of what academics classified as the Second New Deal, but to ordinary citizens living through the Great Depression, these concessions to working people were merely the desired and anticipated evolution of an

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286 “Per affilare i talloni dell’Aquila Blu,” Unione, 29 December 1933, 6.
interventionist government. The president’s willingness to support unionization, regulate specific industries in the public’s interest, provide unemployment and old-age insurance, and set minimum wages and maximum hours marked a reversal of government policy from the previous decade.

**Conclusion**

The celebration of Roosevelt and the New Deal became etched in the minds of Italian Americans who spoke positively of the leader and his program years later. Guido Ferrari, a Pittsburgh resident, exclaimed, “oh yeah, everybody voted for Roosevelt at that time.” According to Everett Pesci of Blairsville, Pennsylvania, although his county, Indiana, was filled with Republican “WASPs” (white Anglo-Saxon Protestants), Italian Americans wholeheartedly supported Roosevelt. Images of Roosevelt or noted union leader John L. Lewis were the second most common portraits hanging on the walls of Italian-American homes after only the Virgin Mary or Jesus Christ. In neighboring Westmoreland County, Samuel Sciullo of Vandergrift summarized support for the New Deal based on actions: “When Roosevelt was in things started to happen. People started to hope. All I remember was that people believed in him and he proved what he could do for them and he pulled us out of the Depression.” Bruno Degli of Youngstown had a similar view. Roosevelt “was a shot in the arm. His inauguration speech just seemed to pick the

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290 Ferrari, interview, 32.
292 Sciullo, interview, 5.
people right off of the ground” as the new president acted immediately to solve the crisis. Ormond Montini of Aliquippa asserted, “we was [sic] all the way for Franklin Roosevelt.” Even Ralph Cenname, who served as a Republican committeeman in New Castle, Pennsylvania, after his service in the Second World War, remembered that during his youth, “during Roosevelt’s time, it was Democrats. A lot of Democrats.”

Italian Americans did not begin the 1930s as committed Democrats but most certainly ended the decade firmly in that camp. Their allegiance was never an assured conclusion. During the depths of the Great Depression, they sought a new way forward. Their previous engagement with civic nationalism, leftism, and Fascism during the preceding decade laid a new ideological foundation for their politics, and they sought a resemblant national program.

Few during the 1920s would have dreamed of the reversal possible. Roosevelt entered office with vague promises to a cautiously optimistic Italian-American electorate, but his presidency reinterpreted the federal government’s relationship with its citizens and continuously delivered the outcomes sought by the ethnic group. His Democratic Party opened its doors to Italian-American office seekers, fulfilling the American promise. Roosevelt appeared to borrow from Fascist Italy, styling himself as a strong leader and economic interventionist, copying a corporatist approach to address the financial crisis.

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293 Bruno Degli and Jennie Irene Degli, interview by Mary Belloto, transcript, 20 July 1974, 4, Youngstown State University Oral History Program: The Depression: Memories and Recollections of Life During the Depression Years, O. H. 86, Maag Library, Youngstown State University, Youngstown, OH.
294 Montini, interview, 10.
concern for the working class laid at the core of his presidency, and he continuously delivered laws and programs that aided ordinary people. Italian Americans had built themselves a New Deal ideology and envisioned such a government, but Franklin Roosevelt made that dream a reality.
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468


