

Italian American Review

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Italian American Review

John D. Calandra Italian American Institute

The *Italian American Review (IAR)*, a bi-annual, peer-reviewed journal of the John D. Calandra Italian American Institute, publishes scholarly articles about the history and culture of Italian Americans, as well as other aspects of the Italian diaspora. The journal embraces a wide range of professional concerns and theoretical orientations in the social sciences and in cultural studies.

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Taking Stock and Looking Forward

JOSEPH SCIORRA

Three years ago, we at the John D. Calandra Italian American Institute relaunched the *Italian American Review (IAR)*. Because of the growth the journal has since then undergone, it seems appropriate to take stock of our work thus far and to offer readers a sense of where the journal is heading in the near future.

The quality of the journal is unsurpassed in its scholarly content, meticulous editing, and elegant presentation. The *IAR*'s excellence is the direct result of the hard work of the Institute's staff and the volunteer labor of the review editors and board members, all of whom are listed in the masthead. In addition, the various scholars—who have peer-reviewed submitted articles and reviewed recent books, films, websites, and exhibitions—have made invaluable contributions to advancing the journal's mission and enriching the field of Italian American studies as a whole.

The publication schedule of the journal has undergone a slight shift, due to a number of factors. One challenge has been a paucity of a steady stream of submitted articles. More than once, publication has stalled for lack of at least two articles that had completed the requisite round of submission, peer review, editing, and copy editing. To address this situation we have been actively involved in encouraging submissions for consideration, by speaking with presenters at conferences and distributing calls for papers via mail, email, and various online venues. In the past year, we have seen a significant increase in submitted articles. This is heartening. It is critical for the journal's success that we continue to receive article submissions that address current concerns in the social sciences and cultural studies in an intellectually rigorous and engaging manner.

The journal's digital presence exists on several fronts: Since fall 2012 it has been listed in the Modern Language Association's Directory of Periodicals, and the full text has been available in EBSCO's "America: History & Life" database. Starting with this issue, published reviews and notes will be available as downloadable PDF files on the Calandra Institute's website. We will work backwards to upload all past reviews since the *IAR*'s relaunch.

The *IAR* currently has a mere 51 individual subscribers (30 regular and 21 students/seniors). These are certainly not great numbers, especially after

three years. As with our campaign to solicit new article submissions, we have engaged in a series of mailings to reach new subscribers. We are thankful to those college libraries and institutions which have chosen to subscribe to the journal: Brooklyn College; College of William and Mary; Elon University; Fordham University; the Historical Society of Pennsylvania; Chapman University; Smith College; and York University (Canada).

According to our original plan, we are changing the board membership periodically in an effort to bring in different perspectives. I wish to thank two departing board members, Richard Alba and Enrico Cumbo, whose support and input were instrumental in establishing the new *IAR* five years ago. I welcome historian Stefano Luconi (University of Padua) and folklorist and religious-studies scholar Leonard Norman Primiano (Cabrini College) as new members of the editorial board.

Nancy Carnevale has served as the volunteer book-review editor from the inception of this initiative, and in that capacity she has helped to establish the intellectual standard of the journal. Because of her various professional commitments, this issue will be her last in that position; we are pleased that she has agreed to continue working for the *IAR* as a member of the editorial board. Starting with Issue 4.2, Robert Oppedisano will begin as the new book-review editor. Oppedisano, who is well-versed in Italian American studies, served as the Associate Director for Fordham University Press and currently does independent editing and chapter and book development. He serves on the executive council of the Italian American Studies Association.

Since 2.1 (Winter 2012), the journal has featured reviews of gallery and museum exhibitions that focus on the lives and work of Italian Americans. These exhibits have encompassed a wide range of works and formats, including art photography and historical overviews mounted in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, the Italian Canadian Centre in Ottawa, and the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Library in San José, to name but three. We at the Institute have been overseeing this new section of the journal until recently, but we are actively searching for an exhibition-review editor.

The new *Italian American Review* redefined itself as a social science and cultural studies journal, albeit one without literary criticism. In keeping with that reconfiguration in the journal's purview I would be remiss if I did not mention, even if only briefly, the death of Stuart Hall in February 2014. One of the key figures in developing cultural studies in the United Kingdom, Hall was instrumental in helping scholars determine ways to approach and interpret various topics relating to ethnicity, race, gender, and media. His influence is felt in Italian American studies in both obvious and subtle ways.

A final point: You will notice that the cover image of the journal has changed. We have moved from the detail of Sabato “Sam” Rodia’s Watts Towers in Los Angeles to Joanne Mattera’s painting *Silk Road 106* (2008). In a way, it can serve as a signal of our continuing scholarly progression both outward *and* inward—expanding the reach of our inquiry as well as focusing on the nuanced realms of texture, saturation, and depth. It is an exciting mission, and we consider ourselves lucky to be charged with it.

Resisting Discrimination and Anti-Semitism on the Culture Page of *L'Unità del Popolo*, 1939–1941

BRENDAN HENNESSEY

In a review of Charlie Chaplin's *The Great Dictator* (1940) published in *L'Unità del Popolo* on November 9, 1940, critic George Bernardi writes:

Chaplin's idea of what it takes to fight Fascism and Nazism is not limited to comic and impractical means. [. . .] Chaplin understands the political forces at work in the world today. He knows that anti-Semitism does not arise out of the alleged innate bestiality or low instincts of the German people or the Italian people or any other people. *Chaplin sees anti-Semitism as a political instrument.* (Bernardi 1940b, 5, Bernardi's italics)

Here and elsewhere, the reviewer's praise for Chaplin is used to highlight affinities between the critique of anti-Semitism in *The Great Dictator* and the broad antidiscriminatory platform laid out in *L'Unità del Popolo*, an Italian-American Communist newspaper published in New York City beginning in 1939. In Chaplin's cinematic rebuke of Nazi anti-Semitism, the editors and authors of *L'Unità del Popolo* recognized a potent ally in the fight against racial prejudice being waged by anti-Fascist factions in New York City at the time.

While the political characteristics of *L'Unità del Popolo's* anti-Fascist platform have received at least some scholarly attention, the various ways in which reviews of culture, the arts, and popular entertainment were yoked to the paper's cause will be the subject of this article.¹ As will be demonstrated, aesthetic judgments played a central role in defining the relationships between politics, race, and place. The newspaper's reviews illustrate how New York's Italian Communist diaspora balanced Italian cultural production (mostly through literature and theater) with new forms of American and Italian-American works of art (especially painting and cinema) and figures from popular culture (athletes, filmmakers, and actors). It is significant that writers for *L'Unità del Popolo* did not ponder such icons and artifacts solely in the interest of spearheading a campaign for Italian cultural and linguistic belonging in the multicultural United States, shaped by narratives of origin (Hall 1992, 292–295). Instead, *L'Unità del Popolo* published cultural reviews out of social and political necessity: They were deployed to defend Italians in America from an onslaught of criticism (stemming primarily from unpopular policies generated by Mussolini's Italy) that fed negative U.S.

portrayals of Italians already common in the mass media. Reviews from the early editions of *L'Unità del Popolo* (from the years 1939–1941) disclose the importance of cultural review as a medium for voicing anti-Fascist, antidiscrimination strategies of Italian-American Communists prior to the passage of the Smith Act (1940), which legislated the registration, imprisonment, and relocation of Italians across the United States.

To preface the transatlantic nature of *L'Unità del Popolo's* cultural interests, I will first introduce the significance given to Italy's artistic heritage contained in a forty-page pamphlet titled *Are We Aryans?*, published by one of the paper's original editors, Gino Bardi, in 1939. Therein, Bardi paired a vast archive of Italian artists with the nineteenth-century political icons of Italian unification to buttress his case against the racially intolerant Fascist regime, whose *Manifesto della razza* of 1938, together with other international events, attracted negative attention to Italian Americans. Next, I outline how Bardi's emphasis on Italian artistic works extended to the pages of *L'Unità del Popolo* in the form of Italian and American theater, radio, and sports reviews, as well as the reproduction of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Italian literature. Finally, I will discuss George Bernardi's cinema column "Screen Time" and how its championing of Chaplin's *The Great Dictator* crystallizes *L'Unità del Popolo's* overall cultural strategy. In its attention to questions of culture, *L'Unità del Popolo* displayed some intriguing responses to questions of race and difference circulating through New York's Italian diaspora, providing a noteworthy attempt to integrate Italian and American culture into a uniquely Italian-American position against discrimination.

Although it was estimated that anti-Fascists made up only 10 percent of Italian Americans in the 1930s, Italian-American Communists exhibited a staunch anti-Fascism in *L'Unità del Popolo*, which was first co-edited by Mary Testa and Gino Bardi and published from 1939 until 1951 (Diggins 1967, 582). This newspaper provides an intriguing view into a relatively small but energetic Italian-American Communist print culture in New York City during the prewar years.² Inscribed in its reporting on general happenings that influenced New York City's large population of Italian workers was an important and multipronged endeavor to fight racism at a grassroots level (Guglielmo 2010, 257). This was part of a coordinated effort between Italian Communist editors from Europe and the United States during the final years of Italian Fascism.³

Gino Bardi embodies the personal intersection between Italian and American Communists in the first half of the twentieth century.⁴ Born in Italy in 1907 and immigrating to New York City as a small child, Bardi went on to receive a degree in philosophy from Columbia University. He

was an active member of the American Labor Party and gave lectures at the Garibaldi American Fraternal Society and the International Workers Order (IWO) throughout New York State; both institutions were important components of the network between Communists and labor in New York (Filippelli 1989, 24–27; Meyer 1989, 206). In March of 1939, he became the co-editor of *L'Unità del Popolo*, an eight-page weekly in Italian and English with a circulation that topped out at around 10,000 units in 1940 (Meyer 2003, 212). The paper's dedication to democratic principles that united Italy and the United States is easily recognized in the two quotes sharing the newspaper's masthead: One side cites Thomas Jefferson: "The most secure protection of the rights of the people is the massed strength of its citizens" while opposite this are the words "Be United O People, be united, and you shall be free!" by Giuseppe Garibaldi.

One source of criticism against Italians in America that the paper aimed to deflect resulted from the Italian imperialist invasion of Ethiopia in 1935, an event whose repercussions were particularly sensitive for those living in Italian East Harlem, an area north of Central Park between 96th and 125th Streets from Lexington Avenue to the East River. According to the 1930 Census, Italian Harlem was home to 89,000 first- and second-generation Italians, making it the largest "Little Italy" in the United States.⁵ Italian Harlem became a lightning rod for the opprobrium of the Italian imperialist project of the mid-1930s since to the west it shared a hazy dividing line with black central Harlem, "the nation's premier black metropolis and the city of dreams for black men and women in small towns around the country," that soon became a center for pro-Ethiopian, anti-Fascist fervor (Orsi 1992, 319).⁶ Prior to the actual attack on Ethiopia, black communities throughout New York used the protest against Italy's imperial aggression as a rallying point. "Not since the days of Marcus Garvey" remarked the *New York Times*, "had black nationalists won so large a following on the streets of Harlem" (Scott 1993, 108). Black members of the American Communist Party, Harlem Marxists, and the League for the Struggle for Negro Rights all sought the assistance of the Universal Negro Improvement Association to begin collecting funds to support Ethiopian independence and to organize mass protests against Mussolini's imperialist aims (Scott 1993, 109).

A second source of the anti-Italian sentiment, specific to Italian Communists of *L'Unità del Popolo*, was related to the signing of the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact of 1939, an agreement that associated Stalin and international Communism with Hitler and Nazism. Suggestions throughout the 1930s that the two dictatorships seemed to be blending into one gained footing after the official agreement, with the press coining "Communazi" to describe the identification between the governing philosophies of Stalin and

Hitler (MacDonnell 1995, 76). The agreement thrust the American party into crisis, and Italian-American Communists, including the readers and editors of *L'Unità del Popolo*, were suddenly expected to support a movement for peace with Germany and a position of American noninterventionism (Isserman 1993, 34–36). Following the pact, nonintervention briefly became the party line in the American Communist Party (CPUSA) and its affiliated publications, as reflected in early editions of *L'Unità del Popolo*, where editorials and international reporting emphasized the need for peace. The perception that Nazi and Soviet espionage were operating on U.S. soil was fueled by the accounts of Soviet defectors such as Walter Krivitsky (2000), who exposed the Soviets' vast network of spying that increased suspicion of foreign-born Communists living in the United States, exacerbating suspicions against Italian Communists.⁷ The alliance with a belligerent and increasingly brutal Germany would be short-lived, ending with the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, yet suspicion of Communists in the United States would continue.

A third source of criticism against New York's Italians was the publication of the *Manifesto della razza* in Italy during the summer of 1938. This document, written by a group of Italian "scientists," argued for a pure, Aryan race of Italians that had remained intact over the course of a thousand years. Jews, according to them, were the only group that had never been assimilated in Italy and therefore represented a threat to the nation's uncontaminated bloodline. The *Manifesto* warned against intermixing with Jews, the conquered people of North Africa, and any "non-Europeans." What followed this publication was a set of draconian anti-Semitic laws that affected thousands of Italian Jews. From the United States, these laws flew in the face of Mussolini's own proclamations of racial tolerance made shortly prior, prompting some to openly question Il Duce's mental state.⁸ The Roosevelt administration's denunciation of this shift was accompanied by a din of vitriolic press aimed at Mussolini. Italy was seen as bowing to pressure from Hitler, and for the first time the Rome-Berlin Axis was regarded as more of a real threat. In an editorial printed in *The Nation*, Albert Viton remarked with dismay: "Have the Italian masses all of a sudden become conscious of their exalted Aryan origin and begun to despise the lowly Jew? Nothing of the sort. . . . Italians have confessed to me that, coming on top of his other recent mistakes, the anti-Jewish laws have convinced them that Mussolini has lost his head" (Diggins 1972, 320). To silence the criticism from American news sources, the regime promptly closed the Rome office of the United Press International.

In the face of these admonishments against Fascist Italy in the United States and abroad, *L'Unità del Popolo* was poised to contribute an anti-

Fascist message that defended Italians in America by distancing them from Mussolini's policies. However, it had to do so against some of the most influential Italian-language newspapers being published in New York City. *Il Progresso Italo-Americano* was owned by the powerful businessman Generoso Pope⁹ and was the most popular Italian-language newspaper in New York City at the time, with a circulation that dwarfed that of *L'Unità del Popolo*.¹⁰ *Il Progresso* encouraged American Italians to voice their support for Italy, a nation that had embarked upon a quest "to write another epic page of glory in the history of civilization" (Scott 1993, 142). *Il Progresso's* call for solidarity with Italy would not have fallen on deaf ears, especially given the fact that it and other newspapers run by Pope (including *Il Bollettino della Sera* and *Il Corriere d'America*, also based in New York) "were the chief source of political, social, and cultural information for Italian Americans" (Cavaioli 2000, 488). Facing the uproar over the Italian campaign in North Africa, Pope's and other Italian-language newspapers in the United States, especially Domenico Trombetta's Fascist *Il Grido della Stirpe*, argued for unwavering support for Mussolini.¹¹ *Il Grido della Stirpe* was one of numerous Italian-language newspapers that directly linked Mussolini to the influential Little Italies of New York (Luconi 2004, 69). It was the most openly anti-Semitic Italian-language paper in America and received both direct and indirect support from the Fascist Ministry of Popular Culture. Trombetta and *Il Grido della Stirpe* illustrated how some of the more extreme, fanatical proponents of Fascist ideology attempted to forge a bond between Italy and Italian Americans via Fascism, with Mussolini as standard bearer (Cannistraro 1977, 53). While some newspapers attempted to temper the outright anti-Semitism by arguing that Mussolini was also helping Italian Jews, their actual position was not difficult to decipher (Luconi 2004, 73).

L'Unità del Popolo's opposition to all forms of discrimination substantiates a resistance to this powerful Fascist and pro-Fascist wing of New York's news media, while also underscoring the difficult and shifting position of the Communist Party in America during the years following the Nazi-Soviet pact. The paper was affiliated with East Harlem's progressive Congressman Vito Marcantonio, who as a member of the paper's Board of Directors contributed to *L'Unità del Popolo's* emphasis on issues of race and equality. Marcantonio, once caricatured as "the Hon. Fritto Misto," was himself a symbolic figurehead of Harlem's diverse racial mixture (Orsi 1992, 320). His ties to Communist newspapers such as the *Daily Worker*, *New Masses*, and *L'Unità del Popolo*, Communist organizations like the American Labor Party, the International Workers Order, and the CPUSA in New York City, as well as his agreement with most of the party's

positions vis-à-vis the war in Europe accentuate the positive exchanges between Marcantonio and New York Communists throughout his career (Meyer 1989, 53–86). As a Marcantonio-affiliated organ, *L'Unità del Popolo* became another important forum for promoting cohesion between Italian Americans and their multinational neighbors.

In this context, cultural review became an important weapon against both Fascism and discrimination. *L'Unità del Popolo's* attention to culture was first revealed in a pamphlet written by Gino Bardi titled *Are We Aryans?* and published by the IWO in 1939. This document, originally composed in Italian and then republished in English, features many of the key anti-Fascist elements that would emerge in *L'Unità del Popolo's* early years. Countering the *Manifesto della razza*, the pamphlet contains a direct refutation of discrimination in Italy, thoroughly destroying the connection between Italian culture and notions of racial superiority that the Fascists were attempting to engender.¹² To do so, the pamphlet brings together a fascinating mixture of Italian, American, and Italian-American cultural achievements that depicted Fascism as a historical low point. Furthermore, *Are We Aryans?* accentuates the potential dangers that Fascist discrimination in Italy posed for Italians in America that would go on to be brought to the newspaper's forefront.

Bardi opens the pamphlet by harkening back to the great contributors to Italian history and culture:

In the heart of the Mediterranean Sea, cradle of civilization, was born Modern Italy. It is the creation of a poet, Dante, who gave it a language; of Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci, who gave it art; of Galileo and Giordano Bruno who gave it a science; of Mazzini and Garibaldi, who gave it liberty. They expressed the Italian people's love for beauty, their hunger for knowledge, their struggle for freedom. (Bardi 1939a, 3)

The proud legacy of these foundational figures, according to Bardi, was being besmirched by Fascism and its racist policies:

This child of poets and artists, scientists and revolutionary heroes, grown to manhood, lies in bondage. Oppression and suffering have distorted its features. The poets and heroes of today who would save it from death are exiled or imprisoned or murdered. The blackest of Black Plagues has brought it down to the lowest depths of barbarism and spiritual and cultural depravity. (Bardi 1939a, 3)

To bolster this stance, Bardi juxtaposes the venerable Leonardo da Vinci with Futurist and pro-Fascist poet Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, as well as Mussolini himself:

Where once the gentle Leonardo da Vinci wrote that he hated war as a “bestilissima pazzia” – that most bestial madness – and that “it is an infinitely atrocious thing to take away the life of a man” – today are heard the ranting accents of a Marinetti declaring that “war is beautiful and the sole hygiene of the world.” Mussolini proclaims that “Fascism neither believes in the possibility nor the utility of perpetual peace . . . War alone brings up to its highest tension all human energy and puts the stamp of nobility upon the peoples who have the courage to meet it.” (Bardi 1939, 3–4)

Against this bellicose combination of contemporary Italian culture (Marinetti) and politics (Mussolini), Bardi then brought forth two pillars of the Italian Risorgimento: Garibaldi and Mazzini. By setting Fascism at odds with the founding fathers of modern Italy, Bardi disputed Mussolini’s claims that Fascism was the logical next step in a nation-building process that began with official Italian unification in 1861 (Bencivenni 2011, 85).¹³

This invocation of the heroic nineteenth century was not limited to these political figures, however, and Bardi demonstrates an interest in literary figures that would appear as well in the culture pages of *L'Unità del Popolo*. He also summoned for this purpose the work of Giacomo Leopardi, the Italian Romantic poet who, along with Ugo Foscolo, was seen as an early supporter of Italian national unification. Patriotic poems like “Sopra il monumento di Dante” (By Dante’s Tomb) and “Ad Angelo Mai” (To Angelo Mai), written in the early part of the nineteenth century, established Leopardi as a foundational representative of the birth of a modern Italian national identity. In 1939, the same year that *Are We Aryans?* was published, *Il Proletario* in Brooklyn published *Il carme a Giacomo Leopardi* with an anti-Fascist introduction by Randolfo Pacciardi, then with the Mazzini Society, meant to counter the Fascist regime’s commemoration of the centenary of the poet’s death two years prior (Marazzi and Goldstein 2004, 201). In a similar vein, Bardi reprinted the incipit to “All’Italia” (1818) the poet’s most famous ode to the homeland, in the next section of *Are We Aryans?*¹⁴ Here Leopardi’s lament for Italy’s degraded condition was followed by a plea to free Italy from foreign powers as a requisite step in the process of national rebirth.

The literature of the Risorgimento, exemplified here by Leopardi, would serve as a consistent resource for *L'Unità del Popolo*’s culture pages, where an interest in introducing readers to nineteenth-century Italian literature from the period of Italian unification became somewhat of a centerpiece. This appropriation in the United States of the literature of unification reflects the conflicting representation of the Risorgimento that was taking place in Italy throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Mussolini, along with Fascist intellectuals such as Giovanni Gentile and Gioacchino Volpe, sought to

represent Fascism as the continuity of Risorgimento ideals. Mussolini in 1923 claimed that, “between the Garibaldian tradition, the pride and glory of Italy, and the action of the blackshirts, not only is there not an antithesis, but there exists a historical and ideal continuity” (Rosengarten 1968, 147). This position was rebutted by prominent anti-Fascists like Benedetto Croce.

Between 1940 and 1941, examples of nineteenth-century Italian literature that were reprinted in *L'Unità del Popolo* were mostly of the prose variety. On Saturday, March 22, 1941, portions of Italy's first modern novel, Ugo Foscolo's *Le ultime lettere di Jacopo Ortis*, were published. As the preface to the novel emphasizes, Foscolo was an example of an early adherent of a notion of an independent, free Italy that was being suppressed by Fascist censors. Furthermore, his prose could be read as a call to action from outside of Italy's borders:

Le Ultime Lettere di Jacopo Ortis, di Ugo Foscolo, pubblicate sotto un altro nome nel 1802, sono uno dei primi documenti letterari del Risorgimento italiano. In esse non si nota soltanto la sconsolata e sterile protesta tipica degli scrittori “romantici:” l'amore della libertà e dell'indipendenza nazionale che le ispira costituisce già un passo importante verso l'azione politica. Gli attuali oppressori del popolo italiano appunto per questo non amano *Le Ultime Lettere di Jacopo Ortis*, e le hanno praticamente bandite dalle scuole. Noi crediamo interessante riprodurre qui per i nostri lettori alcuni dei passi di una delle Lettere piu' famose, la' dove l'autore saluta l'Italia dall'alto delle Alpi Marittime, presso i confini di Ventimiglia. (“Libertà va cercando” 1941, 4)

Le Ultime Lettere di Jacopo Ortis, by Ugo Foscolo, was first published under a different name in 1802 and is one of the first documents of the Italian Risorgimento. The Letters were more than a dejected and sterile protest typical of “romantic” writers: the love of liberty and national independence that were their inspiration represented an early step towards political action. For this reason, the real oppressors of the Italian people bear no love for the *Le Ultime Lettere di Jacopo Ortis*, and have practically banned it from schools. We believe it interesting to reproduce a few passages for our readers from one of the most famous of the Letters: the one in which the author salutes Italy from the Maritime Alps near the border with Ventimiglia. (translation mine)¹⁵

The reissue of patriotic literature of the early nineteenth century continued with the serialized novel *Il Dottor Antonio*, by Mazzinian exile Giovanni Ruffini, which appeared weekly in the 1941 culture page. Originally written in English in 1855, the book was intended to rally favor for the Italian

unification cause in England and then in France. It tells the story of an Italian medical doctor who falls in love with an English patient and mixes anti-Austrian sentiment with a call to create a new, independent Italy. On March 29, 1941, the first installment of the serialized novel was presented under the title “Il Nostro Romanzo D’Appendice” (Our serial novel):

Con questo numero, *L'Unità del Popolo* inizia la pubblicazione a puntate del grande romanzo “Il Dottor Antonio” di Giovanni Ruffini che ha come tema un episodio di amore e di lotta nei primi decenni della storia del Risorgimento italiano. Letto con fremente passione dai padri dei nostri padri, questo romanzo contribuì non poco, sin dal primo suo apparire, ad accendere di entusiasmo gli animi di larghi strati di patrioti rivoluzionari, nel movimento per l’indipendenza e l’unità d’Italia [. . .] (“Il Nostro Romanzo D’Appendice” 1941, 1)

With this edition, *L'Unità del Popolo* begins the publication of the great novel “Il Dottor Antonio” by Giovanni Ruffini, depicting an episode of love and struggle during the first years of the Italian Risorgimento. From its first appearance, it was read with quivering passion by the fathers of our fathers, contributing substantially to enthusiastically igniting the spirits of many revolutionary patriots in the movement for Italian unification. (translation mine)

Together with installments of *Il Dottor Antonio*, the paper also showed a sustained interest in the literature of social realism and depictions of the working class that were fundamental to Italian *verismo*, reprinting excerpted readings from classic novellas by Giovanni Verga (*I Galantuomini* on February 8, 1941, and *Il Mistero* on February 22, 1941).

L'Unità del Popolo's re-evocation of Italian literature was done not only in print, but also on stage. In 1940, the newspaper paid for and organized the performance of dramatist Luigi Pirandello’s *Lumie di Sicilia* alongside a short piece by Ugo Ciliberti. The play was publicized throughout September of that year in the following manner: “The New Dramatic Group of *L'Unità del Popolo* will present *Lumie di Sicilia* by Luigi Pirandello (in Italian) Saturday, September 21, 8.15 p.m. at Park Place Fifth Avenue and 110th st. Also: A dramatic episode by Ugo Ciliberti (Dancing Will Follow)” (*Lumie di Sicilia* listing 1940, 5). Following the performance, a brief note titled “A Successful Evening at Park Palace: Bringing Culture to the People” (Saturday, September 28, 1940, 5) provides a gloss of the production and a commentary:

It is the people who are the inheritors and containers of the best classical traditions and it is they who nurse and protect the culture of centuries. And it is the people who generate culture, who give birth to the genuine

in literature, painting, etc. [. . .] Saturday's dramatic evening was an auspicious beginning for reviving that art and that culture which made Italy known and loved throughout the world.

Although the paper advertised other Italian theatrical productions, especially in opera (on Saturday December 28, 1940: "Italian Opera at Brooklyn Academy — Double-bill Mascagni's 'Cavalleria Rusticana' and Leoncavallo's 'Pagliacci'"), the Pirandello play showed the same dedication to producing Italian cultural events that *L'Unità del Popolo* featured in reprinting examples from nineteenth-century literature both in excerpted and serialized form. Both print and performance can thus be seen as additive to the paper's interest in supplementing lectures and roundtable discussions with cultural and leisure occasions (dances were the most frequently advertised social events).

The paper's willingness to fund this theater production also addresses a worry that the Italian theater tradition was at risk of being extinguished in Italian New York. "The only thing surer than death and taxes," an article titled "The Italian Theatre in America" (Saturday, March 29, 1941) noted, "is that the Italian theatre, along with all other similar immigrant-language enterprises, is doomed to slow but certain death (12)."¹⁶ Likewise, sanctioned performances were organized to contrast with other theatrical events being staged in New York at the time, providing contrasts between "good" and "bad" representations of working-class Italians in the city's theaters. A headline from Saturday, November 29, 1941, reads "New Broadway Play Distorts Life of Italian-Americans":

Alexander Greendale, the author of "Walk into my Parlor," is obviously a sincere and earnest young playwright who meant to write a play with social significance about Italian-Americans. Unfortunately, the play fails in this intent and we have instead a play with anti-labor implications and one which not only distorts the family life of Italian-Americans but propagates the defamatory legend that Italians are naturally gangsters, morally loose and masters of the stiletto. (6)

This aim — to counter misrepresentations of Italian Americans — was another fundamental goal of *L'Unità del Popolo's* culture page that was of crucial importance during this period. The page repeatedly urged American artists of Italian origin to contribute their own expressions of Italian-American life that could combat negative portrayals of Italians. In an article, "Italian Life in America: Literature" (Saturday, September 21, 1940), Louis Guglielmi lamented, "It is unfortunate that writers of Italian origin are so few in number and less still have gone to their own people for material" (5), before mentioning Pietro Di Donato's classic novel *Christ in Concrete* for being

“a notable example of the fine prose that can be created out of the music of the idiomatic speech of the paesani in America” (5). In “Italian-Americans in Modern Art” (Saturday, July 5, 1941), Guglielmi turned his attention to the works of Italian-American artists across New York City. He named as exceptional Joseph Stella, Peppino Mangravite, Luigi Lucioni, Daniel Celentano, Joseph De Martini, and numerous other painters who made up “a large group, certainly there is no dearth of names in the catalogs of the big national exhibitions” (Guglielmi 1941, 7). Beyond this glowing review citing the general success of these painters, another feature, “Giacomo Patri: A People’s Artist” (Saturday, March 29, 1941), stresses the capacity of Italian-American artists to depict the “real” situation of America’s poor in innovative ways. The article makes reference to the 1938 work *White Collar*, a wordless graphic novel composed entirely of a narrative series of linocuts. “[Patri’s] story is the story of a white-collar worker, who tells his fellow workers, whether they be white-collar or manual workers, how he learned that unity is necessary to the liberation of the working class” (“Giacomo Patri” 1941, 12).

Positive examples of Italian Americans could also be found in sports reporting on the careers of Italian-American professional athletes. In “Italian-Americans in Sport” (Saturday, March 1, 1941), Italian boxers and baseball players were referenced as examples inconsistent with representations of Italian Americans by the American press and Hollywood films portraying them as gangsters:

The Italian people have been getting a load of slander and abuse in the press. Because the Italian people have the courage to refuse to fight for their rulers’ imperialist aims they are called “cowards” by such brave warriors of the typewriter as Westbrook Pegler and his ilk [. . .] And, of course, the movies do their bit with the characterizations of sleek, sinister Italian-American gangsters on one hand, and simple comic, inferior types on the other. All this is nothing but shameful slander. The truth is that Italian-Americans, especially in the world of sports, have given splendid proof of courage and honesty. (6)

Westbrook Pegler, the popular columnist mentioned here, had become famous for promoting anti-Italian stereotypes and categorizing all Italians as criminals (Guglielmo 2003, 92).¹⁷ With regard to sports, during the 1930s, New York was international boxing’s unofficial capital, with numerous active Italian and Italian-American boxers who, according to the above-mentioned article, could potentially counter negative stereotypes. Similarly, the late 1930s and early 1940s also witnessed the rise of Joe DiMaggio in a Yankees uniform. In a subsection of the piece titled “Clean and Honest Sportsmen,” Italian Americans in both sports were exalted:

Could anyone mention a better liked and more admired quartet of sport figures in boxing than Lou Ambers, Tony Canzoneri, Fred Apostoli and Sammy Mandell? In a professional sport like boxing where there are always gamblers and whispered insinuations, here are boys who stand out immediately as examples of clean and honest sportsmen. . . . And for baseball players, starting from the greatest player in the game today, Joe DiMaggio, you can run down the list with Camilli, Lavagetto, Crosetti, Lombardi, Lazzeri and so on, all fine players, fine men, quietly efficient, sportsmanlike in the best real American tradition. (“Italian-Americans in Sport” 1941, 6)

DiMaggio was arguably America’s most famous Italian-American athlete at the time, and his fifty-six-game hitting streak was covered with excitement by *L’Unità del Popolo* (for example, Saturday, July 14, 1941, “Joe DiMaggio Continues Record-Breaking Streak”). Among his other praiseworthy attributes, his stance against racial discrimination earned him much praise. In the same article, he was singled out for standing up against segregation on the field:

DiMaggio, who came up from Fisherman’s Wharf in San Francisco to become almost overnight the most talked of player in baseball, never let it go to his head. . . . And he had the courage and sincerity to say that a Negro pitcher, Satchel Paige, was the greatest he had ever faced and belonged in the big leagues – this while the subject was considered strictly taboo. (“Joe DiMaggio Continues Record-Breaking Streak” 1941, 6)

During this same period, DiMaggio had been the target of ungracious ethnic stereotyping at the hands of a major news outlet, most famously in Noel Busch’s feature in *Life Magazine* published on May 1, 1939.¹⁸ *L’Unità del Popolo*’s attention to representations of Italian Americans and celebration of contributions of Italian-American athletes and artists were meant to counter the images of Italians that were available from national media outlets; these were outlets that many of the paper’s authors and editors also accused of promulgating an antilabor message. George Bernardi, who wrote mostly theater and film reviews throughout the early 1940s, took a strong position against Hollywood films, the American radio industry, and antilabor elements in American newspapers. In a series of articles titled “The Inside Story of Radio” (first seen on Saturday, August 17, 1940), Bernardi excoriated the broadcasting industry for doing the public a disservice by excluding Italian Americans. “Last year, over forty radio stations carried the tricky Fascist and Nazi propaganda of one of America’s most dangerous Fifth Columnists – Father Coughlin.” He saw advertising agencies, whose currency kept radio stations afloat, as barred to Italian

Americans and other minority groups in the city. “I shall explain to you,” he remarked, “why Italians, Jews, Catholics, and people who aren’t Protestant Gentiles and didn’t go to Harvard and Yale don’t stand much of a chance of getting jobs in advertising agencies” (Bernardi 1940a, 5).

Bernardi dedicated a large portion of his film column “Screen Time” to denigrating Hollywood for similarly unseemly practices. Hollywood, according to him, was simply another exploitative mass-media outlet that pandered to the political powers in Washington. Within this critique, however, Bernardi did leave space for lauding the achievements of Italian Americans working in Hollywood. Director Frank Capra and actors like Don Ameche and Jimmy Durante were seen as exemplary figures in a questionable industry.¹⁹ Where Bardi’s *Are We Aryans?* skewered Mussolini for rewriting Italian history to claim Italy’s Jews had been assimilated, Bernardi recognized a similarly racist reinterpretation of history as a constant in popular Hollywood cinema. In particular, he focused on the revisionism of Civil War-era movies. For Bernardi, films set in the American nineteenth century – *Gone with the Wind* (1939) was undoubtedly the most memorable example – were egregious in distorting the history of slavery and emancipation in and around the American Civil War. In “Hollywood Distorts an American Hero” (Saturday February 8, 1941), Bernardi analyzed Michael Curtiz’s *Santa Fe Trail* (1940); Bernardi’s timely review marks the film as a one-sided reinterpretation of the important antebellum figure of John Brown, whose fight against slavery and racial prejudice continues to stoke debate.²⁰

Bernardi took umbrage with this portrayal of John Brown. In his review of the film, he raised the issue of bias lingering just beneath the film’s façade as a simple western:

In critical periods like the present, somebody will always try to re-write the nation’s history to conform with what reaction he wants the people to believe. An industry which has as little regard for the intelligence of the American people as the film industry and which turns out so much drivel every year, need not be expected to stick to the facts of history. Recently Hollywood has given us SANTA FE TRAIL (currently at RKO theatres). The title may make you think it’s a Western. But it isn’t. It’s a pretty low-down attack on the memory of a man whose deeds were of world-shaking importance. The man slandered is John Brown, leader of an unsuccessful slave rebellion against the Southern aristocracy. (Bernardi 1941a, 5)

Bernardi was not alone in his outrage over the questionable depiction of John Brown in *Santa Fe Trail*. In May of 1941, Nell Brown Groves, John Brown’s granddaughter, sued Warner Bros. Pictures for \$1.32 million

("Suit by Relative of John Brown is Dismissed" 1941). Bernardi went on to question the reasoning behind portraying a hero of abolition in such a way and to consider the timing of this controversial portrait of John Brown:

John Brown was an American who took the Declaration of Independence seriously, particularly the part which says that all men are created equal. To millions and millions of Americans, for generations, John Brown has been a sacred symbol. The name of this fighter for freedom is immortalized in song. If the democratic liberties that millions of native-born and foreign-born Americans struggled for over 150 years are to survive, it is necessary that the spirit of John Brown go marching on even today. Or shall I say, *particularly* today? (Bernardi 1941a, 5)

When it portrayed the fight for racial equality as the handiwork of a blood-thirsty fanatic, *Santa Fe Trail* was indicative of how Hollywood film could not be trusted to offer an antiracist message in volatile times.

To counteract such films that exacerbated racial tensions, Bernardi looked to the work of Charlie Chaplin, a figure whose message of equality and understanding he found to be exemplary. As *Santa Fe Trail* highlighted racial divisions by casting antiracist heroes of American history in an extremist light, Chaplin's 1940 film *The Great Dictator* recast the racist Hitler in comic form. It should come as no surprise that a Communist weekly such as *L'Unità del Popolo* would find a kindred spirit in Charlie Chaplin. The figure of the Tramp, the prototypical everyman whose urban disenfranchisement generated endless comic scenarios, rapidly became an international icon of the fellow traveler and defender of the underprivileged.²¹ With *The Great Dictator*, Chaplin reconfigured the figure of the Tramp to tackle the issue of Nazi anti-Semitism head on.

On Saturday, November 9, 1940, *L'Unità del Popolo* dedicated a massive, half-page feature to the film upon its release. This represents the only time during this period that so large a section of the paper was given over to the review of one film. Bernardi's headline, "Charlie Chaplin's Splendid Film 'The Great Dictator' A Stirring Indictment of Nazism and Race Hatred," was accompanied by large stills from *The Great Dictator*. Bernardi opened with his observations on the relatively quiet reception of a film that he contrasts with that of *Gone with the Wind*, which had been released to public and critical acclaim a short time prior:

At two crowded New York movie theatres, Charles Chaplin unreels a great human document, a message of hope for the human race. But no trumpets blow for Chaplin—at any rate not the way they did for *Gone with the Wind*, that hymn to the reactionary senators from the lynching-

and-pellagra states. *Gone with the Wind* was helped along by big publicity splashes. The newspapers cooperated and often it made the front page. But Chaplin's film, *The Great Dictator*, is being deliberately played down. It is getting what amounts to "hush treatment." Why? (Bernardi 1940b, 5)

He suggested that Chaplin's stirring speech that concludes the picture (which is reprinted in the review in its entirety) was the source of the film's suppression. The content of the speech outlines Chaplin's anti-racist message ("I should like to help everyone if possible, Jew, gentile, black man, white. We all want to help one another, human beings are like that"), punctuating the film's ending. To some, *The Great Dictator* was a Hollywood attempt to stir up popular support for intervention into the war (Gregory 1989, 237). "Most of the critics have panned Chaplin for that speech," Bernardi continued:

It has been denounced as inartistic, "stuck on," "out of character with the rest of the picture." The audience found the speech intensely moving. Many times it broke into it with loud applause. And why shouldn't they? *Chaplin was talking directly to the people, outlining a broad, clear political, social and economic program for the human race.* (Bernardi 1940b, 5, Bernardi's italics)

He followed with a lengthy plot description of the film, retelling Chaplin's spoof on Nazi anti-Semitism, and then exhorted readers to internalize the film's message:

Chaplin calls on all people to unite, to abolish national boundaries, to fight in the interest of men of all races—Gentile and Jew, Negro and white [. . .] *Chaplin calls on us to beware of demagogues, who by promising these things, have fooled people and risen to power.* Chaplin has faith in the people. He sees a glorious future ahead, but he knows that only the people, *by uniting*, can bring it about. [. . .] His speech is no cynical call to save the British Empire, the French empire or any other empire. It is a call to the people of the world—all of them—English, German, French, Chinese, African, Jewish, Italian, Spanish—all of them, to destroy the system of greed which has nurtured Fascism and Nazism. (Bernardi 1940b, 5, Bernardi's italics)

Chaplin's call for a collective, multiethnic response to the Nazi threat encapsulates *L'Unità del Popolo's* own message against discrimination that began with Bardi's *Are We Aryans?* and continued in the culture page from 1939 to 1941. The choice of *The Great Dictator* rounds out *L'Unità del Popolo's* international attention to culture, matching Italian and American forms and figures. Like the film, the paper forwarded a multiethnic message of racial solidarity that would gain increasing relevance to Italian Americans

in New York City and elsewhere over the course of the following few years. And in addition to *Are We Aryans?* and the many reviews on the culture page, Chaplin's powerful excoriation of dictators, greed, and intolerance echoed an opposition to Fascist and Nazi notions of racial purity and superiority in a plea for defiance to such ideas coming out of Italy and Germany at the time. All provide a poignant point of reference for *L'Unità del Popolo's* broader stance against discrimination that would continue to develop in the years before the American intervention in World War II.

Notes

1. Scholar Gerald Meyer is responsible for the most thorough and thoughtful studies of *L'Unità del Popolo*. For an overview of the newspaper's significance, see Meyer (2001), which is also available at <http://www.politicalaffairs.net/l-unit-del-popolo-the-voice-of-italian-american-communism-1939-1951/>.
2. Meyer places *L'Unità del Popolo* within a genealogy of Italian-language Communist papers of the era: "The circulation of the Party's Italian-language press and membership in the Italian American section of the International Workers Order (IWO), the Party-affiliated fraternal organization, provide two rough measures for quantifying the Communist Party's presence in the Italian American community. The Italian American section of the American Party sponsored *Il Lavoratore* (1924–1931), *L'Unità Operaia* (1932–1938), *L'Unità del Popolo* (1938–1951), and lastly, *Unity* (1954–1961)" (Meyer 1989, 206).
3. *L'Unità del Popolo* was funded by and closely affiliated with the Italian Communist Party and its newspapers, especially *Lo Stato Operaio*. In the June–July 1940 issue of *Lo Stato Operaio*, which had relocated from Paris to New York in 1939, *L'Unità del Popolo* was "riconosciuto come il solo portavoce in lingua italiana della lotta contro la Guerra e contro l'imperialismo negli Stati Uniti" (recognized as the sole voice in the Italian language of the struggle against the war and against the imperialism of the United States) ("Uno sguardo al movimento italiano negli Stati Uniti" [1940] 1966, 67; editor's translation). For more on the relationship between the two papers, see Donini (1984, 331–334).
4. Despite the fact that much of Gino Bardi's life remains a mystery, a fascinating account of his activities that includes his work with *L'Unità del Popolo*, his participation in the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) during World War II, as well as his collaboration with Italian neorealist filmmaker Luchino Visconti is available in Sciorra (2009).
5. Prior to the increase in population in Harlem, the largest concentration of Italians in New York City was in the Lower East Side, the Mulberry District (Pozzetta 1981).
6. As Meyer points out: "The 1930 census showed the remarkable homogeneity of Italian Harlem, 81 percent of its population consisted of either first- or second-generation Italian Americans. (This was somewhat less than the concentration of Italian Americans in the Lower East Side's Little Italy – 88 percent; but Italian Harlem's total population was three times that of Little Italy)" (Meyer, "Italian Harlem").
7. See the most recent edition of Krivitsky's memoirs (2000).
8. In the *New York Times*, June 25, 1937, Mussolini stated: "I authorize you to state and to inform the Jews of America, as soon as you have returned to New York, that their preoccupation about the situation of their racial and religious brethren living in Italy can be nothing other than the fruit of malicious informers" (Sarfatti 2006, 120).
9. Much has been written on Pope: See Cannistraro (1985) and Luconi (2004, especially 69–72).

10. In 1948, for example, *L'Unità del Popolo's* circulation was 5,800, compared to *Il Progresso's* 70,000 units (Meyer 2003, 206).
11. For more on these figures, see Cannistraro (1999).
12. In his preface to the Italian version of *Are We Aryans? (Siamo Ariani?)*, Louis Candela opened with a direct assault on theories of a "great race": "Le dottrine razziste che oggi vengono propagate dal nazismo e dal fascismo sono barbare e criminali. Invece di unire i popoli, li dividono con odio bestiale. Le persecuzioni sadistiche, crudeli, e inumane degli ebrei in Germania sono delle azioni selvagge giustificate dalle infame 'teorie razziste'" (Bardi 1939b, 5). (The racist doctrines that are today propagated by Nazism and Fascism are barbarous and criminal. Instead of uniting the people, they divide them with a bestial hatred. The sadistic, cruel, and inhuman persecutions of the Jews in Germany are savage actions that are justified by infamous racial "theories") (editor's translation).
13. In this, Bardi is working in a similar vein as Benedetto Croce, the most famous Italian intellectual to refute Fascism's claim to be the rightful heir of the Risorgimento. A solid overview on Fascism's relationship to the Risorgimento is available in Davis (2005).
14. The beginning of Leopardi's poem printed here reads: *O fatherland / I see the walls and arches, / The columns and statues, / And armed towers of our fathers; / Now disarmed, / Bare is your breast and bare your brow. / Alas! What wounds, what blood! / How pale I see thee, lovely lady! / I cry to heaven and earth: / Tell me, tell me, / Who brought her to so low a pass?* (translation by Gino Bardi)
15. *L'Unità del Popolo* had both Italian and English sections. Some articles that originally appeared in Italian were later translated into English and published in subsequent editions. Translations into English for the purpose of this article are indicated as such.
16. The feared extinction of Italian theater among immigrants was also tied up with concerns over the perpetuation of the Italian language in newer generations of Italian Americans. This same article goes on to state: "Most of the younger Italians do not understand the language of their fathers, and many who do are ashamed to admit it." Communist leaders in the IWO lodge "La Progressiva" located on East 116th street had organized free Italian-language classes that were taught by Gino Bardi. Classes were canceled due to low turnout (Meyer 1989, 209).
17. For Pegler's self-defense against allegations of anti-Italianism, see Pegler (1938).
18. Busch's description of DiMaggio is punctuated by appalling stereotypes of Italians: "Although he learned Italian first, Joe, now 24, speaks English without an accent and is otherwise well adapted to most U.S. mores. Instead of olive oil or smelly bear grease he keeps his hair slick with water. He never reeks of garlic and prefers chicken chow mein to spaghetti" (Baldassarro 2011, 211–212).
19. The praise for Capra is a constant in Bernardi's articles of this period. In "Italian-Americans in Hollywood" (Saturday, March 29, 1941), he commends *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939) for its "broadside at the malefactors of great wealth"; *You Can't Take It with You* (1938) for portraying a monopolist who "reforms and sees the error of his ways"; and, finally, *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* (1936), where Capra "heaps scorn on money-grabbers" (Bernardi 1941b, 11). For an analysis of Capra's conflicted identity as an Italian-American director, see Cavallero (2011, 11–44).
20. In his review of *The Tribunal: Responses to John Brown and the Harpers Ferry Raid*, edited by John Stauffer and Zoe Trodd, Christopher Benfey writes, "Was John Brown a terrorist justly hung or a martyr to the central humanitarian cause of the nineteenth century? On December 2, 2009, the 150th anniversary of his execution, two Op-Ed pieces appeared in *The New York Times*. Under the title 'The 9/11 of 1859,' Tony Horwitz drew a parallel between Brown's undertaking and the al-Qaeda operatives who attacked the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. [. . .] For David Reynolds, by contrast, Brown was 'Freedom's Martyr,' a towering figure who deserved a presidential pardon for his 'heroic effort to free four million enslaved blacks'" (Benfey 2013).

21. Sbardellati and Shaw (2003) note the extensive government concern in the 1940s that Chaplin's films were Communist propaganda. They write: "[FBI] officials thus became especially concerned that a filmmaker like Chaplin, whose popular appeal was astounding, might intend to spread agitprop. Such thinking was expressed by Robert B. Hood, Special Agent in Charge of the Los Angeles office, who in 1944 sent Hoover an article from a leftist publication emphasizing this passage. 'There are men and women in far corners of the world who have never heard of Jesus Christ; yet they know and love Charlie Chaplin. So when Chaplin makes a film like 'the Great Dictator,' his thoughts reach a far greater audience than do the newspapers, magazines, or radio—and in picture words that all can understand'" (Sbardellati and Shaw 2003, 500).

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Becoming American: “Manila John” Basilone, the Medal of Honor, and Italian-American Image, 1943–1945

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Capone, Luciano, Camonte, Nitti, Anastasia, Castellano, Gambino, Gotti, Soprano. With apologies to the reader, who might reasonably identify this list as a rogue’s gallery of famous Italian and Italian-American gangsters, both real and imagined, these are, in fact, names drawn from the National Archives enlistment rolls for World War II (National Archives and Records Administration 2013); over 500,000 Italian Americans served their country during that war.¹ At the country’s darkest hour, with the attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941 and further losses to Japanese imperial forces over the coming months, an anxious American public turned its attention toward a heretofore largely unknown island in a distant South Pacific archipelago. Over a six-month period, from August 1942 to February 1943, American media were saturated with coverage of combat of unrivaled ferocity on and around Guadalcanal. In the midst of what quickly settled into an agonizing war of attrition in the air, on the sea, and, perhaps most dramatically, on the island itself, haggard U.S. Marines battled not only an implacable foe but also disease and crippling shortages of food, ammunition, and medical and other critical supplies.

The outcome remained in doubt until late autumn, when the Japanese Imperial Army launched its third and final ground offensive against the Marines defending the island’s main prize, Henderson Field. Lieutenant General Harukichi Hyakutake, commander of the Japanese 17th Army tasked with taking Guadalcanal, declared, “The time of the decisive battle between Japan and the United States has come” (Frank 1992, 642). From October 22 to October 26, Marines fought an unrelenting battle to maintain control of the airfield, ultimately repelling Hyakutake’s forces. With this victory the Marines finally secured the advantage; by the end of the following January, Japanese forces were withdrawing from the island. America had its first ground victory in the first major Allied offensive in the Pacific. In short order, it had a hero – Gunnery Sergeant “Manila John” Basilone, hero of the Battle for Henderson Field, the first enlisted Marine of the war to receive the Medal of Honor,² the only one to also be awarded the Navy Cross (for valor in combat on Iwo Jima), and an Italian American. Over October 24 and 25, during the Japanese assault on the airfield, Basilone had manned multiple machine-gun positions in its defense, repelling the overwhelming numbers of attacking forces. His actions were instrumental in the Marine victory.

Basilone's media image—for a time, perhaps, the country's greatest patriotic symbol—integrated specifically Italian-American traits as “American” and implicitly challenged the historic white Protestant consensus of what constituted a “proper” American. Ultimately, the wartime service of Basilone³ and hundreds of thousands of other Italian Americans—much of it the subject of nationally distributed media—fostered the acceptance and recognition of Americans of Italian descent, their customs, and their beliefs as legitimately American. The image Basilone presented, inseparable from the American values underpinning its construction, challenged prevalent perceptions about Italian Americans as dysfunctional, foreign, and often criminal.

While this study will address some of the response of Italian Americans to Basilone's accomplishments, it focuses primarily upon the construction of “America” and “American” within the mass-media image of John Basilone, from the announcement of his receiving the Medal of Honor and his first mention in the *New York Times* and other newspapers in late June 1943 to the announcement of his combat death on Iwo Jima (on February 19, 1945) in early March 1945. This research investigates two related concerns: How did Basilone's image signify Americanness, and how did it signify ethnic Italianness as consistent with that Americanness? It is the thesis of this study that the media image of John Basilone as a war hero, American ideal, and Italian American presented a new construct in the mass media that reflected and brought about greater acceptance and assimilation of Italian Americans into the social fabric of the nation.

Texts and Concepts

The essential element of Basilone's image was his status as a “hero”: If not for his heroics on Guadalcanal, he would not have received the Medal of Honor or become the focus of the press and other mass media. The media coverage that coalesced over the summer of 1943 focused largely on his actions of October 24–25, 1942. The picture painted of him, however, incorporated far more as it developed and evolved. In analyzing the figure of Basilone, this research focuses upon its construction within the most widely distributed and influential media. Among the more important media gatekeepers constructing and promoting Basilone's image was the *New York Daily News*, which enjoyed the highest circulation of any newspaper of the period (Henry 1991, 52). Additionally, the *New York Times*, the “paper of record” renowned for its thoroughness and independence, exerted influence among both journalists and the public and was an important publication for disseminating the Basilone image, as were

two other nationally distributed newspapers, the *Washington Post* and the *Christian Science Monitor*. While newspapers and news agencies provided the initial and most immediate reporting of Basilone's award and his part in the ensuing Third War Loan war bonds drive, the national dialog on Basilone was augmented by coverage in the nation's mass-market publications, including *Life* magazine, *Newsweek*, and *Time*, among others. Further, newsreels and radio broadcasts contributed to the construction and distribution of Basilone's image, and they are referenced in this research.

The foundational text in establishing Basilone as a public figure was the citation for the Medal of Honor⁴ awarded him on June 23, 1943, which was referenced and quoted in great detail by the nation's press. The manner in which Basilone was represented, built upon the facts provided in the citation, was tightly controlled and constructed under the auspices of the Department of the Navy and Treasury's War Finance Board. He was, in effect, the "star" of the Third War Loan Drive, and his image was honed and celebrity exploited to maximize bond buying and support for the war effort. The power and utility of celebrity have long been theorized, celebrity being usefully defined by P. David Marshall in his 1997 study *Celebrity and Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture* as "the epitome of the individual for identification and idealization in society" (Marshall 1997, 19). Much contemporary analysis of celebrity and image springs from Richard Dyer's pioneering work on image, *Stars* (1998), in which he defined and elaborated a field of inquiry within film studies intended to evaluate the impact of stars on the film industry and audience. For our purposes, it is worth noting Dyer's definition of image as a "structured polysemy" — an image that has "multiple but finite meanings and effects" that are limited in part by what the text makes available (Dyer 1998, 63). As such, while Basilone's image was a composite of traits emanating from a wide range of media texts, it nevertheless was bounded, generally, by its focus upon the notion of America and the constellation of ideas associated with it. Because of the centrality of the concept to Basilone's image, essential questions must first be addressed before proceeding on to the specifics of that image: At the time of U.S. entry into the war, what was the status of Americans of Italian descent, and what constituted an American?

"Inbetweenness" and Alienation: Italian Immigrants, Race, and Social Status in the United States

Basilone would be presented as both an ordinary and an ideal American. Yet, his image represents a significant breach of the traditional limits of the white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant hegemony in the United States. Described

as “big, dark, and handsome [. . .] [e]xcept for his jug ears” (“The Life and Death of Manila John” 1945, 18), the figure of this “dark,” Roman Catholic Marine was awash in his ethnic and cultural heritage and, as such, became an even more ideologically potent—and expanded—construction of American. To more fully grasp the significance of Basilone’s media construct, it is necessary to place it within the contemporaneous environment of the highly racialized worldview held in the United States. Basilone’s image was constructed within the context of an ongoing delineation of “us” and “them” —not simply between the United States and its wartime foes but also among Americans along racial and ethnic lines.

Commenting upon their migration to the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Richard Alba (1985) notes that southern Italian immigrants held a “problematic racial position” (68). While Italian immigrants entered the United States as “free white persons” under the law, they—like other immigrants then arriving from southern and eastern Europe—were not so readily granted the benefits accompanying white privilege. The Anglo-Saxon “old stock” asserted an exclusive claim to determine what qualified as “real” white and who qualified as “real” American. *White, race, and, indeed, American* were (and continue to be) contingent terms evolving with the economic, political, and cultural exigencies of the times—as Jacobson (1999) notes, “Caucasians are made and not born” (4). Thus, though these “probationary white groups” of immigrants eventually “became ethnic,” as Roediger (2002) puts it, they long toiled under the burden of an “inbetween” racial status—between the earlier, Anglo-Saxon European immigrants, on the one hand, and Asian, Latin, and non-European immigrants on the other (Roediger 2002, 141, 281–282n7).⁵

With regard to the “inbetweenness” of Italian immigrants, specifically, Orsi (1992) observes that their “place on the American landscape vis-à-vis other dark-skinned peoples fundamentally shaped [. . .] the contours of their everyday lives at work and on the streets [. . .]” (314). The period of the southern Italian migration was fraught with nativist antagonisms to the new arrivals that pitted us versus them, American versus foreign, Protestant versus non-Protestant (primarily Catholic or Jewish), and white versus black. Within this context, the southern Italian immigrants, cognizant of the benefits accruing to whiteness, sought to distance themselves from the “dark-skinned other” (Orsi 1992, 318).⁶ Ultimately they assumed an ethnic identity that over time gained more force vis-à-vis the original racial categorization.

The racialized identification of Italian Americans carried with it both immediate and long-lasting consequences. Like the Irish population that had preceded them to the United States, Italian immigrants were painted

broadly in the media as dysfunctional and prone to any number of urban maladies, including crime. Italian immigrants were not unique in this regard. Informed by the findings in the field of eugenics, as Ruth (1996) makes amply clear, nativists and other critics of the new arrivals had no shortage of "evidence" demonstrating the unique criminal proclivities of the various "races." For instance, Edwin Grant Conklin, in an article appearing in *Scribner's Magazine* titled "Some Biological Aspects of Immigrants" (1921), noted that among the "alien races," the Irish path to crime reflected their proneness to alcoholism and "'unstable nervous organization'"; Russians and Poles excelled at "'gainful crimes such as robbery, larceny, and receiving stolen goods'"; Jews inclined toward white slavery and prostitution; and the "'highly excitable and emotional disposition'" of Italians inclined them toward blackmail, kidnapping, and violent crime. According to another commentator, Honoré Willsie, writing in *The Woman Citizen*, the crimes of the Poles, Slavs, Jews, and Italians, among other "'smaller and darker [and] more mercurial'" immigrant groups, would "displace the old 'Anglo-American crimes of burglary, drunkenness and vagrancy'" with more unpleasant crimes (Conklin and Willsie, respectively, quoted in Ruth 1996, 13–14). For Italian immigrants, these assertions followed decades of reporting on blackmail, kidnapping, and murder attributed to the Mafia, the "Black Hand," and other "secret societies." In the 1920s and 1930s, the consolidation of Al Capone's control of the rackets in Chicago and the activities of Lucky Luciano in New York had captured the imagination of the country. Capone, in particular, had become a criminal celebrity and the topic of countless media accounts. It is noteworthy that it was only in the gangster genre of the early 1930s that Italians first gained visibility in American cinema; Hollywood films such as *Little Caesar* (1931) and *Scarface* (1932), both based on popular novels from 1929,⁷ exploited the public fascination with Capone and constructed central figures consistent with dominant media presentations of Italians as creatures of passion who were prone to violence (Woll and Miller 1987, 275–278).

In addition to this perceived predilection for violent crime, the new arrivals' politics alarmed many Americans, fostering suspicion and accusations that the immigrants were "un-American." While there was initially a strong strain of radicalism within the Italian immigrant population, it receded, particularly after the questionable verdict in the trial and subsequent execution of Italian-born anarchists Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti for murder in 1927. Yet the loyalty of immigrants and their children remained in question due to wide—and widely publicized—support in the 1920s and 1930s for Benito Mussolini and the Fascist Party. Following the Italian declaration of war against Great Britain and the invasions of

France, Greece, and Egypt by Axis forces in 1940, approximately 80 percent of Italian-language newspapers in the United States remained pro-Fascist and supported Mussolini's aspirations for a "place in the sun," opining against American participation in the war (Blum 1976, 149–150). An article appearing in *Fortune* magazine in November 1940 maintained that of the 5 million "Italo-Americans" in the United States, the Fascist International had 25,000 members "pledged to defend Fascism to the death" who, in the event of a war with the Axis powers, would "act as enemy soldiers within our lines, with all the duties of soldiers" ("The War of Nerves" 1940, 85). As noted by historian John Morton Blum (1976), *Fortune* still equated "American" with "Anglo-Saxon" – a sentiment shared by founder Henry Luce as well as Winston Churchill (148). Earlier that year, in June, following Italy's declaration of war and small-scale invasion of France, President Roosevelt had condemned Mussolini for Italy's "stab in the back" of the U.S. ally. Roosevelt's denunciations of Mussolini and Italy's belligerence had contributed to suspicions about Italians in the United States. On December 8, 1941, the day after the attack on Pearl Harbor, an executive order was issued designating as "alien enemies" all noncitizen Italians (as well as Germans and Japanese). In total, 600,000 Italian-born immigrants and their families were so designated and hence were forced to carry identification papers and face travel restrictions and the seizure of property. More than 10,000 were forcibly relocated inland from the West Coast. Thousands were arrested and hundreds interned in military camps (U.S. Department of Justice 2001, iv–v).

Roosevelt and the Democrats were cognizant of the increasing alienation of Italian Americans – the elections of November 1940 had seen Italian-American support drift toward the Republicans. To mollify Italian Americans, whose support Democrats depended on, particularly in the Northeast, Roosevelt directed Attorney General Francis Biddle to combat discrimination against Italians in employment and to show restraint in administering the enemy-alien laws as applied to Italian Americans. Further, in a move welcomed by Italian Americans, Roosevelt appointed Edward Corsi to chair the Alien Enemy Hearing Board for the Southern District of New York (Blum 1976, 152). Suspicions remained high, however, and Corsi, in an article appearing in the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* in 1942, found it necessary to defend the loyalty of Italian immigrants and their children to the United States. He noted that Fascists among this population were an "impotent minority, uninclined to give expression to their sentiments." Furthering his argument, he noted that "the immigrant has always approved of whatever regime or party happened to be in power in Italy." While the Mussolini regime had

once enjoyed the support of Italians in the United States, this situation had changed once *Il Duce* formed an alliance with Hitler. If anything, Italians in the United States were now "resentful of the predicament" into which they had been thrown by Mussolini's actions (Corsi 1942, 105). In fact, wrote Corsi, with the bombing of Pearl Harbor Italian Americans aggressively demonstrated their allegiance to the United States, and Italians in the New York area had led all other groups in the number of voluntary enlistments in the military (Corsi 1942, 106n7).

Thus, at the outbreak of hostilities, Americans of Italian descent remained a suspect population within the United States, one carrying the burden of its "foreignness," inbetweenness, perceived criminality and radicalism, and "un-Americanness." It is within this context that one must understand the construction of John Basilone's media image. Because of the Basilone media construct's function as a kind of repository for American virtue and the centrality of the concept of America to it, an essential question must first be answered before proceeding onto the specifics of that image: What constituted an American at the time of Basilone's celebrity?

Defining *America* and *Americans*

As Henry Steele Commager wrote in 1950, "Over a period of two and a half centuries, marked by such adventures as few other people had known, Americans had created an American character and formulated an American philosophy"; while that character and philosophy had eluded description and definition, "both were unmistakable" (quoted in Bigsby 2006, 2). The American character and philosophy had implied certain duties, responsibilities, and rights. President Roosevelt drew upon this tradition during the State of the Union address given in January 1941 in which he made his strongest call yet for an end to American isolationism. Inaugurating the "Great Debate" over his proposed Lend-Lease program,⁸ the president posited "four essential human freedoms" to be enjoyed "everywhere in the world": freedom of speech and expression, the freedom of "every person to worship God in his own way," freedom from want, and freedom from fear (Roosevelt 2001, 199–205). These "Four Freedoms" became iconic for Americans' conceptualization of the country's role in the war and inspired, among other things, four Norman Rockwell paintings appearing in the *Saturday Evening Post*, in February and March 1943.⁹ Henry Luce, publisher of *Time* and *Life* magazines, in "The American Century," an often-quoted essay appearing in *Life* in February 1941, declared that America must "undertake now to be the Good Samaritan of the entire world" and to act upon the "determination" of the American people to "make the society of

men safe for the freedom, growth and increasing satisfaction of all individual men" (Luce 1941, 65). Luce, of course, was building upon a long American tradition, a missionary enthusiasm underpinning much of the country's history, including the Monroe Doctrine and its corollary of "manifest destiny" on the North American continent.

Clearly, in the months leading up to and following the entrance of the United States into World War II, the Roosevelt administration was deeply involved in defining terms such as *America* and *American* within the context of the Four Freedoms. Roosevelt's Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes, speaking before a crowd in Manhattan's Central Park on "I Am an American" Day, on May 18, 1941, famously declared: "An American is one who loves justice and believes in the dignity of man. An American is one who will fight for his freedom and that of his neighbor. An American is one who will sacrifice property, ease, and security in order that he and his children may retain the rights of free men. An American is one in whose heart is engraved the immortal second sentence of the Declaration of Independence" (Ickes 2004, 68–69). That is, an American is one who believes that, "all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." President Roosevelt, in "A Call for Sacrifice," a "fireside chat" broadcast on April 28, 1942, focused upon the theme of freedom and called on his nationwide radio audience to take up the war effort and contribute by any means possible, including purchasing war bonds:

As we here at home contemplate our own duties, our own responsibilities, let us think and think hard of the example which is being set for us by our fighting men.

Our soldiers and sailors are members of well-disciplined units. But they're still and forever individuals—free individuals. They are farmers and workers, businessmen, professional men, artists, clerks. They are the United States of America.

That is why they fight.

We too are the United States of America. That is why we must work and sacrifice. It is for them. It is for us. It is for victory. (Roosevelt 1992, 229)

Similar sentiments were mobilized for Frank Capra's *Why We Fight* series of films (1942–1945), which were intended—as declared in an intertitle opening the first film, the Oscar-winning *Prelude to War* (Best Documentary, 1942)—to inform the troops as to "the principles for which we are fighting." Another intertitle quotes Vice President Henry A. Wallace: "This is a fight between a free world and a slave world" (*Why We Fight* 1997). Narrator Walter Huston intoned that humanity "became free only through a long

and unceasing struggle inspired by men of vision—Moses, Muhammad, Confucius, Christ."

The centrality of freedom to American public discourse on the war, and of the Four Freedoms specifically, is on display in an article by Ira Wolfert published in the *Nation* in January 1943. Detailing his experiences with the Marines in combat against the Japanese on Guadalcanal during the previous October and November (during which Basilone performed the actions for which he was awarded his Medal of Honor), Wolfert described the source of the resilience of the poorly equipped Marines he met: "Our men know what they want—the four freedoms. If they were told in a way they could accept how these four freedoms could be obtained, they'd help."¹⁰ Thus, by the time of Basilone's first mention in the nation's press, freedom, and specifically the Four Freedoms, had been firmly established in the public consciousness as the *raison d'être* for America's war effort, and one could characterize Basilone's image at its inception as born of the discourse defining America and Americans, and of values distilled in the Four Freedoms said to be cherished by all Americans. For nearly two years, beginning with its first appearance, in June 1943, the image of John Basilone was constructed to embody an ideal of duty and sacrifice in the service of freedom. For an American public reeling from the attack on Pearl Harbor and a string of further losses and humiliations in the Pacific at the hands of the Japanese, the successful Guadalcanal Campaign (August 7, 1942–February 9, 1943) and Basilone's heroics there provided beacons of optimism. As with the star image theorized by Dyer (1998, 42), Basilone's media construction orchestrated two seemingly contradictory qualities—"ordinariness" and "specialness." As a result, it presented an ideal wartime American image comprising qualities of identification and aspiration: In its ordinariness—a new "ordinary" in a country in which military service was now expected—it invited identification for the many Americans called upon to make sacrifices and dutifully serve the country; and, in its specialness, built atop Basilone's "extraordinary heroism" and "conspicuous gallantry" on the battlefield (as described in his citation), it provided an ideal toward which one could aspire—a paradigm for the ideal fighting man.

"Manila John" Basilone: Image and the Media, 1943–1945

Basilone's image was created and evolved within the context of a well-defined public discourse on the sacrifices required for the American victory in the Battle for Guadalcanal, waged between August 1942 and February 1943.¹¹ As even a cursory examination of the record makes clear, the nation's leading newspapers were saturated with coverage of the

conflict.¹² The nation's leading magazines also brought news of U.S. efforts in the Solomon Islands.¹³ A reflection of the country's part in a total war requiring sacrifice across all strata of American society, even the nation's youth—many of whom would soon be in the military and, perhaps, in the Pacific Theater—were apprised of the situation: *The March of Events*, a "Weekly Review of National and World News" published by Scholastic and intended for high-school students, explained the strategic importance of the Solomons and reported on the Guadalcanal campaign.¹⁴ Further, Richard Tregaskis, a reporter accompanying the Marines on their landing on Guadalcanal in early August 1942, published a best-selling memoir of his experiences, *Guadalcanal Diary* (Random House), in January 1943, with excerpts appearing in *Life* in March 1943. A *Reader's Digest* selection for February of that year, it was turned into a Twentieth Century-Fox feature, filmed at and around Camp Pendleton with the full support of the U.S. Marine Corps, which provided men and hardware for the film's re-creation of the landings ("Display Ad 16" 1943, 13; Daugherty 1943, 4). *Guadalcanal Diary*, according to Bosley Crowther, the *New York Times's* noted film critic, opened before "an audience which was visibly stirred" by a film "predestined for top rank" among the films spawned by the war experience (Crowther 1943, 29). It is, perhaps, indicative of the intensity of interest in the Guadalcanal campaign that Crowther, in a generally positive review, nevertheless criticized the film's failure to recreate, specifically, the battles of Tennaru and "the Ridge," which had become popular symbols of the courage and tenacity of American forces fighting on the island. Thus, by the time that John Basilone returned to the United States as the first enlisted Marine of the war to be awarded a Medal of Honor, the Guadalcanal campaign was well-established in the public consciousness.

Basilone first came to national prominence in June 1943, with the announcement of his being awarded the Medal of Honor. From June to November, newspapers, mass-market magazines, and other media detailed his actions on Guadalcanal and his service on the Third War Loan Drive, for which he was the star attraction. Media scrutiny continued beyond the termination of the drive, however, encompassing his marriage in 1944, his death on Iwo Jima, in February 1945, and further public recognition in the years and decades that followed. Basilone's image was a potent counterweight to the overwhelmingly critical descriptions of Italian Americans that were so common in the nation's media to that point. It is worth noting that Basilone's press coverage shared space with the Thomas Aurelio affair in which the Democratic nominee's eventual appointment to the New York Supreme Court was slowed and marred by a lengthy investigation into his alleged connections to organized crime, notably, his relationship

with gambler and Tammany Hall kingmaker Frank Costello.¹⁵ In direct opposition to this discourse, the constellation of ideas and themes making up Basilone's image focused first and foremost upon his standing as an American hero of Italian descent, and his actions during the Battle for Henderson Field were of paramount concern in construction of this image.

The *New York Times*, *New York Daily News*, and *Washington Post* all reported on Basilone's receipt of the Medal of Honor, with stories in the *Times* and *Post* appearing on the front page. Running on June 24, all three noted that "Manila John" (a nickname Basilone picked up during his prior duty in the Philippines while serving in the U.S. Army [1936–1939]), of New Jersey, son of an Italian-born tailor, had been awarded the medal for his "extraordinary heroism." Drawing further from the citation, all three newspapers noted that, during the Battle for Henderson Field, on October 24–25, 1942, he had played a significant part in the "virtual annihilation of an entire Japanese regiment" consisting of some 3,000 soldiers. Basilone had slain the Japanese "so swiftly" that he was compelled to reposition his machine guns, due to the pile of dead Japanese blocking his line of fire. Citing a Navy press release, the *Daily News* and *New York Times* quoted Nash W. Phillips, of Fayetteville, North Carolina, who recalled that Basilone "had a machine gun on the go three days and nights without sleep, rest or food." Adding further detail to Basilone's image, the *Daily News* and *Times* noted the "Death Before Dishonor" tattoo on his left arm, and the *Post* referenced comments by Captain Regan Fuller of Washington, who served with Basilone on Guadalcanal and considered him "one of the greatest fighting men he has ever seen." Yet, while Basilone, as "one of the greatest fighting men" was "special," as predicted in Dyer's formulation of the star image, he was also "ordinary": These comments from Basilone's comrades—one Marine from the southeastern seaboard and another from the Pacific Northwest—are consistent with the press's practice of identifying military personnel with their hometown or region. As such, the practice focused attention upon common sacrifices of individuals and communities across the nation. That is, military service was an experience shared among "ordinary" young men from all parts of the United States and, hence, a point of identification for the public ("Slew 38 Japanese in One Battle: Jersey Marine Gets Honor Medal" 1943; Klein 1943; Norris 1943).

The next day, the *New York Daily News* and *New York Times* ran the same Associated Press "wire photo" of the Medal of Honor winner: Basilone in closeup, his hair dark and close-cropped, chest out, posed slightly to the right, in what appears to be a Service "A" uniform (green coat and tie)¹⁶ with garrison cap (also called a "piss cutter"), the Medal of Honor snug around his collared shirt and dangling between the lapels of his jacket, obscuring

the knot of his tie. The caption in the *Times* read, "Marine Platoon Sergeant 'Manila John' Basilone of Raritan, N. J., wearing his Congressional Medal of Honor, which he won for 'extraordinary heroism' in the Lunga Point area of the Solomon Islands" ("Killed 38 Japanese" 1943, 4). The *New York Daily News* was somewhat more colorful in its description: "As though it wasn't hot enough for the Japs in the Solomons, along came Marine Sergt. John (Manila) Basilone, 26-year-old sharp-shooter. He shot 38 Japs and came home to get the Congressional Medal from F.D.R." ("Big Shot in Solomons" 1943, 24).

An article appearing on September 5, 1943, in the *New York Daily News*, constructed Basilone as a Runyonesque character. Writer Art Smith provides a first-person narrative:

It's dark. The slant-eyes are crouching in the brush, right at the edge of the field. You're in a slit trench and you know they're watching you, their green-painted rifles cocked, their cruel, twisted knives ready. You're scared as hell. [. . .] Your name is Platoon Sergt. Johnny Basilone and you're in charge of a section of United States Marines. [. . .] You don't know, of course, that you're about to become a hero. . . . And if you had, you probably wouldn't give a damn. (Smith 1943, 10)

Smith's foxhole is one peopled by an everyman assortment of Americans (i.e., "Johnny," "Jake," "Mike," and "Harry") manning "choppers" against "little yellow guys" who "tip-off" the Marines. "Listen to 'em," writes Smith: "'Maline! Maline! You die! You die!' They always do that. It don't make no sense, really. There they are! There's a million of 'em!" Basilone's men beat back the Japanese assault ("Take that home to Tojo, sweetheart! Tell 'im it came from Johnny Basilone of Raritan!"). Smith concludes:

Out on the field they're counting the dead Nippos. Twenty-nine hundred of 'em, you hear, will never give that terror-born yelling "Maline! You Die!" again. And 38 of those dead have been cut open by your choppers. Not bad, kid. Not bad at all. [. . .] So now you're a hero with a Medal. Funny, but looking back it doesn't seem that it was so tough. Kind of fun, thinking about it now. [. . .] (Smith 1943, 10)

In both form and content, Smith's telling of Basilone's story is robustly American. In adopting the style of Damon Runyon, including his use of the present tense, slang, and a streetwise narrator, Smith fashioned in Basilone a character that might have come right out of a Runyon story or perhaps inhabited the Runyon-inspired city streets of the Hollywood film. This was the period, as noted by McNally (2008), during which "an urban, working-class, and often immigrant environment," encapsulated in the cinematic construction of "Brooklyn," became a kind of "byword for a standard

urban American community" (17). Here, then, Smith's description of "Johnny" Basilone radiates with the "Brooklynese" then so prevalent in Hollywood film and other mass media. Related to this, Basilone's image, like that of his contemporary Frank Sinatra, resonates with that of the "corner boy."¹⁷ Thomas J. Ferraro (2005), drawing from sociologist Herbert J. Gans's (1982) study of the Italian-American experience in Boston's West End, notes this aspect of Sinatra's media construction and self-identification as an urban youth. On the Hoboken streets that made up Sinatra's world, a certain amount of insouciance and individuality was expected; masculine "display" and "performance" were a common feature of the experience of urban Italian-American males, and masterful assertion of one's individuality—far from instigating resentment—led to imitation among members of one's peer group. Smith's telling of Basilone's heroic actions on Guadalcanal is awash in a bravado (captured in the expression "Take that home to Tojo, sweetheart! Tell 'im it came from Johnny Basilone of Raritan!") that prompts similar actions from the Marines he commands.

The racist tone coloring Smith's description of Basilone's heroism on Guadalcanal seems quite foreign to today's notions of political correctness. As one might expect from these excerpts, the pages of the *New York Daily News* were rife with jingoism and racism, but that paper was not alone. The *Washington Post* also used terms such as "Jap" and "Nipponese" when referring to Japanese forces, as did the two Luce publications *Time* and *Life*, *Harper's*, *The New Yorker*, the youth-oriented *Scholastic*, and, to a lesser extent, the *Nation*.¹⁸

Undoubtedly, the vilification of the enemy is a common feature of wartime propaganda, and, while this is not the place for a detailed analysis of the racist and jingoist elements incorporated into media descriptions of the country's adversaries, it has been demonstrated elsewhere¹⁹ that media constructions of the Japanese often reflected racist sympathies far in excess of those applied to varying degrees in constructions of either of the other Axis powers. For example, the same issue of the *New York Daily News* in which Smith's piece appeared included a map of Italy, which the Allies were poised to invade.²⁰ Compared with the construction of Imperial Japan and the Japanese, the accompanying caption reflected a less jingoist and racist estimation of the other Axis countries—despite the war aims that were at stake (i.e., capture of the northern Lombard Plains "would give the Allies air bases of tremendous value from which to bomb all of Germany's slave empire"), the Allies would be fighting "Germans" and "Italians," not "krauts," "huns," "dagos," or "wops," etc. ("The Rocky Road" 1943, 28).

At this point, another ingredient was brought to the fore in Basilone's image, joining elements foregrounding his status as an American ideal for

the fighting man. Here his Italianness would be posited as a demonstration of the will and ability of Italian Americans to fight for their country. Sports columnist Shirley Povich, writing for the *Washington Post*, integrated the war into his column, recounting stories of athletes at war, the services' involvement with sports, and so on. He managed to incorporate Basilone's honor into his column on August 29: "From Lieut. Col. Harvey L. Miller, U. S. M. C.: 'You and I have seen too many dead-game Italian kids in the ring to subscribe to the opinion that all Italians fold up under fire . . . here's the story of John Basilone of New Jersey, a Marine sergeant who won the Congressional Medal of Honor for extraordinary heroism and conspicuous gallantry against the Japs in the Solomons.'"

Violence, whether in the ring or the allegedly crime-ridden streets of the Italian neighborhoods, had long been associated with the southern Italian immigrants and their descendants. In Basilone's image, however, this supposed Italian predilection is transformed into patriotic martial prowess—Basilone does not kill because of some innate feature of his "race" or ethnicity; he kills, and so effectively, as the very embodiment of American service and duty, as an ideal Marine. Of further interest is Povich's reference to Italian cowardice. This conception drew in large part from the recent failure of the Italian army in Greece and its collapse in North Africa,²¹ which had been reported in detail in the U.S. press.²² Yet, while the notion of Italian cowardice seems to have been widely held, as American forces prepared to invade Italy in 1943, it carried with it a new caveat: That is, the actions of Basilone were used to demonstrate that, indeed, not *all* Italians "fold up under fire"; rather, *Italian Americans* would fight "when they have something to fight for" — a not uncommon refrain in the press during Basilone's participation in the war bond drive.²³

In the days just prior to the start of the Third War Loan Drive, Basilone arrived in New York City and paid a visit to Mayor Fiorello La Guardia. Basilone was greeted by numerous reporters from, among others, the *New York Daily News* and *New York Times*, which, in addition to recording the event, restated the actions leading to his awarding of the Medal of Honor (Smith 1943; "Guadalcanal Hero Welcomed by City" 1943). Quite often, Basilone's appearances were highly choreographed, as was the case on this occasion. Newsreel footage²⁴ from the event shows the tall,²⁵ curly-haired Marine, in what appears to be a Service "A" uniform, standing at ease with the diminutive mayor, who stands half a foot shorter. La Guardia, shaking Basilone's hand, introduces him to the gathering, giving his name the Italian pronunciation, "Basilon-eh," rather than the clipped "Basilone" (long "o," no "e"), or "Basiloney"²⁶: "John Basilone, I'm very happy to welcome you, the first enlisted Marine to receive the Congressional Medal

of Honor, and I'm very proud to have you in New York City." He continues, "Tell me sergeant, are those Japs tough?" "Yes, they were tough," responds Basilone, "but the Marines are tougher." La Guardia replies, "The Marines are always tougher." "Yes, sir," agrees Basilone. The mayor then asks about the events leading to the awarding of the Medal of Honor. "You must have mowed 'em down," prompts La Guardia. The self-effacing Basilone responds, characterizing his heroic actions as ordinary for any American male: "Yes, sir. I was in a good outfit with good men. I just happened to be there, and any man would have done the same in my place." "Spoken just like a Marine," quips La Guardia. Significantly, and, as we shall see, consistent with values imbuing the war bond drives, the mayor then turns to the topic of his and Basilone's shared heritage, and asks, "Where did your old man come from?" "From Naples," replies Basilone. "Mine came from Foggia," says the mayor, "We're both Americans" ("John Basilone Meets the Mayor" 1943). This was a point that La Guardia was anxious to make, and the mayor and Basilone made numerous attempts to get it right. At one point, having completed the statement about their Italian backgrounds, La Guardia turns to the camera to complete the take only to be interrupted by a reporter attempting to ask a question, moving an irate La Guardia to turn away from the camera and the gathered audience. Another take follows. Though perhaps moot on the northeastern seaboard and in other centers of Italian immigration, throughout much of the rest of the country, where Italian Americans were still somewhat of a novelty, La Guardia's point was an important one – Italian Americans are, indeed, American and are fighting valiantly for their country.²⁷

Basilone's receipt of the Medal of Honor was welcomed by Italian Americans as a demonstration that they belonged and were truly Americans. As Paul Pisicano recalled to Studs Terkel for his oral history of World War II, *The Good War* (1984), Basilone's honor brought a sense of relief to many of Italian descent who felt as if they carried the weight of Mussolini's actions: "During the war, there was an implied sense of guilt. It was on all of us. So the sense of relief was tremendous. Remember when Sergeant John Basilone came home? He was the Italian American Medal of Honor winner. They have a bridge on the Jersey Turnpike named after him. He was our hero. He did the right things" (Terkel 1997, 141).

"Back the Attack": The Third War Loan Drive (September 9–October 2, 1943)

To more fully understand Basilone's media image and the values it promoted, both explicitly and implicitly, it is important to understand Basilone's

image as one honed to certain exigencies of the moment, notably, the Third War Loan Drive that motivated his reassignment from the Pacific Theater of operations back to the United States.²⁸ Even before disembarking from Australia, in midsummer 1943, Basilone had been briefed by his military handlers on his duties during the upcoming “Back the Attack!” war bond drive, for which he would be the star attraction. The third drive had a goal of \$15 billion, but it would be the most successful war bond drive to date and exceed its goal by nearly \$4 billion (quoted in Kimble 2006, 45). A mere ten days into the drive, the *New York Daily News* reported that New Yorkers had already accomplished more than 80 percent of the goal set by the Treasury Department, and, showcasing the immediate impact of war bond purchasing, the *Washington Post* noted that the submarine *Gabilan* was funded exclusively through funds from Connecticut’s Third War Loan Drive goal (“Gotham Buys 83.2%” 1943, 20; “Submarine Financed” 1943, B5).

Intensive reporting on the progress of the young Marine marked the autumn of 1943. On September 19, Basilone returned home to Raritan and was welcomed by more than 20,000 residents of the area, who attended a parade and rally for the hero at Doris Duke Cromwell’s estate. The city was decked out in banners celebrating the local hero, and a dirigible flew overhead. Numerous civic groups accompanied Basilone in the parade.²⁹ The *New York Times*, *New York Daily News*, *Washington Post*, and *Christian Science Monitor* gave full coverage to “Basilone Day,” including reporting the gifting of a \$5,000 bond by the people of Raritan to Basilone, and the purchase of \$1,300,000 worth of war bonds by the gathered throng (“Buy \$1,300,000 Bonds” 1943; “Town Gives \$5,000 Bond” 1943; “Marine Receives Hero’s Welcome” 1943; “Townfolk Greet Guadalcanal Hero” 1943). The event was also covered for newsreels and by the nation’s mass-market periodicals, most notably *Life* magazine, which ran an extensive photo essay in the October 11 issue (“*Life* Goes to a Hero’s Homecoming” 1943).

Basilone was “Hero of the Week” in the Fox Movietone newsreel released on September 24 to movie theaters nationwide. In a vignette titled “Marine Sergeant John Basilone Comes Home” (1943), narrator Lowell Thomas described “Basilone Day” festivities over film of the gathered masses and parade: “There’s a mighty New Jersey turnout and warriors great and small parade to honor a Marine that has been awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for heroism on Guadalcanal, Sergeant John Basilone [pronounced “Basiloney” by Thomas] of Raritan, New Jersey. The Sergeant, who killed thirty-eight Japs, gets a reception both official and popular.”

The newsreel continues with shots from the event at the Duke Cromwell estate. Following an introduction and presentation of a war bond to the

young Marine, Basilone addresses the crowd, saying, "I want to thank you [. . .] for this wonderful gift. It's for all my buddies overseas and the front lines, that they really appreciate everything [. . .] you wonderful people are doing by backing the attack and buying these war bonds." The segment concludes with a shot of Basilone hugging and kissing his mother while being embraced by his father.

The *Life* magazine photo essay noted above, like the event that it covered, is a classic piece of Americana, with family, faith, and community celebrated. In addition to restating the story that "everyone knew" (including how Basilone had "mowed down 38 Japs singlehanded"), other qualities were brought forward, many of which explicitly and implicitly referenced his Italian heritage. Among these, of course, was the often-referenced fact that Basilone was the son of an Italian-born father and one of ten children (of which more shall be said, shortly) and had attended parochial school as a child and attended Mass with his family on the day of the event ("*Life* Goes to a Hero's Homecoming" 1943).

The photo essay included seventeen photographs of Basilone, and the "Basilone Day" celebration presented Basilone and his experience as decidedly American—here was the American war hero among the people and places he loved best. One picture captured the crowd gathered at the Cromwell estate, to which Basilone said, "Only part of the medal belongs to me; pieces of it belong to the boys who fought by my side on Guadalcanal." These and other contemporaneous comments by and about Basilone are consistent with the dominant wartime media construction of American GIs, who, "[w]hile courageous, [. . .] were humble and modest, effective fighting men not out of false pride but out of duty accepted in the face of danger" (Blum 1976, 59). Other pictures show Basilone posing with his parents and parish priest; sitting atop the backseat of a convertible during the parade; attending Mass with his family ("Johnny requested mass be said at St. Ann's for his buddies on Guadalcanal, not for himself"); playing with his young nephews ("Children scrambled over him all day, to his great delight."); and with "Movie star, Louise Allbritton," who was "on hand to kiss Raritan's hero," though he was "much more interested in seeing the home folks." Other pictures showed a family photo of the six Basilonas from 1917, with John, "the youngest, enthroned on a chair at center. Brothers George (Marines) and Alphonse (Army) came about later." Also included was a picture from a comic book, "MANILA JOHN MOVES OUT," from a series honoring war heroes ("Here comes the big Jap push—aim low and blast them down!," yells Basilone). Here, in the pages of *Life* magazine, is the Basilone image, fully formed—an image intended not only to spur bond buying and enlistment in the Marines and other

services but also to place Italian Americans squarely within American culture and society. Implicit throughout are the Four Freedoms: Thousands of people gathered freely to express their support and gratitude for the young Marine, a Roman Catholic, who, like his immigrant father, had been free to make of himself what he would, without fear or hindrance.

Embedded in *Life's* coverage of Basilone, and in that of other mass media, is the "American Dream," defined by historian James Truslow Adams, in *The Epic of America*, as the "dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement" (Adams [1931] 2001, 214–215). The dream resides atop an "American myth of success." Among "most enduring expressions of American popular ideals," according to historian Richard Weiss, the myth embodies the "belief that all men, in accordance with certain rules, but exclusively by their own efforts, can make of their lives what they will" (Weiss 1988, 3). In this regard, the success of Basilone's immigrant father in America validated the Basilone story as an American one.

While Salvatore Basilone's immigration to the United States was an early feature of the Basilone experience recounted in the nation's media, Basilone's mother was less explicitly a part of this early narrative. Her presence, however, is implicit. With six sons and four daughters, the Basilone household was substantially larger than the American average, which, according to the 1940 census, included 3.68 total members (U.S. Census 2003, 19). According to noted demographer Ira Rosenwaike (1973), the birth rates among women of Italian descent from Basilone's mother's generation, older than age forty-five at the time of the 1940 census, were substantially higher than those of native-born and other immigrant women (Rosenwaike 1973, 273–274). Yet, the image of the Basilone family offered a powerful counter to then-dominant conceptions of the Italian population in America, a community that, in Rosenwaike's words, exhibited characteristics "traditionally associated with high fertility, viz: a background largely rural, widespread poverty, a high degree of illiteracy, and abundance of unskilled labor" (Rosenwaike 1973, 272). Assumptions about the negative repercussions of higher birth rates had dominated media constructions of the malaise of the numerous Italian immigrant communities. Yet, the media narrative of the Basilone family embodied a new way of being American, one in which qualities of otherness could be recast as quintessentially American: Here was a new construct celebrating the large family that, by implication rather than prescription, promised at least a partial remedy to the nation's manpower shortages in both the military and industry.

Readers may be familiar with the Soviet Union's "Mother Heroine" and the Nazis' "German Mother"—honors bestowed by the state to

mothers who had, among other things, raised large families. Less well known, perhaps, is the American variant. On Mothers Day, in May 1944, one mother with ten sons under arms was honored as the nation's "No. 1 mother" by the American War Mothers organization. Other events over that weekend included radiocasts of "messages of courage to all American mothers and their sons" from the mothers of "three outstanding air heroes," among them Mrs. Patsy Gentile of Piqua, Ohio, the mother of Captain Don Gentile, the Italian-American ace credited at that point with destroying thirty Nazi planes ("U.S. Pays Tribute" 1944, 8). Within the context of the wartime veneration of motherhood, there could be no doubt as to the patriotism of Dora Basilone and her children: As noted in the press at the time of the announcement of Basilone's awarding of the Congressional Medal of Honor, two of Basilone's brothers were also serving in the military, while two others were employed in war plants ("Slew 38 Japanese" 1943, 6; Klein 1943, 19).³⁰

Basilone's Death on Iwo Jima in the Media

Now a full-blown media star, Basilone made the celebrity circuit. A week after the festivities in Raritan, Basilone appeared on Ed Sullivan's program on WABC radio, part of NBC's "Blue Network,"³¹ joining other celebrities, including New York Yankees' catcher Bill Dickey and theater impresario Lee Shubert ("Radio Today" 1943, 39). And, though the "Back the Attack" bond drive ended in October 1943, Basilone (and his family) continued to draw press attention. In June 1944, *Collier's*, one of the nation's most popular magazines, published the most extensive and graphic detailing of the events leading up to Basilone's awarding of the Medal of Honor (Bishop 1944, 44). The following month, as was befitting a celebrity, the press took note of his marriage to Sgt. Lena Riggi, an Italian American and a member of the Marine Corps Women's Reserve ("Guadalcanal Hero to Wed" 1944, 32; "Hero to Marry Marine" 1944, 11). For Basilone, however, the early excitement of his triumphant return to the United States was short-lived. He soon tired of the incessant parade of war bond rallies and munitions factory appearances and of the countless other commitments taking up his time. He was tired of being on display. Basilone missed life in the Marines; he missed his "boys." For months he pled his case to his handlers, begging for reassignment to a combat unit, or, as he put it to his commanding officer, "Sir, I want the fleet" (Brady 2010, 156–158). That is, he wanted a transfer to one of the Marine divisions now a part of the Fleet Marine Force taking the battle to the Japanese in the Pacific. His superiors, ever mindful of morale both within the services and on the home front, opposed sending

one of America's greatest war heroes back into harm's way. Nevertheless, Basilone got his wish, and by the end of 1944 he was going back to his Marines, back to the action.³² As a Marine now on active combat duty, for purposes of military operational security he dropped out of the media and returned to the anonymity and secrecy of American military personnel at war. On February 19, 1945, he landed with the Marines on Iwo Jima for the commencement of a battle that would enter the annals of American bravery, sacrifice, and uncommon valor under fire.

Because of Iwo Jima's size, a mere twenty-one square kilometers, the only tactic available to the Marines was a frontal assault on the barren volcanic rock. They faced heavy mortar fire at landing sites, upon which Japanese guns had already been zeroed-in. The battle received exhaustive press coverage,³³ and by March 1945 Americans were well aware of the unmatched bloodletting taking place on Iwo Jima. In addition to newspaper reports and weekly coverage by *Time* and *Newsweek*, magazines such as *Collier's*, the *Nation*, *The New Yorker*, and the *Saturday Evening Post* provided detailed descriptions of combat, analysis, and communications from the battlefield, though these, for the most part, were not published until mid-March and beyond, well into the operation or following its conclusion.³⁴

Basilone was assigned to Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 27th Marine Regiment, 5th Marine Division, and went ashore on February 19, the first bloody day of the invasion.³⁵ As a machine-gun section leader, Basilone led his men off of the beach and onto the Japanese defenses, destroying one blockhouse on the way to one of two airfields (a third was under construction). It was there, at the airfield, that a mortar explosion killed Basilone. The American public finally learned of his death on March 9, the day after his family had been notified.

In death, Basilone's image continued to portray an ideal in a story consistent across several newspapers. His service on Guadalcanal was noted, as were the fact that he had elected to return to battle and the circumstances of his death. This "handsome, dark-haired boy [. . .] [e]xcept under the stress of combat [. . .] was quiet, modest, almost shy. He was extremely embarrassed whenever anyone asked about his Medal of Honor" ("Basilone Dies at Iwo" 1945, 29). He was both a hero and ordinary: If there was such a thing as a "typical" Marine, wrote the *New York Times*, it was Basilone, and, "When it has needed them the United States always has had men like him" ("John Basilone, Hero" 1945, 18; see also "Marine Hero Slain First Day on Iwo" 1945).

It is in this final narrative that Basilone's mother acquires a special resonance for mothers across the country. In a "Special to the New York Times" titled "Mother near Collapse," it was reported that Basilone's father,

Salvatore, had received a telegram at work notifying him of his son's death. He telephoned his wife with the news from Lieutenant General Alexander A. Vandegrift, commandant of the Marine Corps and, arriving home, found her "in a state of collapse." It was further noted that her "grief over John's death was compounded with anxiety for the safety of another son, George, a Marine, private first class, who she believes also is on Iwo Island" ("Mother near Collapse" 1945, 9). Her son had been, and remained, an ideal Marine and American, and the life of her husband had presented a validation of the American dream. Now the life of Dora Basilone would be a moving testament to the sacrifice of parents, and especially mothers, from across the nation. Her grief was that of hundreds of thousands of mothers, her sacrifice both extraordinary and, unfortunately, all too common.

It was a story told time and again. For instance, later that year, the *New York Times* carried the story of the dedication of the naval destroyer *U.S.S. Damato*, named for Corporal Anthony Peter Damato of the U.S. Marines, who had received a posthumous Medal of Honor. Damato, serving in the Marshall Islands, had died in February of the previous year when he jumped on top of a grenade to save his companions. The story of his mother's arrival in New York perfectly captured the immigrant experience: "A little Italian mother came back to New York yesterday, seeing the skyline, the harbor and the Statue of Liberty for the first time in thirty-five years. It was that long ago when she came as a girl, an immigrant from Italy, to settle in this country and rear a family of five children." Her loss, however, like that of Dora Basilone, was shared by thousands of *American* mothers. Adding further poignancy to her story, it was reported that, unknown to her, another son had died in the skies over Europe—none of her surviving children had the heart to tell her ("Mother Names Ship" 1945, 34). The Damatos and the Basilones, like so many Italian-American families—so many American families—had answered the call and made the ultimate sacrifice for their country. In this time of danger and threat, their service presented ideals in the pursuit of the Four Freedoms; their sacrifice presented the high cost of that mission.

Conclusion: John Basilone, American

Even in death, Basilone, in a sense, continued to serve his country. Noting America's obligation to rebuild Italy, New York's Governor Dewey, speaking to a crowd gathered for a Columbus Day dinner in October 1945, recalled the valor of Italian-American servicemen during the war, Basilone first among them.³⁶ This was not the first time Basilone's name had been invoked as an argument for the rehabilitation of Italy. During a Columbus

Day address in 1943 advancing the notion of a common cause between Italians and Italian Americans in the struggle for democracy, and calling for Italians to support the government of Marshal Pietro Badoglio, Basilone was a guest of honor and introduced as evidence that “Italians can fight when they know what they are fighting for” (“U.S. Asks Italians” 1945, 4). These anecdotes tend to show how far Italian Americans had come during the war years: In 1943, Basilone’s image had first been used to demonstrate the loyalty of the Italian-American community, an important counter to prevalent hostility to an “enemy within”; now, with the war at an end, his name and those of other Italian-American heroes were invoked as evidence of the shared mission of the people of Italy and *Americans* in support of liberty and democracy.

Basilone has been remembered and memorialized in various ways since his death. Shortly after the war, in the opening written introduction to MGM’s *The Black Hand* (1950), Basilone was invoked as a counter to the criminality depicted in the film and was referenced as “no truer American.”³⁷ More lasting honors were bestowed in his memory. He has become a permanent part of Marine Corps lore and, as noted by James Brady, there is not a Marine base in the world that does not have a building or street named for him (Brady 2010, 2). The destroyer *U.S.S. Basilone* was commissioned in 1949 (“New Triple-Threat Sub Fighter” 1949, 1). Basilone was one of four “Distinguished Marines” honored with a stamp by the U.S. Postal Service in 2005, and he was one of three Marines focused upon in the 2010 Emmy-winning HBO miniseries *The Pacific*. Sons of Italy lodges are named for him. Roads, bridges, and statues have been erected and plaques set. Yet, for most Americans, Basilone is largely a forgotten relic of an increasingly distant time, a period during which the country was more sure of itself and its place in the world. Nevertheless, let the record show, a new day dawned with the service of Basilone and his Italian-American brothers in arms, a new day for *Americans* with names like Imperiale, Scassellatti, Basta, Smacchi, Poerio, Ruffo, Scrivano, and Merli.

Notes

1. At the time of U.S. entry into the war, there were over 4 million first- and second-generation Italians (i.e., immigrants and their children) in the country (U.S. Census Bureau 1975, pt. 1, 116–117; quoted in Bruscinò 2010, 59). While one government memorandum from the Office of Facts and Figures, in 1942, reflects the relative magnitude of service by Italian Americans in its assertion that the “largest group of foreign descent in the U.S. Army is that of Italian descent,” which accounted for at least 18 percent of all foreign-born soldiers and soldiers with at least one or more foreign-born parents (Bruscinò 2010, 58), as noted by Belfiglio and LaGumina (2000), “accurate figures are elusive” for the

- actual number of Italian-American service personnel during World War II. Estimates range from five hundred thousand to a million or more (672). Nevertheless, the lower figure is most often quoted and so referenced here. Among others citing this number are Belmonte (2001, 6), Lothrop (2001, 294n96), Mangione and Morreale (1992, 341).
2. Sometimes referred to as the "Congressional Medal of Honor," the honor is actually called simply the "Medal of Honor" and is bestowed by the president "in the name of the Congress." See the Congressional Medal of Honor Society website for a detailed history and description of the medal and the society (<http://www.cmoHS.org/medal-history.php>).
 3. According to the Sons of Italy Commission for Social Justice, among other sources, twelve other Italian Americans were awarded the Medal of Honor for service during World War II (Order of the Sons of Italy 2014).
 4. The citation reads as follows (capitalized as in original document):

"The President of the United States takes pleasure in presenting the CONGRESSIONAL MEDAL OF HONOR to SERGEANT JOHN BASILONE, UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS for service as set forth in the following CITATION:

'For extraordinary heroism and conspicuous gallantry in action against enemy Japanese forces, above and beyond the call of duty, while serving with the 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, 1st Marine Division in the Lunga Area, Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands, on 24 and 25 October 1942. While the enemy was hammering at the Marines' defensive positions, Sgt. Basilone, in charge of 2 sections of heavy machine guns, fought valiantly to check the savage and determined assault. In a fierce frontal attack with the Japanese blasting his guns with grenades and mortar fire, one of Sgt. Basilone's sections, with its guncrews, was put out of action, leaving only 2 men able to carry on. Moving an extra gun into position, he placed it in action, then, under continual fire, repaired another and personally manned it, gallantly holding his line until replacements arrived. A little later, with ammunition critically low and the supply lines cut off, Sgt. Basilone, at great risk of his life and in the face of continued enemy attack, battled his way through hostile lines with urgently needed shells for his gunners, thereby contributing in large measure to the virtual annihilation of a Japanese regiment. His great personal valor and courageous initiative were in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.

FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT,
President, United States'" (USMC Training and Education Command [TECOM] 2012).
 5. Jacobson (1999) notes that, while American political culture had institutionalized a racial order that drew a color line around Europe, there remained a "racial othering" within the category of whiteness. The period of mass European immigration that began in the 1840s and ended with the restrictive legislation of 1924 "witnessed a fracturing of whiteness into a hierarchy of plural and scientifically determined white races." In the period following the limiting of European immigration, during which thousands of African Americans migrated out of the South and into the North and West, a reconstitution of whiteness took place in which the "probationary white groups" of the late nineteenth century were given a "scientific stamp of authenticity" as a singular Caucasian race including Celts, Hebrews, Iberics, Saracens, and so forth (7–8).
 6. Studs Terkel, in his oral history of World War II, *The Good War* (1984), presents the recollections of one Italian American, Paul Pisicano, from New York, which capture, at least anecdotally, not only the force of the desire of Italian Americans to lose their "inbetweenness" and be accepted as Americans but also the attendant costs for both those of Italian descent and African Americans: "Since the war, Italo-Americans have undergone this

amazing transformation. They're now the most right-wing. There was a general black dislike before the war [. . .]. There were riots in Harlem in '45. I remember standing on a corner, a guy would throw the door open and say, 'Come on down.' They were goin' to Harlem to get in the riot. They'd say, 'Let's beat up some niggers.' It was wonderful. It was new. The Italo-Americans stopped being Italo and started becoming Americans. We joined the group. Now we're like you guys, right?" (141).

7. William R. Burnett's novel *Little Caesar* and Armitage Trail's *Scarface* had both ridden the public interest in Capone to commercial success, thus capturing the attention of Hollywood.
8. Lend-Lease, the program by which the United States armed and supplied the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union, China, and Free France, was signed into law in March 1941.
9. These paintings, and the artist, were quite purposefully the star attractions of the second war bond drive, the so-called Four Freedoms War Bond tour, in April 1943. A fact sheet issued by the Office of War Information, in May 1943, explicitly stated the connection: "[W]ar bonds are a symbol of the Four Freedoms we are fighting for" (Samuel 1997, 68).
10. Wolfert described the attitude of the Marines within the context of concerns expressed by military personnel on Guadalcanal and aboard the American flotilla over war production stoppages and labor strikes. While all major unions had made a no-strike pledge, there were numerous "wild cat" strikes and work stoppages during the war, including the A. F. L.-led strike of 250 electricians that slowed the expansion of the Navy's Floyd Bennett Field, in New York City, in June 1942; further, John L. Lewis, president of the United Mine Workers, repeatedly violated the no-strike pledge, including taking the UMW out on strike in 1943.
11. In May 1942, forces of the Empire of Japan arrived on Guadalcanal, the largest of the Solomon Islands, and began construction of an airfield presenting a threat to both Australia and American supply lines to the continent, prompting an American invasion of the island in early August. For the next six months, American and Japanese forces fought a savage war of attrition. By February 1943, when the Americans finally claimed victory and put a decisive end to Japanese expansion in the Pacific, U.S. and Allied forces counted 7,100 killed or missing personnel. Japanese killed or missing in action totaled 25,600 ground troops, including naval units on the island, and at least 3,543 at sea, and 1,200 in the air. American losses were significantly less: Of the 60,000 men committed to the campaign, 1,769 were killed in action, including 1,207 Marines and 562 soldiers. Yet, for every Marine and soldier killed in the ground war, three naval and Marine personnel—or an additional 4,911—perished at sea (Frank 1992, 613–614).
12. A search for the term "Guadalcanal" in the *Proquest Historical Newspapers* database, limited to items published between June 1, 1942, and March 1, 1943, reveals that no fewer than 1,145 feature articles describing the island and/or the campaign were published in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Christian Science Monitor*, and *Wall Street Journal*, with 543 front-page stories and 173 editorials focusing on the war in and around the island. At least 595 features were published in the *New York Times*, 159 of which were on the front page, with 99 editorials and 36 photographs or photo essays. Similarly, the *Washington Post* published 327 features, including 197 on page 1, with 59 editorials and 17 photographic items. The *Christian Science Monitor* published 135 front-page articles. Though not under analysis here, it is worth noting that the *Wall Street Journal*, though primarily focused upon business and economic news, nevertheless published 88 articles on Guadalcanal, including 53 on page 1 (accessed February 24, 2014).
13. From September 1942, when *The New Yorker* and *Life* first ran stories on the Marines on Guadalcanal, through March 1943, the month following the Japanese withdrawal from the island, no fewer than forty stories appeared in the nation's leading publications. A survey of the *Reader's Guide Retrospective* database reveals the following: *Life* published twelve articles; *Time*, six articles; *Newsweek*, six; *Harper's*, one; *the Nation*, one; *Scholastic*, two; *American*, one; *Natural History*, one; *The New Yorker*, three; *Readers' Digest*, one;

New York Times Magazine, two; *Collier's*, two; and the *Saturday Evening Post*, two articles (accessed June 24, 2012).

14. See, for example, "Japs Launch All-Out Push for Guadalcanal" (1942) and "Guadalcanal Awaits Japanese Onslaught" (1942), which explain the strategic value of the Solomons.
15. The Aurelio affair was widely covered in the press. See, for instance, "N.Y. Prosecutor Says Clique Engineered Bench Nomination" 1943; "Aurelio, Only 48, Long in Public Life" 1943; and, "Aurelio Ousters Filed by Two Parties" 1943, which was reported the same day as Basilone's "hero's welcome," in Raritan, New Jersey.
16. Service "A" (or Alpha) is the base Marine uniform. It consists of a green coat, green trousers with khaki web belt, khaki long-sleeve button-up shirt, khaki tie, tie clasp, and black shoes. The coat is cut to be semi-form-fitting, with ribbons and marksmanship badges worn on the left chest of the coat ("Uniforms of the United States Marine Corps" 2014).
17. While the media constructs of Sinatra and Basilone shared some similarities, they also diverged at the crucial nexus with the war effort. Most notably, while Basilone's image presented an ideal for young males of Italian descent and otherwise, Sinatra's 4-F classification made him one of the most reviled figures in the country for certain audiences, with popular journalists such as Walter Winchell, Lee Mortimer, and George Sololsky maintaining that he had paid a doctor to classify him as unfit for duty (Summers and Swan 2006, 119–120). Sinatra biographer James Kaplan (2011) convincingly refutes the notion that Sinatra had bought his way out of military service. Nevertheless, as noted by Summers and Swan, many Americans and military personnel were suspicious of Sinatra's failure to serve. As former Marine and author William Manchester recalled, "It is not too much to say that by the end of the war Sinatra had become the most hated man in the armed services" (Summers and Swan 2006, 119).
18. Of the publications under consideration, the *New York Times* and *Christian Science Monitor* largely refrained from jingoist and racist language. An article appearing in *Time* magazine in February 1943, however, is emblematic of the widespread tendency toward racist speech in conceptualization of the enemy. Detailing "How the Japs Fight," the magazine reported the opinions of officers returning to the United States from the Pacific Theater, one of whom described the "burrowing, rodent tenacity" of the Japanese fighting man. Harkening back to long-held biases and stereotypes against a "yellow peril," *Time* further noted that, "Marine and Army men returning from the South Pacific almost unanimously hold that, man for man, the Jap soldier is inferior in fighting qualities to the American. But in all the things to do with *hiding, stealth, and trickery* [italics added], they give the Japs plenty of angry credit" ("How the Japs Fight" 1943). Such views of the Japanese were widely held in the wake of the attack on Pearl Harbor, and, according to at least one study, animosity after the war toward the Japanese and persons of Japanese descent remained substantially higher than that aimed at Germans or Italians. One survey of U.S. Army personnel published after the war asked respondents whether they would "care to talk, eat, work, play, or live" with any of a list of minority groups (Singer 1948, 399). As to "living" – the classification viewed by the author as "naturally measuring the fullest expression of the degree of prejudice" – 52 percent of respondents said they would not live with a Japanese person. In fact, the category of "Japanese" received the most negative responses for the question, with "Negro" following with 46 percent negative responses, then "Chinese" (26 percent) and "Mexican" (22 percent). Ten percent of respondents replied negatively to living with a German, and only 6 percent reacted negatively to living with an Italian. In fact, only prospects of living with a "Finn," "Frenchman," or "Irishman" were found more desirable than living with an Italian (Singer 1948, 399).
19. See, in particular, John W. Dower's "Race, Language, and War in Two Cultures" (1996) and his seminal book-length study from 1986, *War without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War*. As Dower notes, Americans were obsessed with the "uniquely evil nature of the Japanese. [. . .] Japan's aggression . . . stirred the deepest recesses of white

- supremacism and provoked a response bordering on the apocalyptic" (Dower 1996, 170). The Japanese, as Dower details, were similarly predisposed to vilify the Americans and Allies along racial lines.
20. Mussolini had fallen the previous July, with Marshal Pietro Badoglio heading the government that followed. Italy surrendered on September 8, and Allied forces landed at Salerno, on the mainland, on September 9. Sicily had been secured by Allied forces on August 17.
 21. The myth of Italian cowardice was fostered by the British military and press and picked up by the Allies, who reveled in the defeat of the Italian army under the disastrous command of a long line of officers, most notably Commander-in-Chief of Italian North Africa, Marshal Rodolfo Graziani, and the capture of tens of thousands of Italian troops by the British, ultimately numbering 130,000 prisoners of war (Darman 2009, 111).
 22. For examples of press coverage, see "Advance on Libya: 10,000 of Fascist Force Reported Captured in Egyptian Fighting" (1940), Laycock (1940), and Nover (1941).
 23. See, for instance, the comments of former New York City Mayor Jimmy Walker, who makes exactly that point while speaking before a crowd massed for Basilone's triumphant return to Raritan, New Jersey, in September 1943 ("Town Gives \$5,000 Bond to Hero Son" 1943, 4; "Townfolk Greet Guadalcanal Hero with Big Burst of War-Bond Buying" 1943, 3).
 24. See numerous takes from the newsreel, "John Basilone Meets the Mayor of New York City, USMC." This footage, from the National Archives, was uploaded by a researcher for the HBO series *The Pacific*.
 25. Though there is some question as to Basilone's height, at somewhere between five foot eight and five foot ten the "big and brawny" Marine (Brady 2010, 15) was at or slightly above the average height for a U.S. GI, then five eight (Godwin 1945). Lansford recalls Basilone's service record book as recording his height as five eight and a half and weight as 158 pounds.
 26. Lowell Thompson, the famed broadcaster and travelogue writer, and narrator of Fox Movietone newsreels, pronounced Basilone's name as if it rhymed with "baloney" (*Fox Movietone News: The War Years*, n.d.).
 27. There is a subtext to the meeting between Basilone and La Guardia that bears mentioning. According to La Guardia biographer H. Paul Jeffers, "[n]o more indelible popular image of Mayor Fiorello La Guardia exists in the memory of the people who were alive then, and in the history of the La Guardia years, than that of the tubby, shirtsleeved, sweaty, fiercely expressed warrior against organized larceny swinging a sledgehammer in the midst of a small mountain of slot machines" (Jeffers 2002, 196). In 1934, in an event captured in the press and newsreels, La Guardia had famously led New York police in destroying and disposing of 1,200 illegal slot machines, tossing the first one into Long Island Sound himself. These "mechanical pickpockets," as he called them, were the wellspring of racketeer Frank Costello's wealth, who was forced to relocate much of his gambling enterprise to Louisiana, where he was welcomed by Governor Huey Long. In a sense, La Guardia, a *good* Italian, had rid New York of Costello, a *bad* Italian. The meeting between Basilone and La Guardia, two *good* Italians, undoubtedly registered positively with many Americans.
 28. The defense bond program was devised by Treasury Secretary Hans Morgenthau and Amherst College political scientist Peter H. Odegard and was based upon a belief that the war bond campaign could be a powerful instrument of propaganda. As such, from the beginning the drives presented rich patriotic pageants replete with artists and movie stars at once peddling bonds and the war effort. Basilone's involvement reflected another concern: The Treasury Department was aware of the inherent shortcomings of making a mass appeal to the U.S. population of 130 million, which was far from homogenous. Thus, Morgenthau turned to Madison Avenue, hiring advertising agency

professionals adept at integrating then-current market segmentation concepts into the war bond effort. Informing the advertisers' plans were the opinions of experts on the various ethnic and minority communities making up the U.S. population. The conflation of bond buying and patriotism, and of civilian and soldier, promoted by Morgenthau and Odegard, rested atop an assertion of the contributions made by the country's ethnic communities and appealed to the individual desires of members of these communities to be accepted as American (Gerstle 1996, 111–112). Appeals to these various groups also entailed appeals to unionism, for ethnic workers were largely unionized as a response to industrial and societal apathy and antagonism toward them. Union rolls had expanded dramatically over the past decade, spurred on by the pro-labor policies of the New Deal, and ethnic workers, bridleing under their second-class status, were among the most active unionists and union supporters. In turn, the unions had become the most ardent advocates of the communities from which they came. Emblematic of this support was a pamphlet published by the Congress of Industrial Organization's Political Action Committee in 1944: "They came from England and from Ireland . . . They came from Russia and from Germany. They came from Italy and from Poland. They came from Yugoslavia, Africa . . . They came from all corners of the earth to share in our way of life" (Gaer 1944, 20; quoted in Gerstle 1996, 113). These appeals to ethnic workers were, in fact, part of an unprecedented celebration of American diversity, which was among the most salient features of the nation's wartime culture, whether expressed through official, governmental organs or via the mass media, notably in Hollywood cinema, and including media coverage of Basilone's combat heroics and efforts in service to the Third War Loan Drive.

29. Among the groups marching were the American Legion, the VFW, soldiers and WACs from Camp Kilmer, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, the Red Cross, a drum and bugle corps, the Italian-American Society, and numerous marching bands. Basilone rode in a convertible, sitting atop the back seat with his parents, while his friend Private 1st Class Stephen Helstowski, another veteran of Guadalcanal, sat with a uniformed chauffeur in front.
30. The youngest of the Basilone children, Donald, enlisted in the Marines when he turned seventeen, in 1947 ("Marines Sign Brother" 1947, 27).
31. The "Blue Network" was sold in October 1943 and renamed the American Broadcasting Company in 1945.
32. While being feted by the National Association of Manufacturers in the Grand Ballroom of the Waldorf, Basilone took advantage of the opportunity to seek the aid of another guest on the dais—Marine Lieutenant General Alexander A. Vandegrift, the man that had commanded him on Guadalcanal, recommended him for the Medal of Honor, and pinned it to his chest. Vandegrift promised that he would look into the Marine's request. Whether it was this plea that finally set Basilone's course is not clear, but he soon got his wish to return to the Pacific (Brady 2010, 158).
33. A search of the *Proquest Historical Newspapers* database reveals that there were at least 148 features appearing in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Christian Science Monitor*, and *Wall Street Journal* between February 4, 1945, when the press first posited that the Bonin Islands were "worth watching" as likely targets for America's next move in the Pacific ("Bonin, Volcano Islands" 1945, B3), and March 20, when it was reported that the Japanese government had radiocast to its population an admission that Japan had lost the island ("Loss of Iwo Admitted" 1945, 5). One-hundred-and-five articles appeared on the front pages of these newspapers (accessed February 24, 2014). Additionally, the *Readers Guide Retrospective* reveals that between February 26, when *Time* and *Newsweek* ran the first stories on the invasion, and the end of March, when the American victory was detailed, the nation's leading mass-market weeklies published at least 22 articles about the Battle for Iwo Jima, with more coming in the following months (accessed February 24, 2014).

34. Though too numerous to detail here, the reportage in the following articles is emblematic of coverage received by the battle in the nation's mass-market periodicals. See, for instance, Bolte (1945), Davenport (1945), Lardner (1945), Painton (1945), Worden (1945), and Zurlinden (1945).
35. The 3rd, 4th, and 5th Marine Divisions, tasked with the landings, suffered an appalling 5,732 casualties in the first three days of the invasion (Bolte 1945, 240). The island was riddled with caves, tunnels, and heavily fortified blockhouses constructed and excavated by the Japanese, and it would take weeks to overcome their defenses. Due to a vast superiority of force, the American victory was assured from the beginning, yet, American deaths totaled nearly 7,000, with more than 19,000 wounded, and the campaign to take Iwo Jima and its airfields was the only battle of the war in which U.S. Marine total casualties exceeded those of the Japanese. Yet, the Japanese losses were even more horrific, with approximately 21,000 of the 22,000 Japanese defending the island killed in action (Ross 1986, xiii-xiv; Newcomb 2002, 296). For the Japanese defenders, the first American invasion of Japanese home territory was a fight to the death, and imperial losses for the remainder of the war reflected growing Japanese desperation.
36. Other servicemen noted by the governor included Medal of Honor recipients William Bianchi (of Minnesota), Peter Dallesandro (of New York), and Gino Merli (of Pennsylvania), as well as Ohio's Don Gentile, who had received the Distinguished Flying Cross ("Dewey Calls U.S. Obligated" 1945, 15).
37. *The Black Hand* (1950), starring Gene Kelley as an Italian-American lawyer in New York City's "Little Italy" battling the criminal gang, circa 1900, opens with the following written foreword: "At the turn of the century, there were more Italians living in New York than in Rome. Many had hurried here seeking fortune and freedom. Some of them found only failure and fear. From all these Italian immigrants came no truer American names than Di Maggio, Pecora, Giannini, La Guardia, and Basilone. This story deals with the hard, angry days when these new citizens began to place their stake in the American dream—when they purged the Old World terror of the Black Hand from their ranks and gave bright dignity to their people and to this nation."

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Book Reviews

Mafia Movies: A Reader.

Edited by Dana Renga.

Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011.

368 pages.

This collection of essays is a most welcome addition to the study of Mafia mythology in American culture; it focuses on examples from popular film and television in an engaging and accessible manner. The stated purpose of the collection is to discuss Mafia films “in terms of stereotyping, gender roles and representations of violence” (6). In consequence, it is best described as a cultural study from a mainly Italian-American perspective rather than analyses within the theoretical framework of film studies, although some of the chapters are more contextualized than others. In short, it offers multiple discussions that state how “the myth of the Mafia is still alive and well in the American imaginary” (3), and it does so from a specifically Italian-American viewpoint. The voices in the first half of this collection interrogate Italian ethnicity as it has appeared in the gangster genre throughout American cinema and television history, from the presentation of immigrants in films such as *The Black Hand* (1906), D.W. Griffith’s *In Little Italy* (1909), as well as *Little Caesar* (1931) and *Scarface* (1932), through to second- or third-generation Italian Americans in *The Departed* (2006) and, of course, *The Sopranos* (1999–2007).

Certainly one of the great strengths of this book is its breadth. It not only focuses on early cinema but it also gives a chapter to just about every popular Italian-American Mafia film since *The Godfather*. The fact that the focus is only on Italian ethnicity means that some major films, such as Brian De Palma’s *Scarface* (1983) or Sergio Leone’s *Once Upon a Time in America* (1983) are absent. This is an issue only because of the strength of Renga’s argument about the intertextual discourse of *mise en abîme*. She states that “*mise en abîme* is key to the gangster genre; films cite one another ad nauseam, and real life Mafiosi mimic what they watch on screen” (8). This is clearly one of the richest qualities of the genre and is not confined to those films that feature Italian-American characters. Having said that, there are obviously enough examples in this book to prove the rule, and it would have been wonderful to see Renga’s introduction expanded throughout the book to remind us of these connections. However, that is only a personal view: One of the values of an edited collection is the inclusion of multiple voices and the freedom to read and re-read sections regardless of order.

The book not only focuses on American media, it also gives an equal amount of space to Italian cinema. Both sections are full of rich information about the appeal of Mafia mythology in modern culture. Specifically enjoyable are the discussions of modern Italian cinema and its focus on the Naples-based Camorra. The chapters on *Gomorrhah* (2008) and *Certi bambini (A Children’s Story)* (2004) and especially the chapter devoted to Francesco Rosi’s *Hands Over the City* (1963) really capture the ability of genre films to not only interrogate but also anticipate many cultural debates about organized crime and its effects on the wider society. The two discussions of the Italian documentaries *Excellent Cadavers* (2005) and *The Mafia Is White* (2005) are intriguing in the ways they reveal “the relations between the Cosa Nostra and politics” (365), and

such informative studies make one wonder why American cinema cannot interrogate the Mafia in as direct a way.

Renga, in her introduction, suggests that “at first glance, it might appear that American directors are mainly interested in making films that romanticize and idealize mob life, while Italian filmmakers are concerned with socially conscious filmmaking” (6). She states that her book’s intention is to encourage “the reader to think beyond these paradigms” (6), especially about how American cinema critiques the Mafia, how Italian cinema branches out from politics to more generic entertainment, and how later films are influenced by Hollywood. This is certainly evident in *Gomorra*, which reached worldwide acclaim, not only for its political resonances but also for its cinematic allusions. However, in general, the differences between American and Italian attitudes toward the Mafia cannot be breached in a collection of individual essays because the individual chapters do not refer to one another. The book is best situated to show the ever-present connections between Mafia mythology and a general distrust or frustration concerning capitalist societies, their political systems, and the attendant social need for individual success. Most of the essays assert that the gangster genre at its core always includes some aspect of sociopolitical critique.

The second introductory chapter, by Peter Schneider and Jane Schneider, focuses on Mafia wives. The book has three other chapters devoted to women in the Mafia films *Prizzi’s Honor* (1985), *The Funeral* (1995), and *Angela* (2002). This introductory chapter is an informative historical study of the role of Mafia wives in providing extended family connections for the Mafia in Italy and America. The focus on self-sacrifice and stoicism is not surprising in this context and provides a sobering reflection on women’s suffering. However, as the individual chapters focus on fiction film rather than real-life events, they provide a more optimistic view and discuss examples of strong women characters as questioning or usurping their male partners’ authority. Abel Ferrara’s *The Funeral*, one of the most interesting gangster films of the last twenty years, is shown to blur the boundary between the dichotomy of virgin/whore that has often been associated with specifically Catholic women on screen. Both wives, through conscious displays of passivity or rebellion, negotiate the authority of their spouses in ways that question the very honor and loyalty upon which Mafia gender roles are fixed. The film’s violent ending is not simple tragedy, but as Lara Santoro notes “the old regime of male power is destroyed and a new order is created, where the women are now free to choose their own paths” (161). While this may be a fairytale narrative for Mafia women in real life, it is important to remember as the introductory chapter does that most Mafia wives, just like the men, have grown up in that world. Mafia has informed every aspect of their being, and one feels that this recognition simply creates an intertextual notion of *mise en abîme* as a continuous reflection of life imitating art imitating life.

In summary, this collection of essays is engaging and thought-provoking from a cultural standpoint. There are not enough serious studies of the gangster genre, especially in contemporary cinema. While this collection is specifically dedicated to Italian-American culture, the breadth of films does justice to the genre as a whole. This collection is a very welcome contribution to the topic of organized crime in cinema.

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*Hollywood's Italian American Filmmakers:
Capra, Scorsese, Savoca, Coppola, and Tarantino.*

By Jonathan Cavallero.

Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011.

264 pages.

In this thought-provoking study, Jonathan Cavallero explores and contextualizes selected films by Italian-American directors working in different time periods and in diverse styles: Frank Capra, Martin Scorsese, Nancy Savoca, Francis Ford Coppola, and Quentin Tarantino. Rather than relying on their Italian Americanness as a “quint-essential,” static common denominator, the author focuses on the dynamic significance of ethnic identity in their works and their lives. These directors have constructed the multifaceted “imagined community,” to use Benedict Anderson’s concept, of Italian America while shaping the modes in which individual Italian Americans comprehend and form their own ethnic personae. This imagined community emerges from intriguing analyses of heterogeneous cinematic aesthetics and historical contexts in which Cavallero deftly intertwines a “classical film studies approach to authorship with a cultural studies perspective” (6). Through this hybrid critical methodology the author demonstrates that, despite their different representations of Italian-American ethnicity, each director “contributes to our collective understanding of the ways Italian-American ethnicity functions socially, culturally, and historically” (10). By drawing, in particular, upon Janet Staiger’s and James Naremore’s studies on the relevance of *auteur* cinema, Cavallero underscores the political potential that issues of authorship imply when they refer to marginalized communities. His book succeeds in countering “essentialized notions of Italian-American identity and culture” (9) and, therefore, widens the scope of the discourse on Italian-American cinema: “The works of these filmmakers have become a pervasive aspect of the cultural discourse not just on ethnicity but also on assimilation, acculturation, immigration, and tolerance” (161).

In every chapter, Cavallero begins his analysis by providing the reader with clear and succinct critical and historical coordinates. In the first chapter, devoted to “Frank Capra: Ethnic Denial and Its Impossibility,” he carefully situates the director’s works in the critical discourse between “descent” and “consent” (as per Werner Sollors’s seminal work) and in the historical context of the changing role of the Italian immigrant community, from the Immigration Acts of 1921 and 1924 to the post-World War II “white” assimilation to suburban middle class (43). Through formal and cultural analyses of several of Capra’s productions, including *The Strong Man* (1926) and the war documentary series *Why We Fight* (1942–1945), Cavallero convincingly argues that ethnic identity had a continuous influence on Capra’s work despite the filmmaker’s (partial) denial of his ethnic origins. Capra’s protagonists’ multiethnic ties raise problematic questions about the construction of an American identity and its founding ideals, such as individualism, capitalism, communalism, and equality. “In doing so, Capra redrew the line between American and un-American—not along ethnic lines but rather along the lines of personal value judgments” (41) and, therefore, challenged audiences to rethink nativist views toward immigration and identity.

The ensuing chapters point out how the shifting cultural climate of the white ethnic revival of the 1960s and 1970s, deeply related to the civil rights movement,

granted later Italian-American filmmakers the opportunity of exploring their ethnicity both openly and critically, through a cross-cultural focus on race, gender, and class. Chapter 2, "Martin Scorsese: Confined and Defined by Ethnicity," interprets Scorsese's work, from *Mean Streets* (1973) to *The Departed* (2006), as a "cinema of group solidarity" (46). Thus, Cavallero's perspective situates itself between authoritative interpretations that underline either the ethnic group identity of Scorsese's characters or their isolated individuality. Scorsese's protagonists are, rather, "torn between a kind of tribal solidarity and a modern world of multicultural assimilation to secular capitalist values" (47). Ethnicity by and large provides Scorsese's Italian-American protagonists with a sense of identity, but it also functions as a limiting and threatening entity from which they sometimes attempt to escape in a self-destructive spiral.

Chapter 3, "Nancy Savoca: Ethnicity, Class, and Gender," explores the cinema of a filmmaker of mixed Italian and Argentinian ethnic heritage whose childhood was suspended between continents, cities, and neighborhoods. The characters of her films, spanning from *True Love* (1989) to *Dirt* (2003), "confront the threat of dislocation, financial insecurity, and the numbing effects these situations can have on their emotional well-beings" (78). While Savoca's cinema highlights "the collision of multiple identities" (79) in which class, gender, and ethnic identities are inextricably interwoven, gender roles, and particularly women's experience, represent a privileged focus of attention. Savoca's films not only counter what Edvige Giunta characterizes as the "double marginalization" (79) of Italian-American women but also poignantly represent how characters from diverse backgrounds share similar struggles. Therefore, they lay "the foundation for a new community that is based on common experiences of gender and class rather than just ethnic or regional identity" (91).

The fourth chapter, devoted to "Francis Ford Coppola: Nostalgia, the Family, and Ethnicity," offers an example of the opposite approach to the representation of ethnic identity. Cavallero contends that "nostalgia and a preoccupation with the family are thematic mainstays of Coppola's movies" as heterogeneous as *Dementia 13* (1963) and *The Outsiders* (1983). The ethnocentric representation of a one-dimensional, romanticized Italian-American crime family, at the center of *The Godfather* trilogy (1972-1990), infuses Italian Americanness with an aura of deeply conservative nostalgia, which creates "a mythical image that resonated with an American culture reeling from social upheaval and military defeat in Vietnam" (123).

The power of these and other romanticized representations of ethnic identities in shaping the "imagined community" of Italian America emerges in forceful and disquieting ways in the cinema of Quentin Tarantino, which is analyzed in Chapter 5, "Quentin Tarantino: Ethnicity and the Postmodern." Tarantino's persona, marked by an Italian-American paternal absence and an Irish-Cherokee maternal presence, becomes by synecdoche the part for the whole, the epitome of the questions that define ethnicity in the postmodern era: "Is being marked with an Italian last name enough to secure one's Italianness? Can we base one's ethnic identity solely on genetic makeup? And through what other avenues can ethnic identity be communicated, understood, and felt today?" (126). Cavallero's discussion of Tarantino's works, with particular attention to *Pulp Fiction* (1994), *Kill Bill* (2003, 2004), and *Inglourious Basterds* (2009), offers a persuasive, albeit problematic, answer to these questions. While acknowledging the critical debate that surrounds the originality (or lack thereof), the violence,

and the politics of Tarantino's movies, Cavallero insists on the empowering role of performance and irony through playful homage to iconic images of ethnicity, which Tarantino absorbed from Coppola, Scorsese, and others.

Therefore, Tarantino's cinema epitomizes an antiessentialist, inclusive, and performative approach to ethnic identity:

For many today, ethnicity (particularly white ethnicity) may not be as connected to a specific historical experience as it once was, but then being ethnic (Italian American or otherwise) regardless of historical era cannot be reduced to an essentialized understanding of identity. This is not to suggest that we live in a posthistorical world. Rather, it is to recognize that there are always multiple ways to understand and perform one's ethnicity. (148)

Jonathan Cavallero's investigation of five major Italian-American directors offers not only a solidly researched, engagingly argued, and innovative perspective on each one of them, but it also opens up cinematic discourse on (Italian) ethnicity to wider horizons of cultural and political reflections and leaves us with a constructive, dynamic vision of identity.

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Bitter Greens: Essays on Food, Politics, and Ethnicity from the Imperial Kitchen.
By Anthony Di Renzo.

Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010.

193 pages.

Italian food epitomizes pleasurable eating. Not just the kind that satisfies hunger. It certainly does that, but it also awakens the palate, soothes the soul, stimulates the mind, and offers occasions for — even requires — companionable socializing. In keeping with its topic, so does this delightful and erudite book. In it, author Anthony Di Renzo traverses continents and centuries to discuss politics, history, classics, philosophy of the past and present, and Italian and Italian-American culture.

Di Renzo calls himself a “coffeehouse philosopher,” grounding that identification in a history of coffee and coffeehouses as well as in the roles they play in Italy and Italian America, all of which is based on his experiences growing up Italian American in Brooklyn. This philosophizing is in his blood, part of his cultural heritage and family tradition. He shares it with his readers as if they were fellow coffeehouse-goers. The result is a book to savor slowly and by chapter — much like courses in a meal — in which events and people, politics and ethnicity are shown to be connected in surprising ways through food. If all roads lead to Rome, then everything else leads to food.

Summarizing the book is almost impossible. Di Renzo addresses universal themes through seemingly ordinary events in his own life and memories of his Italian-American family. He contextualizes those with well-researched and scholarly histories

and ethnographies, pointing out connections between the ancient past, the remembered past, and the present; between the individual and the larger tide of politics and economics; between the personal and the cultural. Food throughout grounds these forays. It also then serves as the springboard for musings on the state of the world, particularly the Italian-American world. Di Renzo also constantly reminds us of the classical Roman era, pointing out the continuities between the past and the present. His discussions of the classics are enlightening but sometimes demand more knowledge than many readers will have. Similarly, translations are usually given for Latin terms, but references are oftentimes inside jokes that will whet the appetites of some readers and frustrate others. Overall, though, I enjoyed the approach: Tidbits of knowledge and insight are thrown out, like crumbs being scattered for us to pick up as we want.

The volume is organized according to a six-course meal from southern Italy, with each chapter being a course or ritual within such a meal; additional chapters frame the meal. A recipe precedes each essay and is the foundation for contents that follow: a vivid testimony to how food feeds the imagination. Most of the chapters were previously published in various literary outlets.

The preface or “Aperitif” introduces the idea of the book as well as the main characters – including the Roman satirist Horace, and the author’s Italian-born, American immigrant parents. Di Renzo also introduces himself, an American with strong Italian roots, academic training in the classics, a desire for justice, and a penchant for irony. His keynote chapter on Lucullan feasts recounts his reaction to attempts by Wegman’s supermarket in New York to offer “true tastes of Italy.” He explains his less than enthusiastic response by giving us a history of classical Rome and its feasts. This provides a commentary on the contradictions of capitalism and globalization and frames his mourning for the loss of aspects of traditional Italian culture less as a nostalgic romanticization of the past than as a critique of the impact of the technology and economy that have made the United States a land of opportunity.

The first course of the actual meal is the “Antipasto,” in the book featuring a “recipe” for *abruzzese soppressata*, mozzarella, and olives. More of a description of how to present those ingredients together and how to create the appropriate setting for them, this prelude leads to personal anecdotes about the sausage, imports of which were banned in the United States until May 2013, and the ways in which it represents the immigrant experience. “Italian-Americans can learn more about the heartbreak and horror of assimilation from *soppressata* than from any book” (25). They have seen their culture “ground up” to be re-formed into an acceptable product, all in the name of capitalism. Di Renzo is not a knee-jerk anticapitalist, though. He recognizes that the free-market system also offered opportunities and freedoms that were not available in Italy. It is the worship of the system that he dislikes and the hypocrisy of greed for power and wealth being allowed to control the system.

The “Primo” offers a recipe for Calabrian onion soup before exploring the connections between tears and onions. That connection not only is a proverb that the author’s grandmother often quoted, but it also represents an outlook on life fundamentally different from the American obsession with happiness. It furthermore gives an entry into a history of Canastota, New York, where Sicilian immigrants developed an onion empire in the late 1800s lasting into the latter half of the 1900s, and Di Renzo’s nonna provides a modern face to ancient Roman philosophy and eating habits.

“Secondo” explains tripe – what it is, how to cook it properly, regional variations of tripe dishes in Italy, and the nostalgia it evokes for the author. He also explores the lower-class connotations it held in Italy along with the racial and class associations it still has in the United States. His suggestion that tripe be considered a symbol for the human soul certainly would give most readers a new perspective on this bit of offal, but it also brings home the point of its meaningfulness to Italian Americans.

Another proverb introduces the next chapter, “Contorno,” and explains the title of the book, bitter greens, by exploring the rise of broccoli rabe from a peasant food into a gourmet specialty. “Dolce” follows with a recipe for Sicilian chocolate cake and a history of chocolate. Both chapters include family histories as well as politics, demonstrating that our lives are shaped by powers beyond ourselves. That theme is partly why the subject of the following chapter, “Caffé” (with its discussion of coffeehouse philosophy), is so necessary to our existence and humanity. It includes a history of coffee machines, not the typical stuff of interesting conversations, but in this instance a case study for the common tale of technology both helping and hindering.

“The After-Dinner Speech: Lunch with Trimalchio” weaves a fascinating tale of how McDonald’s took over the world, including Italy, which at least put up a good fight and even started its own movement in response. Di Renzo points out the irony of that global takeover being led by an Italian immigrant, a classics scholar who failed to find a university position in the United States. The book ends with “Envoy,” a nightcap and an essay on the 9/11 terrorist attack that demolished Windows on the World, the restaurant on top of the North Tower.

So, who are the audiences for this book? The short answer is everyone who has rich but mixed memories of family, who struggles to define themselves in the modern world, and who muses as they eat, particularly those who enjoy conversing over a meal or coffee. It would be an excellent text for the classroom, particularly one in classics, ethnicity, or food studies, where it would stimulate much thought and discussion. Perhaps the book’s greatest strength is that it shows that people never really change. The same issues that plagued the ancient Romans plague us today. It is only our responses that differ. Food can help us to see that more clearly.

–LUCY M. LONG
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Columbus Day et les Italiens de New York.

By Marie-Christine Michaud.

Paris: Ed. Presse Universitaire Paris-Sorbonne, 2011.

227 pages.

Since the nineteenth century, in New York City and throughout the United States, Columbus Day has been a celebration of Italian pride. In this book, Marie-Christine Michaud describes the development of a strong feeling of ethnic cohesion among Italian Americans and shows how Columbus Day helped the consolidation of this

particular community of New Yorkers. The holiday both fostered a sense of national belonging and created a basis of political and cultural influence (14–15).

Michaud examines the meanings of Columbus Day commemorations for Italian Americans in light of their sense of civic status: their economic, political, and cultural influence. The book interrogates the appropriation of Columbus Day celebrations by Italian Americans, considering the celebration as an indicator of the expansion of the Italian-American community's public presence in New York City. While the author notes certain continuities in the holiday's ceremonies over time, she also analyzes the different functions that Columbus Day had during critical periods of U.S. or Italian history, such as the 1908 Messina earthquake and World War II. These changing national and international roles are key to comprehending the underlying issues of the celebration.

Because Italy became a nation relatively late, in 1871, Italians in New York didn't think of themselves as a "national" community initially. There were several regional groups of Italian immigrants, but to other Americans these groups were simply "Italians," and they were stigmatized and even considered a potential danger to U.S. identity and the established social structure (19–21). These groups coalesced around the myth of Christopher Columbus (32–33), sensing an affinity between his spirit of discovery and their own destiny as newcomers. Columbus Day afforded leaders of the Italian-American community a way to establish an "Italian" culture in relation to other groups and to raise their visibility and demonstrate their status, particularly in the eyes of white Anglo Saxon Protestants. Michaud explains the process of Italian-American assimilation, the feeling of a lack of identity, and the need to find rituals to assert their (national) selfhood.

Chapter 2 focuses on the 1892 celebration, the 400th anniversary of Columbus's voyage to America. New York's local authorities intended the commemoration to be about the assimilation of immigrants under the umbrella of "American" values. The parade the city organized was to involve all ethnic groups, the idea being to induce a patriotic "American feeling" into migrants' hearts and souls. On the other hand, the migrants themselves felt their participation celebrated their individual cultural contributions to the construction and greatness of the United States (55–59). Irish immigrants, especially the Knights of Columbus, tried to be closely involved in organizing the festival, claiming that the diffusion of Catholicism was a direct consequence of the discovery of the new world by Columbus. This effort by Catholics illustrates an assertion of their religious freedom in relation to Protestants (50–52). The author discusses ways in which, for Italian Americans, who mostly hailed from southern Italy, the 1892 celebrations began the process of establishing their common identity and fueled their desire to affirm and strengthen their role in U.S. society (66).

Chapter 3 covers Columbus Day's official recognition by the federal government as a national holiday in 1968. Michaud examines how Italian Americans became increasingly involved in the organization of the celebration and the ways in which its meaning differed for the first, second, and subsequent generations of Italian Americans. For the first Italian immigrants, Columbus Day represented a way to encourage community solidarity, while for the second or third generations, it has become an index of their distinction, their Italian Americanness (73). This has been the principal approach to the holiday for most of the twentieth century, an approach that Italian Americans have used to their communal advantage.

In the first part of the twentieth century, Columbus Day provided a way for Italian Americans to demonstrate their loyalties: loyalty to American values, to their families and to less fortunate Italians back home (for example, in the collection of funds to help Italy recover from the 1908 Messina earthquake [77–79]), and to the Italian community in New York City (i.e., during the 1921–1922 strikes [79]). Columbus Day also became a means of exercising community influence on local political matters by inviting politicians to participate in the parade (93).

During the Fascist era in Italy (1922–1943), Italian Americans experienced feelings of acute discomfort and embarrassment. Columbus Day became in that period an arena in which Fascist supporters and detractors faced off: Both groups organized celebrations for the same day, each claiming fealty to American values and pride in being descendants of Columbus. U.S. authorities, some of whom were initially impressed by Mussolini and his government as constituting a bulwark against communism, nevertheless wanted to support the non-Fascist elements in the United States; hence, politicians could be found attending both factions' Columbus Day parades (95).

World War II was an especially difficult time for New York's Italian Americans, who felt constrained and yet at the same time mistrusted for displaying national pride, as a result of the hostile relationship between the United States and Italy during the conflict (100). But Italian Americans managed through this period to maintain pride in their ethnic identity without compromising their deep loyalty to the United States. As a consequence, Columbus Day became a vehicle for reemphasizing Italian-American values against Fascism (104–105). After World War II, Columbus Day in New York City assumed a more pragmatic purpose: reifying the political influence of Italian Americans as a white ethnic group and setting them apart from groups of color, such as African Americans or Latinos.

In the 1960s Italian Americans continued using Columbus Day to reaffirm their identity as part of U.S. society, while celebrations of the holiday served as an increasingly important political stage (106) – politicians found that taking part in the parade was an effective means of getting Italian-American community support, strengthening ties with Italy for the European Recovery Program, and also highlighting anticommunist values among Italian Americans (109). In this way, Columbus Day became, from one side, an opportunity for other Americans to show their interest in Italians (both Italian Americans and those in Italy), and from the other side, for Italian Americans to express their embrace of both American and Italian values (110). Italian Americans formed part of the U.S. mainstream, while simultaneously maintaining their own cultural and ethnic characteristics.

Chapter 4 describes the modern meaning of Columbus Day in New York, the culmination of Italian Americans' social, economic, and political evolution in the United States. After the civil rights movement of the 1960s, Italian Americans, like other immigrants, could express their cultural and ethnic heritages without fear of not being considered "true" Americans, a freedom that marks integration into multi-ethnic society (119–120). Michaud discusses the fact that Italian Americans vied for a time with the Latino community for legitimacy (130) inside the predominantly Anglo society. Nevertheless, by the time of the 1992 celebration of the discovery of America, the two communities were working more together than in opposition (163).

Largely as a result of 9/11, the 2001 celebration of Columbus Day in New York brought about a return to an old-fashioned patriotism, featuring the songs “The Star-Spangled Banner,” “The Stars and Stripes Forever,” and “God Bless America.” Columbus Day that year thus allowed for an opportunity to commemorate victims of the attack and to highlight the indomitable spirit of America (175).

The contemporary Columbus Day commemoration is a popular event that celebrates the strong ties between the United States and Italy and showcases the economic and social integration of the Italian-American community of New York (177). The job of Italian Americans at this point is that of any other immigrant group: to maintain their specific community’s economic influence (181).

Marie-Christine Michaud provides a wealth of detail in the reconstruction of the holiday’s history. Her style is clear and accessible, and her approach is insightful. Her choice of linking the history of Columbus Day to the evolution of the New York Italian-American community, while engaging, sometimes leaves the reader wondering if her assertions pertain to all Italian Americans or only to New Yorkers. In other words, the influence of local context is not questioned enough, and a comparative perspective would have brought a sharper overview on Italians’ integration in the United States.

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Mussolini’s National Project in Argentina.

By David Aliano.

Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2012.

220 pages.

It may seem strange that to date only a few studies have tried to analyze extensively the effects of Fascist Italy’s attempts to advance its political ideology in Argentina, a country with a significant Italian population (Gentile 1986; Newton 1994; Scalzanella 2005). However, David Aliano has now written an exhaustive study of Fascist penetration in the South American country using an extensive array of sources in English, Italian, and Spanish. Furthermore, he adds an analysis of numerous archives on both shores of the ocean, as well as many textual sources, such as Italian textbooks produced for schools abroad.

Aliano defines Benito Mussolini’s policies in Argentina as a state-sponsored national project, structurally similar to those that had been promoted abroad by Italian governments during the liberal period, as apparently demonstrated “by the fact that most of the institutions abroad had been established prior to the fascist seizure of power” (47). In this sense Fascists would have “shifted to promoting Italian national identity rather than the more expansive project of spreading the fascist revolution” (47). Aliano’s interest centers on the fact that “the significance of Mussolini’s efforts abroad lies not in the propaganda effort itself and whether it was rejected or accepted but rather in the dynamic national conversation it provoked, in which both supporters

and opponents of the regime's national project articulated their own original understandings of the Italian nation" (7).

In his first chapter, the author provides an account of what Fascists wrote and said about the idea of an Italian identity outside of Italy, as well as the attempts to transmit this identity through propaganda in Argentina. This links to the second chapter, where Aliano includes a wider view of Italy's global activities in this effort. The third chapter analyses in depth the Fascists' programs in Argentina, with special interest paid to cultural arenas, and it segues into Chapter 4's focus on a specific textual analysis of school textbooks. The fifth chapter, which discusses the reception of Mussolini's message specifically in terms of the categories of Fascism/anti-Fascism, examines how Italian Argentines redefined their identities in relation to Argentinian democratic values. The final chapter analyses Argentines' views of the success and failure of Mussolini's Italian project with regard to their identity as a nation.

Aliano has commendably made an analysis that covers all Fascist activities in Argentina, even though some of his source materials (i.e., textbooks for schools abroad) are not ground-breaking, as they have been previously utilized by other scholars. His exposition is linear and readable, yet—according to this reviewer—it raises a couple of criticisms. Aliano argues that Mussolini's state-sponsored project was not significantly different from that promoted during the liberal era, in particular because the Italian dictator did not apparently aim to bring about a Fascist revolution in Argentina. In other words, because the policy was not violently Fascist oriented and was in fact softened by the promotion of cultural activities, Aliano seems to suggest a sort of continuity with the pre-Fascist period. First, it is important to remember that the regime, apart from the reinforcing and fascistization of institutions abroad (such as the schools of Italian), made a further and considerable effort to spread its politics through the creation of purely Fascist institutions, such as the publications *Fasci* and the *Dopolavoro*, aimed specifically to gather immigrants around not only an Italian, but in fact a *Fascist*, conception of nation. This is particularly relevant in textbooks, analyzed by Aliano, where advanced students of Italian

expanded upon the themes of Italians abroad as part of the *patria* and the obligation of Italians abroad to devote their lives to the regime. [. . .] The message is unequivocal: the children of emigrants, though far away, remained integral to the *patria*; therefore, like their little brethren across the sea, they too had to devote themselves to the *patria* and prepare to fight and struggle for its greatness. (94)

This sort of "aspiration" to return to the homeland or to take responsibility for its defense is not present during the liberal age, when a moderate nationalist approach toward migrants obtained.

Underlying Mussolini's policies one often detects a nature of pure aggressiveness in his dealings with Italian communities abroad, especially in the second half of the 1930s. Yet, as Aliano rightly suggests, when the Argentinian authorities' reaction prevented the successful transmission of Rome's violent activities and political messages, Mussolini's government worked to smooth its words and deeds in the South American country and silenced the most extremist militants. However, as in the case of the United States, this was mostly done for convenient political maneuvering and in an effort not to give encouragement to Argentinian nationalism, which

was ready to strongly react against any foreign political influence that could menace its own national identity (Chapter 6). Nevertheless, Fascism's true nature periodically surfaced, as Aliano relates happened during the Argentinian tour of Italian Senate President Luigi Federzoni, who in 1937 embarrassed an audience of notable Italian immigrants with his denunciations of his countrymen who had acquired Argentinian citizenship. This act demonstrates the existence of a Fascist ideological specificity in designing a project for Italians abroad. The fact that violence and aggressiveness were sometimes softened, or disguised, does not diminish the consistency and nature of the project itself and in fact underlines its difference with the pre-Fascist age.

The second, albeit minor, criticism is of Chapter 5, where Aliano plans to examine how the Italian community in Argentina responded to Mussolini's national project. In terms of labeling immigrants simply as Fascists or anti-Fascists, Aliano rightly asserts that Italian Argentines melded political ideological values coming from the homeland with democratic values of their host country, in which they aimed to assimilate. Again, as in the well-known case of the United States, Italian communities in Argentina could develop complex identities in which it was possible to combine pro-Mussolini sentiments with a belief in democratic values. Yet these considerations, far from being completely unknown by historians of Italians in Argentina, leave unresolved a major and thorny issue: the extent to which immigrants expressed consent to the regime. This topic has been partly explored by some contributions on Argentina, for example, Eugenia Scarzanella's *Fascisti in Sud America*. Given the richness of his archival sources in Argentina, Aliano could have undertaken a more challenging task and shed new light on the matter of the complexity of public opinion. As it is in this book, unfortunately, the discussion is confined to the analysis of a few notable pro- or anti-Fascist Italian Argentines, leaving behind the ranks of average Italian Argentines.

Despite these criticisms, Aliano's work deserves to be read, particularly by those interested in policies of a sending state toward its communities abroad of citizens (or ex-citizens) and their descendants, a topic that sees an increasing number of contributions in international scholarship. In addition, the book helps to give a comprehensive account of Fascist activities in Argentina, an account that has been largely lacking so far. Lastly, the book could encourage other scholars to reflect more on the alleged continuity or fracture between policies of pre-Fascist and Fascist governments in dealing with Italian communities abroad.

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Film Reviews

[s]compare.

By Antonio Tibaldi.

No Permits Produktions, 2011.

62 minutes. DVD and Blu-ray formats, color.

In 2010 Antonio Tibaldi arrived on the island of Linosa with his high-definition video camera during the production of the widely publicized feature film *Terraferma* (2011). As a longtime acquaintance of the director, Emanuele Crialese, he already knew that the film was concerned with the ongoing flow of irregular seaborne migration to Italy's southernmost islands and the humanitarian issues it implied. An accomplished filmmaker in his own right, as well as a member of the Media Arts faculty at the City College of New York, Tibaldi had received permission to shoot whatever aspects of the production might interest him. The resulting documentary, however, was not destined to become the kind of promotional video that one often finds among the extra features included in the DVD release of a noteworthy film. Instead, it constitutes a sharp critique of the unfolding production process, revealing the disruptions imposed on the lives of the islanders by Crialese's film crew and, more important, implicitly questioning the ethics of obliging the African immigrants who worked as extras on the film to relive the experiences of their own difficult arrival on Italian soil.

Like its better-known neighbor Lampedusa, Linosa is located in the Strait of Sicily, less than ninety miles from the Tunisian coast. These islands have received international attention over the past decade as the point of arrival for massive waves of migration from the global south. Thousands of migrants still arrive there each year in flimsy, overcrowded vessels; many others die of drowning, dehydration, or starvation before reaching dry land. The treatment of the migrants by the Italian authorities has become increasingly controversial in recent times, thanks to a series of changes in Italian immigration policy. In 2009, with the implementation of Silvio Berlusconi's controversial policy of pushbacks, Italian Navy and Coast Guard patrols were authorized to return the migrants intercepted at sea to Libyan waters, where they were handed over to representatives of Moammar Qaddafi's government, a regime well known for its human-rights violations. At the same time, the Italian government made it a crime for Italian civilians to aid clandestine migrants.

These circumstances provided the background to Crialese's well-intentioned fictional film, which asks: What dilemmas come into play when ordinary Italians are asked to shelter desperate migrants whose very presence on Italian soil is construed as criminal? *Terraferma's* narrative centers on members of a local fisherman's family who save several shipwrecked Africans from drowning and subsequently agree to hide a pregnant Ethiopian refugee and her son while the border police comb the island to find those migrants who have eluded their grasp.

Avoiding voice-over narration, *[s]compare* provides no expository information on Crialese's project and never names the film. At first it appears that Tibaldi's work is simply a well-shot, lyrically inflected commentary on the circumstances surrounding the filming of a large-scale production in a rugged, insular location where the film crew

imposes its frenetic rhythms on a population thoroughly set in its ways. In fact, the islanders remain an important element in *[s]comparse*, as Tibaldi follows several local characters engaged in assisting with the production of *Terraferma*. It becomes clear that their way of doing things and the pace at which they normally live are at odds with the demands of the imperious outsiders, causing ongoing frustration and resentment.

Accustomed to living in a location that experiences irregular migration, the islanders express mainly sympathetic attitudes toward the migrants in their midst. One elderly man, seen on camera while canning tomatoes, reflects thoughtfully on his own experience of emigration and compares his hardship to that of the Africans arriving on the island. Only one person, the pharmacist, a transplant from Milan, claims that the migrants should be sent back. She adds bluntly, "In Greece they were right to shoot at them."

Early in the documentary, a new group of individuals emerges into focus and will remain central to the unfolding narrative: several young African men and at least one woman recruited in Palermo and brought to Linosa to work as extras on Crialese's film. It is at this moment that the significance of Tibaldi's title *[s]comparse* begins to resonate. "*Comparse*" means "extras," whereas "*scomparse*" may signify "vanished" or "disappeared." The wordplay encoded in the title signals the deconstructive aspect of the documentary, pointing to the ambivalent, problematical status of the young Africans vis-à-vis the production of *Terraferma*.

Tibaldi intimates these tensions in an early scene where four of the African men employed as extras are obliged to take swimming lessons in order to mimic the gestures of shipwrecked migrants clumsily seeking to swim to safety. One of them reveals his anxieties to Tibaldi, expressing his concern for his three companions, who are less competent swimmers than he. Later, Crialese himself appears on screen, giving a brief and oddly impersonal pep talk to a larger cluster of African men assembled on the quay. Describing the film they are going to be part of, he says: "We are trying to tell a story that's a bit closer to you than to us, and we are a bit critical of ourselves. . . . You are lending your bodies to many people who came here and were not treated well by us." He does not, however, engage them in dialog, nor does he attempt to determine if their personal histories have any resonance with the figures they are being called on to embody.

For the most part, Tibaldi's camera follows the Africans at a distance, observing them as they are shown around the village, escorted to the wardrobe unit, evaluated for costuming, or instructed by the stunt coordinator. At specific moments, however, the camera moves in closer, enabling the migrants to engage individually with the filmmaker. In this way, the viewer learns that many of the scenes they are obliged to enact bring back powerful memories of their personal histories as irregular migrants. One of the men mentions arriving in nearby Lampedusa after seven horrific days drifting at sea aboard a damaged and overcrowded boat. For another, the point of arrival was Linosa itself. He remembers reaching the shore in September 2007 after several harrowing days at sea with forty-four other people on a small raft designed to carry only a fraction of that number. He adds that virtually all of the African people he knows in Italy arrived there illegally by boat, under similarly dramatic conditions. By giving prominence to the men's testimony, by registering their unease in re-staging circumstances so close to their personal experiences, *[s]comparse* draws attention to the

collateral emotional costs stemming from Crialese's desire for authenticity. Indeed, as the Africans enter the chilly water to enact the desperate gestures of the shipwrecked, it seems inevitable that their performance will involve a process of retraumatization.

Ultimately, however, Tibaldi's film does not portray the Africans as helpless victims. Rather, it draws attention to their ability to mobilize and to voice their objections and frustrations. One of the men interviewed by Tibaldi, for example, questions Crialese's decision to focus his film on the experience of a fictional white character, rather than on a migrant, whose journey, when told from the beginning, is always more complex and dramatic than Italians might realize. The extras also raise the issue of wages, protesting angrily when they realize how little they are to be paid. They especially object to the fact that they were not informed of the details of their contract before leaving Palermo. After much discussion, they form a collective bargaining group to negotiate a small increase in pay. These negotiations end on a bitter note when they discover that taxes will automatically be deducted from the wages they receive, apparently nullifying the impact of the small raise.

For those viewers already familiar with *Terraferma*, one of the most intriguing individuals to appear in *[s]compare* is Timnit T., the young woman who plays the part of the migrant Ethiopian mother rescued by a local fisherman in the feature film. Timnit is not a professional actress but rather an exceptionally resilient individual whose own journey to Italy was among the most horrific imaginable. Having learned of her experiences from news reports, Crialese was gratified when she accepted his invitation to play the key role of Sara. Thus, unlike the other Africans who appear in *[s]compare*, she was brought to the island not as an extra but as an indispensable member of the *Terraferma* cast. Perhaps for this reason she was not eager to speak to Tibaldi about the production. Nonetheless, smiling sweetly in the direction of the camera, she begins to sing, offering a lullaby in her own language for the benefit of his viewers.

If the men who work as extras are nameless and speechless in Crialese's film, names and voices are restored in *[s]compare*. No longer in the shadows, the Africans face the camera and candidly express their thoughts. Shivering after his stint in the water impersonating a shipwrecked migrant, a Sudanese youth tells Tibaldi that twenty of his acquaintances had drowned in the Mediterranean in the course of their journey northward. He then adds that he had always dreamed of becoming a movie actor, and as he speaks, the viewer is prompted to acknowledge that, in a way, he has achieved this. But he has also become a mouthpiece for countless other migrants whose voices have been elided in mainstream media representations. The same is true of his colleague, a French-speaking extra who tells Tibaldi, and hence the viewers, "Don't be afraid. I am not a 'colored' person. I am a human being. My blood is red like yours."

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Men of the Cloth.

By Vicki Vasilopoulos.

Orestes Films LLC, 2013.

96 minutes. DVD and Blu-ray formats, color.

Men of the Cloth, a documentary film by fashion journalist Vicki Vasilopoulos, is an elegy to a dying breed of Italian custom tailors, highly skilled and passionate about their craft. The film follows three men in particular—two in the United States (Nino Corvato in New York and Joseph Centofanti in Ardmore, Pennsylvania) and one in Italy (Checchino Fonticoli in Penne, Pescara province, Abruzzo)—as they lovingly describe the trade they entered more than a half century ago as boys in Italy and still pursue in the twenty-first century. Tailoring has been good to all three men, who have clearly prospered materially, but it is just as clear that they remain at the job well past normal retirement age for the love of the artistry involved in the work. A soulful original score by Chris Hajian reinforces the film’s “elegiac quality” (as proclaimed on the film’s website, <http://menoftheclothfilm.com/>).

Men of the Cloth is part biography, part lesson in the process of constructing a men’s suit, and part ethnographic exploration of artisanal life. It touches on issues of migration and global commerce through the stories of its three sympathetic and engaging main characters. Corvato was born in Ficarazzi, Palermo province, Sicily, and migrated to the United States in 1960. After twenty years at Brooks Brothers and some additional experience in the mainstream high-end fashion business (not explored in the film), he started his own shop for custom-made clothing on Madison Avenue in New York City. Centofanti was born in the United States and brought to Italy at a young age by his parents. He grew up partly in Ethiopia, where his father was a tailor during the Italian occupation of that country, and spent time in a British internment camp during World War II. After returning to the United States he maintained a shop in the suburbs of Philadelphia for decades. Finally, Fonticoli remained in Italy but, convinced that modern “American” production methods were necessary to save the Italian garment industry, joined the Brioni firm (a semi-industrialized producer of high-end, made-to-order suits), founded in Penne by a cousin of his. All three of these men, plus other tailors who make up the supporting cast, are impeccably dressed always; apparently the old saying that all shoemakers go barefoot does not apply to tailors.

The men of the cloth express much anxiety about the future of their trade. They are all old and nearly the last of their kind. Italian towns that used to turn out tailors by the dozen (so many that quite a few had to emigrate), now have just one or two independent tailors still at work. Corvato has been searching without success for a replacement for a skilled employee who passed away a couple of years ago. Nevertheless, there is hope: Brioni has opened a school to train young men in the trade, providing jobs to the program’s best graduates. Corvato’s right-hand man was older than his boss and passed away in the course of the film’s production, but Corvato seems to have hopes for a young Latina, Yasmin Huerta. The most well-explored relationship is that between Centofanti and a young Italian-American college graduate named Joe Genuardi who, after deciding on tailoring as a career, walked into Centofanti’s shop one day and became his apprentice.

Vasilopoulos writes on the film's website that *Men of the Cloth* "advocates for humanist values in an era of worldwide industrialization of the clothing industry." But there is little social analysis. The closest *Men of the Cloth* gets to the global garment industry is Brioni, where bespoke suits are produced by hand for a select international clientele. There is no reference to the mass production or contracting system that characterizes most of the global industry long marred by poor conditions and low pay: That is not the subject of the film. But there is little reference even to the economics of the custom trade itself. The viewer wonders as he or she watches the tailors' well-heeled clients trying on their suits how much the garments cost. How much are the workers paid? Why, since there are clearly women in the Brioni factory, are there none in the training school? These and other questions go unanswered. Nevertheless, *Men of the Cloth* is a moving portrait of an artisanal culture that has survived into the supposedly postindustrial era in the West.

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La Mia Strada: My Road.

By Michael Angelo DiLauro.

Michaelangelo Productions, 2012.

71 minutes. DVD format, color.

Immigrant Son: The Story of John D. Mezzogiorno.

By Frank Capiello.

Lux Vista Films, 2012.

57 minutes. DVD format, color.

Midway through *Immigrant Son*, there is an interview with Nancy M. Shader, director of Archival Operations at the National Archives and Records Administration in New York City. She speculates as to reasons for the increased interest in the archives in recent years, suggesting that perspectives shift between first- and second-generation immigrants and their third- and fourth-generation children and grandchildren. She explains that initially "the feeling was you've come to the United States, you should speak English; this is where you're from. But the next generation often asks, 'Well, where did we come from?'" It is this question that motivates both Michael Angelo DiLauro and Frank Capiello, and while there are significant differences between their two documentaries, much in each of them will likely resonate with Italian Americans who seek to understand the roots of their Italian heritage.

La Mia Strada opens in Cleveland, Ohio, where we see DiLauro family members maintaining many of the traditions that were brought to the United States by their parents and grandparents. Following this opening sequence, the film moves back to Italy, with an extended discussion of sheep herding, focusing specifically on the *transumanza*, the seasonal movement of sheep through various parts of Italy to the

final destination of Foggia in Apulia. DiLauro suggests a literal and metaphorical link between the *trattori*, or ancient trails used by these herders, and the roads that led Italians from these lands to the United States. For DiLauro, it is this connection that allows him to “link people on both sides of the Atlantic looking to re-evaluate their identity,” as stated in the voice-over.

While these opening moments present a compelling framework for DiLauro’s story, the film that follows never quite lives up to this potential. Unfortunately, the film lacks a clear narrative arc that would allow DiLauro to accomplish several separate but related tasks: (1) telling his family’s story in a way that is clear and accessible to viewers, (2) connecting this specific narrative to the broader Italian immigrant experience, and (3) exploring the many issues and questions about Italian and Italian-American identity and culture that emerge from this journey. This is not to say that the film does not seek to do all of these things; rather, it goes about doing so in a way that is often disjointed and confusing.

For example, viewers are likely to struggle as they seek to ascertain the connections among the various individuals interviewed throughout the film. Because they are scattered across different locations both in the United States and in Italy, it is difficult to know who these individuals are and how they are related to one another (if at all). While DiLauro utilizes captions to identify each speaker, in many instances this text creates further confusion. Individuals are identified by name and location, and in some cases additional information is provided, including how DiLauro met the person or how he or she is connected to someone in the DiLauro family. However, such explanations often reference other people or circumstances that remain unexplained, which causes further confusion; this confusion is exacerbated by the fact that the transitions between speakers are often abrupt and lack narrative continuity. In one sequence, for example, we hear from an Italian-American woman named Maria Palmieri in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, followed by Gaetano Rubino in Pacentro, Italy, and then Fernando Rubino in Youngstown, Ohio. We then encounter five men sitting around a table in Pittsburgh, followed by a musician in Italy named Michele Avolio, a woman in Italy named Immacolata Del Busso, and a man in Pittsburgh named Joseph D’Andrea. It is difficult to identify any relationships between these individuals or to follow any narrative threads that connect them. Thus, viewers are left with thoughtful – but essentially disconnected – insights from each of them.

This pattern continues throughout most of the documentary as it introduces an ever-expanding list of disparate speakers. Toward the end of the film DiLauro returns to his family’s story as he travels with his wife, sister, and nephews to Italy. While it is entertaining to witness this reunion (especially sequences when his nephews and their Italian cousins attempt to communicate across their language barrier), this part of the film feels more like a family’s personal home movie than an integrated component of a larger project that seeks to engage complex issues of Italian and Italian-American culture and identity.

If the film reads as disjointed at the level of content, some of its most appealing moments come when it shifts away from interviews to readings of short poems that are accompanied by visually stunning landscapes. In fact, one of the film’s greatest strengths is its homage to the Italian countryside and the small towns that are scattered across it. Given the film’s recurring theme of changes happening across Italy and with

them the anticipated loss of cultural traditions, DiLauro has performed an important task in capturing and preserving these images of rural southern Italy.

Like *La Mia Strada*, *Immigrant Son* uses the narrative of one family's journey from Italy to the United States. In this case, however, director Frank Capiello tells the story of the fictional Mezzogiorno family, utilizing first-person narration to give voice to the character of John D. Mezzogiorno. While it is never explicitly acknowledged in the film, this fictional family seems to serve as a stand-in for Capiello's own family. This framework allows Capiello to seamlessly link one family's experience with the broader story of Italian immigration as framed by the social and economic history of the United States in the twentieth century. Ultimately, the film weaves together beautifully the Mezzogiorno family's history with the broader immigrant experience in the United States in general and New York City in particular.

Mezzogiorno's journey to rediscover his family's past is motivated by an accidental return to the Van Nest section of the Bronx, described as an "old working-class Italian enclave from the turn of the century." First he comes upon the pharmacy once owned by his family, which they sold in the early 1970s. Next, he discovers a memorial garden dedicated to the benefactors of the neighborhood church. Seeing his grandparents' names on this memorial, he admits to feeling ashamed that "over the years, just like this memorial and this neighborhood, I had forgotten about them." It is this sense of shame that motivates him to rediscover their story.

The film's success at employing the Mezzogiorno family narrative as an illustration of the immigrant experience is evidenced, for example, as viewers travel with Mezzogiorno to Ellis Island while he retraces his great-grandparents' route to the United States. What follows is a story of Ellis Island (as told through voice-over narration) that is carefully paired with archival footage, including period photographs, film footage, and newsreels. In fact, Capiello utilizes such archival materials effectively throughout the documentary to bring an added layer of authenticity to his very realistic narrative.

Another one of the film's compelling features is that rather than nostalgically romanticizing the past, it recounts the very difficult history that Italians faced both in Italy and the United States. For example, Capiello supplements black-and-white photographs of Manhattan's Lower East Side—which is described as "one of the largest slums the world has ever known [. . .] something out of a Dickens novel"—with an interview with an elderly Italian-American woman recalling the miserable conditions in which she and her family lived when she was a child. As he revisits this history, Mezzogiorno thinks of his ancestors and wonders "how this dire and desperate situation must have shaped them" and how "precarious and dangerous their lives must have been."

The story remains unflinching as it turns to the horrible working conditions in factories and sweatshops in which these immigrants toiled, their role in building New York City's (and the United States') infrastructure, and the seemingly inevitable backlash against them, culminating in a 1924 law restricting immigration and the closure of Ellis Island in 1936. It continues in this vein as it follows the Mezzogiorno family from the Lower East Side to the Bronx, using their story to trace a larger shift from the "vibrant middle-class optimism" that permeated these growing neighborhoods in the 1940s and 1950s to the white flight, economic crises, and racial tensions that dominated them in the 1960s and 1970s.

Although much of the film focuses on what has been lost across generations, it also includes several optimistic moments, including when Mezzogiorno realizes that amid a lot of change, Italian Americans are maintaining what he refers to as “real and authentic Italian culture,” namely through food. Although he does not problematize this phrase to consider the complications of such claims to authenticity, what Mezzogiorno underscores are some of the cultural practices that vibrantly carry an Italian thread within them. While he laments that there are no Italian Americans living on Arthur Avenue in the Bronx, which he describes as formerly “ground zero for one of the largest Italian immigrant communities in North America,” he acknowledges that Italian Americans still flock back to this neighborhood for Italian foods. He also finds this respect for food traditions at his Aunt Mary’s house in the Pelham Bay section of the Bronx, where she and her family continue food traditions that have been passed down through generations (including preparing over one hundred jars of tomatoes for the winter).

In the final section of the film, Mezzogiorno determines to trace his great-grandparents’ roots further back, promising to return to the Italian towns from which they emigrated. Through archival research and letters uncovered at his aunt’s house, Mezzogiorno is able to fulfill this promise, visiting both the town of Agnone (Isernia province, Molise) and the Basilicata region of southern Italy. Once again, the film resists sentimentality as it acknowledges the difficult circumstances that motivated the mass migration of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Mezzogiorno articulates this very tension as he surveys the terrain: “My initial reaction to the beauty of the landscape was to ask why anyone in their right mind would want to leave it. But its beauty only served to hide the irony that this place, like so much of the Italian peninsula, wasn’t providing enough economic opportunity for its people and quite frankly, never really had.” Thus, the nostalgia of Mezzogiorno’s return to the towns of his family’s origins is tempered by his acknowledgment of the overwhelming difficulties his ancestors faced in Italy and the United States. Consequently, the shame that initially motivated his journey is replaced by a sense of indebtedness to his forebears for their sacrifices, which made his life possible.

At one point in *Immigrant Son*, there is an interview with Antonio Bandini, Italian consul general in New York, who talks about the growing interest among Italian Americans in seeking dual Italian citizenship. He feels that “people seem to look at the fact of being considered Italian as something that adds to their status” and speculates that “the prestige of the country, of its culture, has motivated many.” This can certainly be said of both DiLauro and Mezzogiorno, both of whom reflect a pride in their Italian background that motivates them to retrace their families’ journeys. While ultimately *Immigrant Son* is a more successful film, both it and *La Mia Strada* communicate deep feelings of honor and respect for one’s ancestors that are surely shared by many Italian Americans.

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Digital Media Reviews

North End Stories.

northendstories.com

(accessed December 29, 2013)

Created by North End native and community journalist Jeanne Dasaro, *North End Stories* describes itself as “a digital narrative project that aims to collect, preserve, and share the stories of Italian-Americans whose families immigrated to Boston’s North End in the late 19th and early 20th century.” In order to fulfill this mission, this conventional but nicely designed blog-style site offers two principal content sections reflecting the two narrative formats it utilizes.

In the Interviews section, users can watch short edited clips (between one and fifteen minutes in length) from interviews done by the site’s contributors with residents of the North End. These accounts range from oral histories to personal narratives and offer a wide, if not deep, sample of the diversity of Italian-American life and history in the neighborhood.

The interview recording quality is generally good: The video is clear and consistent; the editing is seamless; and historical or family photos are inserted into the videos, ostensibly to provide the viewer with a visual representation of the immigrant and ethnic life of the neighborhood in the past. However, at times the audio quality is a little faint, or background noise intrudes into the interview. (This sound quality issue is common in field recordings, of course, and given that the interviews appear to be the product of a single individual working in the field, the problem is not entirely unexpected.) Each interviewee’s name is given in the short text accompanying the video, and in the clips the interviewee often discusses his/her connection to the North End. In some cases, links to other information, such as personal genealogical or family websites, are also included in the video caption. Generally, however, little or no other contextual information is given by the fieldworker, and the fieldworker’s questions do not appear in the video.

The Articles section contains a wide variety of writings. These range from medium-length (approximately 1,000 words) historical articles prepared by Dasaro, to short (approximately 500 words) memory-based pieces authored by the site’s other major contributor, Sam Viscione, to materials on the neighborhood compiled from other sources, to news updates on the activities of the site’s contributors or interviewees. As is typical with blog-style sites, each article or video posting has an area for public comment. Although the comment areas are not generally very active, instances where interview clips or memory-based articles prompt users to present their own reminiscences about neighborhood life are much like the narratives often presented in some neighborhood-based Facebook groups, where users open threads with a memory and then other users comment on those memories or present ones of their own.

A third section allows users to Suggest a Story by completing a web form. The proposal can be made either by a person who wishes to be interviewed for the project or on behalf of another, though the form asks for specification about the relevance to the North End.

From a scholarly vantage point, one of the most significant limitations of this site may be its dogged focus on a certain understanding of Italian-American culture as a way of defining the scope of the project. While undoubtedly it helps to make the program manageable, in a neighborhood that was historically home to other ethnic communities it presents a somewhat less rich picture of neighborhood culture and history.

Since the *Italian American Review* is a scholarly publication, in the above, I have been adhering to the conventions of academic reviews. Yet in many ways this site defies the kind of categorization that makes those concerns applicable. It has something in common with digital public folklore or oral history projects, such as City Lore's *City of Memory* (<http://www.cityofmemory.org/map/index.php>) project in New York City, especially in its mission to preserve and promote North End history and culture and in its open-ended invitation for users to submit material. Yet, the site does not seem to have the same kind of funding, technological infrastructure, or professional personnel available to City Lore, so the scope and quality of the production are sufficiently different that it is difficult to consider it exclusively in academic terms. This is not to sound discouraging; the site is well made, and its contributors have done a nice job in collecting a body of interesting reflections by local residents on their experiences and the experiences of their families living in a much-studied ethnic neighborhood. Thus, while the material presented by *North End Stories* may be too heavily curated to be of use as sources in scholarly writing, it will certainly be of interest to scholars of Boston history and Italian-American culture, as well as the general public.

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John Fante: A Life in the Works.

<http://unitproj.library.ucla.edu/special/fante/index.htm>
 (accessed periodically between June 1, 2013, and July 30, 2013)

The material for the online exhibit about Italian-Californian writer John Fante was selected from the John Fante Papers, which were acquired by the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) Library Special Collections in 2009. The exhibit, *John Fante: A Life in the Works*, was curated by Daniel Gardner (UCLA Library, Center for Primary Research and Training) and Stephen Cooper (professor of English at California State University, Long Beach), author of *Full of Life: A Biography of John Fante* (2000).

John Fante made art of his life: He reinvented it in order to write powerful stories, focusing on fictional truths, not biographical ones. He was not interested in confessing anything: He was interested in his style. Like any artist, he gave shape and beauty to life. To consider Fante's work as being autobiographical would be misguided because such an approach risks underestimating his imagination and talent. Yet how can we deny the role of biography in his artistry? His life was his raw material. Thus, "walking" virtually through this exhibit is extremely involving, and those of us who have loved

this writer enter the exhibit with anticipation. Someone familiar with Fante's oeuvre can't help but want to associate a particular photograph or letter with a memorable paragraph or character in one of his books. Indeed, even experiencing the exhibition online, we look for the confirmation that his most famous creation, Arturo Bandini, existed. But even for the Fante novice, this exhibit compels visitors to enter his world, to perceive the smells and the colors of another era. It offers a strong incentive to read Fante, by offering us an introduction to his unique literary adventure.

The exhibit is well organized and easy to explore; it uses a book format as its organizational guide and is divided into eight discrete sections called chapters. In the first one ("Colorado Youth, Lifelong Themes") we find a few photographs of a young Fante; the suggestive cover of *Dago Red*; and also a touching letter from his former "sparring partner" Herman Hanston to Fante's wife, Joyce Smart Fante, after her husband's death. In Chapter 2, "Southern California and Early Writings," we can see that Fante's bittersweet humor is already well shaped in a 1932 letter to his mother where he claims he would never get married (marriage is "a messy business!"). This chapter includes an acceptance letter by the editor H. L. Mencken in which he also gives Fante advice, a letter from publisher Alfred A. Knopf, and a few fragments from Fante's diary. In the third chapter, "The Allure of Hollywood," we can read Fante's treatment for Orson Welles's unfinished movie *It's All True* and the letter Fante wrote to his parents about it (reading his letters is quite enjoyable because of his crystal-clear penmanship). The first-edition covers in the exhibit feature vibrant illustrations evocative of their eras, the cover of *Full of Life*, seen in this chapter, being a prime example. (One senses that Joyce Smart would probably object to the caption accompanying a photograph of her as a young woman ["Their marriage inspired the novel and film *Full of Life*"], given that she famously commented on how the sugary novel was the opposite of their marriage at that time. But this is the only criticism I would make of this otherwise superb homage to John Fante.)

In Chapter 4 ("The Saga of Arturo Bandini") we find, among other things, a letter to author William Saroyan and a photograph of Marie Baray, the inspiration for Camilla Lopez, *Ask the Dust's* unforgettable female protagonist. A letter from John Steinbeck (his handwriting not as clear as Fante's, a version typed by the curators would have been appreciated) is the highlight of Chapter 5 ("The War and Post-War Years"), while in Chapter 6 ("The Confusion of the Times") we come upon a fragment of a seemingly spontaneous personal prayer typed on an upside-down manuscript page. Here, in lines such as "come to me with the wonderful clarity of my boyhood," it is possible to perceive the echo of Arturo Bandini's lyrical and powerful voice, the voice of youth. Chapter 7 ("Revival") tells the story of the resurrection of Fante as a writer: There's an encouraging letter, full of sincere admiration, from Charles Bukowski, written in a digressive, bukowskian style, and a letter from John Martin, publisher of Black Sparrow Press, telling Fante of interest from a German publisher in new editions of his previously published books. Finally, Chapter 8 ("Fante in the World") exhibits evidence of the posthumous success of this writer: the program of the Literary Festival dedicated to him in Italy; covers of the foreign editions of his books; and a picture of John Fante Square in downtown Los Angeles taken by co-curator Stephen Cooper, who has contributed so much to Fante's rediscovery. This exhibition is Cooper's latest homage to his literary hero.

For the more advanced scholar or reader of Fante this exhibit is enjoyable and satisfying. But I would say this engaging exhibit is especially valuable for visitors who have not read Fante yet and who might subsequently be interested to explore his work. It is particularly important that this exhibit is online: Fante, the writer who wrote more than anyone else about his youth and ours, should be made accessible to young people, and what better way to do that than through the youngest of media? And, among so much muddled information we often sift through on the Internet, it is a pleasure for them (and us) to find such a treasure.

—EMANUELE PETTENER
Florida Atlantic University

Exhibition Reviews

The Last of the Italians.

Curated by Anne Kristoff.

SoHo Gallery for Digital Art, New York, New York.

June 11–15, 2013.

Anne Kristoff's photographic series *The Last of the Italians* was on display at the SoHo Gallery for Digital Art, located at 138 Sullivan Street in New York City, for just five days in June 2013—too short a run for such compelling photographs, many of which deserve repeated viewings. But then the gallery, renamed SoHo Arthouse in October 2013, is not a traditional exhibition space. It is a multipurpose event space, art gallery, theater, and, according to promotional materials, “NYC’s favorite pop-up space for art, film, fashion, photography, tech, start-up, and just about anything imaginable.”

The basement gallery, redolent with a scent of damp, cold stone and natural gas sulfur, would have been unsuitable—if not downright alarming—for the display of paper photographic prints, but it worked well for what was an immersive installation experience. The darkened, intimate space served to amplify the impact of Kristoff's images and lure the visitor closer to the fourteen large flat screens mounted on walls around the room. Six to seven images appeared on each screen, cycling through at a leisurely pace. The screens were mounted mostly in twos and threes, placement that was permanent. In many instances the movement of images on a screen, combined with the visual pull between screens, created a fascinating and even exhilarating effect.

The installation, made possible by a grant Kristoff received from the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, expanded upon an article that ran in the *New York Press* in July 2012, for which Kristoff interviewed and photographed the mostly female elder parishioners of the Shrine Church of Saint Anthony of Padua, located just across Sullivan Street from the gallery. They are the last of the Italians referred to in the exhibition's title, described in the installation's introductory panel as “the remaining members of a once vibrant and dominant, but dwindling, Italian-American community in South Greenwich Village.” Kristoff's focus on these women was an inspired way to document not just the ebbing of an Italian-American community but also the declining number of parishioners at a church with a serious historical pedigree: It is the oldest existing Italian parish in the United States as well as the first church built by Italian immigrants in the United States. The church's history reflects a coupling of the holy and the secular, the spiritual and the physical. The placement of the portraits of the women parishioners toward the end of the installation was yet another play, intentional or not, on their being representative of the last of the Italians.

The images shown closest to the gallery entrance were of the annual feast of Saint Anthony, a fitting start for an installation timed to overlap with the feast. Kristoff's keen sense of formal composition captures the fluidity of human interaction as figures intersect and at times seem to merge, while also remaining separate and distinct. Among the rotating images was a variation on the traditional depiction of the three ages of man: a middle-aged man, cigar in his mouth, reaches to contribute a dollar to the donation basket on the St. Anthony float; a teenage boy, in a world all his own,



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stands nearby; an elderly man descends the church steps; a gesticulating elderly woman is seen at the edge of the frame. Also in the first section was an image of a Franciscan friar, dressed in the traditional brown robe cinched with rope, looking on as a trio of musicians performs in the feast parade. The bright red lipstick and vivid green eye shadow of the woman cymbal player is in keeping with the Italian flag color scheme of the musicians' costumes and likely as loud as the cymbals she is playing. In yet another image, the dynamism of a quiet moment is revealed as a friar descends the stairs in the foreground; a man walks past the church as the Italian flag floats above in the middle ground; and the viewer's eye is drawn to the background, where a man sitting on a bench in front of Joe's Dairy appears to be part of the storefront.

Next to the first set of panels, a speaker broadcasted the oral histories Kristoff recorded for the installation. Although peppered with familiar sentiments that bordered on the cliché ("we were poor but happy"), overall the stories were of interest and worth listening to: businesses being handed down from one generation to the next, a time when Bleecker Street was lined with fish stores, the ups and downs of working life. The recordings related to photographs throughout the gallery, but because of the placement of the only speaker within the first section of the installation, the visitor was inclined to connect the audio to the images in the immediate area and forget the audio component once out of earshot. A station with a couple of headphones toward the center of the room would have been a preferable setup, but then—between the renting of the space for unrelated events in the evening and very limited floor space—this likely was not an option.

Between the specificity of the feast photographs in the first section and the portraits of the women parishioners toward the end of the installation, Kristoff displayed additional images of the South Greenwich Village community. This sizable section contained images of venues familiar to most visitors, if only from their walk to the gallery (Raffetto's pasta shop, Pino's Prime Meat Market, Jean Claude restaurant) as well as locations and people usually out of public view (the private club Tiro a Segno, members of the American Legion Washington Square, nuns at the convent of Saint Anthony's). While many of these photographs were quite engaging, there were just too many. The quality of each photograph and any impact created by the juxtaposition of photographs, one after the next and side by side, were undercut by the sheer number of images. More often than not, the selection of images on a single screen was lacking an inner logic, and the play between and among screens was more disconcerting than alluring. The more subjects that were introduced, the more the installation lost its center, especially since there were no labels or a checklist to help the visitor navigate the room. Is the woman holding a photograph of newlyweds the pictured bride? Is the man standing in front of the restaurant Jean Claude its owner? Is the young woman sitting on the stoop the daughter of the older woman sitting nearby, and who are they? Are the women, plainly dressed and peeking out from what seems like a gated community, nuns? Are those pictured lifelong residents or new arrivals? Are they of Italian descent or representative of a broader population?

The women of Saint Anthony's returned to greet the visitor as the installation came to an end, their portraits interspersed with, and appearing next to, other people and places in the community. This placement mirrored their role as vital anchors of the community, out and about each day, and interacting with everyone in the neighborhood. Many of these women attended the opening reception for the installation.

Seeing them looking at photographs and mingling with partygoers added yet another, enchanting dimension to the immersive installation experience. For the few hours of the reception the installation moved into the realm of what was a very magical and successful performance-art piece. The women's presence, real and three-dimensional, added to the sensation of being immersed in a very tangible world, a world in which the last of the Italians prove that they are the Italians who last.

Those who want to revisit the installation or who missed its short run should take a look at Kristoff's website (www.annekristoff.com/), where she has posted selections from *The Last of the Italians* series along with digital images from other equally impressive photographic series. Although it's preferable to see Kristoff's work displayed on large digital screens, the website is a great resource that could be made even better by the addition of more images. While selection is a key component of exhibitions, websites are apt venues for a comprehensive approach. Those interested in photography, urban and ethnic history, and the specific Italian-American community of South Greenwich Village will appreciate the opportunity to view Kristoff's striking images not just for five days but as frequently as they like. The website could easily become the place where the images of *The Last of the Italians* truly last.

—NINA NAZIONALE
Independent Scholar

Little Italy, Un Cuore Grande.

Curated by Harry Connolly.

Stevenson University, Stevenson, Maryland.

August 26 – November 23, 2013.

During the fall 2013 semester, Stevenson University, located just outside of Baltimore, celebrated the Italian government's initiative 2013: Year of Italian Culture in the United States with a series of public events that included screenings of Italian and Italian-American films, a concert of selections from Italian opera and popular songs, and a book talk focusing on Giuseppe Garibaldi. The university's semester-long programming would have lacked a certain homegrown flavor if not for its premier program: *Little Italy, Un Cuore Grande*, an exhibition of the work of local photographer Harry Connolly. For sixteen years, Connolly has visually documented the people, places, and traditions of Baltimore's Little Italy, a neighborhood roughly ten square blocks in size and a short walk northeast of the city's touristic Inner Harbor. It is a distinctive neighborhood to this day, one whose history stretches back into the nineteenth century, when immigrants from a range of Italian cities, including Turin and Cefalù, settled there. *Little Italy, Un Cuore Grande* brought stories of local Italian-American culture to the university's front stoop, anchoring the broader narratives of Stevenson's event series to the historic center of Italian-American life in the Baltimore region.

Situated in a spacious, naturally lit room that also doubles as a reception and lecture hall, the exhibition used three of the room's four walls. Given the fact that

thirty-seven of Connolly's 20,000 photographs of the neighborhood were highlighted, the exhibition can be considered a small selection of his broader, long-term project. Placed close together on each wall, the large, colorful photographs consisted mainly of portraits of the neighborhood's residents—from children to the elderly to families—including what appear to be candid shots from cultural events, such as an evening street festival and a baptism, as well as daily routines. It was at this surface level that the strongest message of the exhibition was conveyed: Little Italy is about people, and it is they who comprise and convey its vibrancy. In a sense, this exhibition expressed Connolly's vision of Little Italy as a collage of people and places viewed over sixteen years. In the show, portraits and candid scenes were interspersed, with seemingly no organizational or thematic structure.

The exhibition's core image, which was used for the promotional booklet and postcard, was of James "Guido" Lancelotta in front of St. Leo's Church, which was established in the late nineteenth century as the spiritual and cultural cornerstone of the neighborhood. Connolly does not give Lancelotta center stage; instead, his figure shares the compositional space with a fire hydrant painted in the colors of the Italian flag, as if it were another local personality. A longer, panoramic-like photograph provides a candid look at Rita Patti sweeping one of the city's busy thoroughfares, Eastern Avenue, in front of a restaurant, Luigi Petti, and an adjacent bar, Lucky Luciano's, complete with a mural of the infamous mobster. The image can be interpreted in different ways. Connolly could be juxtaposing "good" and "bad": Patti, challenging herself with the task of sweeping a portion of a major city route, is doing good, while the figure of Luciano represents criminality and corruption, and the bar itself celebrates sinister nightlife—the bad. Indeed, the painted face of Luciano falls right above Patti's down-turned head in the composition as if he is watching over her. Connolly could also be highlighting two different expressions of pride: the romanticization of Luciano, or Italian-American mobsters in general, that is commonplace in American popular culture (since one would assume his legacy is referenced to attract bar patrons) and the pride of regular neighborhood beautification. However, despite the somewhat jarring inclusion of Lucky Luciano's legacy in the image, what comes across most strongly is Patti's indifference to and, perhaps, acceptance of it as she endeavors to keep the street clean. The title of the photograph, *Rita Patti Sweeping Eastern Avenue*, also serves to emphasize the role she is playing in this mundane street scene. Here, in basic visual terms, Connolly frames a sense of place by capturing the strong, multilayered identities of residents and how these have shaped a unique urban space.

Nonetheless, *Little Italy, Un Cuore Grande* provided only a glimpse, much like a film trailer, into this particular world. While it was predominantly an exhibition of photographs that could be enjoyed for aesthetic reasons alone, Connolly's emphasis on people and their lives within these images left too many questions unanswered and too little context given. When thought about this way, it was an art exhibition at first glance, but one with strong social history undertones that could have been explored further. In the introductory text, placed next to the image of Lancelotta and the fire hydrant, Connolly alludes to neighborhood change: the changes Little Italy has undergone during the sixteen years of the project, as well as former transitions he had learned of from talking with residents. The text ends with the following questions: "The future of Little Italy? That's for others to decide. Could it ever again be like this?"

It seems likely that Connolly wanted the viewer to ponder these questions, to reflect upon the portraits and street scenes and form some sort of an opinion. However, the most helpful of clues were missing: Not one photograph was given a date.

While there were a handful of small text panels that featured short quotes from those portrayed in the photographs, most information for the images could be found within the exhibition's booklet, which needed to be kept in hand for reference, since each piece was numbered. The booklet allowed one to learn titles and read longer texts corresponding to the people and events represented in five of the thirty-seven photographs. It was explained that these are excerpts from stories compiled by Connolly, and they certainly maintain his emphasis on people through a reliance on direct quotes, as opposed to paraphrasing. It was evident that Connolly places importance on not only the images but also the stories, memories, and voices represented by them; given that fact, why stop at five? Each photograph or framed series of photographs, such as a triptych depicting a tense bocce game, begs for its story to be told. In one portrait, Mario Pompa, standing against a wall of Baltimore's iconic Formstone, proudly presents his traditional Italian-American Easter pie to the camera. One would gather that the making of these pies holds particular significance in the community, and especially to Pompa, but the only information given is the photograph's title: *Mario Pompa with his Easter Pie*.

It may be that, to fully engage with *Little Italy, Un Cuore Grande*, one had to come equipped with knowledge of the history, as well as of the living heritage, of the area. Yet, that could also signal that an opportunity for engaging with visitors uninformed about Baltimore's Little Italy was missed. In his introductory text Connolly calls these past sixteen years a "bittersweet experience." And while some of the excerpted stories focus on people, places, and traditions long gone, this element of bitterness was not spotlighted. The images are vivid, beautiful, and, when taken together, convey a certain place-based happiness and pride.

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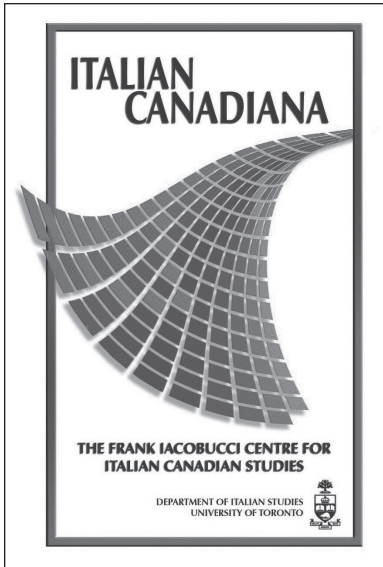
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EDITOR:
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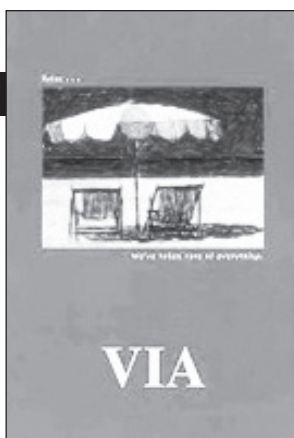
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