

solidified his control at home in the period 1925–1929, Migone argues, quite convincingly, that Mussolini devoted considerable energy to his foreign policy in this period—with the United States—in order to secure this control at home.

Migone's book continues to be of great value to the study of Italy and the United States in the interwar period, most especially now in this new translation. Its virtue is that it offers a clear narrative of the motives behind Italian and U.S. policies. However, in stressing the centrality of the U.S. role in Europe as one of the most important factors in Italy's evolution, Migone cannot give much consideration to the many other reasons for Mussolini's shift to an aggressive foreign policy in the 1930s. Though the loss of U.S. investment contributed to the turn to autarchy and imperialism, the Italo-Ethiopian War, the turn to Nazi Germany, involvement in the Spanish Civil War, the imposition of the racial laws in Italy, and finally Italy's involvement in World War II and its declaration of war on the United States in 1941 are rooted in issues of prestige, envy, racism, misguided nation building, shifting strategic considerations, and sheer, blind desperation. Such issues should be kept in mind, in addition to Migone's findings, when trying to make sense of the actions of Benito Mussolini over his long tenure in power.

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Flavor and Soul: Italian America at Its African American Edge.

By John Gennari.

Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017.

295 pages.

With *Flavor and Soul: Italian America at Its African American Edge*, John Gennari has written an eloquent book about Italian Americans and race that carves out new space in our increasingly polarized national debate about whiteness and racial identity. Gennari, like me, is a white scholar who is both frustrated by a reductionist discourse on white privilege that erases class differences and history (14) and appalled by the reemergence of racism and xenophobia as a force in national elections. His deeply personal and evocative portrait of spaces where black and Italian American culture and style intersect does two important things: It complicates the national discourse on whiteness, and it gives Italian Americans a means of affirming their love for their culture in ways that link

them to African Americans rather than separate them. It is a powerful work of healing and imaginative reconciliation that is even more important now than it was when it was first published, especially in light of the orgy of ethnic stereotyping that followed the appointment of Anthony Scaramucci to a position in the Donald Trump White House. Gennari, writing about things that most of us hold dear—music, food, film, and sports—rescues Italian Americans from the box many other Americans have placed them in (and in which some Italian Americans have placed themselves). In doing so, he points the way for people to cross racial boundaries in a spirit of joy and mutual discovery. To quote from Gennari's introduction:

This is a book about the fascinating and complicated intersection between Italian America and African America, a space of hopeful encounter and wary suspicion, dangerous, sometimes violent and collision and magnificent, joyful collusion. It's a study of expressive ethnicity and raciality with a focus on the contact zone—the edge and the overlap between—between Italian American and African American cultures . . . I suggest that performances at the boundary between Italian culture and black culture . . . have made an indelible mark on American culture writ large. I also aim to show how expressive culture—music, film and other media, spots and food—can help us think more deeply and in more subtle and nuanced ways about race and ethnicity. (8–9)

Gennari's essays, which are more literary than sociological (he openly describes his book as an exercise in "sensuous scholarship" [15]), rescue Italian Americans from simplistic narratives of their American journey as a triumphant (or in some views, shameful) march from "otherness" to "whiteness." Whether discussing the mingling of races and cultures in Southern Italy, the reverence of hip-hop artists for Frank Sinatra (an "O.G." or original gangsta), the nuanced depiction of Italian American characters in Spike Lee's films, or the prominence of Italian American coaches (Jim Valvano, Rick Pitino, John Calipari) of nearly all black teams in shaping the popularity of modern college basketball, Gennari convincingly argues that Italian Americans have set themselves apart in a cultural zone that is stubbornly resistant to Anglo conformity and one that provides a bridge to the experience of black Americans for those who choose to take it. Italian Americans may have become white, but they were whites with a difference, marked by a theatricality and stylistic flair that resembled those found in the black communities with which they uneasily shared city streets. As Gennari shows us, Italian Americans were—and in some ways still are—the hottest and, therefore, the "coolest" of whites (9).

As a Jewish kid who grew up with Italian Americans in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, in the 1950s, I can testify to the power and seductiveness of

the public persona that many Italian Americans, especially young Italian Americans, so commonly adopted. It was the tight pants, duck-tail haircuts, and swaggering self-confidence of the tough Italian guys in my high school that I tried to imitate, convinced that incorporating their “bad boy” stances into my somewhat nerdlike aura (I wore glasses) would help me attract more girls. It was also Italian American doo-wop groups like Dion and the Belmonts who built on a tradition started in black neighborhoods—taken to unprecedented heights by black groups like the Drifters and Little Anthony and the Imperials—that had me singing in hallways, on street corners, and on the stage in summer camp, always in pursuit of the same objective: romantic and sexual charisma.

Much has been written about the long tradition of white male adolescents in the United States appropriating blackness to enhance their masculinity, but when I was growing up, Jewish kids did the same with the culture and style of urban Italian Americans. Watching movies like *Grease* or TV shows like *Laverne & Shirley* is enough to see that this phenomenon extended beyond my neighborhood, but Gennari is one of the few scholars to explore how many cultural commonalities and shared ways of approaching music, food, and ways of presenting oneself in public space link these two groups whose relationship in racially polarized urban communities was often tense.

Gennari’s remarkable chapter on Frank Sinatra as a cross-racial symbol (titled, with appropriate impertinence, “Top Wop”) is a perfect example of this, covering a variety of experiences where black and Italian identities seem to intersect and overlap, ranging from the lynching of Italians in New Orleans in 1891 to the racialization of Italians by early twentieth-century nativists, to the cultural capital Italian immigrants brought from Southern Italy—a “cultural crossroads where European, African and Arab music had mixed for centuries” (31)—to Italian influences in the making of New Orleans jazz, to the role of powerful mothers in shaping Italian and African American male identities. Gennari calls on all of these in explaining how Sinatra rose from New Jersey Italian origins to become not only the most popular male singer of his era but also a jazz vocal stylist on a par with Billie Holiday, a strong supporter of the civil rights movement, and a mythic symbol of masculinity whom African American musicians including Marvin Gaye and P. Diddy have hailed as the ultimate symbol of “stylized virility” (39).

Gennari argues that, where blacks and Italians are concerned, cultural appropriation went both ways. To many black Americans, Italian Americans were objects of fascination, admired for their food, their stylized ways of dressing and communicating, their powerful family loyalties, and even their capacity for violence and organized crime. In the black imagination, Gennari suggests, Italian Americans were the only whites with “street cred” (my term,

not his) capable of inspiring nuanced and empathetic portrayals in the novels of James Baldwin and the films of Spike Lee (Gennari devotes a chapter to “Spike and His Goombahs”). No scholar or writer has ever explored the multiple zones of contact between these two groups in the world of arts and the imagination the way Gennari does.

As for contact in “real life” in the streets, schools, and communities, his book is less illuminating. What Gennari presents complicates, though hardly invalidates, the portrait of Italian American racism and policing of urban space contained in sociological works like Jonathan Rieder’s (1965) *Canarsie: The Jews and Italians of Brooklyn Against Liberalism* and reinforced by some of the interviews I conducted for the Bronx African American History Project and the Bronx Italian American History Initiative. After listening to interview after interview of how blacks in the Bronx were chased out of Italian American neighborhoods from the 1940s through the 1960s, or embroiled in fights with Italian Americans in Bronx high schools, I found myself wondering how many Italian Americans would welcome the information in this book. In his first chapter Gennari acknowledges the power of racism, but he goes forward with what is a profoundly optimistic view of black/Italian encounters, suggesting that cultural commonalities and shared values provide a basis for overcoming this racism when the will to do so is present.

At a time of increasing racial tension in the United States, Gennari’s brilliant book performs two important functions. First, it fulfills the much-needed mission of complicating whiteness, showing how torturous and in some cases incomplete the process of whitening Italian Americans has been. Many Italian Americans still socialize, sing, eat, and present themselves in ways that differ markedly from other whites and that make it easier for them to connect with African Americans if they choose to do so. Second, it presents Italian Americans with a stark choice—to identify with the white majority (membership in which, however grudgingly granted, has given them access to power, privilege, and wealth) or to begin to deconstruct their relationship to whiteness and affirm the cultural diversity in their history and their ties to African Americans.

Some will be disappointed by Gennari’s failure to offer programmatic suggestions as to how to organize Italian Americans to embrace antiracist politics or to explore how they have benefited from “white privilege” once it finally began to apply to them. Those looking for a road map to change the voting patterns and political affiliations of Italian Americans in order to make them more critical of Donald Trump or more receptive to Black Lives Matter, affirmative action, or diversification of schools and neighborhoods won’t find one in this book. What the book does offer is a reformulation of Italian American identity made with great power and emotional resonance, giving

those promoting a new relationship between Italians and black America an array of images and symbols that make this difficult transition seem noble and historically compelling. For that contribution, delivered with passion and flair, *Flavor and Soul* is a landmark in both cultural studies and in the exploration of race in the United States.

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Work Cited

Rieder, Jonathan. 1985. *Canarsie: The Jews and Italians of Brooklyn Against Liberalism*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

See You in the Streets: Art, Action, and Remembering the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire.

By Ruth Sergel.

Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2016.

209 pages.

This is the story of how Ruth Sergel—a well-known American artist, director, writer, and human rights activist—became involved in efforts to remember and commemorate the New York City Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire of 1911 on its one-hundredth anniversary and beyond. Beginning with her public art project *Chalk* and continuing for over a decade as the leader of the Remember the Triangle Fire Coalition, Sergel was instrumental in marking the centenary of the fire. In this book she reflects on the ways her work on the Triangle fire affected her activism and her art both personally and professionally.

This relatively short, thoughtful, and exceptionally well-written book brings the Triangle fire into sharp focus. Sergel writes about all the twists and turns of public memory and commemoration that finally led her to focus on the fire. Yet Sergel didn't write this book alone. Each chapter includes at least one "postcard"—photographic and textual sidebars written by Sergel's colleagues and supporters. Each postcard offers an interesting perspective on the fire, its aftermath, and how the tragedy is viewed and understood today.

The deadliest such event in New York's history, the Triangle fire of 1911 cost the lives of 146 garment workers, 123 of them women, mostly young immigrants. It generated national and international outrage over sweatshop working