

The City University of New York



Italian-American Educational Attainment

presented by

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25 West 43rd Street
New York, N.Y. 10036

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Italian-American Educational Profile

Figure 1. USA

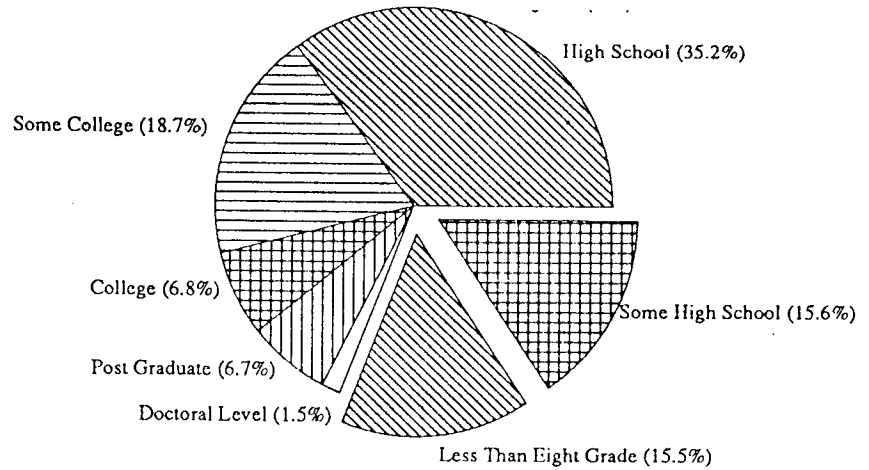


Figure 2. New York State

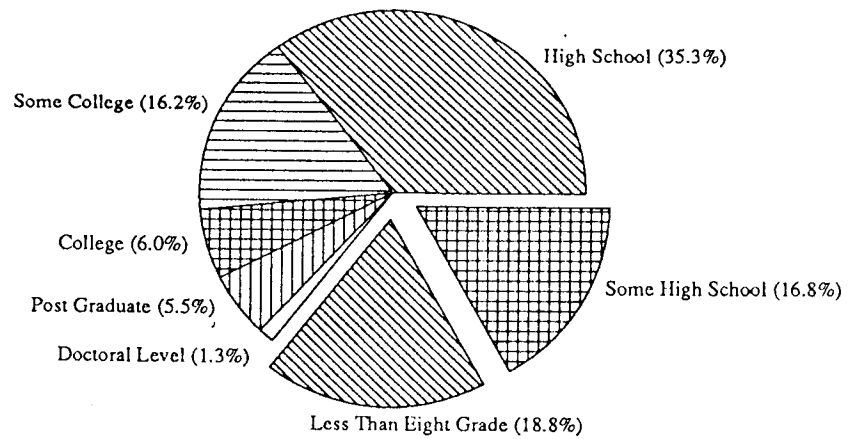
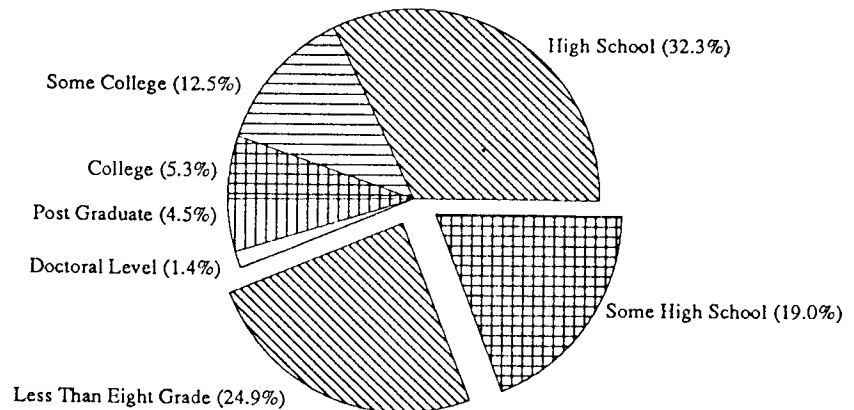


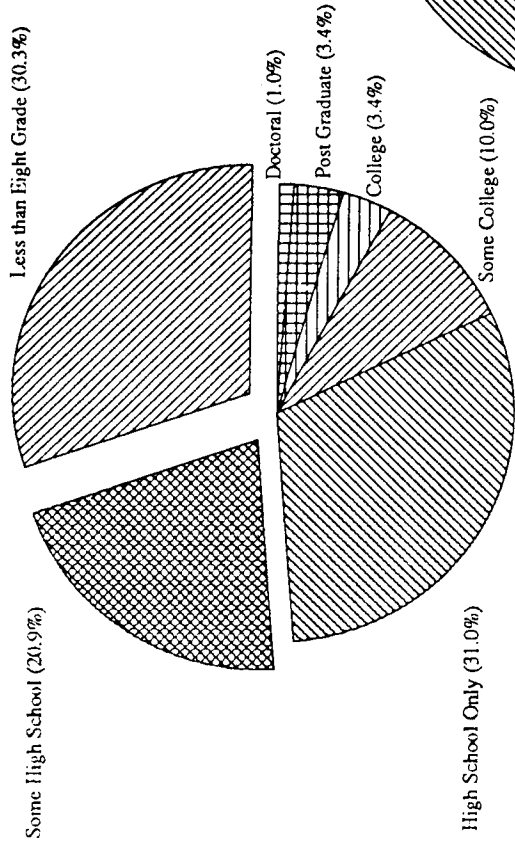
Figure 3. New York City



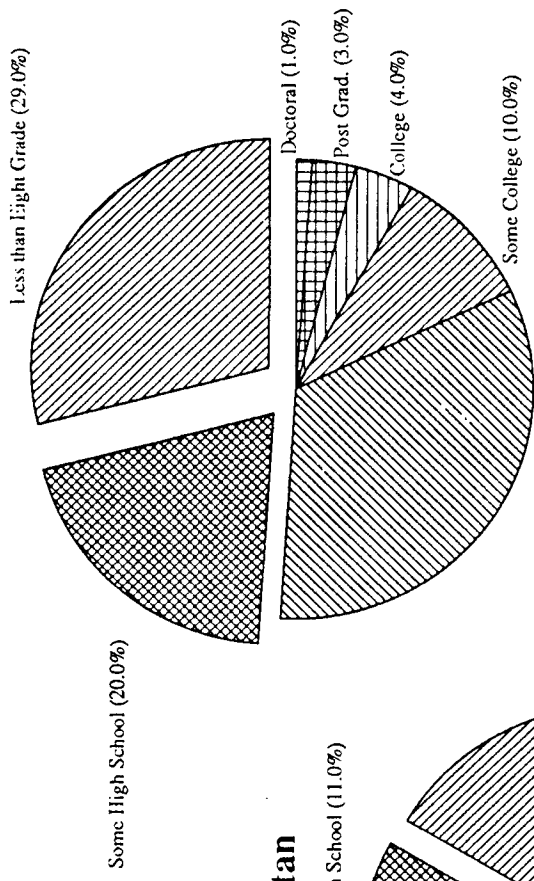
Reference: John D. Calandra Italian American Institute; 1980 Census Data

Italian-Americans Educational Attainment by New York City Boroughs

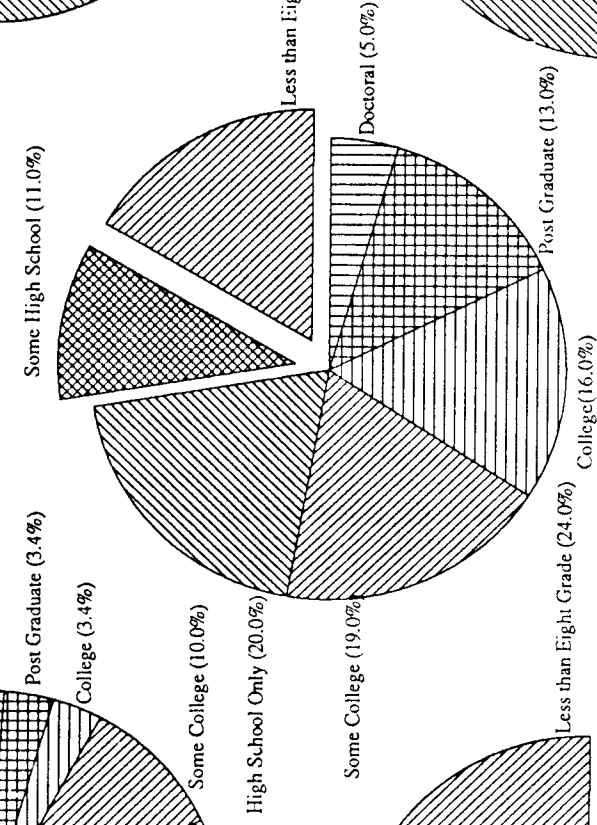
Bronx



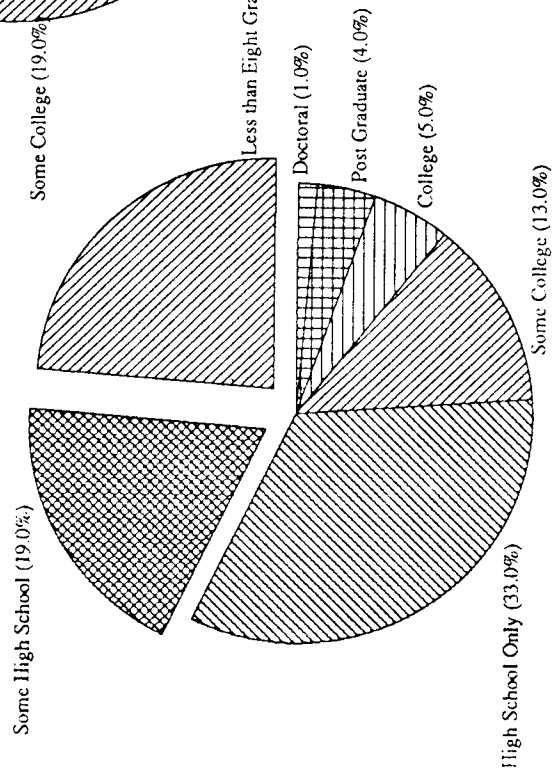
Brooklyn



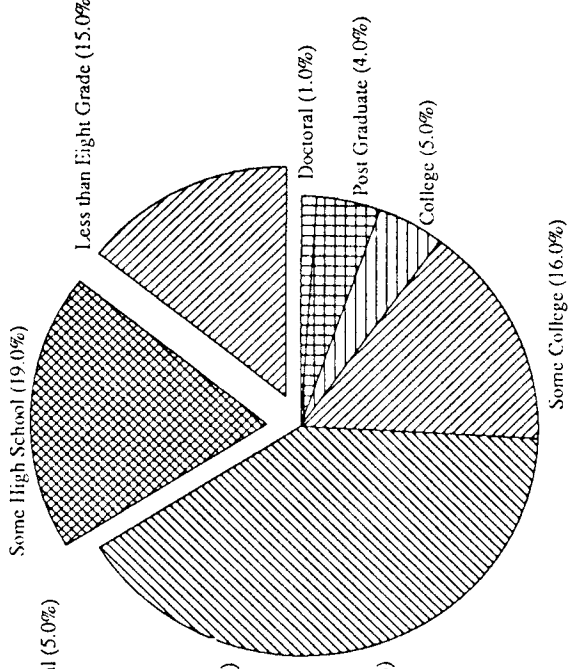
Manhattan



Queens



Staten Island



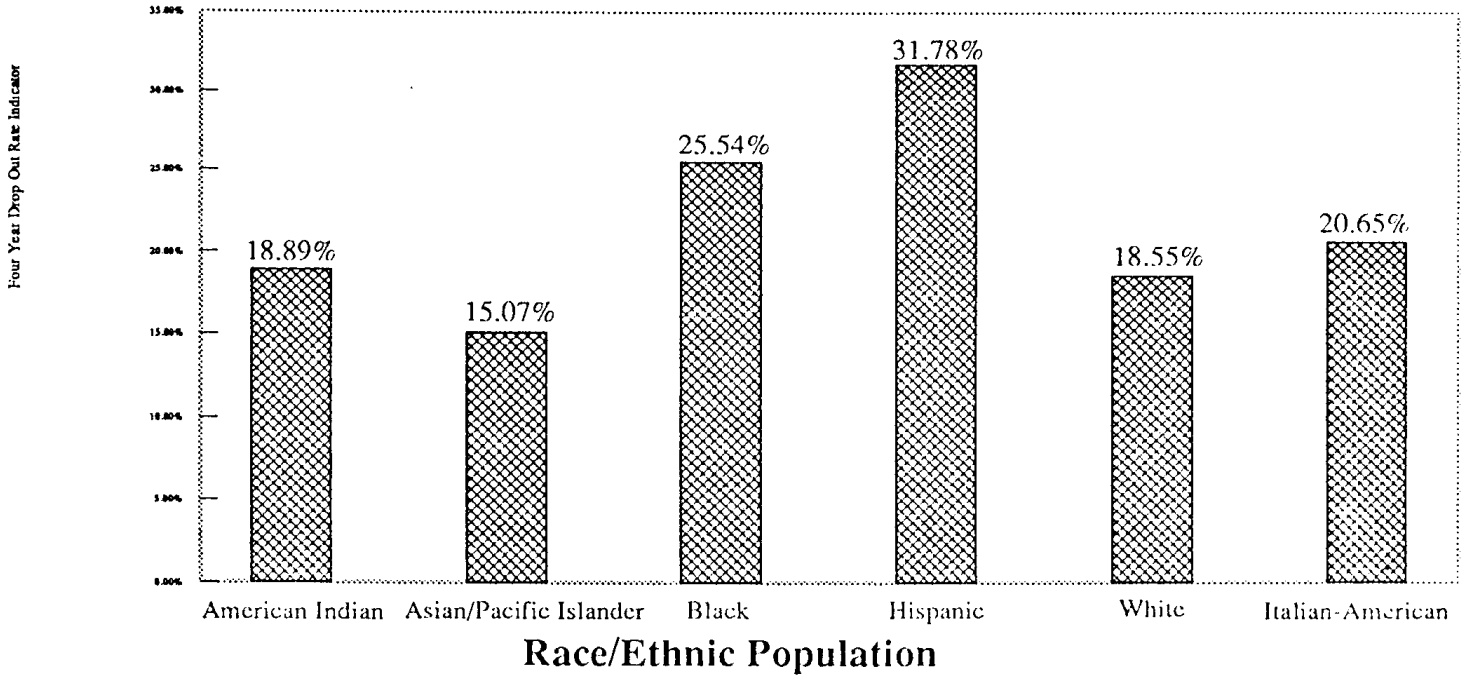


The City University of New York
 Dr. Joseph V. Scelsa

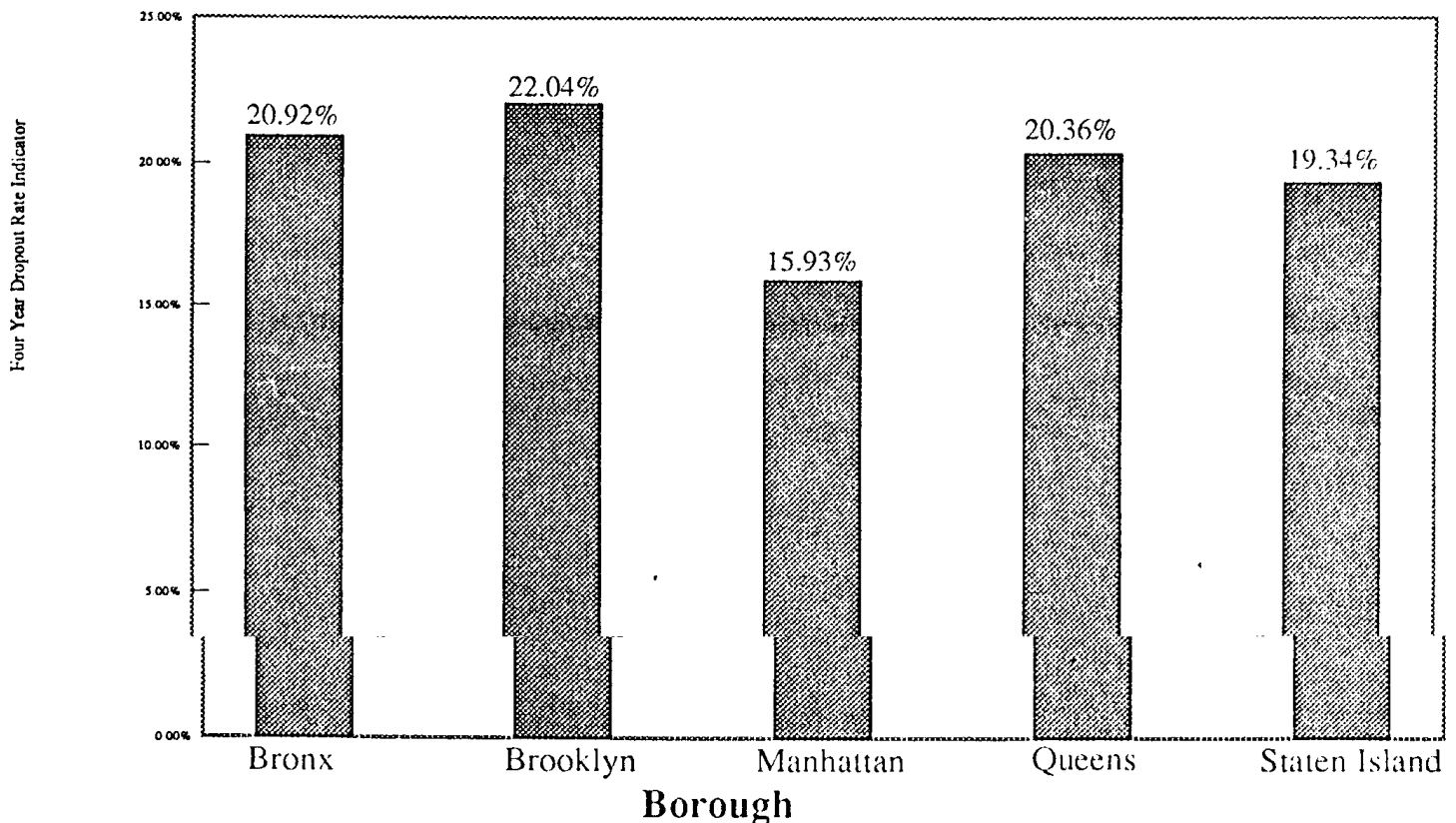
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New York City High School Dropout Rate Indicator (HSDRI)



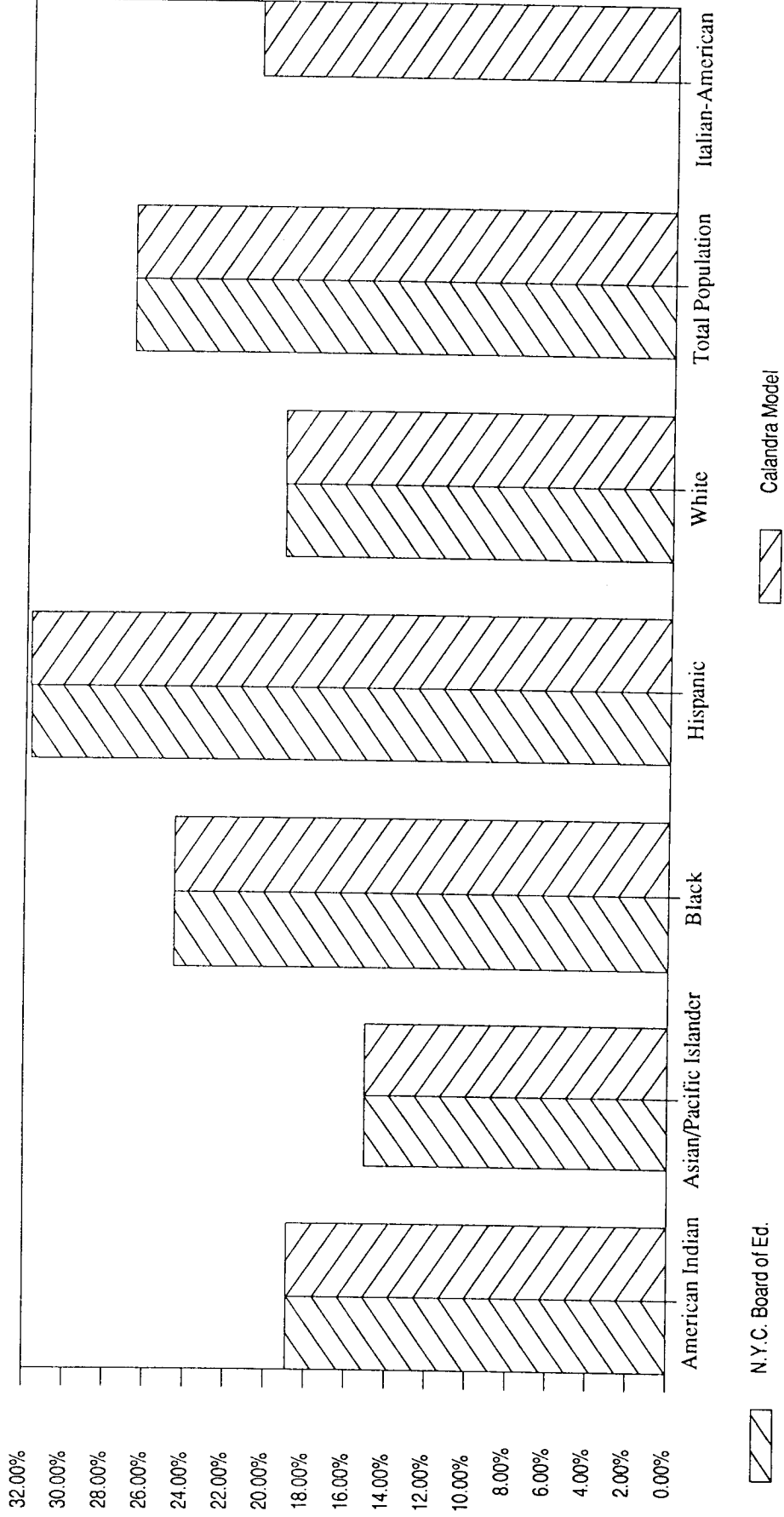
New York City Italian-American HSDRI by Boroughs



Reference: John D. Calandra Italian American Institute; Dropout Rate Model
 Utilizing 1980 Census Data and 1988 NYC Board of Education Data

New York City Board of Education Four Year Drop Out Rate vs.

Calandra Drop Out Rate Model (By Race and Ethnicity)



Reference: John D. Calandra Italian American Institute; Drop Out Rate Model
Utilizing 1980 Census Data and 1988 New York City Board of Education Data

20% Dropout Rate Found For Italian-Americans

By FELICIA R. LEE

In movies, newspapers and best-selling novels, Italian-Americans say, they often find themselves depicted as killing, cooking or singing.

That biased view, experts said yesterday, has filtered through to classrooms in New York, where many Italian-American students suffer low self-esteem because of the stereotypes. A study released yesterday showed that 20.65 percent, or 1 in 5, will not finish high school.

Those figures are alarming to Italian-American leaders, who for the first time separated the statistics for Italian-American youths from those for whites in general. The dropout study, by City University researchers, showed that Italians, the largest white ethnic group in the city, have the third-highest dropout rate.

Hispanic students have the highest rate, with 31.78 percent. Blacks are second, at 24.54. The rate for other whites is 18.55. Italians are one-third of the white students in the schools.

"Italian-American youth are highly influenced by popular culture, like all others," said Dr. Richard Gambino, director of Italian-American Studies at Queens College and a writer of books and studies of Italian-Americans.

"Hollywood has given an image over the years that Italian-Americans are inferior, physical, anti-intellectual," Dr. Gambino said. "There is the criminal image of the Italian-American. This is not a healthy basis for a self-image to succeed in life or education."

"The notion that we are all either bigots, bums or buffoons still lives," said Frank Arricale 2d, superintendent of Cpmunity School District 11 in the Bronx.

The dropout numbers and the rea-

Stereotyping is attacked in a CUNY study.

sions behind them were the focus of a daylong conference at the City University Graduate Center on West 42d Street. Held under the auspices of the state and the United Federation of Teachers, the session attracted 175 people.

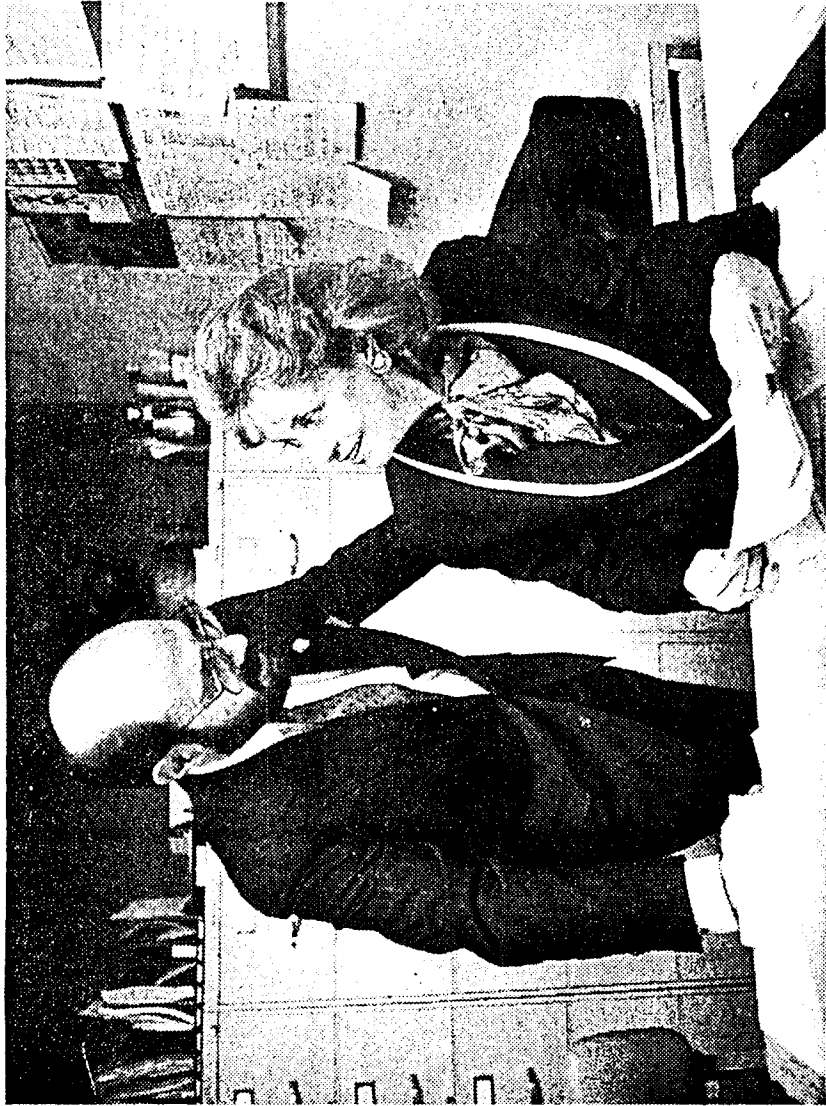
'Driven by a Passion'

Matilda R. Cuomo, wife of Gov. Mario M. Cuomo and honorary chairwoman of the State Council on Children and Families, was the leader.

"This is especially distressing, because Italians came to America driven by a passion to get a good education," Mrs. Cuomo said.

The experts said the reasons for the high dropout rate included not only poor self-esteem and self-images, but also factors like peer pressure, parental ignorance about education and the belief that the benefits of education did not outweigh working.

The profile of Italian-American Educational Attainment, prepared by the John D. Calandra Italian-American Institute, showed Italian-American students in New York lagging behind those elsewhere in the country. Nationally, 15.5 percent of Italian-Americans have less than an eighth-grade education. In New York, the figure is 24.9 percent. Nationally, 18.7 percent have some college work, compared with 12.5 in New York.



Chester Higgins, Jr. The New York Times

Negative stereotypes of Italian-Americans in the press have filtered through to New York schools, where Italian-Americans have a dropout rate higher than 20 percent. Dr. Joseph V. Scelsa, who gave a report to psychologists and education experts, talked with Matilda R. Cuomo.

Concern for 'White Underclass'

The director of the institute, Dr. Joseph V. Scelsa, said Italian-Americans in New York were simply suffering the same urban stresses that are so well documented for black and Hispanic youths, gangs, family dissolution and economic pressures.

"I personally think there is a white underclass in New York beyond Ital-

ians, and New York City needs to address that segment," Dr. Scelsa, a sociologist, said.

"When you look at the Bensonhurst situation you have to look at perception. There is the perception that Italian-American youths are not going to be given the same opportunities as those in affirmative-action categories. It creates an anger. Unfortunately black men become a symbol of the special treatment."

The Bensonhurst incident, in which a black teen-ager, Yusuf K. Hawkins was apparently slain at the hands of a group of white youths because of his race, was a topic throughout the conference. The killing and the press depictions of the predominantly Italian-American neighborhood in Brooklyn pointed up the need for education on the contributions of all groups, conference participants said.

Urban Italian-American Youths Experiencing High Drop-out Rates

By Joseph Wakelee-Lynch
Guidepost Staff Writer

Italian-American students in New York City are dropping out of high school in large numbers, and the cause, according to counselor and psychologist Joseph V. Scelsa, is cultural.

Negative stereotypes, traits of the urban underclass and even family traditions are contributing to lower than usual high school graduation rates of urban Italian-Americans, he added.

The *New York Times* cited a City University of New York study that found that 20.7 percent of Italian-American students in New York City will not complete high school. That represents the third-highest drop-out rate among ethnic groups, preceded by that of Hispanic students, at 31.8 percent, and blacks, at 24.5 percent.

Scelsa, a founder of the N.Y. branch of the American Mental Health Counselors Association, as well as a past recipient of its "Counselor of the Year" award, has worked for more than 10 years on education issues related to Italian-Americans. He told *Guidepost* that Italians have been viewed by most people as another of the white European immigrant groups that, after more than a century of immigration, have "made it" in American society. His warnings about drop-out rates and poor education for Italians, therefore, have been overlooked or ignored, he said. "I felt like a voice in the wilderness for quite some time," he admitted.

Scelsa, the director of John D. Colandra Italian-American Institute of the City University of New York, said that Italians in urban settings are part of "a developing urban underclass." While many assume they've made it, urban Italians are confronted by issues that other ethnic groups in cities face: lack of role models, stereotyping and economic pressure.

Italian-American students in the cities, Scelsa said, have few role models in professions to relate to. Stereotypes—Italians portrayed as mafiosi, buffoons, or as swaggering and anti-intellectual personalities, such as the comedian Andrew "Dice" Clay, he noted—reinforce the lack of

positive role models. And when the children try to imitate their parents' way of life, they are, in effect, choosing a lifestyle that serves to keep them trapped in the urban underclass.

Scelsa said one of the greatest obstacles students face is in the Italian-American community itself: the family. The family is a "primary variable," he said, in influencing the choices of young people. A strong family can inhibit the development of young people if choices involving occupational mobility elicit the psychological pain of separation. Scelsa notes a kind of social isolation resulting in decreased options when people are unable—or choose not—

Italians in urban settings are part of "a developing urban underclass," said Scelsa.

to function outside what he called their "ethnic enclaves."

Another obstacle Scelsa faced while trying to heighten public awareness of these problems is *la bella figura*, the good image. Many in the community have believed it important to present only a good picture of Italian-Americans to the outside world. To some Italian-Americans, Scelsa recalled, "going public with this information was [just] about sacrilegious. But I said if we don't go public, we're not going to get any help."

The Colandra Institute offers a counseling service to Italian-American students and has been working with the New York State Mentoring Program and with Matilda R. Cuomo, honorary chairwoman of the State Council on Children and Families and the wife of Gov. Mario M. Cuomo. The institute attempts to increase students' access to education and provides mentors from varied professional fields. And Scelsa added that prominent members of the community and Italian-American cultural societies have contributed to scholarship programs to benefit the students. "Large numbers of people," Scelsa said, "when they understand [the drop-out problem] are now willing to give something back."

nyant on the Airwaves, page 3.

Skinner, page 8.

■ CHDF Reports and Grants, page 17.

■ Hypnosis in Counseling, page 22.

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