

VOL. 4 NO. 1 APRIL 17, 1995

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THE ITALIAN AMERICAN REVIEW

*a semi-annual
commentary*

on

*Italian American
Achievement*



in this issue:
Armando Assante

*Affirming
Italian American
Creativity*

Verrazzano Institute At Mercy College

The Changing Demographics of Italian-Americans in New York State, New York City and Long Island: 1980 and 1990¹

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The Italian American community has a long history in the United States. Immigration of Italians to the Western hemisphere may have originated with Cristoforo Colombo; however, over the last hundred years the majority of Italian Americans in New York State can trace their immigration roots to the major Italian immigration wave at the turn of the century and after World War II. In this period the Italian American community has been changing in its adaptation to the American society. This study presents the socio-demographic changes within the Italian American community for 1980 to 1990. It focuses within the geographic regions of New York State, New York City, and Long Island. This study is a preliminary analysis concerning their population, the age life cycles, family structure, assimilation and culturalization, education achievements, and occupational attainments. The data used in this socio-demographic study is 1980 and 1990 federal data from the United States Census Bureau. The census data consists of a sampling of 1 out of 20 households, or a 5% sample obtained from the longer census questionnaire forms. Specific questions ask the respondent's ethnic ancestry. The reported ancestry is self-identification that may include multiple ancestry of two or more ancestral roots. The identification of the Italian American population is through those respondents who answer Italian as one of their ancestral roots. Italian Americans with multiple ancestry are included within the Italian American population. The Italian American ancestry stratification of this census question enables identifying the other social and demographic census data describing

¹ Summary of speech presented at the 42nd Annual Meeting of the New York State Sociological Society, Dowling College, Oakdale, New York, October 15, 1994.

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the Italian Americans within populations in any region of the United States.

Figure 1

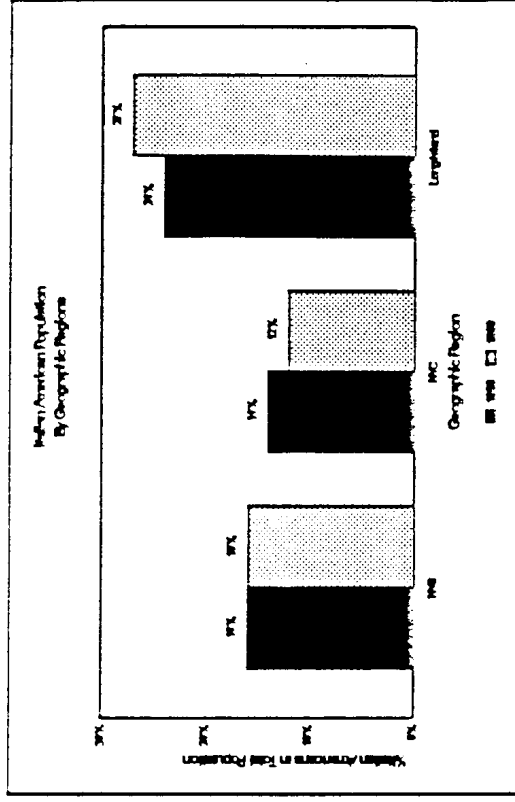
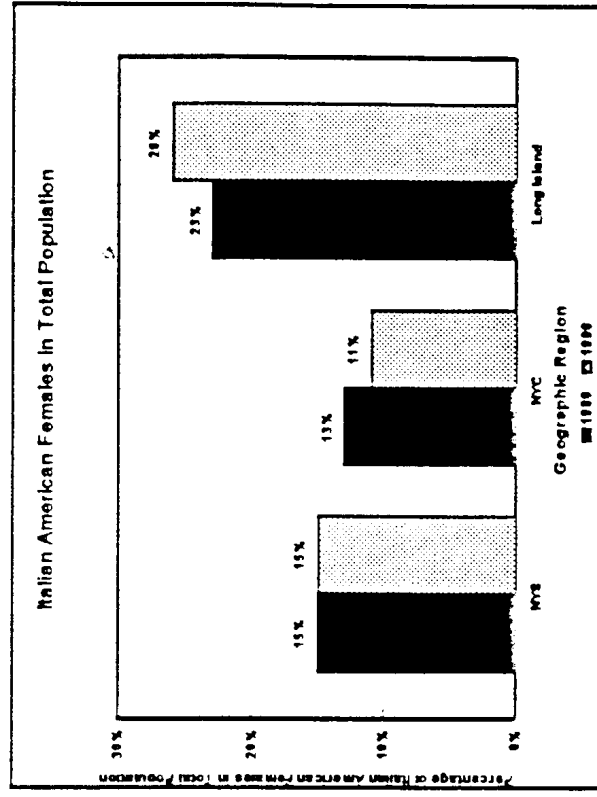


Figure 2



Italian American Population

Figure 1 shows the percentage of Italian American population in New York State, New York City, and Long Island from 1980 to 1990. In New York State the Italian American population was 2,765,680 residents in 1980 and increased by 57,377 Italian Americans to 2,823,057 Italian Americans in 1990. However the percentage of Italian Americans remained constant at 16% of the total population, still comprising the largest ethnic group fraction in New York State.

Between 1980 and 1990, the Italian American population in New York City declined by 147,090 residents, from 984,820 Italian Americans to 837,730 Italian Americans. The percentage of Italian Americans in New York City only decreased 2 percentage points from 14% to 12%, still constituting Italian Americans as one of the largest ethnic groups in New York City next to the Dominican Americans.

The decrease in New York City Italian Americans may be due to migration to the regional suburbs including Northern New Jersey, Westchester, and Long Island where the percentage of Italian Americans ranges from 17% in Northern New Jersey to as high as 29% in Suffolk County.

Overall on Long Island consisting of Nassau County and Suffolk County, the average percentage of Italian Americans is 27% of the total population. From 1980 to 1990 this increased 3 percentage points with a total of 697,448 Italian American residents in 1990. Italian Americans are the largest ethnic group on Long Island with more than 1 out of 4 of the residents being of Italian heritage.

Italian American Females

In New York State there were 1,445,561 Italian American women in 1990, an increase of 31,961 females since 1980. Since 1980, there was a net decrease of 73,004 New York City Italian American women with 438,296 Italian American females in 1990. Italian American females on Long Island increased by 39,752 women for a total of 354,912 females in 1990 (162,275 Italian American women in Nassau County and 192,637 Italian American women in Suffolk County).

Generally within the Italian American population there are more Italian American females than Italian American males in all

three geographic regions, being 1 to 2 percentage points higher than Italian American males. However on Long Island the percentage of females in the Italian American community has increased by 1 percentage point, probably due to the longer age spans of women.

The change in the percentage of Italian American females compared to all females in the population in the three regions is similar to the overall Italian American percentage population changes between 1980 and 1990. Figure 2 shows the percentage of Italian American females to all females within New York State, New York City, and Long Island. In New York State the percentage of Italian American females stays the same between 1980 and 1990 at 15% of all females. In New York City the percentage of Italian American females decreased two percentage points from 13% to 11% of all females. On Long Island the percentage of Italian American females increased 3 percentage points from 23% to 26% of all females.

Even though Italian American females are an increasing part of the total population, some contemporary research studies on Italian American women have indicated that the Italian American females are not participating in the overall women's movement of career development and social mobility like the rest of the population.

Italian American Senior Citizens

Figure 3 shows the percentage of Italian American senior citizens (65 years or older) within the Italian American population in New York State, New York City, and Long Island. The graphs show that the percentage of the Italian American community that is 65 years or older has increased in all three geographic regions.

In New York State, Italian American senior citizens have increased by 72,759 residents since 1980 to 381,899 Italian Americans who were 65 years of age or older in 1990. This is nearly a 24% increase in Italian American senior citizens since 1980, going from 1 out of 9 Italian Americans in 1980 to 1 out of 7 Italian Americans in 1990.

The largest percentage of Italian Americans who are senior citizens is in New York City, changing 15% and 19% of the Italian American community respectively from 1980 to 1990. The Italian American senior citizen population changed by only 3,878 residents since 1980 to 155,618 Italian Americans who are 65 years of age or older. This results in nearly 1 out of 5 of the Italian American community in New York City being 65 years or older in 1990.

Figure 3

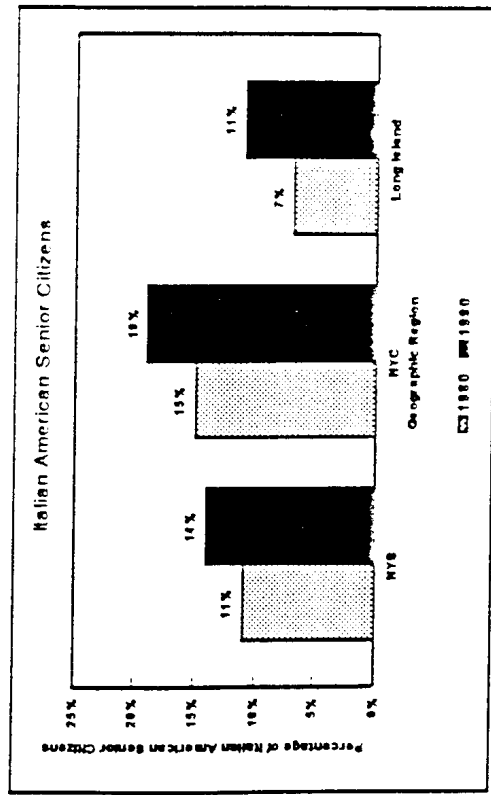
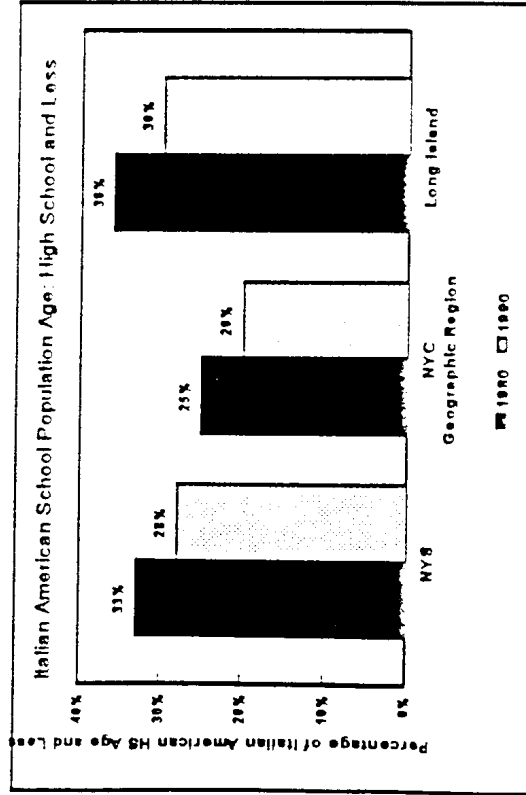


Figure 4



On Long Island, senior citizens were 7% of the Italian American community in 1980 (or 1 out of 15 Italian Americans), compared to 11% of the Italian community in 1990 (or 1 out of 9 Italian Americans) again showing the aging of the Italian American population. Since 1980, Italian American senior citizens increased by 26,879 residents to 74,059 Italian Americans (40,425 residents in

Nassau County and 33,634 residents in Suffolk County). This is a 57% increase in Italian Americans who are 65 years of age or older.

Italian American Youth

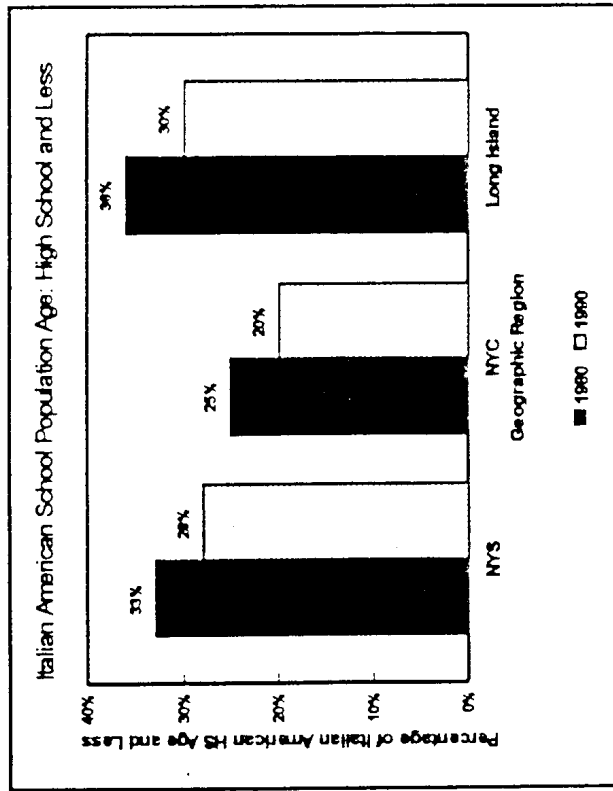
The graph, Figure 4, also shows the change in the age demographics of Italian Americans depicting Italian American population of high school age or less (19 years old or less). The percentage of Italian American youth within the Italian American community has decreased 5 to 6 percentage points in all three geographic regions of New York State, New York City, and Long Island.

In 1980, Italian American youth was a large fraction of the community, comprising 1 out of 3 Italian Americans in New York State (33%) and Long Island (36%) and 1 out of 4 Italian Americans in New York City (23%). In fact, in 1980, Suffolk County Italian American youth, 19 years old or less, make up 41% of the Italian American community with nearly 1 out of 2 youths being Italian American.

In 1990, Italian American youths are still a large part of the Italian American community in New York State (28%) and Long Island (30%), but have declined to 1 out of 5 of the New York City Italian American community. Since 1980, the Italian American youth population in New York State decreased 11% by 99,823 residents to 789,777 Italian Americans. In New York City the Italian American youth decreased approximately 31% or 77,502 residents to 173,418 Italian Americans in 1990. Since 1980 there is nearly a 10% decrease in the Italian American youth on Long Island, declining by 22,245 residents to 211,355 Italian Americans. Nassau County experienced a larger decrease with 14% decline of the 1980 Italian American youth in 1990 compared to 8% decrease in Suffolk County for the same period.

The next two graphs, Figures 5 and 6, separate the Italian American school age population by high school age (greater than 14 years of age and less than or equal to 19 years of age) and not in high school age (14 years of age or less). From 1980 to 1990, the high school age population of Italian American youth decreased 4 to 1 percentage points in the three geographic regions of New York State, New York City, and Long Island respectively. In this period the not in high school age population of Italian Americans decreased 2

Figure 5



percentage points in the three respective geographic regions of New York State, New York City and Long Island.

Since 1980, the Italian American high school population in New York State decreased 27% by 73,757 students to 198,063 students in 1990 while the not in high school population decreased 4% by 26,066 students to 591,714 Italian Americans. In this period the high school age population in New York City decreased approximately 43% by 33,376 Italian Americans to 44,684 high school students of Italian descent. The Italian American not in high school age population decreased nearly 26% by 44,126 students to 128,734 Italian Americans. The decrease in Italian American not in high school age population is less, declining 14% or 23,151 students since 1980 to 138,769 not in high school age population of Italian heritage.

During this time on Long Island the change in high school age population decreases 28% to 51,948 Italian American high school students in 1990. The high school age population of Italian Americans in Nassau County decreased 4 percentage points from 1980 to 1990. This results in a decrease of 36% less students or a decline of 12,160 high school age residents of Italian descent to a total of 21,860

Figure 7

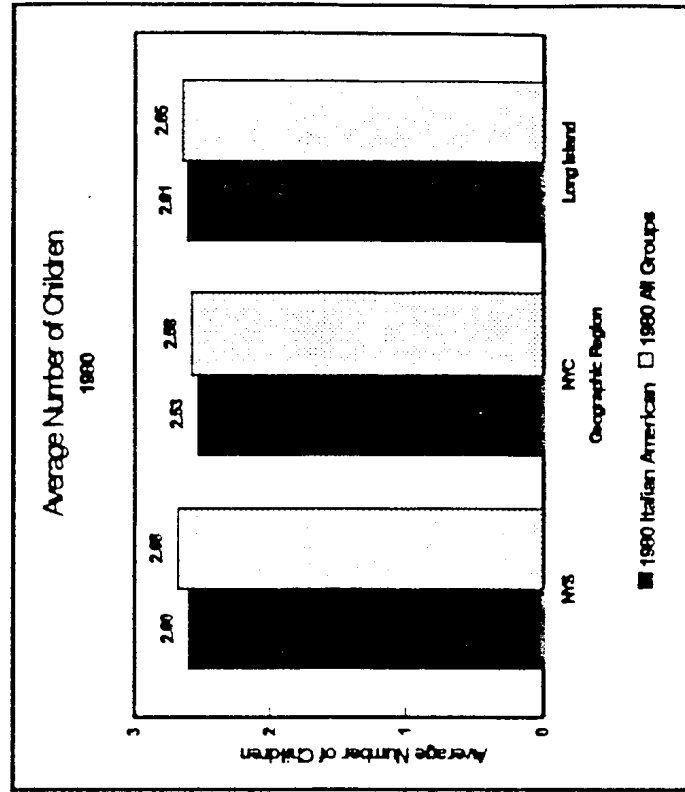


Figure 6

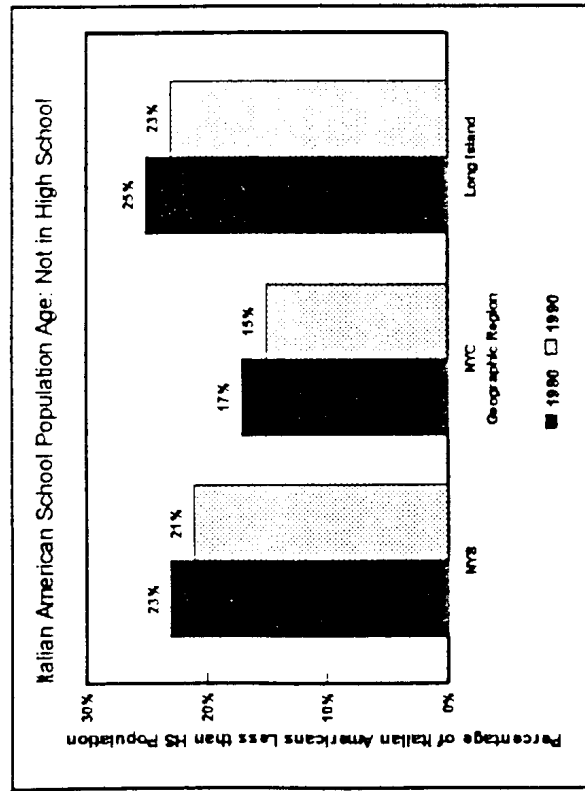
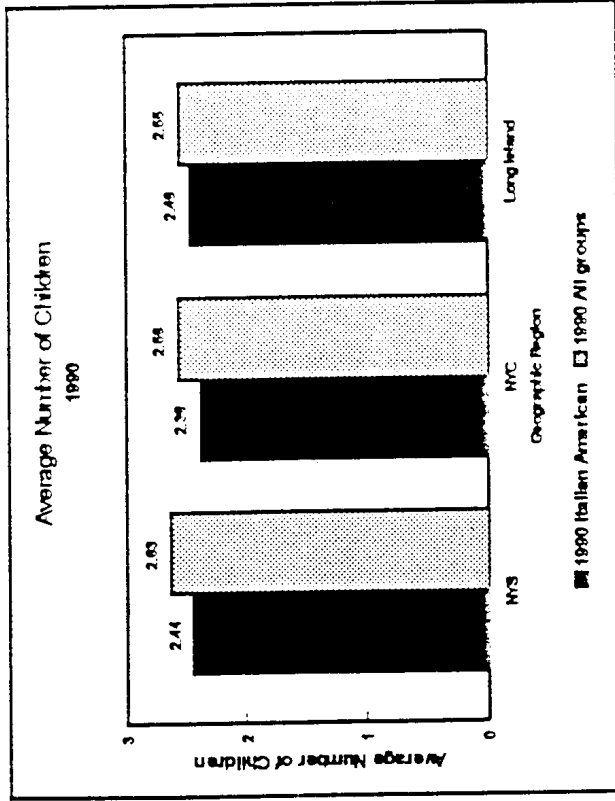


Figure 8



students. Nassau County has most of the decrease on Long Island Italian Americans not in high school age children, declining 3% or 2,335 students with virtually no change in Suffolk County that had 93,542 not in high school age Italian Americans in 1990.

However, there are anomalies in the decrease of Italian American school age population patterns between 1980 and 1990. Italian American youth in the preschool age (4 years old and less) increased 1 percentage point throughout New York State and Long Island. In New York State, Italian American preschool students increased 18% by 32,469 residents to 214,209 preschool age Italian Americans. On Long Island, the preschool Italian American students increased 27% or 12,338 residents to 57,878 preschool Italian Americans.

Social Demography

The increase of preschool Italian American youth between 1980 and 1990 may be due to the onset of the echo-baby boom and later year childbirth patterns of the last generation baby-boomers. However the overall decreases in the Italian American youth from

Figure 9

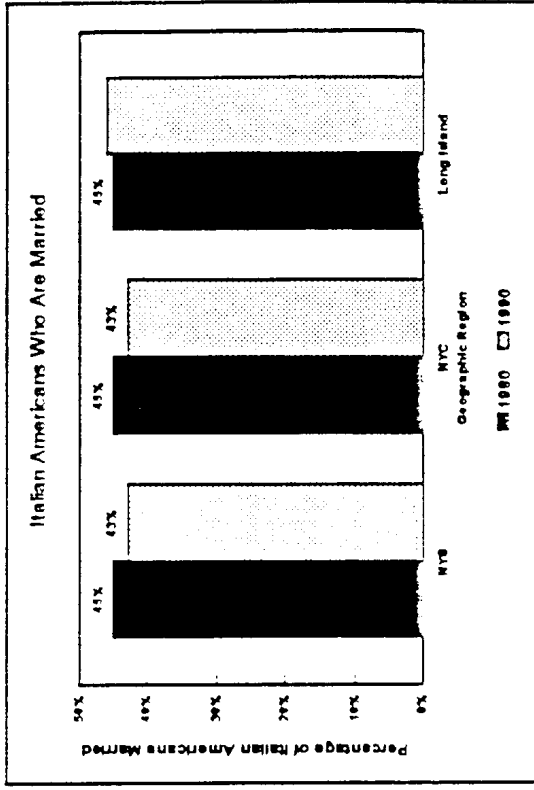
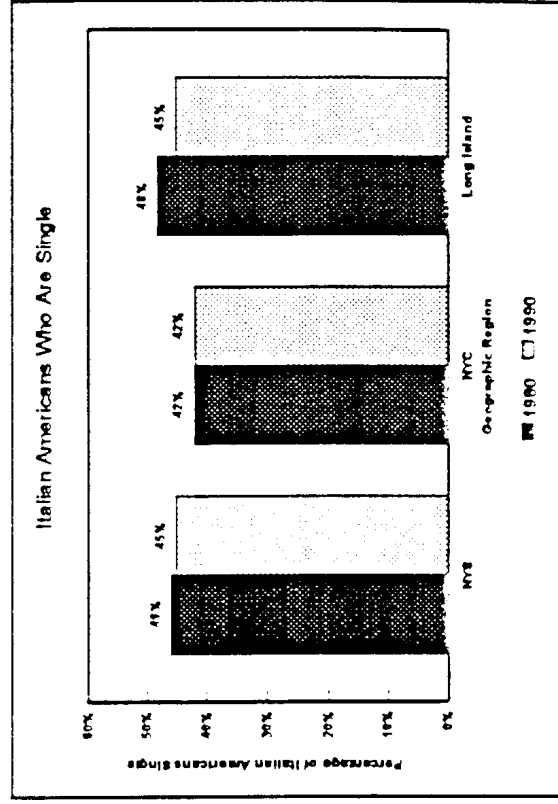


Figure 10



1980 to 1990 may be due to the lower rate of average children per Italian American female and changing marital patterns of the Italian American family.

Figure 7 shows that from 1980 to 1990 the average number of children for Italian American women has declined by 6% in New York State (2.60 to 2.44 average children per female), and New York City (2.53 to 2.38 average children per female). In this period the corresponding decrease in average children per female for all the population was less than 2% in New York State and less than 1% in New York City (see Figure 8).

The decline of the average number of children for Italian American females is greater than the overall population for New York State and New York City — 3 times greater in New York State; 8 times greater in New York City.

In 1990, on Long Island the average number of children for Italian American females is 4% lower than the total population. Since 1980 the average number of children per Italian American female decreased approximately 6% (2.61 to 2.46 average children per female). The decrease of the average number of children in the total population is two times smaller at approximately 3%.

The number of married Italian Americans in New York State who are 20 years of age or older has not changed appreciably since 1980 with 1,223,412 married Italian Americans. The number of single Italian Americans in this age group increased 31% to 485,965 Italian Americans (see Figures 9 and 10). The single status of Italian Americans on Long Island increased by 4 percentage points. However, married Italian Americans on Long Island increased by approximately 13% from 1980 to 1990, where in this time there is a 52% increase in single Italian Americans. In New York City, married Italian Americans decreased by 20% and single Italian Americans increased by 14%.

The next graph, Figure 11, shows the changes in the divorced marital status of the Italian American community who are 20 years of age or older from 1980 to 1990. The divorce rate of Italian Americans in the three geographic regions has increased 2 percentage points. In New York State, divorced Italian Americans increased by 52% to 118,100 divorcees and on Long Island increased by 78% to 22,738 Italian American divorcees. New York City had the lowest increase of 27% more divorcees for a total of 38,751 divorced Italian Americans.

The percentage of Italian American widows who are 20 years of age or older remained the same on Long Island in spite of the aging Italian American population (see Figure 12). However, there is a net increase of Italian American widows of approximately 24%

Figure 11

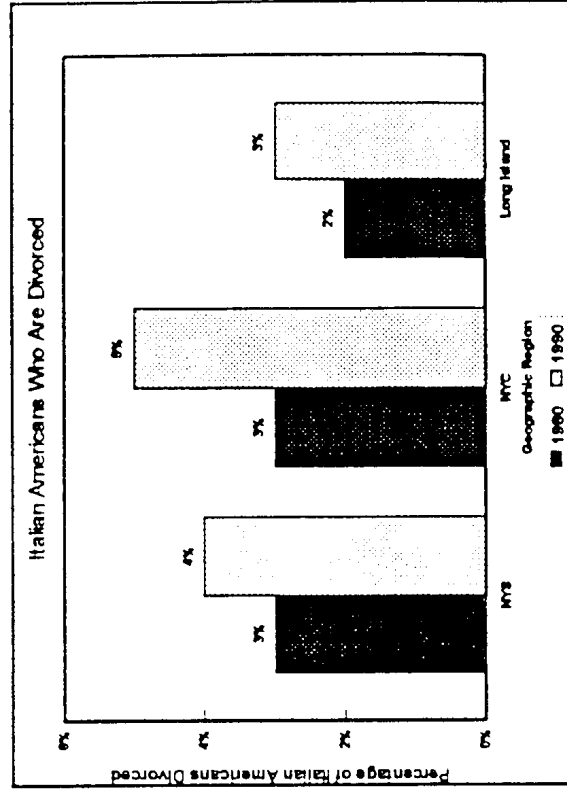
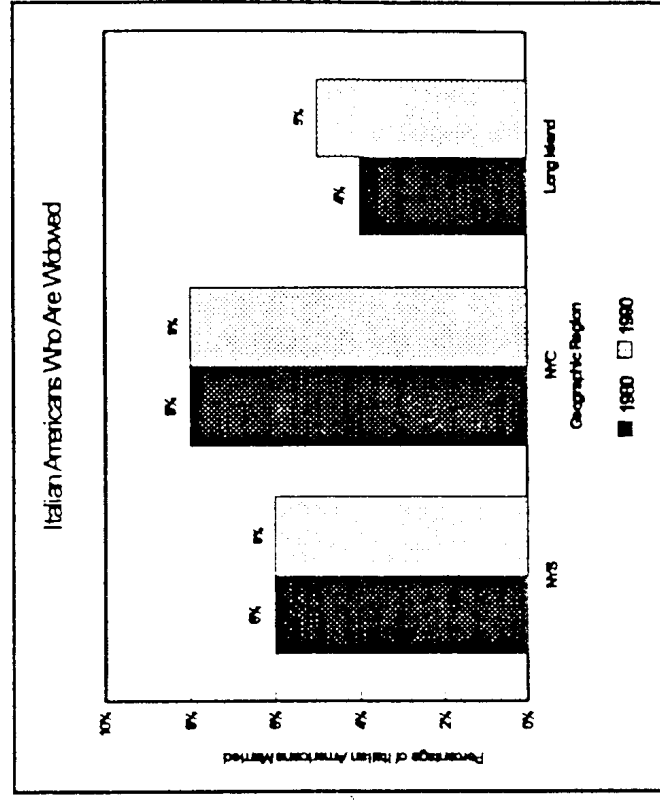


Figure 12



since 1980. In this interval, New York State Italian American widows have increased by 4% and in New York City have decreased approximately 10% since 1980.

Figure 13

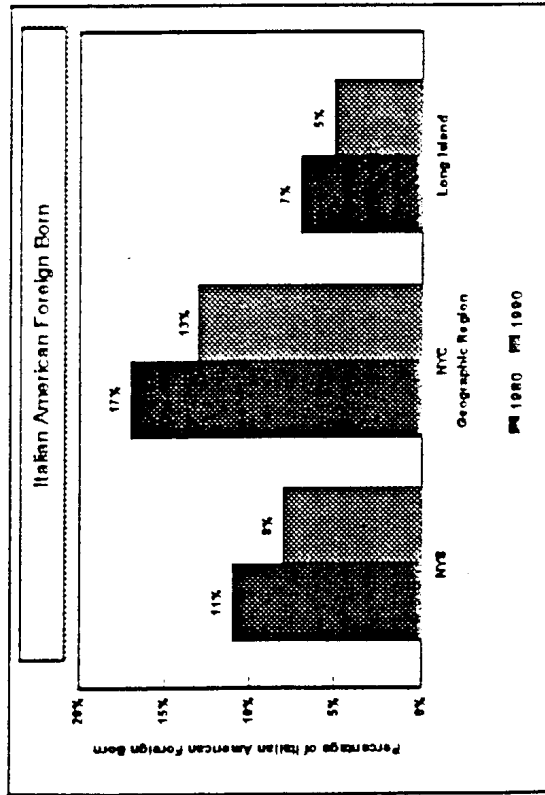
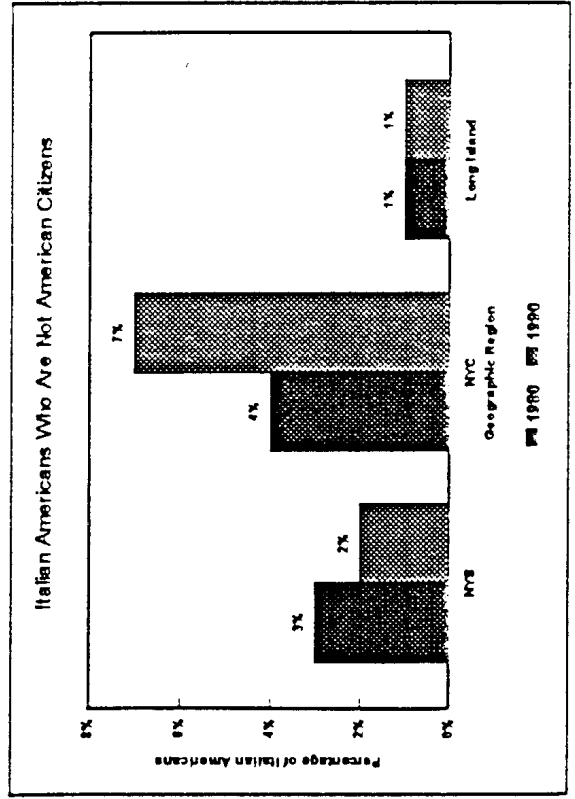


Figure 14



Assimilation and Culturalization

The next three graphs, Figures 13, 14 and 15, depict an indication of the changing social assimilation status of Italian Americans since the major immigration waves at the turn of the century and after the Second World War.

Figure 13 shows that from 1980 to 1990 the number of foreign born Italian Americans has declined in the three regions 2 to 4 percentage points with the largest decline in New York City (4 percentage points), New York State (3 percentage points), and Long Island (2 percentage points). In 1990 in New York City, 1 out of 7 Italian Americans were foreign born, 1 out of 12 Italian Americans were foreign born within New York State, and on Long Island 1 out of 20 Italian Americans were not born in the United States. The immigrant percentage of Long Islanders may be due to the later generations of Italian Americans and their upward social mobility to the suburbs.

The foreign born Italian Americans in New York State have decreased 29% since 1980 to 215,368 residents of Italian origin. From 1980 to 1990 New York City Italian Americans born in other countries decreased 35% to 108,345 residents and on Long Island decreased by 18% to 37,079 residents.

Another indicator of the immigrant and assimilation status of Italian Americans is the change in the American citizenship of this population. Figure 14 depicts the percentage of the Italian American community who are still not Americans citizens. In 1990, 1 out of 14 New York City Italian Americans were not American citizens in comparison to only 1% on Long Island and 2% throughout New York State.

Between 1980 and 1990, the non-citizenship of Italian Americans has declined throughout New York State 22% to 54,278 residents. It has declined on Long Island approximately 9% for a total of 7,782 Italian Americans in 1990. However, a strange anomaly exists among the Italian Americans who are not American citizens in New York City from 1980 to 1990, showing an increase of 3 percentage points. Since 1980, the non-citizenship of Italian Americans increased approximately 37% to 60,479 residents. This may support recent findings by the New York City Planning

Figure 15

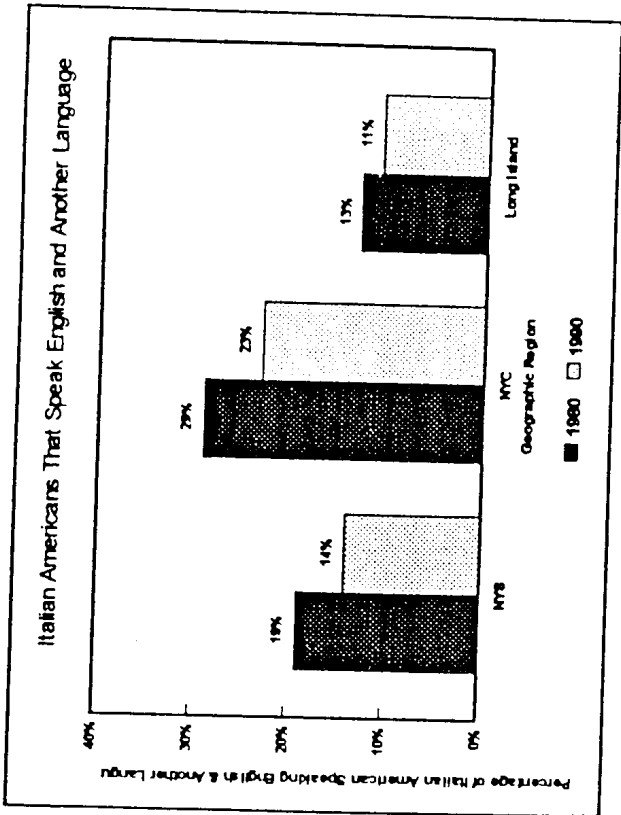
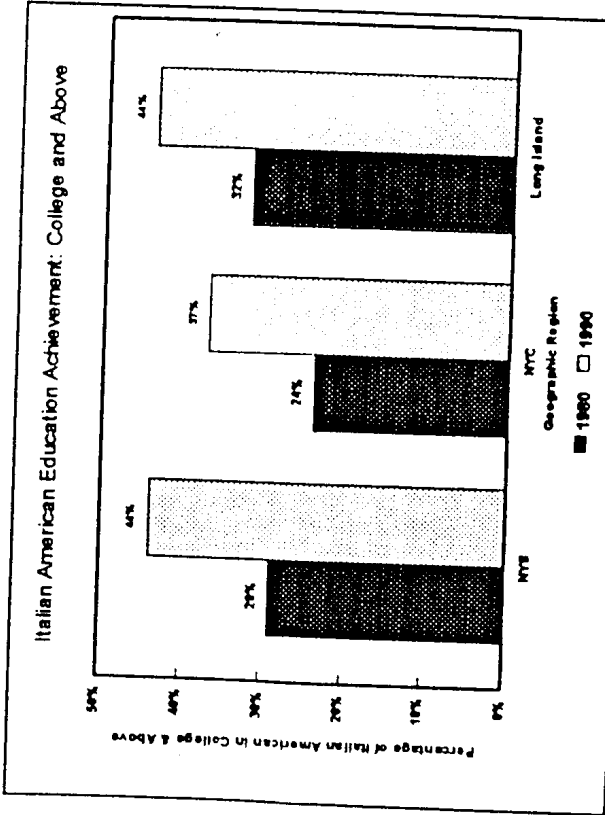


Figure 16



Commission that the second highest percentage of illegal immigrants are from Italy.

Even though 1990 Italian immigrants and their language may still be an important aspect of American culture, the next graph shows the percentage of Italian Americans that speak English and another language (which is probably Italian) for the geographic regions of New York State, New York City and Long Island between 1980 and 1990.

In 1980, nearly 1 out of 3 New Yorkers spoke Italian, an Italian American still may speak community speaking Italian to 195,598 Italian Americans. Italian may have changed from 1 out of 7 Italian Americans that may speak Italian in 1980 to 1 out of 5 Italian Americans in 1990. The percentage of Italian Americans that speak English and another language decreased nearly 24% since 1980 with 405,017 residents in 1990.

The speaking of Italian among Americans on Long Island changed from 1 out of 9 Italian Americans to 1 out of 9 Italian Americans at least change in the speaking of Italian Americans declining by approximately 9% to 75,450 residents. New York City, and Long Island, the percentage of Italian Americans that speak the Italian language is much higher than the percentage of Italian Americans that are foreign born and adaptation to the Italian language by Italian Americans are within the continuation of the Italian culture.

In all three geographic regions of New York State, New York City, and Long Island, the percentage of Italian Americans that speak the Italian language is much higher than the percentage of Italian Americans that are foreign born and adaptation to the Italian language by Italian Americans are within the continuation of the Italian culture.

Education Achievement

The next graph, Figure 16, depicts the educational achievement levels of Italian Americans (21 years of age or older) above, including graduate studies and some college education or professional degrees, and earned doctorates in New York State from 1980 to 1990.

In this time, Italian Americans with college education or more has increased drastically in New York State by 13 percentage points.

Italian Americans appear more assimilated into American culture than their immigrant ancestors. Figure 15 shows the percentage of Italian Americans that speak English and another language (which is probably Italian) for the geographic regions of New York State, New York City and Long Island between 1980 and 1990.

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Figure 17

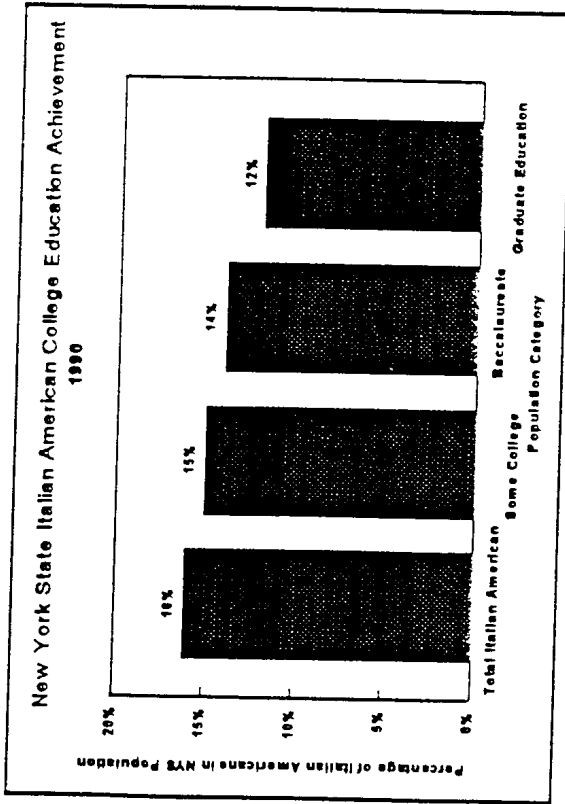
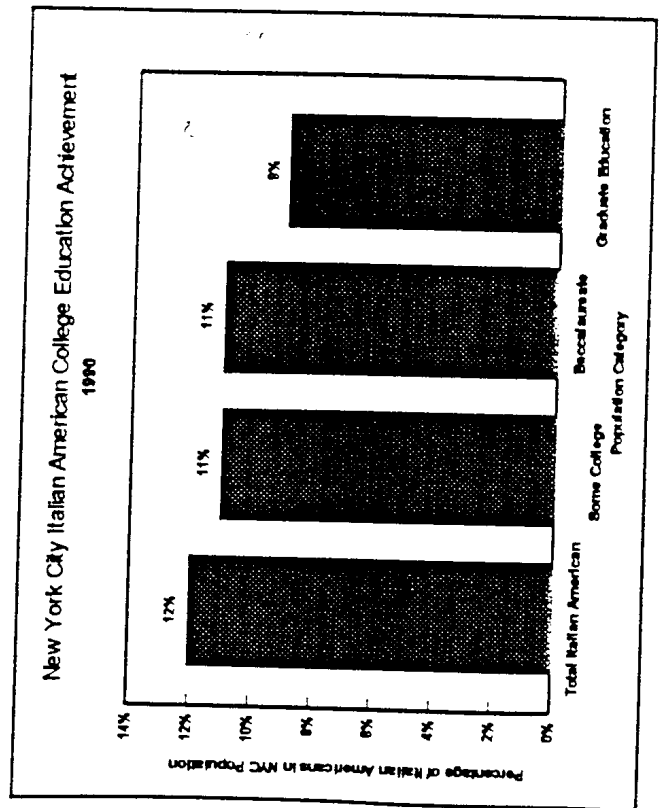


Figure 18



nearly 1 out of 4 Italian Americans in 1980 had achieved some college education or more. However in 1990, as high as almost 1 out of 2 Italian Americans throughout New York State and Long Island had achieved some college education or above.

Since 1980, the Italian Americans with at least some college education in New York State increased by 61% to 851,642 residents in 1990. On the other hand, Italian Americans in New York State that have at least a high school degree or less decreased nearly 14% to 198,063 residents of Italian heritage in 1990. The largest decline in Italian American education levels is for those residents who did not complete high school, decreasing approximately 28% since 1980 to 462,147 residents in 1990.

Since 1980, New York City Italian Americans with at least a college education increased nearly 41% and 240,360 residents of Italian heritage are at this education achievement level in 1990. Since 1980, Italian Americans in New York City with a high school degree or less have decreased by 41% to 411,850 residents in 1990. In this period, Italian Americans in New York City with less than a high school education decreased 37% to 197,241 Italian Americans.

In this period, the Long Island Italian Americans with at least a college education increased by 56% to approximately 189,218 residents in 1990. Since 1980, the Italian Americans with high school education or less decreased 10% with 236,987 Italian Americans with

Figure 19

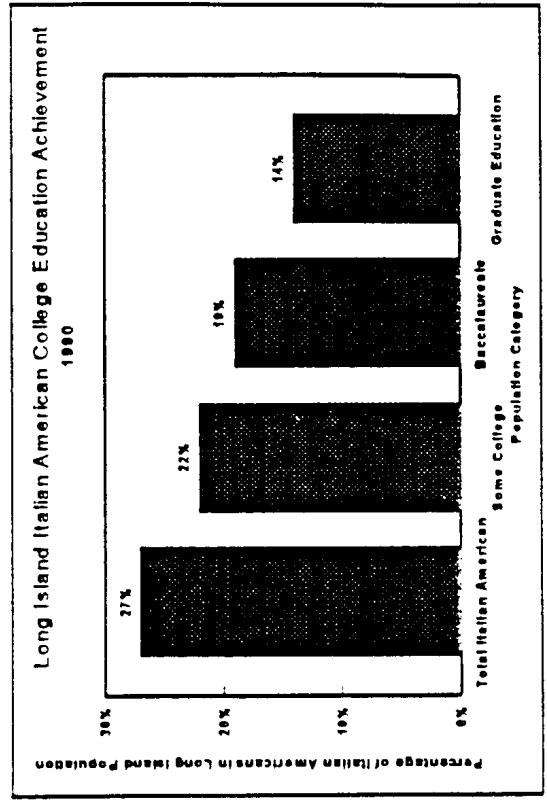


Figure 20

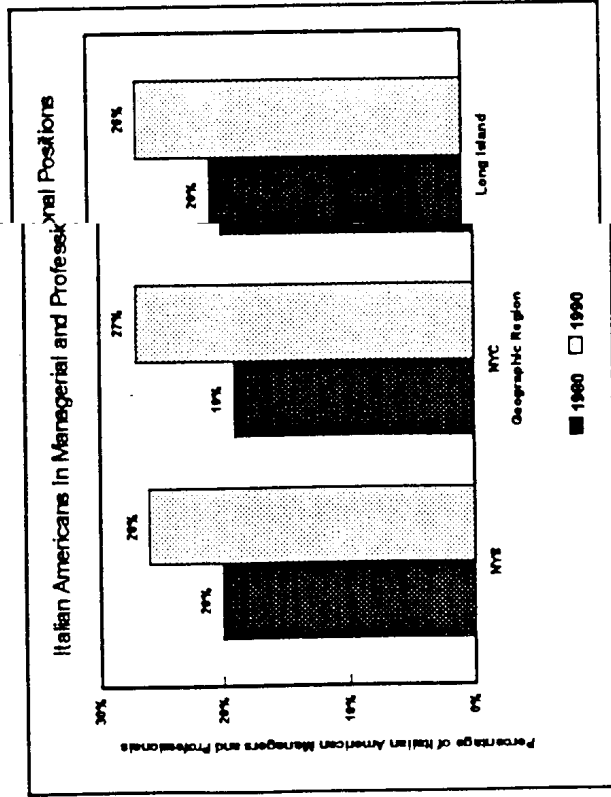
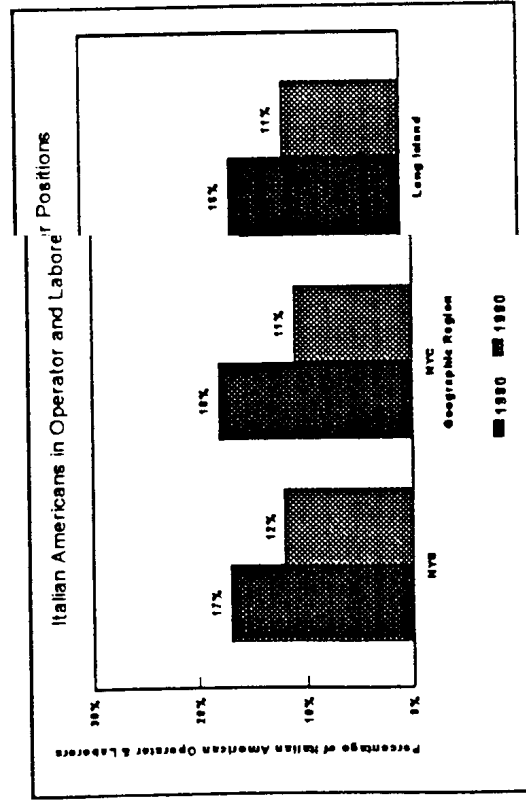


Figure 21



trends for Italian Americans with baccalaureate, masters, professional, and doctorates are not possible. However comparisons of the percentage of Italian American education achievement compared to the overall regional population in 1990 can serve as a benchmark to assess the higher education achievement of the Italian American community in graduate studies.

Figure 17 shows the 1990 college education achievements of New York State Italian Americans with some college education are 15%, with baccalaureates, 14% and 12% with graduate degrees compared to 16% Italian Americans in the New York State population.

The educational achievement of New York City Italian Americans with college in 1990 is 11% with at least some college education, 11% with baccalaureates, and 9% with graduate degrees, compared to the percentage population distribution of 12% Italian Americans in New York City (see Figure 18).

In 1990, on Long Island the college education achievement for Italian Americans with some college education was 22%, with baccalaureates is 19% and with graduate degrees 14 %, compared to the percentage Italian American population on Long Island of 27% of all the residents (see figure 19).

Even though Italian Americans have made increased strides with college education up to the baccalaureate, graduate education levels in 1990 are lagging behind, compared to the total Italian American population in the three geographic regions of New York State, New York City, and Long Island. The largest gap in pursuing graduate education is on Long Island with the percentage of Italian Americans with graduate degrees nearly half the percentage of Italian Americans in the regional population.

Occupational Attainment

The next graphs, Figures 20, 21, and 22, show how the changes in education achievement levels of Italian Americans since 1980 may have affected occupational attainment levels of the Italian American community in the three geographic regions of New York State, New York City, and Long Island.

From 1980 to 1990, the Italian Americans in managerial and professional positions have increased from 6 percentage points in New York State and Long Island and 8 percentage points in New York

this educational achievement in 1990. Italian Americans with only a high school degree decreased 22% in this same period. Unfortunately, since the census did not report conferred degrees until 1990, comparisons of the 1980 educational attainment

City. In this period Italian Americans in managerial and professional positions within the three geographic regions changed from 1 out of 5 Italian Americans to more than 1 out of 4 Italian Americans in these positions in 1990 (see Figure 20).

Since 1980, the Italian Americans in managerial and professional positions in New York State increased approximately 48% to 443,390 residents in 1990. In this period Italian Americans within these positions changed by 35% to 1,35,964 Italian Americans in New York City and increased on Long Island approximately 62% to 107,610 managers and professionals of Italian ancestry in 1990.

The next graph, Figure 21, illustrates Italian Americans within unskilled operator and laborer positions from 1980 to 1990, again showing the changes in career attainment of Italian Americans that may be due to educational achievements. From 1980 to 1990, the percentage of Italian Americans working as operators and laborers decreases drastically from 5 percentage points in New York State and Long Island while decreasing 7 percentage points in New York City.

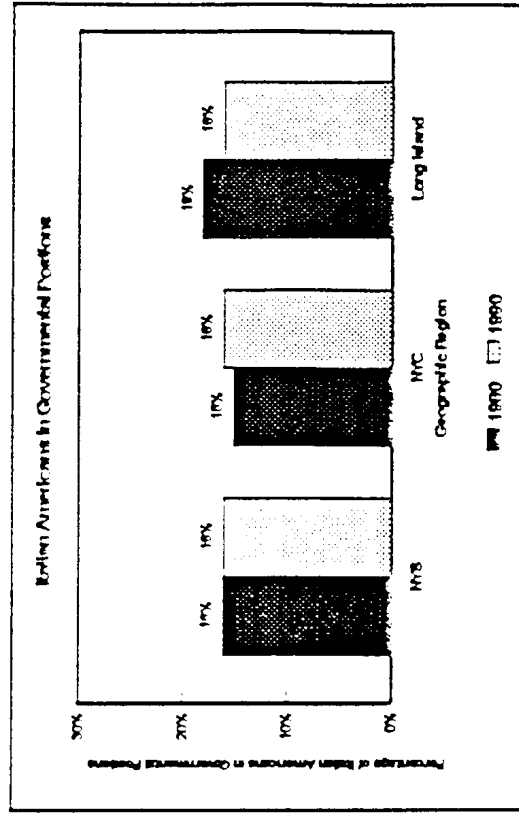
In 1980, within all the three geographic regions, nearly 1 out of 5 Italian Americans were in these unskilled positions, while in 1990 only 1 out of 9 Italian Americans were working as operators and laborers. Since 1980, the Italian Americans in New York State working in these positions have decreased by 23% to 198,324 Italian American laborers and operators in 1990.

Finally, the next graph, Figure 22, shows Italian Americans working in federal, state, and local government occupations for New York State, New York City, and Long Island from 1980 to 1990. In this period there is very little change, with only a 1 percentage point increase in New York City and a 2 percentage point decrease on Long Island. Nearly 1 out of 6 Italian Americans are working in federal, state, and local governmental positions. The decrease in Italian American government workers on Long Island is among local county and municipal positions, even though there is a large increase in population and educational achievement of Italian Americans.

In New York State, the percentage of Italian American government workers did not change compared to all government workers. Italian American 1980 government workers increased 6% to 270,561 residents of Italian descent in 1990. It appears that since 1980 Italian American government workers in New York City increased by approximately 2% to 77,552 Italian Americans in 1990. In this time on Long Island, the percentage change of Italian American

government workers since 1980 is 16% with 65,645 Italian Americans in 1990 working for federal, state and local government.

Figure 22



Summary and Conclusions

This paper presented a preliminary socio-demographic analysis of the Italian Americans in New York State, New York City and Long Island from 1980 and 1990 using analogous data from the United State Census Bureau.

Initial results indicate that Italian Americans are still a large constituent of the total population within the three regions with increasing growth in the suburban communities.

A review of the age and female demographics of the Italian American community shows that the population is aging rapidly and possibly developing human service needs for its elderly and female populations, presumably not effectuated through the traditional Italian American family support structure.

Italian American youths are still an appreciable percentage of the community but declining, possibly due to lower rates of average children per Italian American female. However this change in the proportion of Italian American youth in the community may stabilize

or slightly increase due to the onset of the echo-baby boom and later year childbirth patterns among women.

The traditional structure of the Italian American family may be changing due to higher divorce rates, single and divided families, smaller number of children, and intermarriages. Italian American cultural patterns are still present defining the uniqueness of this ethnic population through the Italian language, and sufficiently large presence of its immigrant history through its elderly and possible new immigrant arrivals.

Later generations of Italian Americans have made great strides in its education achievement levels and career accomplishments to decision making occupations contradicting the historical stereotypes of Italian Americans as uneducated, unskilled, bigots, bums, and buffoons. However, even though the socio-demographic statistics show that Italian Americans have achieved equivalent social-demographic status among its non-Italian American peers, it appears that this population may not be making sufficient inroads into the infrastructure of the social-political decision-making positions within government occupations.

These results provide a preliminary assessment of the changing socio-demographics of the Italian American community in New York State, New York City, and Long Island in the period 1980 to 1990. The findings provide an indication of the further research needed to better understand the Italian American society.¹



¹ Acknowledgments: The author gives special appreciation to Carmine Pizzirusso, graduate student in electrical engineering at CUNY City College, for assisting with the data analysis and Jianxun Hu, doctoral student in business at CUNY Baruch College for the census data processing.