

Branded: How Italian Immigrants Became "Enemies" During World War II.

By Lawrence W. DiStasi.

Bolinas, CA: Sanniti Publications, 2016.

312 pages.

The Office of Strategic Services and the Italian Americans: The Untold Story.

By Salvatore J. LaGumina.

New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.

188 pages.

Italian Prisoners of War in Pennsylvania: Allies on the Home Front, 1944–1945.

By Flavio G. Conti and Alan R. Perry.

Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2016.

312 pages.

World War II had a complex impact on Italian Americans, one that would be influenced by the course of the war in Europe. A decade before Adolf Hitler seized the reins of power in Germany, Italy came under the sway of Fascist leader Benito Mussolini in 1922. Italy would be the first Axis nation to surrender to the Western Allies and even be permitted to join the United Nations as a co-belligerent. Although the Italian king and government deposed Mussolini in 1943, they failed to prevent the German army from occupying most of the country. British and American troops, aided by guerrilla activity from anti-Fascist partisans, faced a protracted campaign to liberate Italy from German domination.

Even before the United States formally entered the war, there existed widespread fear of internal subversion by “fifth columnist” sympathizers for the Axis cause. The FBI focused much of its effort on “hyphenated Americans,” especially those with German, Italian, and Japanese ancestries, even compiling lists of foreign nationals and American citizens to be interned in the event of war. Pearl Harbor, as well as a series of Allied military setbacks in 1942, fueled paranoia about possible invasion that, when mixed with racial animosity, led to the internment of Japanese nationals and Japanese American citizens living in the Western United States. In *Branded: How Italian Immigrants Became “Enemies” During World War II*, Lawrence W. DiStasi focuses on the restrictions, including internment, of a number of Italian nationals, deemed by federal authorities as security risks after the Pearl Harbor attack of December 7, 1941. Without trial, federal authorities mandated that individual Italian nationals leave zones of exclusion on the Pacific Coast and around sensitive military installations. If allowed to reside in an exclusion zone, Italian nationals were required to adhere to a nighttime curfew. Those

deemed high security risks by the FBI, including Italian American citizens, faced internment in concentration camps in interior locations. Harsh restrictions were imposed on Italian American fishermen on the West Coast who then lost their livelihood when federal authorities refused to allow them to put out to sea.

DiStasi's study examines another example of the heavy price paid by some during the war when the nation sought to rigidly classify friend and foe. In a number of instances, Italian nationals who arrived in America as young children and led exemplary lives were forced to vacate homes located in military designated zones of exclusion. Worse, families were divided when one parent had U.S. citizenship and would be permitted to stay in the exclusion zone while the noncitizen parent had to move. Some parents deemed a security risk had children serving in the armed forces of the United States.

This is a frustrating work, given the author's overreliance on newspaper accounts, oral histories, and public investigations. For example, General John DeWitt was a major force who tried to rid the West Coast of all Axis enemy aliens—Japanese Americans, German Americans, Italian Americans—from the exclusion zone: DeWitt still lacks a biographer, and it is unfortunate DiStasi does not explore in greater depth why he took such a harsh line against Italian enemy aliens. In addition, DiStasi could say more about the divisions within the Roosevelt administration about internment and exclusion zones, especially Attorney General Francis Biddle's eventually successful effort to rein in DeWitt. On Columbus Day 1942, Biddle publicly announced an end to most of the restrictions on Italian nationals living in the United States.

One of the things missing from this work is discussion of the relationship of Italian Americans toward Mussolini's regime, especially in the 1930s and early 1940s. Without defending the many miscarriages of justice undertaken in the name of national security, the FBI's targeting of Italian nationals who had worked for the Italian consulates or held membership in organizations with strong ties to the Italian government is understandable, if often mistaken. This targeting is also not surprising given the deep divisions present within the Italian American community over Mussolini and the cry of action by some in the anti-Fascist movement against those they perceived as supporting Mussolini's regime. Not all national and military leaders were gripped with fear in the dark months of early 1942, but a good many did panic and take ill-advised actions. Various individuals were apprehended who posed little threat to national security, most notably a barber in Providence, Rhode Island, who made some careless remarks in praise of the Italian war effort that hardly warranted internment. Those caught up in the security dragnet could appeal to flawed review boards that abridged traditional rights of a defendant guaranteed under the U.S. Constitution.

The treatment of Italian nationals residing in the United States during World War II was restrained compared with the mass internment of Japanese Americans; only a small percentage of Italian nationals and Italian Americans were placed in concentration camps. By contrast, during World War I, the vigilantism directed at German Americans led to staggering instances of violence. Moreover, while Woodrow Wilson remained largely silent about the gross violations of civil liberties during World War I, Franklin D. Roosevelt and Francis Biddle affirmed the vital contribution to American life of Italian Americans and other ethnic groups. And Secretary of the Treasury Robert Morgenthau used the war bond campaigns to reaffirm the ethnic pluralism of American society.

DiStasi's discussion of Italian Americans being stripped of their culture as a result of World War II is simplistic. One of the central aspects of Italian American culture that certainly thrived during the war and after 1945 was Roman Catholicism. The Roosevelt administration promoted religious tolerance; for instance, the armed forces appointed unprecedented numbers of Roman Catholic chaplains. Despite tensions with the Vatican over its failure to denounce the Holocaust and papal criticism of the Allied bombing campaign, the Roosevelt administration cultivated good relations with the Roman Catholic Church at home and abroad.

Salvatore J. LaGumina in *The Office of Strategic Services and Italian Americans: The Untold History* offers a narrative that stands at odds with the one offered by DiStasi. Far from shunning the Italian American community, the OSS under General William "Wild Bill" Donovan actively recruited Italian Americans in order to tap their fluency as native speakers of Italian and their often firsthand knowledge of Italy. LaGumina offers a series of biographical vignettes of the Italian Americans who served as agents and the sensitive missions they undertook. Some, like Ernest L. Cuneo, operated at the highest levels serving as a liaison with British Security Coordination. Others from modest working-class backgrounds served in the field and took part in the long campaign to liberate Italy. This work tells some gripping tales of small contingents of OSS agents who managed to convince military garrisons in the Mediterranean to surrender.

While a concise and highly readable account, *The Office of Strategic Services and Italian Americans* draws on a narrow range of secondary sources and only a smattering of primary sources. There are also some striking omissions; for instance, LaGumina's mini-biographies do not draw on the many personnel files for OSS agents available at the U.S. National Archives. Even some obvious sources are not consulted, such as Allen Dulles's published intelligence cables from his Swiss-based operation that included documents related to efforts at engineering the surrender of German forces in Italy in March 1945. One of the sources the author draws upon is my oral history interview with Stephen

Capestro conducted for the Rutgers Oral History Archives (50–51, n72). While it was flattering to have my work tapped for this study, LaGumina did not indicate that he sought a paper trail to further document Capestro's experiences in the OSS.

Some complicated issues raised are dispatched with little significant analysis, especially OSS aid to Italian partisans who often had strong ties to the Communist Party. Surprisingly, LaGumina does not touch upon the postwar legacy of the OSS in Italy. The OSS would prove pivotal to the creation of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), as many former operatives became part of this new agency. Moreover, the CIA would have been heavily involved in Italy in the late 1940s and 1950s in order to prevent the country from falling into the Communist camp.

Despite these limitations, this work does make some important contributions. It underscores that neither the Roosevelt administration nor the armed forces were so completely captive to xenophobia and irrational fears of fifth columnists that they passed on the opportunity to enlist Italian Americans into the OSS. Often the story of the OSS is told, especially in popular history and Hollywood movies, as one of WASPs from Yale going into the intelligence business. LaGumina suggests this view needs a balancing correction and more case studies on the relationship of the OSS with other ethnic Americans in the United States.

Italy's surrender in 1943 and alignment with the United Nations had important implications for Italian prisoners of war held by the United States, as well as for Italian Americans. Although not repatriated back to their homeland, Italian prisoners were given the opportunity to volunteer to aid the American war effort. Flavio G. Conti and Alan R. Perry in *Italian Prisoners of War in Pennsylvania: Allies on the Home Front, 1944–1945*, offer a case study of a quartermaster battalion formed to work at the Letterkenny Army Depot in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania.

In a war characterized by brutality, dehumanization, and war crimes, the microhistory offered by Conti and Perry is a heartening one. Subject to military discipline and granted a number of privileges, including pay, those in Italian service units aided the Allied war efforts significantly. The volunteer status of those serving in Chambersburg ensured their cooperation and enthusiasm in arduous work moving vast quantities of supplies and other duties to maintain this large depot. Morale among "cooperators" would be boosted by the Italian American communities in the region reaching out to those serving in the depot by organizing a range of social events for them, including dances. Friendships, even romances, developed between Italian cooperators working in the depot and civilians living in the community. For groups of Italian cooperators working at the depot, the Army organized outings and

often granted passes to individual Italian soldiers so they could visit relatives living in the vicinity of the camp.

The benign treatment accorded to cooperators did generate controversy, which according to Conti and Perry stemmed from the failure to publicize the existence of Italian POWs present on American soil and their changed status after the surrender of Italy. Strong criticism, especially by veterans groups, emerged nationally and locally over the “coddling” of Italian POWs. This resulted in a reduction of leave privileges for Italian cooperators that sparked a near mutiny among them. Although local commanders restricted travel privileges, they did encourage social functions at the depot that linked the Italian POWs with the wider community. Moreover, leadership of the depot worked to cultivate a positive public image in the press and through public events of the work of the Italian POWs.

One of Conti and Perry’s contributions is the focus on the religious lives of the cooperators. Under the Geneva Conventions, prisoners of war have the right to the free exercise of religion. The Vatican secretary of state took an active interest in the plight of POWs, particularly Italians held within the United States. Not only did the Vatican facilitate communication between prisoners and their families, but a papal nuncio also sought to enlist the American church to meet the prisoners’ spiritual needs by arranging for priests to say Mass in the POW camps. In the case of the Letterkenny depot, the papal nuncio made two visits to the Chambersburg facility to offer Mass and to visit with Italian cooperators. Many cooperators were devout Roman Catholics; a sign of their religiosity was their construction of a chapel on the grounds of the depot. Three Italian soldiers left a lasting religious and cultural legacy in the form of murals in Corpus Christi Catholic Church in Chambersburg.

This book fills a valuable niche in the historiography on the experiences of prisoners of war. Although the experiences of German POWs have produced several excellent monographs, including numerous case studies, few scholars have examined the experiences of Italian prisoners. This work could have been strengthened by placing the experiences of Italian cooperators into a wider context. For instance, the authors briefly touch upon the establishment of a formal program to inculcate democratic values among Italian prisoners through the Prisoner of War Special Project. How did this project fare compared with those aimed at German POWs? Ron Robin in *The Barbed-Wire College: Reeducating German POWs in the United States During World War II* (Robin 1992), argues that efforts to indoctrinate German captives proved spectacularly unsuccessful. Although a solid work of scholarship, Conti and Perry’s work provokes the inevitable question asked of most case studies: How representative are the experiences of Italian prisoners of war in Pennsylvania of those held in other parts of the United States? How did Italian POWs fare who

were held in a region of the United States that lacked strong Italian American communities? Were their experiences as positive as those in Chambersburg?

One of the strengths of Conti and Perry's book is that it does not end the story with the repatriation of Italian cooperators. The authors offer postwar life course histories for many former prisoners that show that they were successfully reintegrated into Italian society. Several friendships forged between prisoners and Italian Americans continued for decades, nurtured by the exchange of letters and even the occasional transatlantic visit.

What to make of the Italian American experience during World War II? Can a grand narrative be written that includes the different facets offered by these three works under review? And how does the Italian American experience fit into the broader story of the United States in World War II? All three works when considered collectively suggest a nuanced and complicated wartime experience for Italian Americans. Persecution and fear were felt by a significant number, especially those living on the West Coast, mixed with opportunities to participate in sensitive intelligence operations of the war for others. And despite a war marked by inhumanity, Italian prisoners of war were treated with dignity by the U.S. Army and received support from the Italian American community.

—G. KURT PIEHLER
Florida State University

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After Identity: Migration, Critique, Italian American Culture.

By Peter Carravetta.

New York: Bordighera Press, 2017.

278 pages.

In *After Identity: Migration, Critique, Italian American Culture*, Peter Carravetta invites a rethinking of Italian America beyond the problematic framework of identity discourse. Carravetta notes that identity, as a category that labels a group on the basis of sameness, imposes a collective homogeneity on internally diverse subjects. To declare a singular identity is to erase an interior plurality, and this in turn presents a problem because it differentiates one entity from