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## The Italian American Community's Responses to Discrimination during World War Two.

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The Italian American Community's Responses to  
Discrimination during World War Two.

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An Honors Thesis Submitted for partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation with  
honors in History from Hamline University

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## Abstract

This research covers the treatment and internment of Italian American residents during the Second World War to lay bare infringements of civil rights by the United States Government. During this time, Italian American residents were subject to persecution in the form of job discrimination, censorship, detainment, and internment. The scholarly work surrounding the topic thus far primarily discussed the causes and details of Japanese internment, only referencing the treatment of Italian or German Americans. The research on the treatment of Italian American residents during the war centers around the idea of the secret history and try to understand what legislation the U.S. passed to control these individuals. While most historians focused on the question of why the history is unknown, my research centers on the community and their reactions to World War Two.

To accomplish this, I studied laws passed by the U.S. Government designed to control and distinguish the Italian, Japanese, and German resident and non-resident communities. I also studied the investigation conducted by the Department of Justice that included court hearings; these detailed who was interned and where, and what these individuals were interned for. Finally, from looking at cultural artifacts and newspapers written by Italian American residents I conclude how different demographics responded to the circumstances they faced.

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## Introduction

Italian Americans faced discrimination both before and during World War Two. This includes employment discrimination, racial discrimination, and both verbal and physical assaults. During the war, The United States government acted out of xenophobia, passing a series of legislation which restricted the liberties of the Italian American community, labeling some as Enemy Aliens, interning others. Yet, this topic continues to be neglected through history scholarship. Moreover, what is even lesser known is the reaction of the Italian American community to this discrimination. In this research, I ask how the Italian American community responded, what parts of the community responded, and what influenced their decisions.

The scholarly work surrounding the topic of discrimination against immigrant and minority communities during the Second World War thus far primarily discussed the causes and details of Japanese internment, merely referencing the treatment of Italian Americans. Of the secondary sources specifically on Italian Americans in World War Two, most center around the idea that it is unknown by most people, trying to understand why the history is so unknown, and what legal policies caused it. While most historians focused on the question of why the history is unknown, my research centers on the community. Specifically, what pressures on the community influenced change, how did different demographics responded to the laws, the internment, censorship, and the effects these factors left on them.

To do this, I first provide the historiography of Italian Immigration to the U.S., highlighting and how discrimination and struggle impacted the building of new lives in the U.S. Then I delve deeper into the history of Italians in America, exploring community organization, religion, employment, and return migration. Finally, I will study the reactions or changes taken by three groups of the Italian American community. First, newspaper articles published by

*L'Unita del Popolo*, a communist publication, then Italian Americans interactions with the church during the war; and lastly the fraternal by-laws of the Order of the Sons of Italy. Through these sources, I will attempt to describe the Italian American responses to their circumstances during the Second World War.

### Historiography

Much of the research on internment in World War Two focused on the discrimination the Japanese immigrants and Japanese American residents endured during the war, but an increasing amount is working to uncover the understudied stories of Italian American residents. The study of Italian Americans has recently gained more attention, being studied through the context of immigrant and refugee studies. Through reading the body of research surrounding the topic of Italians immigrating to The United States, common themes and questions arose regarding the ways in which culture transferred, how religion played into the lives of new immigrants, and how their lives were structured once they were settled. Further questions that came up in this research surrounded the ways in which the Italian American community interacted with the various different ethnic groups around them, as well.<sup>1</sup> What remained consistent, however, is that through the hardship of travel, war, and times of distress, immigrant communities had to change and negotiate their identity to best suit their survival in foreign lands.

In this portion of my research I will address the debate among historians regarding the integration of Italians into American society prior to and during the Second World War. Then I will study how historians explain the secret history of internment, censorship, and

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<sup>1</sup> Pozzetta, George E. "Immigrants and Ethnics: The State of Italian-American Historiography." *Journal of American Ethnic History* 9, no. 1 (1989): 67-95.

discrimination. First, I will examine the findings of early Italian American history including Vecoli, Nelli, Yans-Mclaughlin, and Bayor, in order to demystify “the melting pot,” and question the ways culture carried over to Italian communities abroad. Then I will present the arguments of Disasi, Scherini, Fox, and Dickerson and their understandings of the secret history of the Italian American internment, and how the U.S. government targeted them. Through examining the wide scopes of these works, I contextualize the experiences of the Italian American community during the war while also explaining how the outside pressures impacted the community throughout their history in America.

Boneno takes a look at the social life of Italian Americans and the problems they faced. She begins her text, *From Migrant to Millionaire: the Story of the Italian-American in New Orleans*, by detailing the early immigration of Italians to The United States, highlighting issues of assimilation, as well as social, religious, intellectual, and political developments. She further explains the hardships facing poor laborers in southern Italy during unification, which prompted the mass immigration. Boneno focuses her work on the community of Italian Americans living in New Orleans; dissecting the issues of language barriers and education they faced while also celebrating the actions taken by the community (ESL classes, community organizations) to mend some of the problems they faced.<sup>2</sup> Her work showed how, when facing challenges such as language barriers and education, the Italian American community came together to address the issue and resolve it. This is just one of the ways the community would develop and adapt through their history in the U.S.

Tomasi and Stibli surveyed works studying Italian Americans and religion. They pay

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<sup>2</sup> Boneno, Roselyn Bologna, "*From Migrant to Millionaire: the Story of the Italian-American in New Orleans, 1880-1910 (Louisiana)*." (1986). *LSU Historical Dissertations and Theses*. 4286. [https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool\\_disstheses/4286](https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_disstheses/4286)

particular attention to Italian Americans and Catholicism and how the study of the two independently developed the other since they were so connected. Furthermore, they assert that upon first immigrating to The United States, immigrants arrived with few social or communal organizations to latch onto. Therefore, socially progressive Americans viewed the church as an avenue for integrating immigrants, specifically Catholic Italians, into society. It then outlines the relationship between Italian immigrants and the press, the history of Catholicism, and immigrants' relationship with their culture in the face of American Catholicism.<sup>3</sup> The survey proves that upon arrival the Italians community lacked religious structure and made concessions by joining American Catholic churches, therefore assimilating to reinstate some level of familiarity while abroad.

Lorizzo and Mondello also surveyed the Italian American experience. They found that when Italian Americans first began traveling to The United States they faced a myriad of social and economic difficulties and that they seemed to live in a small enclave that experienced different struggles compared to other immigrant groups. In their work, they not only discuss the domestic lives of Italian Americans but they also provide background into the relationship of Italy and America to provide context for the reader.<sup>4</sup>

In the works of Vecoli, Nelli, and Yans-Mclaughlin, all three historians discuss the narrative of the “melting pot” opting for either one where Old Italian traditions survived the immigration process in their entirety, or the traditions did not. These sources show the impact stressors such as the process of immigration have on communities and their traditions. This will

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<sup>3</sup> Tomasi, Silvano M., and Edward C. Stibili. *Italian Americans and Religion: An Annotated Bibliography*. Center Migration Studies, 1992.

<sup>4</sup> Lorizzo, Luciano J., and Salvatore Mondello. "The Italian Americans." *Italian Americans: Bridges to Italy, Bonds to America* (1980): 183.



contribute to the study of community responses in World War Two by providing context for surviving traditions and how they evolved through their history.

In Vecoli's article *Contadini in Chicago: A critique of the uprooted*, he takes a revisionist look at Handlin's views of immigration. Vecoli provides a new perspective on Italian American life by writing about Italians in rural America who lived on farms and worked on railway construction camps, thereby undermining the common narrative of Italian Americans only settling in larger cities. He also challenges the image of Italian life presented by Oscar Handlin, who discusses the disruptive impact of immigration on culture. Instead, he proposes that cultures survived the ocean crossing and significantly influenced the lives of Italians in America.<sup>5</sup> This shows that despite the difficult processes and challenges, some aspects of culture and identity were not affected by immigration.

In Yans-McLaughlin's text, *Family and Community: Italian Immigrants in Buffalo*, she deemphasizes immigrant disorganization and alienation, while also bringing to light more minute aspects of the Italian American family dynamic given the economic hardships they experienced. She claims the culture of the immigrant did not only make it safely across ocean travel but rather it thrived and grew in doing so, undermining the narrative which states that immigration is damaging to culture. She claims culture is brought to the new world and changed, but not lost, which is not an entirely negative thing. In another one of her books, *Immigration Reconsidered: History, Sociology, and Politics*, she explores the general history of immigration and delineates from the common narrative to glean an understanding of what made America what it is today, stating that immigrants are active participants in their immigration rather than passive victims,

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<sup>5</sup> Vecoli, Rudolph J. "Contadini in Chicago: A critique of the uprooted." *The Journal of American History* 51, no. 3 (1964): 404-417.

echoing Vecoli's sentiments.<sup>6</sup>

Bayor, who also disagreed with the concept of the melting pot, studied intergroup conflict (among Irish, Italian, Jewish, and German immigrants) in New York City. He believed the conflict between multiple ethnic groups was caused by a variety of threats, and further exacerbated by the intersections of social, economic, and political oppression. He did note Italian Americans were particularly in conflict with Irish Americans, partly due to political, employment and religious reasons since the Irish were also Catholic and dominated the church at that time. This caused the vulnerable groups to lash out in their defenselessness.<sup>7</sup>

In *Beyond the Melting Pot*, Glazer and Moynihan describe what Italians did when they first arrived in The United States, specifically looking at immigration from 1929-1941. They begin the task of explaining New York's immigrant population, putting forth five essays which characterize the five immigrant groups, but first breaking down the unique nature of New York City and how it operates in an incredibly complex way compared to different cities based on the sheer amount of people and different cultures existing in one geographical area. They first delve into the realm of the Italian Americans and begin by describing the nature of Italians' first encounters abroad in China and then continues to discuss the types of jobs and skills Italians had once coming to The United States. In New York, the early Italians who came over were from Genoa and Venice. They were musicians, opera singers, impressionists, political émigrés, and street musicians. They describe this early migration as a proletarian one made of peasants and laborers, seeking seasonal jobs around Europe who eventually made their way to The United

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<sup>6</sup> Yans-McLaughlin, Virginia. *Family and community: Italian immigrants in Buffalo, 1880-1930*. University of Illinois Press, 1977.

<sup>7</sup> Bayor, Ronald H. *Neighbors in Conflict: The Irish, Germans, Jews, and Italians of New York City, 1929-1941, Issue 1*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978, 1978.

States. Compared to Italians who migrated to Brazil or other European countries who amassed comfortable wealth through hard work, Italians in New York who worked hard only achieved a moderately comfortable lifestyle. They also emphasize the division between northern and southern Italians and how immigration differed for both. The northerners were more from the gentry while the southerners were clearly peasants who were largely illiterate and impoverished. This distinction is played out once again when the two very different groups arrive to The United States and begin settling in their respective communities.<sup>8</sup> Their essays show the breakdown between class and how that influenced what immigrants did upon arrival. This is important since economic privilege aided particular groups. This also helps contextualize the multifaceted nature of the Italian American immigrant community, and how this could influence their possible responses to war.

Nelli's work on Italian Americans challenges Vecoli's and takes a more environmentalist point of view. Nelli claims that the Italian American community succumbed to external pressures, instead adopting new American customs. Evoking images of Handlin, Nelli discusses the assimilation of Italian Americans, their experiences of social mobility, and the ways the new world environment impacted immigrants. Nelli describes rapid deterioration of ethnic cultures, institutions, and common community, claiming newcomers stripped themselves of old world traits, favoring new American ideals.<sup>9</sup>

Much like Vecoli and Yans-Mclaughlin, Cinel's research on Italian Americans in San Francisco documents the continuation of old world traditions in The United States while

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<sup>8</sup> Glazer, Nathan, and Daniel Patrick Moynihan. *Beyond the Melting Pot: The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians, and Irish of New York City*. Vol. 33. Cambridge, MA: mit Press, 1970.

<sup>9</sup> Nelli, Humbert S. *Italians in Chicago, 1880-1930: A study in ethnic mobility*. Vol. 2. Oxford University Press, USA, 1970.

studying the settlement patterns of Italians, too. He discovered that the immigrants who arrived in The United States after 1912 were more likely to spend more time establishing themselves than the Italians who immigrated before the First World War. When considering cultural shifts and characteristics, he argued that traditional cultures were adaptive and changed to meet new demands, meaning that Italian Americans chose to maintain certain traditions which suited their new life in the new world, but often adjusted them to fit new conditions, and to mold into society to an extent.<sup>10</sup> His work is one of the clearest examples of how the Italian American community adapted their traditions to succeed in a new world.

William Demarco also emphasized the power of Old World loyalties to the Italian community by studying Italian Americans living in Boston. Once coming to The United States, Italian communities broke down into a smaller neighborhood that hinged on common identifications such as religion and social life and occupation. He pointed out that no other ethnic group entered the U.S in such high numbers at that time, which is remarkable but understandable given the socio-economic issues plaguing Italians back home.<sup>11</sup>

Erasmus Ciccolella in his book *Vibrant Life: 1886-1942 Trenton's Italian Americans*, examines parts of the Italian American experience from 1886 when Italian Americans were first immigrating to The United States through 1942, focusing particularly on the Italian community in Trenton, New Jersey. To do this, he studied the employment, education, and social organizations of the Italian American community while also paying attention to their politics and the lives of their children, to propose a wide view of their experience.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Cinel, Dino. *From Italy to San Francisco: the immigrant experience*. Stanford University Press, 1982.

<sup>11</sup> DeMarco, William M. *Ethnics and Enclaves: Boston's Italian North End*. Vol. 31. UMI Research Press, 1981; Bruner, Jerome S., and Jeanette Sayre. "Shortwave Listening in an Italian Community." *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 5, no. 4 (1941): 640-56. <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.hamline.edu:2048/stable/2744704>.

<sup>12</sup> Ciccolella, Erasmo S. *Vibrant Life, 1886-1942: Trenton's Italian Americans*. Center Migration Studies, 1986.

Charles Ferronni focused on the assimilation of Italian Americans in his text *The Italians in Cleveland: A Study in Assimilation*. In the text, he discusses the ways in which community institutions such as churches, schools, and immigrant organizations played in the development of community and the process of assimilation. He found that the community organizations allowed for the Italian American community to hold onto some traditions and embrace new parts of life.<sup>13</sup>

Gabaccia has studied the social and communal organizations of Italian Americans. In her research Gabaccia asked why immigrants from the same settlement formed community in different ways despite coming from the same region of Italy. This was explained by looking at the occupations of different Italian communities, and by looking at the different places Italian Americans settled. For the most part, Gabaccia found, Italian Americans settled in areas that were very diverse so they were mingling with many different cultures at once.<sup>14</sup>

Harney and Scarpaci studied the occupation of Italians immigrants to The United States from Sicily. They found that the migration of Sicilians to Louisiana was for the cane harvest, where they were subjected to racism as they worked in sharecropping, tenantry, and even in land ownership. Reflecting on her own experience growing up in an Italian immigrant household, Scarpaci also focused her work on the lives of Italians living in Brooklyn as it gave her context of her own identity, and how she fit into the narrative. She took a lot from Vecoli's work too, particularly because he also strayed from the "melting pot" view of American immigration.<sup>15</sup> Through abandoning the "melting pot" narrative, their text shows how the community held onto important traditions, despite the discrimination they experienced. This is significant because it exhibits the strength of the community in adverse times.

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<sup>13</sup> Ferroni, Charles D. "The Italians in Cleveland: a study in assimilation." (1970)

<sup>14</sup> Gabaccia, Donna R. "Neither Padrone slaves nor Primitive rebels: Sicilians on two continents." *Struggle a Hard Battle. Essays on Working Class Immigrants* (1986): 113.

<sup>15</sup> Harney, Robert F., and Vincenza Scarpaci. *Little Italies in North America*. No. 1. Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1981.

When it comes to the scholarship around the internment and treatment of Italian Americans in World War Two, the body of work is considerably smaller for a couple reasons. First, since the number of Italian Americans interned during the war was smaller than the population of Japanese Americans who were interned, there are fewer people to tell their story. Second, with the smaller population of survivors, there are even fewer who want to bring attention to themselves and relive what happened.<sup>16</sup>

In Disasi's text, *Una Storia Segreta The Secret History of Italian American Evacuation and Internment in World War II* he uses a collection of first-hand narratives and articles by other leading scholars to provide a clear glimpse into the lives of Italian Americans in the Second World War. He argued that Italian Americans had to essentially prove their loyalty to the government of The United States by forgetting or rejecting their Italian heritage, instead adopting an American lifestyle and family life. He also argues that the biased targeting spurred feelings of shame in the Italian communities.<sup>17</sup> This discrimination had a pretty clear impact on the Italian American community. This aids the study of the communities' responses to the war by showing how previous generations succumbed to societal pressures, and in turn adjusted their behavior, and traditions.

In her text, *When Italian Americans Were Enemy Aliens*, Scherini primarily aims to retell the secret history of Italian treatment during World War Two, delving into the issues of how the Italian American community was treated when America first joined the war, and how that opinion changed over time in relation to increased escalation in the conflict and the treatment of

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<sup>16</sup> Iacovetta, Franca, Roberto Perin, and Angelo Principe, eds. *Enemies within: Italian and other internees in Canada and abroad*. University of Toronto Press, 2000. 300.

<sup>17</sup> DiStasi, Lawrence, ed. *Una Storia Segreta: The Secret History of Italian American Evacuation and Internment During World War II*. Heyday, 2001.

other immigrant communities. She further argues that the selection of Italian Americans for internment was just as arbitrary as any other displaced group.<sup>18</sup>

James L Dickerson in his book, *Inside America's Concentration Camps: Two Centuries of Internment and Torture* closely examines Italian American internment in order to place the use of internment and torture during the Second World War into context against the American backdrop of atrocities. He cites America's long history of torture, beginning with the rejection of non-religious thinkers in colonial America, to modern day prejudice and discrimination based on race and religion, and aims to create a linear understanding of the use of torture in American domestic and foreign affairs. When discussing the displacement of Italian Americans in World War Two, he explains how The United States government first wanted to use the Italian American population to target and fight Mussolini, but then shifted towards censorship and detainment shortly after the Pearl Harbor attacks in a wave of increasing xenophobia.<sup>19</sup>

As shown above, there were examples of the Italian American community adjusting to change in different ways; be that creating an ESL class to assist the community, letting go of certain traditions, or engaging in new American customs to preserve some semblance of normalcy. In either case, it is clear that the pressures they felt impacted their lives, and some in negative ways. Below, I continue to examine the relationship between transition, pressure, and the Italian American community from the time of early immigration through the war.

### Italian Immigration Prior to World War Two

In 1861 Italy unified as a nation, which sent economic shocks through the country. Due to this unification, the southern part of Italy experienced the brunt of the social, economic, and

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<sup>18</sup> Scherini, Rose D. "When Italian Americans Were Enemy Aliens." 2001.

<sup>19</sup> Dickerson, James L. *Inside America's concentration camps: two centuries of internment and torture*. Chicago Review Press, 2010.

political upheaval, with the effects hurting the most vulnerable sharecroppers and laborers in the land. As a result, from 1880-1915, 13 million Italians left their home for opportunities elsewhere, with roughly 4 million ending up in The United States by 1914.<sup>20</sup> But, despite facing economic struggles back home, Italians who made the voyage to The United States ended up being moderately comfortable and actually began to flourish in their own communities. They created a new social and cultural scene with concerts, social clubs, or other forms of entertainment.<sup>21</sup> Italians continued to immigrate to America until a restriction was placed on immigration in 1924 with the passage of the Johnson Act.<sup>22</sup> The primary and not so covert focus of this act was to shift the designation of America away from a place for the poor and oppressed of other nations to come seeking refuge.<sup>23</sup> Under the Johnson Act, The United States government decreed that the number of Italians immigrating to The U.S. had to be three percent of the population listed on the 1910 census. This meant about 42,000 Italians could make the trip overseas, just a fraction of their previous immigration numbers.<sup>24</sup> Later that year, Johnson proposed new restrictions on immigration; he suggested that instead of three percent, the quota should be dropped down to two percent and that this figure should be based on the 1890 census, not the one from 1910. This hit Italy especially hard, reducing their immigration cap to 3,845 Italians a year.<sup>25</sup> This was quite the shock to Italy since over 400,000 Italians had requested passports that year.<sup>26</sup> Through this legislation, discrimination against Italians continued in The United States and deepened once Italy joined the Axis in the Second World War.

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<sup>20</sup> Choate, Mark I. *Emigrant Nation: The Making of Italy Abroad*. Harvard University Press, 2008.

<sup>21</sup> Briggs, John *An Italian Passage: Immigrants to Three American Cities, 1890-1930* (New Haven, 1978) 272.

<sup>22</sup> Finkelstein, Monte S. "The Johnson Act, Mussolini and Fascist Emigration Policy: 1921-1930." *Journal of American Ethnic History* 8, no. 1 (1988): 38-55.

<sup>23</sup> Finkelstein, 38.

<sup>24</sup> Finkelstein. 39

<sup>25</sup> Finkelstein, 40.

<sup>26</sup> Finkelstein, 40.



Most historians agree that the Italian immigrants coming to The United States were not completely committed to Old World beliefs but were ready and willing to ways of the New World in America. John Briggs in his book *An Italian Passage: Immigrants to Three American Cities* discussed how many Italian immigrants were not “old world minds and souls who either clung irrationally and at an unreasonable cost to an irrelevant past, or who submitted passively to the powerful forces changing the future.”<sup>27</sup> In fact, most historians accept that immigrants were, “rationale, confident, capable, and talented individuals who contributed to shaping their future rather than receiving their destinies wholly defined and packaged by others.”<sup>28</sup> When Italians began the massive immigration to The United States just prior to the 20th century, Leone Carpi discovered that a majority of those coming to America in the mid-19th century were either political refugees, merchants escaping uncertain traditions, or citizens of the province of Genoa who have a reported history of overseas travel. For Italy, international migration took off after 1875. From 1876 to 1880, 100,000 Italians immigrated every year. By 1887 that number would surpass 200,000, and in 1913 this number will peak at 700,000, roughly 3% of their national population.<sup>29</sup> Before the 1880s, most Italian immigrants set their sights on living in South America, but from 1880 an influx began arriving in The United States. Of the Italian immigrants who immigrated to The United States, many were channeled there by Italian immigration agents to avoid poverty and starvation. There was also a correlation discovered between successful harvests, imports, and exports to and from The United States with the rate of immigration; if there was a poor harvest in Italy, then there would be a significant increase in immigration to The

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<sup>27</sup> Briggs, John W, *An Italian Passage: Immigrants to Three American Cities, 1890-1930*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978. Pp. xxii, 348.

<sup>28</sup> Briggs, John W. 348

<sup>29</sup> Cinel, Dino. 36

United States to compensate for their lack of employment, money, resources.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, Cinel goes on to explain the lives of some peasants should they stay in Italy, “peasants live lives unfit for humans. Even in the most prosperous regions of the north, peasants work from sunrise to sunset, seven days a week. Regardless of how hard they try, they will never be able to improve their conditions if they stay where they are.”<sup>31</sup> Cinel argues that for poor Italians in the south, the conditions are even worse. Given the low quality of life, paired with the continued agricultural depression in the 1880s through the 1890s, it is easily understood the grave and impending struggle facing these Italian laborers and peasants which caused them to immigrate in such high numbers from their lot in Italy to a hopefully better and more prosperous life in the U.S. When peasants who went to The United States came back with small accumulated wealth, that fever spread to the other peasants and helped spur the interest in overseas travel to America.

As stated above, the fever for immigration to The U.S. from Italy grew at an increasing rate once returnees came back with their “success” stories. In 1900, “The Fifth Annual Report of the Italian Bureau of immigration in New York” released a census for the Italian American population, citing that nearly 77,000 Italian Americans were residing in The United States, specifically that New York and Philadelphia were the homes to 50,000 Italian American immigrants. The remaining 27,000 were primarily centered in Connecticut, Illinois, Massachusetts, Louisiana, California, Rhode Island, and Ohio. Of the 77,000 Italian Americans, a considerable portion (82%) came from provinces on the southern tip of Italy, while the other 18% came from the north, which is not surprising considering the economic struggles facing southern Italian residents since unification in the 1860’s.<sup>32</sup> What differentiates Italian

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<sup>30</sup> Cinel, Dino. 38.

<sup>31</sup> Cinel, Dino. 39.

<sup>32</sup> E. H. D. "Italian Immigration." *Publications of the American Statistical Association* 7, no. 51 (1900): 41-43.

immigrants is that Italians were the sole immigrant group that experienced such high rates of return migration back to Italy because their immigration to The United States was driven primarily by economic need.<sup>33</sup> Cerase's theory of return immigration can be broken down into three common patterns: The initial realization the immigrant has cut himself off from what he left behind; the achievement of economic success, and what he will compare to what success looks like in Italy; or, failure to achieve economic security and success, falling prey to stereotypes and societal pressures. For a majority of the Italian immigrants, their stay in The United States over the course of 15 to 20 years was interrupted by trips to Italy, with only 38% remaining in The United States for the entire duration of their stay.<sup>34</sup>

When Italians did immigrate to The United States, Northerners were often the ones to settle first and were viewed as the "model" immigrant group. Shortly after the southern Italian immigrants were to follow, often laborers, working at low paying jobs.<sup>35</sup> In San Francisco, this was a different story. Northern Italians actually comprised around 70% of the Italian population while Southern Italians were only hovering around 20%.<sup>36</sup> Once they settled in, many Italian immigrants found themselves joining into the rung of low-class workers, acting as blacksmiths, tending to land, or even holding small market positions. But, for many other Italian Americans, this was not the case. Since Italians were the last international demographic to arrive in many cities across The United States, the competition for jobs was much steeper and the positions available were less than desirable. Cinel contends that in San Francisco, 43% of employed, male Italian immigrants were in the personal service sector as maids, janitors, bartenders, waiters, and

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<sup>33</sup> Cerase, Francesco P. "A study of Italian migrants returning from the USA." *The International Migration Review* 1, no. 3 (1967): 67-74. 1.

<sup>34</sup> Cerase, Francesco P. 63

<sup>35</sup> Cinel, Dino.. *From Italy to San Francisco: the immigrant experience*. Stanford, Calif. : Stanford University Press, 1982. <http://hdl.handle.net.ezproxy.hamline.edu:2048/2027/heb.00517.0001.001>.

<sup>36</sup> Cinel, Dino. 21.

street workers. The other roughly 50% percent of the working male Italian immigrant population worked in low paying transportation jobs or manufacturing mechanical jobs.<sup>37</sup>

For Italians making the trip to The United States, it was not uncommon that they would reach out, or be contacted by immigrants already settled in the U.S. who immigrated from the same community back home in Italy. Over time, this pattern helped establish tight-knit communities throughout the country. These communities often had members who would help newcomers access employment, such as a paesano. A paesano, for instance, is someone often from the same village, who also helped newcomers find housing and stable employment. Having these community members help them was also beneficial because these immigrants could now negotiate and talk business in their own dialect, rather than struggle to navigate a new land with no language ability, and then try to find a job on top of that.<sup>38</sup>

During the interwar period the Italian American community flourished and their influence on politics grew as well. Politicians were becoming keenly aware of the impact immigrants had on elections since they comprised a large part of the population. Furthermore, politicians also realized the importance that the foreign press played in educating voters on public matters.<sup>39</sup> In Philadelphia the Italian American community experienced changes in how their community was organized, affecting anything from jobs, politics, and religion. Regarding jobs, the Italian American community enjoyed the increase in positions available to them. Italian Americans had entered positions in employment offices, even gaining the support of the

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<sup>37</sup> Cinel, Dino. 135

<sup>38</sup> Luconi, Stefano. "The Changing Meaning of Ethnic Identity among Italian Americans in Philadelphia during the Inter-war Years." *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 63, no. 4 (1996): 561-578.563.

<sup>39</sup> Luconi, Stephano. 1033.

Republican party of Philadelphia at the time who assisted in job creation.<sup>40</sup> However, Italians were still underrepresented in politics. As of 1933, only 6 members of the Republican Party were of Italian descent.<sup>41</sup> Regarding religion, Italian Americans were facing discrimination and exclusion even from Catholic churches in the form of ordinances barring Italians from attending particular churches. This caused the community to harden themselves against the attacks as a way to preserve their culture, even engaging in protests and demonstrations.<sup>42</sup>

During the Second World War, Italians in Philadelphia condemned Roosevelt, saying he betrayed them by invading Italy, resulting in a drop in voter turnout over 10 percent for the Democratic Party at the time. Yet, despite their Italian pride, anger, and fear for the war, Italian Americans still found it in themselves to identify as Americans of Italian descent, rather than simply Italian during the war. 400,000 young Italian American men enlisted in The United States armed forces in 1942.<sup>43</sup> World War Two worked as a catalyst towards the assimilation of Italian subcultures throughout The United States by placing pressure on the community to express extreme levels of patriotism, thus abandoning their unique identities in favor of one American nationality.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, it could be said that the pressure of war influenced different parts of the Italian American community in different ways, but the primary response being a negotiation of identity and culture.

The narrative surrounding the Catholic Church and immigrant groups claims the Catholic Church was the unifying factor for families, which helped assimilation into American life. The Church was also viewed as a strong influencer, serving as a conservative ideal in quelling

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<sup>40</sup> Luconi, Stephano. 568.

<sup>41</sup> Luconi, Stephano. 568.

<sup>42</sup> Luconi, Stephano. 569.

<sup>43</sup> Cerase, Francesco P. 573

<sup>44</sup> Luconi, Stephano 574.

possible radicalism among new immigrants. The Church introduced millions of immigrants to American political and social ways of life and expectations.<sup>45</sup> Yet, the scholarly discourse about the Catholic Church and immigrants in America fails to analyze how the church interacted with immigrants it was not so successful with, or the difficulties in breaking down differences between old world religious institutions and new ones. The immigration of Italians to The United States was the second largest influx of Catholics, only falling short of the Irish immigrant population. Despite living in such close proximity to the Pope prior to immigration, it did not equate piety for all Italian immigrants. Rather, the new Italian immigrant population was trouble for the American Catholic church. In the eyes of the Church, Italian immigrants, “were succumbing to religious indifference and even apostasy, deserting to the camp of the enemies of true faith,” meaning that they were not showing the same enthusiasm for the church as other immigrant groups had in the past.<sup>46</sup> Since fewer Italians were attending church services, animosity towards the group grew among other ethnicities in the Catholic Church. Additionally, anti-clerical sentiment among Italian immigrants was peaking, as many believed the papacy is the exact opposite of progress for Italy. Of the rare Catholic newspapers published in The United States by Italian immigrants, few were so bold as to explicitly call out the Church, claiming it is the root of all injustice against the disadvantaged Italian peasants.<sup>47</sup> Historically, the church in Italy and specifically the papacy had been associated with the upper class, landowners, and not with the rural peasant class of the south. In smaller villages, the rural Italians expressed similar attitudes toward local clergy members as corruption and greed run rampant through the church.

Italians were also far less likely to attend mass or build churches because the nature of

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<sup>45</sup> Vecoli, Rudolph J. "Prelates and peasants: Italian immigrants and the Catholic Church." *Journal of Social history* (1969): 217

<sup>46</sup> Vecoli, 220.

<sup>47</sup> Vecoli, 229.

their immigration patterns. Since the goal of immigrating to America was never to transition there permanently, it made it hard to lead a consistent religious life. For Italians, their goal was to work in America for a while until they earned enough money to support their life back home, or improve their quality of life.<sup>48</sup> Also, because of the nature of the jobs Italians worked in moving to The United States, they often had to work on Sundays and had no choice but not to attend mass.

Of course, some Italians who immigrated to The U.S. did not stay there once finding work, but if an immigrant had decided that his life was better off in America and that he could support his family there, then he would request they move to The U.S to join him. At the base of most Italian immigration, the family was at the center, always. Italians who emigrated to The United States from the southern part of Italy felt a particularly strong draw to their family, and community. In this vein, some villages would have droves of men traveling to The United States together to find work. Once they arrived, they would stick together and form “Little Italies” all throughout the country. Through this process, community members were able to band together in tenement housing or smaller towns, which helped preserve their cultural identity in a sometimes hostile environment.<sup>49</sup>

Since many Italians were immigrating to The United States with little to no English abilities, there was a need for someone to help in finding employment, housing, and general assistance for them, this person was the Padrone. The Padrone served to assist American employers and new immigrants by acting as the middleman since neither side understood how to

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<sup>48</sup>Angelo di Domenica, *Protestant Witness of a New American* (Chicago, 1956), 42; *America*, XII (Dec. 19, 1914), 243.

<sup>49</sup>Vecoli, Rudolf J, "Contadini in Chicago: A Critique of The Uprooted," *The Journal of American History*, LI (Dec. 1964), 408.

navigate the customs of the other. New immigrants did not understand American business practices, and business owners and employers did not understand the traditions of immigrants. With help from the Padrone, the newcomers could make connections and find employment or housing opportunities in an unfamiliar land.<sup>50</sup> Padroni would advertise particular jobs, find the necessary number of men, and bring them to the work site. They would often find room and board for the immigrant workers, sell them steamship or railway tickets, send funds back to their families abroad, and other necessary services for the immigrants they worked with, too.<sup>51</sup>

While this seems like a good service, it too was riddled with corruption. Padroni would advertise false information regarding job offerings, pay levels, and location of jobs. This would result in new immigrants signing contracts not knowing the full responsibility of the job, where it was, or how much they were really being paid.<sup>52</sup> Padroni were also given the power to run the commissary on job sites, selling food or other necessary supplies. This too became an outlet for corruption because padroni would increase the prices of products, sometimes 50-100 percent. In some cases, bosses would send their workers to purchase work supplies and tools from the commissary, unaware of the extent of the markups. In other cases, bosses would turn the men's wages over to the padroni in the commissary for them to allocate, which was equally mismanaged. The abuses of this system are unfortunate, but without it, these immigrants would probably not have found employment at all.<sup>53</sup> In response to the rampant abuse, immigrant societies and protective services began educating immigrants on workers' rights, anti-padrone literature, and there were even laws passed regarding labor bosses in multiple states to protect

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<sup>50</sup> Pozzetta, George E. "A Padrone Looks at Florida: Labor Recruiting and the Florida East Coast Railway." *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 54, no. 1 (1975): 74-84. 75.

<sup>51</sup> Pozzetta, George E 75.

<sup>52</sup> Pozzetta, George E 76.

<sup>53</sup> Pozzetta, George E 77.



immigrant workers from hostile work environments.<sup>54</sup>

Outside of work, new Italian immigrants faced another type of discrimination in the form of overt violence. In 1910, there were multiple instances when Italian Americans were subject to lynching. In September of 1910, Two Italian American laborers were accused of killing an accountant for a well-established cigar company in Tampa Florida.<sup>55</sup> These two men were part of a series of lynchings involving Americans of Italian descent, from the 1880's through 1910 there were at least 34 Italian Americans lynched, not including those from small towns who were not necessarily accounted for.<sup>56</sup> Another instance followed the death of David Hennessy, the police superintendent of New Orleans. After his death, a mob of townspeople broke into the jail and shot and killed 11 Italian inmates. Of those who had yet not died, they dragged them from the prison and lynched them outside. There was also a series of hangings through the south, from Mississippi, Arkansas, and West Virginia. Through all this, it was not necessarily the incidents that provoked the hanging, rather the ethnicity of the victims.<sup>57</sup> Despite already facing difficulties finding employment and establishing a life for themselves, certain parts of the community had to deal with the harmful stereotyping and outright violence to survive.

When Italians first arrived in The United States, scholars observed and debated the nature of the communities they lived in. Some argued that Italians would mingle with other immigrants on the coast; the other insisted that regional differences would persist like they did in Europe. For the most part, the latter was true. The communities in California for immigrants were quite

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<sup>54</sup> Pozzetta, George E 77.

<sup>55</sup> Luconi, Stefano. "Tampa's 1910 Lynching: The Italian-American Perspective and Its Implications." *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 88, no. 1 (2009): 30-53.

<sup>56</sup> Luconi, Stefano 31.

<sup>57</sup> Luconi, Stefano 33.

separated, creating a sense of loss and isolation for the communities.<sup>58</sup> Upon arrival, Americans were woefully unfamiliar with the history and culture of Italy, like they were with a lot of foreign groups, which spurred initial anxiety and distrust. This built the foundation for a weak relationship between the two communities from the start and would contribute to the ongoing abuse and ignorance towards Italian Americans.<sup>59</sup>

This history of the Italian American community reveals the ways Italian immigrants and second-generation Italian Americans had to change themselves in order to survive and avoid violence or further discrimination. Regarding the church, Italian Americans began attending more Americanized churches. Italian Americans began participating in superfluous holidays to prove their allegiance, giving up a part of themselves for survival. Transitioning to how the Italian American community responded to World War Two, it is important to consider the myriad of groups within one immigrant community, and how their individual culture or interpretation of it will impact their response.

By the time The United States entered the Second World War, there were around 695,000 Italian American non-residents under the status of “Enemy Alien,” out of a population of near five millions.<sup>60</sup> Coined during the war, the term “Enemy Alien” is legally defined as any, “native, citizen, denizen or subject of any foreign nation or government with which a domestic nation or government is in conflict with and who are liable to be apprehended, restrained,

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<sup>58</sup> Cinel, Dino. *From Italy to San Francisco: the immigrant experience*. Stanford University Press, 1982. 257

<sup>59</sup> Stella, Antonio. *Some aspects of Italian immigration to The United States*. Ayer Company Pub, 1975. 4

<sup>60</sup> 106th U.S Congress. “World War II Enemy Alien Control Program Overview.” *National Archives and Records Administration*, National Archives and Records Administration, [www.archives.gov/research/immigration/enemy-aliens-overview.html](http://www.archives.gov/research/immigration/enemy-aliens-overview.html).; Corsi, Edward. "Italian immigrants and their children." *The Annals of the American academy of political and social science* 223, no. 1 (1942): 100-106.

secured and removed. Usually, but not always, the countries are in a state of declared war.”<sup>61</sup>

Therefore, given that Italy had joined the Axis powers, all Italian American residents were deemed enemy aliens and given this title.

Through studying the Department of Justice investigation regarding wartime violations against the Italian community, Executive Orders passed by President Roosevelt, individual court cases, and employment restrictions I will describe the legal discrimination faced by the Italian American community during World War Two. Then, I delve into individual Italian American internment hearings, address the arbitrary nature of court proceedings, a select few newspapers published by some members of the Italian American community during the Second World War, and finally examine the relationship between the Italian American community and its fraternal societies and churches to understand how the war changed those organizations. It is important to acknowledge that while these are a variety of sources, the voices they speak to represent different perspectives among the Italian American community.

After the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941, President Roosevelt devised the Executive Order 9066. The executive order authorized the Secretary of War, Henry L. Stimson, to establish military-style camps for enemy aliens. In the executive order, he states that he gives all discretion to the Secretary of War to decide the means necessary to enforce compliance among the displaced people, thereby signing internment and torture into law. The order excluded all Americans of Japanese, German and Italian descent from entering military zones, which caused the forced displacement of those citizens residing in military residences.<sup>62</sup> After

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<sup>61</sup> *Restraint, Regulation, and Removal*. U.S.C. § 21. 1918

<sup>62</sup> "106th U.S Congress. "World War II Enemy Alien Control Program Overview." *National Archives and Records Administration*, National Archives and Records Administration, [www.archives.gov/research/immigration/enemy-aliens-overview.html](http://www.archives.gov/research/immigration/enemy-aliens-overview.html).

the President of The United States signed the order, Italian Americans were subjected to nightly curfews or confined to house arrest, their belongings searched, and their homes foreclosed. Local and federal regulations then required Italians to carry identification cards, restricted their freedom of movement, and displaced around 10,000 residents from their homes.<sup>63</sup>

The President also issued the Proclamation 2527, which states that the very presence of Italians, Germans, and Japanese in The United States was a direct threat to America's safety since the two countries were at war.<sup>64</sup> These two orders together led to the almost complete control of Italian Americans resident, regulating not only what the families could own such as certain flashlights, radios, and boats, but it also legitimized the process of discrimination against them. Therefore it justified the anti-Italian employment discrimination, internment, and unwarranted arrests.<sup>65</sup>

In order to enforce these policies, The United States government passed Public Law 77-503 in March of 1942, which granted authorities power to charge misdemeanors to anyone violating provisions of federal or military regulations. On March 21, 1942, Congress passed, and the President signed, Public Law 77- 503. This bill stated that any person found guilty of breaking one of these laws would face a misdemeanor, possible imprisonment for a year, and up to \$5,000 in charges, imposing misdemeanor penalties on anyone violating the military orders to be issued.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup>Carnevale, Nancy C. "No Italian Spoken for the Duration of the War": *Language, Italian-American Identity, and Cultural Pluralism in the World War II Years*." *Journal of American Ethnic History* (2003): 3-33. 8.

<sup>64</sup>Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley. "Harry S. Truman: Proclamation 2655-Removal of Alien Enemies - July 14, 1945." *The American Presidency Project*, 1999, [www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=87034](http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=87034).

<sup>65</sup> Carnevale 8

<sup>66</sup> "Internment Archives." Internment Archives: Public Law 503 - March 21, 1942. Accessed May 02, 2017. <http://www.internmentarchives.com/showdoc.php?docid=00104>.

Additionally, the ostracizing of the Italian community had a significant mental impact on families and individuals psychologically. The conflict between The United States and Italy caused Italian Americans to feel torn between their mother country, and the country they now call home.<sup>67</sup> Italian Americans described performing almost over patriotic behavior; they would give speeches at pro-allied Rotary clubs, only to return home, ridden with anxiety over their families back home in Italy who struggled in the war effort.<sup>68</sup> The suspicion building around the Italian community created more anxiety around the otherness of Italian people, their language, and the ambiguity of their race.

Regarding the Italian language, this was one of the biggest factors used against the community because it was one of the most obvious differences between Americans and the Italian immigrants. When their homes were searched, FBI officials would not only look for the items listed above but also Italian newspapers that could possibly be pro-axis.<sup>69</sup> Members of the Italian American community quickly understood the conditions on which their discrimination was being determined, and adjusted their behavior. In Italian stores across The United States, signs were hung up saying, “No Italian Spoken for the Duration of the War,” and some organizations and people went so far as to change their names in order to assimilate to American culture.<sup>70</sup> After the war, the teaching of Italian in school suffered a steep decline. From 1942 to 1948, Italian periodicals dropped severely by 40 percent.<sup>71</sup> Italian Americans were viewed as a secret poison in American society, which had been going relatively unnoticed by the government

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<sup>67</sup> Carnevale, pg 8.

<sup>68</sup> Carnevale, pg 9.

<sup>69</sup> Carnevale, pg 9

<sup>70</sup> Carnevale Cpg 13

<sup>71</sup> Carnevale pg 25

since it was distracted by the war.<sup>72</sup>

At the same time during the war, however, Italian Americans found themselves in a position where they could assist the war effort, as well as prove their loyalty to The United States.<sup>73</sup> When working for the US military, these Italian American men were chosen for their intimate knowledge of the Italian language, referencing specifically the ability to understand and interpret specific dialects of the Italian language, as well as unspoken body language which could determine intent. These men were deployed to Italy and dropped into unfamiliar towns, acting as spies for the American armed forces.<sup>74</sup> To further unite and assimilate the community, days such as “I am an American Day” helped unify immigrant neighborhoods towards one American nationality instead. This, paired with the increased rate of naturalization of Italians during the war proves there was a sense of urgency in proving loyalty to their country of residence.<sup>75</sup> Naturally, given this sense of urgency, there was heightened pressure on the community to choose between their home country and where they currently live, causing some families to avoid all news of the war in order to protect their mental health and wellness.<sup>76</sup>

Internment camps were located all across The United States. The camps that held Italians were Sharp Park Detention Station, California; Kooskia Internment Camp, Idaho. Fort Missoula Internment Camp, Montana, which was originally built to hold Apache Indians during the Indian wars, and in 1941 it was officially converted into a facility for war-related internees. The camp initially held 125 Italian soldiers who were captured on a ship off the coast of New York, who were detained at Ellis Island, and then sent to Missouri. Camp Missoula was also one of the

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<sup>72</sup> Carnevale 9.

<sup>73</sup> Carnevale 1.

<sup>74</sup> Carnevale, Nancy C 17.

<sup>75</sup> Carnevale, Nancy C. 6.

<sup>76</sup> Carnevale, Nancy C 9.

largest in the country, holding at one time the most Italian Americans, peaking at 1,500 residents. There were also Fort Stanton Internment Camp and Santa Fe Internment Camps in New Mexico; this was one of the first internment facilities for Italian American sailors captured off the coast of New York. This camp was initially created to hold Apache in 1855 during the Indian wars, later used to hold Billy the Kid, so as we can see, has a long-standing history.<sup>77</sup> In her biographical essay, *When Italian Americans were Enemy Aliens*, Rose D. Scherini retells the life of Filippo Molinari who was one of the Italian Americans interned during the war. Molinari was a newspaper salesman who worked in San Jose, California. Like other members of the Italian community there, he was victim to being detained by the local authorities the night of December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1941. Once there, he described his way to work was “over the snow, still with slippers on [his] feet, the temperature at seventeen below and no coat or heavy clothes”<sup>78</sup> This text provides an individual look into the experience had by Italian American residents, laying bare the severity of the camps that they were being sent to and the negligence towards members of the Italian American community.

In addition to steep discrimination described above, Italians were also disproportionately arrested, usually with little to no evidence for it. For certain Italian Americans who were able to get hearings before being detained, the legal process was a nightmare. They often had to fight minuscule accusations surmounted against them by community members or local authorities. Furthermore, those being brought to trial were not told what charges were being brought against them and had to guess based on the questions asked in court.<sup>79</sup> As described in *Una Storia Segreta*, many Italian immigrants, like Louis Berizzi, expressed love and respect for both The

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<sup>77</sup> Dickerson, James L. *Inside America's concentration camps: two centuries of internment and torture*. Chicago Review Press, 2010. 124.

<sup>78</sup> Scherini, Rose D. "When Italian Americans Were Enemy Aliens." 2001. 13

<sup>79</sup> Dickerson, 167

United States and their home country of Italy, damning himself by saying they wished not to see their mother country bombed. This was enough evidence to prove his pro-axis sympathies.

Another case that will be examined in depth later on in the analysis will be that of Ezio Pinza, an Italian opera singer who was detained in March of 1942 for entirely baseless charges. Italian Americans living in Oklahoma City were similarly seized and searched in their homes, but were also subject to random spot checks when they were in public. During these searches, FBI officials were confiscating anything written in Italian, or other weapons and contraband, citing all of it as evidence for suspicion and justification for internment.

Given the rising level of discrimination throughout the history of Italian Americans, it is clear to see how the pressures of change, times of war, and lack of community impacts the performance and strength of their identities. Each individual had to navigate this differently, deciding how they were going to adjust or not adjust their customs, behaviors, and culture.

#### Responses of the Italian American Community to the War

As shown above, the Italian American community experienced numerous acts of discrimination through legislation, censorship, violence, and stereotyping. Before the war, Italian Americans changed how they performed their Italian identity through adopting American customs and holidays. After the war began, this performance of identity was still altered but differed for each facet of the community. The Italian American community was composed of so many different people at different places in their lives, so it is expected that different groups had wildly different responses to the pressure placed on them.

The scholarship on the numerous assaults the Italian American community faced gives a



clear but limited understanding of their treatment before and during the war, but it leaves out the reactions of Italian American residents themselves. This research seeks to explore their reactions further to understand how members of the community responded, keeping in mind how diverse the community was and how their difference impact their responses. Through analyzing these sources, I will lay bare some of the ways in which the Italian American community reacted to increased discrimination, and some of the the ways in which that discrimination changed the community.

In 2000, members of the 106<sup>th</sup> U.S Congress requested that the Department of Justice to investigate the treatment of Italian Americans during the Second World War. The Department of Justice produced a comprehensive review of the treatment of Italian Americans in the Second World War by both federal and local governments while outlining specific cases, discrimination practices, and legal actions. The investigation covered how the government treated Italian American residents during the war, listed everyone who was arrested or interned, where they were interned or detained, and the employment discrimination they faced. Below, the findings of this document will be explained, addressing two particular first-hand accounts of trials, as well as one first-hand account of employment discrimination by an Italian American fisherman.

One individual's story that appeared in this research was that of Louis Berizzi. As also shared in *Una Storia Segreta*, like many Italian immigrants, he expressed love and respect for both The United States and their home country of Italy. This was a dangerous, yet seemingly innocent move, saying they wished not to see their mother country bombed because it undermined their loyalty to The United States. Others, like Joe Cervetto, used a metaphor to explain their innocence and complicated relationship as dual citizens, "You have a mother, and

you have a wife. You love both of them, different love. You cannot go in bed with your mother, but you love your mother, and you love your wife. You can't say you want one to love or the other. It's the same thing like your country."<sup>80</sup> Authorities were not impressed with the use of this metaphor as he, and others who invoked it were similarly detained. In either case, both men were innocent of being pro-axis in any way, but the U.S government took any type of loyalty to an enemy country as a serious threat.

Famous opera singer Ezio Pinza was also arrested and detained as an enemy alien in March of 1942. Like the other Italian Americans being detained at this time, he was not made aware of the grounds for his arrest. Instead, the FBI arrived at his house and presented him with a warrant for search and seizure per the President's request.<sup>81</sup> He was arrested on grounds of communicating with the enemy since he once owned a boat that had a radio installed. Pinza had sold the boat immediately following the bombing of Pearl Harbor since gas was no longer sold for recreational boats, in any case, the radio in the boat had never worked. The court claimed his nickname was Mussolini, which also was incorrect; it was a different popular opera singer who bore the nickname "Mussolini" due to his striking resemblance to the dictator. Another accusation used against him was that he was a close, personal friend of Mussolini despite never meeting him. In court, Pinza's wife, Dorris, was allowed to testify for her husband and illuminate the process of arrest, detainment, and internment for Pinza. She states that the FBI told her and Ezio that he would not be told the grounds of his arrest.<sup>82</sup> She continues on to describe her husband's stay at Ellis Island, explaining how Ezio could only receive one letter from her per

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<sup>80</sup> DiStasi, Lawrence, ed. *Una Storia Segreta: The Secret History of Italian American Evacuation and Internment During World War II*. Heyday, 2001.

<sup>81</sup> Jacobs, AD. "Wartime Violations of Italian American Civil Liberties." Legislation on internment. Accessed May 01, 2017. <http://www.foitimes.com/internment/Legislation.htm#H.R.2442>.

<sup>82</sup> Jacobs, AD. "Wartime Violations of Italian American Civil Liberties." Legislation on internment. Accessed May 01, 2017. <http://www.foitimes.com/internment/Legislation.htm#H.R.2442>.

month and had fallen into a deep depression while detained. Furthermore, Dorris explained how Ezio had tried before the U.S even entered the Second World War to show how loyal he was by selling all property he had in Italy and performing for free for the U.S Treasury Department.<sup>83</sup>

The final decision regarding his innocence came down to the votes of four board members. The board members voted 3:1 for his innocence, but due to the fact that the board needed to be unanimous in their decision, all it took was one vote for him to be found guilty. Once found guilty Pinza was detained at Ellis Island until his lawyer could appeal his case. In most cases, an appeal would not work but his lawyer used his connections to the mayor of New York City to get him a second hearing. His lawyer was not optimistic since appeals relied on the defendant remembering exactly what he said in the previous questioning. Miraculously he did win the case and was released from detainment three months later. He was still watched closely, and not allowed to travel without permission.<sup>84</sup>

As explained above, the accusations leading to Pinza's arrest were arbitrary and lacked hard evidence. It is clear that he was being persecuted solely on the grounds that he is an Italian American and The United States was at war with Italy. This gave the U.S an excuse to target innocent individuals in the name of national safety. His case served as an example of what the legal process was like for Italian American residents who had done almost everything to prove their loyalty to The United States, short of gaining citizenship. The courts relied on heresy from competitors at the opera house he was performing at for evidence. This shows how the FBI was looking for information that was circumstantial at best to warrant arrest.<sup>85</sup> The case of Pinza is

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<sup>83</sup> Jacobs, AD. "Wartime Violations of Italian American Civil Liberties." Legislation on internment. Accessed May 01, 2017. <http://www.foitimes.com/internment/Legislation.htm#H.R.2442>

<sup>84</sup> Dickerson, 167.

<sup>85</sup> Jacobs, AD. "Wartime Violations of Italian American Civil Liberties." Legislation on internment. Accessed May

incredibly emblematic for others of the time: he was falsely accused of knowing Mussolini and communicating with the enemy despite the authorities having no evidence whatsoever. This serves to prove the arbitrary nature of the legal proceedings and discredits the policies put in place by The United States government.

While Italian Americans were being interned and arrested, they were also facing an employment crisis as The United States government limited their access to employment. Italians coming to The United States primarily settled in towns along the coastal regions of the country, with a great many participating in the fishing industry. In 1942, District Coast Guard Officers and Captains of the Port published a commandant that aimed to establish control over this industry. They imposed restrictions on who could obtain a fishing license, requiring 50% of the ship's crew to be American citizens for it to be allowed to operate.<sup>86</sup> Furthermore, enemy aliens were not allowed to board any ship unless that ship's direct purpose was for work transportation.<sup>87</sup> Naval authority further ostracized enemy aliens. The naval districts made all enemy aliens wear badges, or carry identification cards that said "ENEMY ALIEN" as a form of differentiation from other vessel workers.<sup>88</sup> These are fairly clear examples of discrimination endured by disadvantaged Italian American workers who had no choice but to comply, lest they lose more employment opportunities.

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01, 2017. <http://www.foitimes.com/internment/Legislation.htm#H.R.2442>

<sup>86</sup>"106th U.S Congress. "World War II Enemy Alien Control Program Overview." *National Archives and Records Administration*, National Archives and Records Administration, [www.archives.gov/research/immigration/enemy-aliens-overview.html](http://www.archives.gov/research/immigration/enemy-aliens-overview.html). Pg 41

<sup>87</sup>"106th U.S Congress. "World War II Enemy Alien Control Program Overview." *National Archives and Records Administration*, National Archives and Records Administration, [www.archives.gov/research/immigration/enemy-aliens-overview.html](http://www.archives.gov/research/immigration/enemy-aliens-overview.html).

<sup>88</sup>"106th U.S Congress. "World War II Enemy Alien Control Program Overview." *National Archives and Records Administration*, National Archives and Records Administration, [www.archives.gov/research/immigration/enemy-aliens-overview.html](http://www.archives.gov/research/immigration/enemy-aliens-overview.html).

An individual story shared in the Department of Justice investigation was of Giovanni Olivieri. He was an Italian American resident living in The United States for the 40 years leading up to the Second World War. He wrote a letter to the California senator Sheridan Downey in December of 1941 telling his story of being denied the right to fish:

“Forty years ago I came to America from Italy. For the past 38 years I have been a fisherman in Santa Cruz and have fished the waters of Monterey Bay. I am not an American citizen and cannot become one because I cannot read or write. I have been deprived of the right to fish because I am not a citizen. I have two sons in the Navy and ones on in the army. I have a wife and three daughters at home to support. I cannot get outside work because I am not a citizen. I am as loyal and devoted to this country as though I were born here. During my forty years in America I have never been arrested and have always worked from twelve to fourteen hours a day.”<sup>89</sup>

As shown above, Olivieri was an innocent Italian American resident who was denied the right to work because he was a non-citizen resident of Italian descent. He stressed the importance of his loyalty to his country, citing that his sons are in the U.S military and that he has a family to provide for. In response to the letter, the Navy explained to Olivieri that this is a matter of policy, which, “in some instances, results in hardship.”<sup>90</sup> This reaction by The United States Navy was insensitive and it did nothing to resolve Olivieri’s hardship and lack of employment.

Furthermore, it showed the complete unwillingness of the U.S Navy to acknowledge their

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<sup>89</sup> "106th U.S Congress. “World War II Enemy Alien Control Program Overview.” *National Archives and Records Administration*, National Archives and Records Administration, [www.archives.gov/research/immigration/enemy-aliens-overview.html](http://www.archives.gov/research/immigration/enemy-aliens-overview.html). 44.

<sup>90</sup> "106th U.S Congress. “World War II Enemy Alien Control Program Overview.” *National Archives and Records Administration*, National Archives and Records Administration, [www.archives.gov/research/immigration/enemy-aliens-overview.html](http://www.archives.gov/research/immigration/enemy-aliens-overview.html). 44.

bigotry or the arbitrary nature of this policy. By instituting laws that barred Italian American residents from working in their communities, The United States government was trying to undermine and disarm them by removing their source of income and welfare. Furthermore, this was done to issue more control over the Italian Americans so the U.S government could control who worked in what occupation and further their disenfranchisement.

While most newspapers published by and for Italian Americans were censored during the war, there were instances where Italian American writers continued to publish in both Italian and English, speaking overtly against the war and The United States government. One paper, in particular, would be *L'Unita del Popolo*. Issues of the Italian newspaper *L'Unita del Popolo* published during the war were more explicit with their distrust and disappointment in the choices of the U.S government than anticipated. This newspaper was associated with the left-leaning members of the Italian American community but had no financial ties to the present communist faction.<sup>91</sup> It is important to note their affiliation in order to understand why the reactions below were so overt. Since they were communists, it is understandable why they were more likely to criticize the government in such a way. But, in lieu of official ties to the Communist Party, the paper was independently funded by large Italian American worker unions. Of the founders, the most notable were Vito Marcantonio, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, and Arturo Giovannitti. Marcantonio, serving as a Congressman for Harlem for fourteen years was unparalleled in his radical ideas.<sup>92</sup> Flynn was an Irish American, she devoted her life to protecting workers and individuals who were the most oppressed, moving from one worker's rights movement to

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<sup>91</sup> Meyer, Gerald. "Political Affairs." *L'Unità Del Popolo: The Voice of Italian American Communism, 1939-1951* » Pa. Accessed March 20, 2018. <http://www.politicalaffairs.net/l-unit-del-popolo-the-voice-of-italian-american-communism-1939-1951/>.

<sup>92</sup> Meyer, Gerald. "Leonard Covello and Vito Marcantonio: A Lifelong Collaboration for Progress." *Italica* 62, no. 1 (1985): 54-66. doi:10.2307/478680. 54

another.<sup>93</sup> She was also an influential member of the Communist Party in The United States, and eventually became its president.<sup>94</sup> Arturo Giovannitti was a prominent figure in the Italian American community, a philosopher and poet who embraced neo-romantic ideals. He also served as an editor for earlier iterations of *L'Unita Del Popolo*.<sup>95</sup>

Prior to the war *L'Unita Del Popolo* had already begun publishing controversial materials since the 1920's, giving a voice to the communists Italians in America.<sup>96</sup> In one article from the anonymous author recalls the life of Thomas Jefferson and his attitude towards immigrants. The article specifically cites how he insisted, "on equal treatment of foreign-born," continuing on to explain how when Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence, he did not say, "all men except the foreign-born," are created equal and are entitled to inalienable rights.<sup>97</sup> Despite all the discrimination and censorship, the Italian American community was facing, members were willing to stick their necks out and defend their rights to be in The United States, citing well known historical figures to do so. It is particularly interesting that this writer chose to recall Thomas Jefferson, one of America's Founding Fathers. It is a powerful way to pull on American history to almost undermine the bigoted actions of the contemporary government, especially considering it is coming from an Italian American immigrant.

Another article describes the ways in which the Italian American community banded together to protect themselves from such discrimination, and make discrimination against the community more well-known. In the summer of 1940, an alliance was set up by members of the

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<sup>93</sup> Kizer, Benjamin H. "Elizabeth Gurley Flynn." *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 57, no. 3 (1966): 110-112. 112.

<sup>94</sup> Kizer, 110.

<sup>95</sup> Buhle, Paul. "Anarchism and American Labor." *International Labor and Working-Class History*, no. 23 (1983): 21-34. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27671439>. 27

<sup>96</sup> Meyer, Gerald.

<sup>97</sup> Anonymous, *L'Unita Del Popolo*, July 6th, 1940. University of Minnesota Immigration History Research Center Archives (P3175, Reel 2), University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Fordham Italian American community.<sup>98</sup> The committee was set up in the wake of discrimination “against [Italian Americans] in the matters of employment and the government of The United States itself has itself discriminated against non-citizens, as for example the public works administration where all non-citizens have been dismissed from all WPA jobs, and private employers have followed the lead of the government in discriminating against non-citizens in all basic industries.”<sup>99</sup> The committee resolves to prevent, “the spread of discrimination in employment against the foreign-born and especially the Italian people because such action affects the welfare and security of all Americans.”<sup>100</sup> This shows a different reaction taken by the Italian American community. Rather than just critiquing the government, they are taking precautions to protect community members from further discrimination. Another article titled *The Crime of a System*, by an unnamed author, they mention the state of an Italian American family going through extreme hardship. The family just endured the death of the mother who committed suicide due to environmental stress, misery, and worry.<sup>101</sup> The local authorities claimed she committed suicide because she was insane, but community members knew this was caused by the extreme levels of poverty and discrimination facing the Italian American community. The article concludes by saying, “fathers and sons tramp the streets in search of work that cannot be found. Hounded and humiliated, facing greater threats and deeper insecurity, the millions of unemployed bear the burden of an economic system which offers them no

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<sup>98</sup> Anonymous, “FORDHAM ITALIAN AMERICANS Organize to Protect foreign-born”, *L’Unita Del Popolo*, July 6th, 1940. University of Minnesota Immigration History Research Center Archives (P3175, Reel 2), University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

<sup>99</sup> Anonymous, “FORDHAM ITALIAN AMERICANS Organize to Protect foreign-born”, *L’Unita Del Popolo*, July 6th, 1940. University of Minnesota Immigration History Research Center Archives (P3175, Reel 2), University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

<sup>100</sup> Anonymous, “FORDHAM ITALIAN AMERICANS Organize to Protect foreign-born”, *L’Unita Del Popolo*, July 6th, 1940. University of Minnesota Immigration History Research Center Archives (P3175, Reel 2), University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

<sup>101</sup> Anonymous, “The Crime of a System”, *L’Unita Del Popolo*, July 20th, 1940. University of Minnesota Immigration History Research Center Archives (P3175, Reel 2), University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota.



relief.<sup>102</sup> The author here is conveying just how destitute the poor Italian Americans were, emphasizing the suffering they are endured at the hands of The United States government, and U.S populace. This shows just how severe the discrimination towards the Italian American community was and how desperately they needed help and protection from their government. And with this discrimination, it is no wonder the community turned inward and relied on each other for assistance.<sup>103</sup>

In another article from the same issue, a different author takes a stand against the passing of the Smith Act, relating it back to the infamous Sacco-Vanzetti case. To provide some context, the Smith Act, also called the Alien Registration Act of 1940, outlined everything which the government deemed dangerous, or a threat to The United States. This author found it to be so troubling since they were communist, and therefore this bill affected them directly. The act states:

“Whoever knowingly or willfully advocates, abets, advises, or teaches the duty, necessity, desirability, or propriety of overthrowing or destroying the government of The United States [...] Whoever, with intent to cause the overthrow or destruction of any such government, prints, publishes, edits, issues, circulates, sells, distributes, or publicly displays any written or printed matter advocating, advising, or teaching the duty, necessity, desirability, or propriety of overthrowing or destroying any government in The United States [...] Whoever organizes or helps or attempts to organize any society, group, or assembly of persons who teach, advocate, or encourage the overthrow or destruction of any such government by force or violence [...] Shall be fined under this title or imprisoned not more than twenty years, or both, and shall be ineligible for employment by The United States or any department or agency thereof, for the five years next following his conviction.”<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Anonymous, “The Crime of a System”, *L’Unita Del Popolo*, July 20th, 1940. University of Minnesota Immigration History Research Center Archives (P3175, Reel 2), University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

<sup>103</sup> Panunzio, Constantine. "Italian Americans, Fascism, and the War." *Yale Review* 31 (1942): 771-82.

<sup>104</sup> “18 U.S. Code § 2385 - Advocating Overthrow of Government.” *LII / Legal Information Institute*, [www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/18/2385](http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/18/2385).; “Alien Registration Act of 1940.” *Los Angeles Times*, August, 1940. Accessed March 1st, 2018, <http://www.latimes.com/visuals/photography/la-me-fw-archives-alien-registration-act-20170214-story.html>.

The function of this bill is to prevent any political radicalism or division among the American people, and to establish legal procedures in the event of such dissent. In stating that anyone who willingly promotes the destruction of the government, defined as publishing or promoting anything that criticizes the U.S government, will be subjected to imprisonment or employment restrictions for the next five years. These provisions, however, provide the basis for unjust application towards minority groups, immigrants, or anyone who speaks out against the government during an extremely turbulent time. Furthermore, it is not just that it does not serve its intended purpose, but it's the fear that it will be unequally applied to minority groups, hence the authors apprehension.

To provide context on the Sacco-Vanzetti case, it involved the wrongful accusation of two Italian American men in April of 1920. Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti were accused of robbing and killing a guard and paymaster of the Slater and Morrill Shoe Company.<sup>105</sup> Based on the fact that the witnesses had conflicting testimonies and the stolen money was never connected to either Sacco or Vanzetti, it is commonly understood that these men were tried and convicted solely on their anarchist identity.<sup>106</sup> The case drew global attention given its controversial verdict, and it affected America's perception of the Italian American community for the coming decades. The writer first goes into detail about the community reaction to the Sacco-Vanzetti case, explaining the "streets lined with grieving mourners."<sup>107</sup> In one paragraph, the writer states, "The rulers of this country waited for the last war to end before ordering the snoopers out hunting a bigotry and spreading a fear among the population. Today the

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<sup>105</sup> McGirr, Lisa. "The passion of Sacco and Vanzetti: A global history." *The Journal of American History* 93, no. 4 (2007): 1085-1115. 1085

<sup>106</sup> McGirr 1086.

<sup>107</sup> Guglielmi, Louis, "Smith Bill Recalls Sacco-Vanzetti", *L'Unita Del Popolo*, p. 6, July 6th, 1940. University of Minnesota Immigration History Research Center Archives (P3175, Reel 2), University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

preparations are well in advance. Our rulers have learned a thing or two from the Nazi method of anticipating opposites among people who want peace and democracy. But it seems the desire to continue the status quo is downright indecent and revolutionary”<sup>108</sup> Here the author is comparing the government of The United States to that of Nazi Germany because of the Smith bill. They believe that the bill is nothing more than stirring up fear in the American population and spreading a discriminatory agenda against Italian immigrants, Americans of Italian descent, and many other marginalized groups of people. Furthermore, the article goes on to say, “The first of the bills introducing the new order is aimed at the foreign-born. The Smith Bill is for the registration and fingerprinting of aliens. Imagine what a fine time the police and the agents of the Department of Justice will have choosing names out of the files to be the future Sacco and Vanzetti.”<sup>109</sup> This expresses the fear and apprehension the author has about how the bill will be abused by government bodies and law enforcement, determining that it will arbitrarily target alien residents to further maim the community. Finally, he states, “an elementary right of the dignity of a free people will have been forfeited. [...] There has been let loose a great deal of opposition to it and there is still time to protest its becoming law.”<sup>110</sup> This is the first instance where a direct action is called for in an article speaking out against the government. At the time, this was almost unprecedented considering the censorship of the Italian American community. By calling for direct protest against the Smith Bill the author is asking the readers to stand up for themselves and their inalienable rights, which was also fairly unprecedented for the time.

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<sup>108</sup> Guglielmi, Louis, “Smith Bill Recalls Sacco-Vanzetti”, *L’Unita Del Popolo*, p. 6, July 6th, 1940. University of Minnesota Immigration History Research Center Archives (P3175, Reel 2), University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

<sup>109</sup> Guglielmi, Louis, “Smith Bill Recalls Sacco-Vanzetti”, *L’Unita Del Popolo*, p. 6, July 6th, 1940. University of Minnesota Immigration History Research Center Archives (P3175, Reel 2), University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

<sup>110</sup> Guglielmi, Louis, “Smith Bill Recalls Sacco-Vanzetti”, *L’Unita Del Popolo*, p. 6, July 6th, 1940. University of Minnesota Immigration History Research Center Archives (P3175, Reel 2), University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

In a related article titled *Roosevelt Signs Smith Bills, Opens Waves of Persecution*, Fernando Platone makes a similar claim about the Smith Bill and highlights the ways in which this bill could be used to discriminate against the Italian American community. He states, “Roosevelt has proved what opponents have said all along: that the Smith Bill is a weapon to blackmail the fighters for peace. It is a dam to block the peace movement sweeping the country.” He goes on to explain how Roosevelt, “did not even mention one very dangerous section of this new law. This is the part that makes it illegal to advocate ‘overthrow of the government’ and to try to incite ‘dissatisfaction in the armed forces.’”<sup>111</sup> He furthers his point by saying, “time and time again, the Supreme Court has declared such laws unconstitutional, and now the president signs it without a word of explanation.”<sup>112</sup> He continues to criticize the Democratic Party, saying no matter “which candidate [for presidential reelection] -whether Roosevelt or another- he is certain to be committed to war abroad and reaction at home.” And that, “Wall Street is in the saddle, and so no matter how prettily they dress up the platform the Democratic Party will ride for the bankers.”<sup>113</sup> He explains that the Smith Bill will act as a dam, halting any progress towards change and peace happening on the home front at the time. By calling on the precedent the Supreme Court has set, Platone conveys to his readers how unjust this law is, and the damage it will do to the Italian American resident community. Furthermore, he points out to the readers how corrupt the Democratic Party is, mentioning how despite what the platform says, the party will be keeping the interests of the bankers at heart instead of the people they claim to represent

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<sup>111</sup> Platone, Fernando, “Roosevelt Signs Smith Bill Opens Wave of Persecution”, *L’Unita Del Popolo*, p. 6, 1940. University of Minnesota Immigration History Research Center Archives (P3175, Reel 2), University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

<sup>112</sup> Platone, Fernando, “Roosevelt Signs Smith Bill Opens Wave of Persecution”, *L’Unita Del Popolo*, p. 6, 1940. University of Minnesota Immigration History Research Center Archives (P3175, Reel 2), University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

<sup>113</sup> Platone, Fernando, “Roosevelt Signs Smith Bill Opens Wave of Persecution”, *L’Unita Del Popolo*, p. 6, 1940. University of Minnesota Immigration History Research Center Archives (P3175, Reel 2), University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

and protect. They will lead with reactionary measures, rather than thought out policy which would actually protect all Italian American residents. Given his political ideologies as a Communist, he was understandably upset about the war and the corruption of power displayed above, thus provoking him to write for *L'Unita Del Popolo*.

In response to the Smith Bill, New York politician and lawyer Vito Marcantonio wrote a column in *L'Unita del Popolo*. Having opposed the Smith Bill before it was passed, he supported his view by saying, “It seems to me that in a period as trying as this period, the test of a democracy lies in the ability of that democracy to maintain its liberties, to preserve those liberties, and to have more freedom,” than before the time of crisis. He goes on to explain how he opposes a bill which, “has been fought bitterly in Congress for years and years, a bill which now provides the registration of every non-citizen in The United States, represents that philosophy of restricting liberty and freedoms in America; and [The United States Government] restrict that liberty and freedom under the guise of our American democracy.”<sup>114</sup> He goes on to state that the bill will not actually protect The United States from real threats, “a democracy has a perfect right to protect itself, but remember this: you are not protecting by this legislation. Spies and saboteurs will not register nor subject to fingerprinting. You are not protecting democracy by discriminating against the non-citizen.” He concluded by pointing out the bigotry in the bill’s provisions, asking, “what difference is there between this procedure and that of Gestapo, Germany?”<sup>115</sup> Taking an overtly oppositional stance against the bill during the time it was enacted was dangerous because it subjected one to serious fines, imprisonment, or employment

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<sup>114</sup> Anonymous, “Vito Marcantonio Flays Anti-Alien Bill”, *L'Unita Del Popolo*, *L'Unita Del Popolo*, July 6th, 1940. University of Minnesota Immigration History Research Center Archives (P3175, Reel 2), University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

<sup>115</sup> Anonymous, “Vito Marcantonio Flays Anti-Alien Bill”, *L'Unita Del Popolo*, *L'Unita Del Popolo*, July 6th, 1940. University of Minnesota Immigration History Research Center Archives (P3175, Reel 2), University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

discrimination. Yet Marcantonio spoke openly about his disdain for the bill. Having worked in politics right before World War Two and during it, he could tell how the bill would be applied, and the impact it will have in preserving American democracy. He also highlights that what The United States government proposed to do with the bill was, in his eyes, not different from what was happening with the Nazi party in Germany.

After the war ended, and after Italy had left the Axis powers, *L'Unita del Popolo* continued publishing articles critiquing the government, expressing their dissatisfaction with the government's wartime actions. In the article *Il discorso di Truman e i nostri compiti*, the writer discusses a speech given by Truman regarding the state of the nation after the war, and the treatment of marginalized people. The author expresses agreement with particular points Truman makes, such as ones regarding the treatment of people of other races, but generally calls to arms members of the Italian American community. The author asks the readers to confront their representatives who were trying to maim progressive legislation which would protect the community.<sup>116</sup> The Italian American community at this time was clearly facing grave hardships at the hands of the U.S government, from the detainment to vetting. In some ways, they too were censored in the press in which newspapers were not supposed to be published in Italian. However, they persisted in the publication of the Italian newspapers and explicitly expressed their disagreements. These newspapers provide evidence of how part of the Italian American community was reacting to the current administration's treatment of residents in explicit and overt ways. This is quite interesting since Italian publications during and after the war were so carefully monitored. For one to be overtly undermining the government and calling on others in the community to fight back against legislators is really radical. However, given the politics of

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<sup>116</sup> "Il discorso di Truman e i nostri compiti." *L'Unita del Popolo*, February 6<sup>th</sup>, 1946. University of Minnesota Immigration History Research Center Archives (P3175, Reel 2), University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

*L'Unita Del Popolo*, this is not too surprising. Another reason for this radicalism would be that the war, by this time, was finished, and furthermore, Italy had left the Axis in 1943, so there was less pressure on the Italian American community. This allowed Italian American newspaper to publish a bit more freely since The United States had reduced the restrictions on them.

Regardless of the received level of threat, these newspapers are significant because they reveal that disapproval of the government was so severe that it was published overtly. This also shows the ways in which one faction of the Italian American community felt they could respond to the pressures being placed on the group as a whole. Rather than coding their language, or avoiding the issue altogether, they addressed it head-on.

Besides newspapers which showed one type of reaction the Italian American community had towards World War Two, specifically overt reactions to the government policies both before and after the war, Italian Americans also responded by changing how they performed their identity to appear more American. In order to change their communities, assimilation was done through their fraternal societies and church organizations. Often, especially with churches, both the non-Italian churchgoers and the Italian immigrants worked together towards assimilation.

Italian American fraternal societies functioned as a way for Italian Americans to maintain community, as well as preserve Italian American history and culture. One in particular which gained a wide following was the Order of the Sons of Italy in America. OSIA is a nationwide organization which was founded in 1905 as a source for mutual aid for Italian Americans or Italians living in the U.S. They strove to not only assist the Italian American community in gaining stability, they also wanted to promote the learning of Italian language and history in

schools, and preserve the memory of their ancestors in both Italy and The United States.<sup>117</sup> This edition of the constitution and by-law was published between 1940-1943<sup>118</sup>, and states the organization was “founded in the belief in God and based upon the Constitution of The United States of America, which government rests upon the proposition that all men are created equal and functions through the consent of the governed.”<sup>119</sup> The text goes on to list their specific by-laws, saying all members will “Promote civic education [...] uphold the concept of Americanism [...] encourage the active participation of our membership in political, social, and civic life of [the community] [...] organize and establish benevolent social welfare institutions for the protection and assistance of our members, their dependents, and the needy in general [...initiate and organize movements for patriotic and humanitarian purposes.”<sup>120</sup> From this text, one can see how this organization operated. One of the first things the by-laws states is that they are to operate under a constitution similar to that of The United States, and furthermore, that they will work to promote Americanism. Therefore, this group is not only working to build a community for Italian Americans, but it is acting as a force of assimilation through the promotion of American ideals in the Italian community. This was not only included as an act of patriotism but as protection, too. The fraternal society is taking its powerful and influential position within the Italian American community to promote American patriotism and by doing this, the organization ensured its members would clearly and explicitly display loyalty to not only Italy but The United States. This is significant because it once again shows how the community had to alter its own

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<sup>117</sup> Order Sons and Daughters of Italy in America “Who We Are.” [www.osia.org](http://www.osia.org) <https://www.osia.org/about/who-we-are/> (accessed March 7th, 2018)

<sup>118</sup> Exact date of publication within 1940-1943 unknown. However, this edition was the official copy until at least 1949.

<sup>119</sup> Constitution and By-Laws of The Order of Sons of Italy in America., p 4. University of Minnesota Immigration History Research Center Archives (OSIA - Ontario, Grand Lodge / F. Zaffiro, Italian, Box 1), University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

<sup>120</sup> Constitution and By-Laws of The Order of Sons of Italy in America., p 4. University of Minnesota Immigration History Research Center Archives (Italian Miscellaneous Mss Collection, OSIA - Ontario, Grand Lodge / F. Zaffiro, Italian, Box 1), University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota.



behavior and beliefs in order to stay safe.

In churches around the country, Italian Americans were beginning to integrate into their congregations. Not all of these were Catholic, as stated above, meaning the Italian American community was already giving up or changing part of their identity. At some churches, pamphlets were made for non-Italian congregation members as a way for them to learn more about the Italian American community, which would then help break down barriers and stigmas against the new Italian immigrants. In one pamphlet from a church in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, the church circulated a document created by an Italian American which outlined common characteristics of Italian American homes and lifestyles. They made sure to highlight home decorations, traditional dress, customs in the traditional Italian Church and worship styles, popular family games and activities, and music.<sup>121</sup> By having the document made by an Italian American, the church made sure they were not passing along misinformation about an already stereotyped community. Furthermore, simply by giving their congregation members this information, they were working to create a safe worship environment for Italian Americans, which in turn helped them assimilate into American society.

There was also a lot of missionary work done at the time of the war, working to integrate immigrants into American churches. One church, the Italian Evangelical Church of Wisconsin, in Racine, Wisconsin, published a similar pamphlet to the one mentioned above. The pamphlet for the Italian Evangelical Church, however, was more faith-oriented, calling on the reader to consider the church's role in welcoming immigrants. It states, "The church must soon face the task of evangelizing the immigrant and the immigrant child. It resolves itself to this: either the

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<sup>121</sup> Mrs. A Germanotta, "Suggestions for Creating Atmosphere in Programs on Progress: Italians in America." Italian Miscellaneous Mss Collection, Box 2, University of Minnesota Immigration History Research Center Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Christian Church evangelizes the immigrant and his child, or they will demoralize the church.”<sup>122</sup>

The pamphlet goes on to say that the church must be an “open door” for immigrants in order to protect them from neglect. This way, this church worked to not only provide worship services for the Italian American community, but it also worked to ensure that the immigrants and their families would be safe within the faith and the community. This also helped integrate Italian Americans into the community, which helped them assimilate during the war. While this integration seemed well-intentioned, it came with the pretense that, if left to their own devices, the Italian American community will harm the reputation of the church. This is a rather insulting insinuation, especially considering it was pointed at a disadvantaged community. Nonetheless, of those in the Italian American community who wanted to attend worship services had few other options. With this integration into these churches, the Italian Americans who chose to join this church had to do so while explaining their culture to an unfamiliar and possibly hostile audience.

## Conclusion

In the 20th century, The United States endured many changes, and experienced xenophobia, racism, and all-out war. In wake of these changes, American culture changed as well. With the increasing amounts of racism and xenophobia in the turn of the century, both the American people and the Government sought solutions which would cap the influx of immigrants in hopes of preserving their conservative view of what America should be. Naturally, this had quite damaging effects for anyone who was an immigrant or not white. This meant that

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<sup>122</sup> “Home Mission Work Among Immigrants” Italian Miscellaneous Mss Collection, Box 2, University of Minnesota Immigration History Research Center Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

immigrants had to negotiate their existence in society even more than they had before, altering the performance of their identity and culture. In the time leading up to the Second World War, Italian immigrants felt this shift as they were the victims of not only employment discrimination but also verbal and physical violence at the hands of their neighbors. This caused the Italian American community to make specific changes in how they behaved or appeared to the American public to protect their own safety. Once World War Two started, discrimination took a new face after The United States officially declared war on the three countries in the Axis Alliance: Germany, Italy, and Japan. By doing so, they placed restrictions on non-citizen Italian, German, and Japanese residents. The legislation passed by the Government following the attack was definitely defensive as it called for the investigation, arrest, and internment of certain non-citizen residents of German, Japanese, and Italian populations in The United States. Specifically, this allowed for Federal and local Government officials to search the home of any Italian American resident. This judgment was often arbitrary and completely up to the officer's discretion, though, which opened the door to relentless discrimination. When interned or arrested, the members of the Italian American community had more often than not done nothing to warrant this treatment but were victims of widespread xenophobia, often commonly seen during times of war in The United States and other countries. When brought to trial, these residents faced a similar fate of completely fabricated evidence leading to conviction. This shows that the legislation made by the U.S government gave complete control to Federal and local officials to isolate, arrest, and intern all Italian American residents on whatever grounds possible in order to make America "safe" from enemy aliens. All it really did was intern, and arrest innocent Americans in the process. One response of the Italian American community was to conform to standards held by American society in order to protect themselves, thereby stripping

themselves of their identity to survive. This hyper-Americanization was certainly a defense mechanism given the violent climate they were subjected to. This would typically manifest by complying to censorship laws placed on their media or by participating in overly patriotic events, enlisting in the war effort, or simply joining their neighbor's churches and switching their faith. Conversely, Italian Americans also hardened themselves in their identities. While they were in fraternal societies which pledged their allegiance to The United States' government, their other provisions promised loyalty to Italy and its legacy. This difference is due to the how diverse the community was, it is understandable that different portions would respond to pressures in different ways.

In newspapers, particular Italian Americans were not afraid to call out The United States for their bigotry, citing they were not better than the Germans the way they interned and registered Americans during the war. *L'Unita Del Popolo* showed how one smaller faction of the community, the communist faction, responded to the increased pressure placed on them at this time. In doing so, the often anonymous authors hoped to strike a chord with Americans who happen to read it, so that they could then see the other side's point of view. They published their fears and anger towards the laws passed by the government, provided access to committees, education on their rights, and other simple services. Furthermore, these newspapers functioned as rallying calls for other members of the community to stand up for themselves against the oppressive government. This not only empowered the sometimes defenseless Italian Americans to acknowledge and call out their oppressors, but it gave them the avenue for protection and security.

In order to extend the study, including newspapers written by non-Italian Americans

about the treatment of Italian Americans would provide another perspective on the issue to shed light on why they did or did not support the discriminatory policies. Additional research incorporating the treatment of women in these internment camps, or the effects left on the wives of Italian American residents would elucidate the narrative of Italian Americans during the war. Furthermore, it would be beneficial to delve deeper into the cases brought against the Italian Americans in order to provide more evidence of the plausible arbitrary nature of these hearings and to reveal the ways policy and law can be manipulated. Finally, this investigation could have been enriched by more first-hand testimonies made by Italian Americans themselves, specifically ones which focus on their circumstances during the war as a way to delve deeper into what life was like for immigrant communities and how they perceived those circumstances.

Regardless of how the community responded to detainment, arrest, internment, censorship, forced assimilation, and overall discrimination, the reaction was one of self-defense and defiance; whether they were conforming to American societal standards or denouncing the government in their local newspapers, the Italian American community took the challenges and discrimination presented to them and survived in an environment which did its best to minimize their identity. I believe this research is significant because it shows the ways in which immigrant communities adjust and respond to an increased pressure from change, movement, and war. This can be applied to our contemporary moment as immigration has become more political than ever, given recent events. Since 9/11, the Department of Homeland Security has increased raids, arrests, and deportations.<sup>123</sup> This negatively impacts immigrant and migrant communities by causing more tension, increased financial burden, and tearing families apart. The increased attention on immigrant communities has created culture of fear around immigration and has

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<sup>123</sup> Golash-Boza, Tanya Maria. *Immigration nation: Raids, detentions, and deportations in post-9/11 America*. Routledge, 2015. 2

furthered the negative perception of immigrants and their families. All of these actions, much like those taken during The Second World War, were done in the name of National Security.<sup>124</sup>

It is clear that regardless the time or circumstances, the safety and identity of immigrant communities in America is contingent on politics, often having harmful impacts on the community.

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<sup>124</sup> Golash-Boza, 62.

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