“La Religione, La Patria, e la Famiglia:” Comparison of the Reactions of Italian Americans in Philadelphia and New York City to Fascism, 1910s-1930s

By

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Abstract

In the period between 1880 and 1920, Italy experienced the mass migration of 17 million of its inhabitants, which brought millions of these Italians to settle in the United States. This influx of Italian immigration to the United States reached its tail end just as Benito Mussolini was beginning to introduce his fascist doctrine to Italy, rapidly rising to power shortly after. This research involves and analysis and comparison of the responses of the Italian Americans in both Philadelphia and New York City to the rise of Mussolini’s fascism during the early 1910s to the early 1930s. To understand how each city’s Italian-American communities responded, this thesis focuses on the way their reactions to fascism are reflected in their Italian-American press organizations, religious organizations, labor organizations and social organizations. The differences found between the reactions of those Italian Americans in New York City and in Philadelphia are then placed in the context of each city's unique challenges and conditions in order to provide an explanation of why such variance in their reactions occurred.
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Chapter I

Introduction

“City streets in the United States became transplanted into Italian towns and provinces, where old parochialisms, including endogamy, flourished. This situation encouraged more and more Italians to set out for America.”

In the period between 1880 and 1920, Italy experienced *la grande migrazione* (the Great Migration): the mass migration of 17 million Italians from regions across Italy. When this migration began, European countries with which Italy had territorial proximity and contiguity, such as France and Switzerland, were the main destinations for these Italian migrants. This pattern shifted around 1890, when Brazil, Argentina, and overwhelmingly, the United States (taking 36.9 percent of all Italian emigrants between 1896-1915), became the main receivers of the Italian migrants. By 1920, in a span of just forty years, the United States had received approximately four million Italian immigrants. The mass immigration period began to fade around 1920, when nationalism and prejudice against immigrants surfaced in the United States as a side effect of the World War, resulting in new legislation placing limitations on immigrants. In 1912, the Literacy Act denied access to those immigrants proven illiterate, which accounted for a large number of rural, impoverished hopeful Italian immigrants. In 1920 and 1924, the Quota Acts were passed, reducing immigration from Eastern and Southern Europe, dropping it to a third of what it was in the previous decade. The Great Depression and the emergence of the

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Fascist regime in Italy and fear of its spread further restrained Italian immigration in the next decade, officially putting an end to “la grande migrazione” to America.

Why did this massive phenomenon of migration occur? Scholars who have done work on this subject seem to agree that the explanations behind this mass migration can be reduced to a handful of intertwining and interrelated factors, a few of which I will discuss in brief. One of these is the occurrence of major developments in overseas transportation during the latter half of the 19th century. As metal hulls replaced wooden ones, and new more powerful engines were developed, ships became bigger, faster, more predictable and more punctual. Before these improvements, a sea voyage from Naples to New York would take anywhere from five weeks to two months, where it could be now done in ten to twelve days. These improvements also led to voyages being more affordable, and having more space and better sanitary conditions, making the trip more accessible and comfortable.

Coinciding with these major improvements in transportation, Italy saw a spectacular growth in its population during the last half of the 20th century. Between 1861 and 1911, the population increased by 40%, rising from 24 million to 34.7 million. This growth coincided with substantial stagnation in Italy’s agricultural sector: wheat prices declined with the introduction of cheap American, Australian, and Russian wheat to the European market, rice prices declined with the opening of the Suez Canal and access to less expensive Indian rice, and a new civil code passed in 1865 abolished feudalism and led to the fragmentation of land into parcels too small to sustain agricultural production. With the agricultural economy in crisis, most of this population growth could not be effectively absorbed into the labor force, leading to a

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4 Bailey, Immigrants, 32.
5 Bailey, Immigrants, 33.
spike in unemployment and poverty, and thus, a motive to find new opportunities through migration.

Another contributing factor to the mass migration was the fact that there were few restrictions by the Italian government on those who wanted to go abroad. In fact, the government passed the Emigration Law of 1888, declaring emigration a private matter in which the state could not and should not intervene. The law also provided support for migration with the regulation of agents, contracts, and security and health aboard the ships through the Commissariato Generale dell’Emigrazione (General Commission of Emigration).\(^6\) This subtle support of migration was in part due to the fact that the Italian government saw emigration as an essential tool to keep control of social unrest, as it was often members of the unemployed and impoverished working class who were leaving the country. Once settled in their new homes, these emigrants often sent money back to their relatives in Italy, which became an important source in the Italian economy.\(^7\)

The immigrants taking part in this “great migration” came from all regions of Italy, with approximately 45 percent coming from southern regions (Sicily, Campania, Abruzzo, etc.), 44 percent from northern regions (Veneto, Friuli, Piedmont, Lombardy, etc.), and 11 percent from the center of the peninsula (Lazio, Marche, Tuscany, Umbria).\(^8\) Occurring nation-wide, the “great migration” had a distinct pattern. The first chunk of the migration period (1876-1900) saw most of the migration coming from the northern regions compared to the south and central regions. In the latter period of migration (1901-1920), the migration pattern shifted, as migrants from the southern regions began to dramatically surpass migrants from the north. Migration from

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\(^6\) Bailey, *Immigrants*, 32.
\(^7\) Bailey, *Immigrants*, 32.
the central regions remained small and constant throughout the period. During the first phase of mass migration (1876-1900), most of those who migrated were younger to middle-aged males (16-45 years old) from lower socioeconomic ranks of society. More than 90 percent of these male emigrants held occupations of rural work, industrial and artisanal work, and day labour. Half of those migrating were seasonal workers who planned on returning to Italy after a brief time in America. Due to this, they had no interest in integrating into American society; their goal was to simply find employment, make money, and return to Italy to buy back lands they had lost. By the second phase of mass migration (1901-1920), once it became clear that many of these migrants were not coming back, women and children, with their tickets financed by those who had already emigrated to America, began to account for a larger number of those migrating to the United States.

The process of migration was nothing close to easy. To start, one needed to get a passport, save up enough to buy tickets, and organize or join a group to travel with. Finally, after the journey to get to a port (the only three were in Genoa, Naples, and Palermo), baggage inspections, medical examinations, and passport checks, came the voyage across the ocean. Once they were accepted into the United States, the Italian immigrants began to settle in major industrial centers in the Northeast in search of work. More than 3/4 of the immigrants settled in an area of seven adjacent states stretching from Massachusetts through Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio and Illinois. Few were able to find fulltime jobs, or jobs in which they had experience with at home, often settling for any available position they could find. Some took up jobs as fishermen in San Francisco, or in cigar factories in the south. Most found

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9 Bailey, Immigrants, 29.
10 Bailey, Immigrants, 29.
11 Bailey, Immigrants, 57.
employment in the mines of Pennsylvania and Illinois, and in garment factories in Chicago and New York City. With this, two of the biggest populations of Italian Americans developed in Philadelphia and New York City, which will be the focus of this paper.

Following the general trend of Italian migration to America, there was no sizable Italian-American settlement in Philadelphia until the 1880s. In 1880, there was as few as 1,656 Italian immigrants living in the city, concentrated within a small area in the southern region of the city.¹² Just ten years later, in 1890, the number of Italian immigrants and their offspring in the city reached 10,023, and ten years after that, in 1910, it was up to 76,734.¹³ The original conglomeration in southern Philadelphia spread into the rest of the city, with new settlements popping up in Manayunk, Roxborough, West Philadelphia, North Philadelphia, Frankfort, and Overbrook, to name a few. By 1920, the time in which the mass migration started to fall, the total number of first and second-generation Italian Americans in Philadelphia reached 136,793, making them the second largest nationality group in Philadelphia (7.5 percent of the city’s total population), second to German Americans.¹⁴

During this period of Italian immigration to Philadelphia, various industries in “were experiencing substantial growth” supplying the immigrants with a wide range of options for employments to fit their interests and skills.¹⁵ Italian immigrants in Philadelphia found themselves with occupations in mining, cigar factories, barber shops railroad construction, restaurants, milk companies, bakeries, banks, insurance firms, street-car manufacturing, and

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groceries, amongst others. The expansive Philadelphia job market also facilitated people to move freely within the market, allowing Italian immigrants to “shop around” in search of more enjoyable work or better wages. For example, one Italian immigrant went from being an ice cream cone salesman, to a baker, and then a civilian employee of the United States Signal Corps. Like its job market, Philadelphia also provided Italian immigrants with a large supply of housing options and property ownership opportunities. Unlike New York City, populated with cramped apartments and tenement buildings, Philadelphia contained a large supply of small, sturdy houses designed for single-family occupancy. Due to unique land rent contracts established by Philadelphia’s founder, William Penn, a settler could “build on leased land, which [would] remain in the family as long as his descendants paid the ground rent,” allowing those low in wealth a chance to own a home. This land-rent policy, coupled with greater economic opportunities in the job market, facilitated a great number of Italian immigrants to build and own their own, single-family homes. This land contract also allowed for Italian immigrants to open their own shops for things like barbering, tailoring, groceries and shoe-repairing.

While outsiders viewed this ever-growing group as “Italians” living in America or even “Italian Americans,” this concept of common Italian ancestry was something reserved for census enumerators rather than for actual members of the Italian-American population. As a result of Italy’s late national unification, which did not come until the early 1870s, regional, provincial and local allegiances were still essential to the self-identity of Italians in America. This phenomenon, seen not only in Philadelphia, but across various communities of Italian Americans, had individuals from different regions shying away from each other and sticking

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17 Juliani, Social Organization Philadelphia, 94.  
18 Juliani, Social Organization Philadelphia, 189.
close to others from their region. Since immigration occurred through a chain of family and village connections, it was not uncommon at all to have a sizable group of Italian Americans from the same region living in the same location in America. In the United States, they settled in separate neighborhoods based on these regional or even village lines, sometimes occupying an entire section of the city. For example, in Philadelphia, the area of Montrose Street was occupied by Albanian-speaking Italian immigrants who could not understand the traditional Italian language, from the city of Spezzano Albanse. In each of these regionally defined colonies, these immigrations did things like speak their own dialect and shop at neighborhood stores and businesses owned by other immigrants from their region.

These region-based divides in Philadelphia within Italian-American society went beyond separate settlements within the city but were also reflected in various institutions across the city. For example, political organizations catered to these divisions, recruiting party workers who not only had Italian ancestry, but also shared regional ties with their Italian American constituents. The division also extended into religion: despite most Italian Americans being Catholic, those immigrants from different regions would attend churches dedicated to different saints and religious figures. For example, immigrants from the Calabria region attended the church of Our Lady Pompei, while those from Genoa attended the church of St. Michael of the Saints. Even Italian-American mutual aid societies and organizations attended to these divisions. One of the biggest Italian-American mutual aid societies in Philadelphia, the Societa Italiana Unione Abruzzese, allowed only immigrants born in the Abruzzi region to receive their support. A major aspect of Philadelphia’s Italian-American society that was influenced by these sub-

21 Juliani, Social Organization Philadelphia, 564.
national divisions was the Italian-American periodical press. These Italian language newspapers would address immigrant readers from certain regions or provinces, supplying them with local news from their region back home.

These regional divides within the Italian-American population in Philadelphia and stayed relatively strong until around the 1930s, when shared experiences of prejudice and discrimination began to bring these individuals together. For those belonging to other ethnic groups in Philadelphia, these regional identities did not exist: “a wop was a wop,” no matter where in Italy he came from. Thus, Italian Americans from all regions in Italy experienced the same anti-Italian sentiments from the community: they were harassed by Irish policemen and were blamed for being “mobsters” and “criminals.” In 1934, an article in a Philadelphia newspaper described south Philadelphia’s Italian community as “the gangdom of triggermen, where extortion, banditry, robberies and murders were typical of everyday life among Premier Benito Mussolini’s former countrymen.” As a result of this shared animosity from their non-Italian counterparts, the mid-1930s saw the break-down of these regional divides, with most mutual aid societies and organizations opening their membership to all Italian Americans.

From the start of the mass migration movement in the 1880s, New York City was home to the largest settlement of Italians in America, and outside of Italy. In 1890, there were 75,000 Italian-born Americans, and 40,000 born in America of Italian parentage, making up 5 percent of the city’s total population. By 1930, when mass immigration had dwindled out, at least a sixth of the city was made up of those either born in Italy or were second-and third-generation Italian

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22 Juliani, Social Organization Philadelphia, 566.
23 Juliani, Social Organization Philadelphia, 566.
24 Juliani, Social Organization Philadelphia, 566.
25 Bailey, Immigrants in the Lands of Promise, 58.
Americans who had been born in America.\textsuperscript{26} Within the city, the Italian immigrants mainly concentrated within the boroughs of Manhattan (East Harlem, Greenwich Village, South Village) and Brooklyn. These areas were known as “immigrant zones” and were characterized by their large populations, high densities, and high mortality rates, giving them the reputation as containing the worst housing of all American cities in the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century.\textsuperscript{27} Housing situations were specifically horrendous in lower Manhattan, where the greatest number of Italian immigrants lived. Here, most Italian Americans lived in “old law” (pre-1901) tenements, also known as “dumb-bell” tenements. These were five-story high buildings with each floor divided into four apartments housing multiple families at a time with limited access to direct air or light from outside. The bedrooms, located on the back of each floor, would be closet sized (7 x 8 1/2 feet), with only the ones on the top floors receiving light from the airshaft. Two water closets would be located on each floor in a public hallway and were to be shared by two or more families. With no fire escapes and little access to outside in general, if these tenements caught fire, the result was deadly. Due to their inhabitable and unsafe conditions, New York State passed the Tenement House Act in 1901, which increased fire safety, added a water closet for each family, added more windows and widened the airshaft of all buildings erected after its passage.\textsuperscript{28} Unfortunately, many Italian Americans continued to live in the old tenement buildings as it was all they could afford.

As occurred in Philadelphia, and the rest of America, due to the process of chain migration and persisting ties with origin regions rather than Italy as a whole, Italian Americans in New York City clustered along these regional lines in residential areas, block by block, or building by

\textsuperscript{26} Bailey, \textit{Immigrants}, 58.
\textsuperscript{27} Bailey, \textit{Immigrants}, 124.
\textsuperscript{28} Bailey, \textit{Immigrants}, 126.
building. Also like in Philadelphia, these persisting regional divides led to things like the formation of mutual aid societies named after specific regions and offered membership exclusively to people from those regions, as well as Italian-language newspapers catering Italian immigrants from a specific region.

Like in Philadelphia, in New York City, these regional-origin based ties broke down in the 1930s with the shared experiences of prejudice and discrimination, with increased frustration with the *padroni*, and the expansion of social networks due to involvement with peddlers’ markets, business partnerships, youth gangs, church related activities and festival societies. Something unique to New York City that exploited these regionally defined groupings of Italian Americans was the *padroni*. Wanting to stick together in the job force, men living in these regional-origin defined neighborhoods would go to work under a *padroni*, who was someone from their same area/origin region. After recruiting a squad of laborers from their neighborhood for a larger employer, the *padroni* would act as an intermediary boss, necessary as most workers and employers could not speak the same language. The *padroni* often exploited their workers: they would lie in job descriptions and would not adequately distribute the workers’ pay, keeping a chunk for themselves.\(^{29}\) Despite their frustrations with the *padroni*, the workers, being mostly illiterate, having poor English, and fearful of the government, rarely ever spoke against them. Thus, money that may have helped improve their miserable standards of living in tenements and slums went to a small number of these wealthy *padroni*.

Selecting the sizable Italian-American communities of New York City and Philadelphia as its focus, this research will look at the reactions of these Italian Americans to the rise of fascism back at home in Italy, as well as in America. In doing so, the question of whether or not a

\(^{29}\) Bailey, *Immigrants in the Lands of Promise*, 98.
difference existed between each city’s Italian-American communities’ reactions, and why, will be answered.

**Chapter II**

*Italian Fascism/Anti-Fascism Comes to America*

In its most basic definition, Italian fascism was a political doctrine that combined elements of corporatism, nationalism, militarism, anti-liberalism, and anti-Communism.\(^{30}\) Fascism was introduced to Italy during the post-First World War period, which had left the country in a state of fear and anxiety due to crises in political, social, and economic order in Italy and across Europe. With democracy and capitalism seeming to fail to resolve these crises, and with the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution setting an example of an alternative, more Italians of the middle class were coming to fear the rise of the left. Fascism filled the void in this political vacuum, introducing a “third way,” that was neither capitalism nor communism. In this climate of national and international crisis, fascism offered Italians a way to regenerate their nation “through the violent destruction of all political forms and forces they held responsible for national disunity and divisiveness.”\(^{31}\)

It was Benito Mussolini who capitalized on the climate of post-war Italy to bring this fascist doctrine to power in Italy. Mussolini had become active in politics in 1919, with the establishment of the Fascio di Combattimento. At first, the political movement attracted minimal attention, with only around a hundred participants including veterans, politically minded futurists, and some dissident socialists. But between the fall of 1920 and the spring of 1921, with the growing strength of trade unions, communism, and socialism, the movement became more


\(^{31}\) De Grand, *Italian Fascism*, x.
popular. It was primarily those from the middle class (teachers, architects, and lawyers, some agrarians, etc.) and the elite that were drawn to the movement to destroy “the alternative power structure created by the rising socialists.” At this point in 1921, the loose Fascio di Commattimento movement transformed into the Partito Nazionale Fascista (the National Fascist Party or PNF). The fascist militias, backed by the middle-class and the elite, as well as much of the state apparatus, began a series of violent offensives against all political parties of socialist or Catholic motivations. By 1922, the socialist party “had become so divided and weakened that it could no longer mount a threat to the state,” yet the fascists continued their movement, which was no longer simply to defeat the Socialists, but to “create a new framework that would deprive the workers, their party, and the unions of the power to threaten bourgeois Italy at any future time.” On October 24, 1922, the fascist party launched a campaign of psychological warfare to seize control of the country: The March on Rome. As the party’s militia was no match for the strength of regular troops, they attempted to “bluff the government into submission” by laying out fictitious plans to mobilize and to seize public buildings and rail centers in major cities, before converging on Rome. By October 28th, the plan worked, and King Victor Emmanuel III appointed Benito Mussolini as Italy’s youngest Prime Minister. From then, Mussolini set out on his path to restoring Italy to its previous grandeur at whatever costs it would take.

The pressures of American society in the post-war years left Italian Americans in a position that made them potential supporters of fascism before Mussolini took power in 1922. As John Diggins identifies in his Mussolini and Fascism: The View from America, there were three main compounding reasons that made fascism so attractive to Italian Americans. The first was

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32 De Grand, Italian Fascism, x.
33 De Grand, Italian Fascism, 36.
34 De Grand, Italian Fascism, 36.
the increase of nativism in American society brought on by the Red Scare of 1919, leading to its “rejection of the ‘melting pot’ in favor of national homogeneity.”\textsuperscript{35} With rising fears about the left and its spread from Europe, Americans began to associate Italians with radicalism and labour violence, increasing animosity and discrimination against them. These kinds of negative stereotypes became “deeply ingrained in the minds of rural, native, Protestant Americans, who felt threatened by the inundation of an alien \textit{canaille}.”\textsuperscript{36} The most well-known example of these discriminatory beliefs and behaviors against Italian Americans were apparent in reactions to the Sacco and Vanzetti case of 1921, where two Italian Americans, Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, were convicted and tried for robbery and murder. Although the court disproved many of the arguments made against them, their position as known radicals prejudiced the jury and judge to rule against them, and they were ultimately sentenced to death. Though shared experiences of discrimination from American society had helped to break down regional ties that were keeping Italian Americans divided, discrimination still kept them from integrating into American society. Feeling like “unwelcomed strangers in a sometimes hostile land, the Italian American[s] looked almost desperately to [their] home country for personal solace and national identity.”\textsuperscript{37} Hearing the news of Mussolini’s fascist ideology and seeing it rise to power in the March on Rome, people were drawn back home to Italy, where Mussolini appeared to be revitalizing Italy and restoring its grandeur. With this, Italian Americans “began to look at their home country with a new sense of pride and dignity.”\textsuperscript{38} As one Italian American girl put it,

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\textsuperscript{36} John Diggins, \textit{Mussolini and Fascism}, 79. \\
\textsuperscript{37} John Diggins, \textit{Mussolini and Fascism}, 79. \\
\textsuperscript{38} John Diggins, \textit{Mussolini and Fascism}, 79. 
\end{flushright}
“[Mussolini] enable[ed] four million Italians in America to hold up their heads...if you had been branded as undesirable by a quota law, you would understand.”

Secondly, Italian Americans growing nostalgia for home filtered their reaction and interpretation of Fascist Italy. As many Italian immigrants struggled to assimilate into American society, these immigrants frequently looked back on their time in Italy, often recalling only the best characteristics of the country they left. Thus, with this nostalgia placing rose colored glasses on their view of Italy, it became difficult for Italian Americans to reject fascist Italy. Lastly, there was what Diggins called the “conflict of the generations:” the second-generation Italian Americans’ rejection of their immigrant heritage. Many Italian-American youths who were still struggling to fit into the society they were born in began to reject the Italian customs of their parents, seeing them as the root of their difficulties with assimilation. Their first-generation Italian immigrant parents tried to prevent revolts against their heritage by instilling within them a strong identification with Italy, through things like the teaching of Italian language. The fascist government supported these endeavors, with propaganda that encouraged language classes and identified the “wholesome family unit” as the first source of a worker’s moral happiness. Evidence of just how integral the maintenance of a strong family unit became to the fascist support can be seen in the slogan of the leading fascist organization in America: “La Religione, La Patria, e la Famiglia.” Thus, Fascism emerged as a way to fill a void that Italian Americans had from their alienation and failure to become a part of American society, despite their time in the country, making the occurrence of fascism’s spread to America easy to understand.

39 John Diggins, Mussolini and Fascism, 63.
40 John Diggins, Mussolini and Fascism, 80.
41 John Diggins, Mussolini and Fascism, 80.
42 John Diggins, Mussolini and Fascism, 80.
On May 2, 1921, the first official Italian-American fascist organization in America was created in New York City, sending news of its establishment to Mussolini in a telegram that read:

“The first Fascio Italiano di Combattimento in the United States, meeting in an assembly today, salutes all of the Fasci of Italy. We assert the right of all emigrants to participate in the national recovery and reconstruction and to voice their desire to participate in [Italian] elections. Because the fascist idea exalts Italian national power and inspires respect and dignity for our brothers abroad, who work for the well-being of their families and for the honor of Italy, we count on the efforts of our kinsmen and friends of the entire peninsula to bring about the triumph of the fascist electoral list.”

Mussolini reacted to news of the first Italian-American fascist organization with an ambivalence that gave it a rocky start. Mussolini had been slightly surprised, as this first fascist organization in New York had come to fruition as a local, autonomous, initiative by Italian Americans. Mussolini took this opportunity to outline the goals of fascism abroad for the first time, which were:

“To arouse, conserve, and exalt Italianita among the millions of fellow Italians dispersed between the colonies and the mother country; to established tried and true ‘fascist consulates’ for the legal and extra-legal protection of all Italians, especially those who work for foreign entrepreneurs; to hold aloft, always and everywhere, the name of the Italian homeland.”

With this, the first fascist emissary, Giuseppe Bottai, was sent to the United States in August 1921, as a “fascist representative who want[ed] to help combat bolshevism in

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Bottai was to maintain a role of diplomatic pressure rather than one of party activism, helping to secure Italy’s foreign policy goals for Mussolini. With Mussolini being named Prime Minister after the March on Rome, his involvement with the rising fascist movement in the United States intensified. He could no longer let the fascist organizations in America develop on their own as their “local needs would take priority to party needs.”

He also knew the importance of maintaining a positive relationship with Washington, so he could secure American loans and bring an end to Americas’ restrictive legislation on Italy immigration. The Italian-American fascist movement posed a risk to this, as they would be “the example by which Americans would judge Italian fascism” if they began to disrupt American society. To protect Italian fascism, Mussolini urged that the Italian-American fascist movement “limit itself to the ideological [and] philanthropic, and [that it should not] assume [the] character of an active political organization.” By early 1923, he had ordered the establishment of a central fascist organization in New York City to govern all of the fascist organizations in North America, while still making it look like they functioned independently from Italy. Leaders of this organization were to ensure that the Italian-American fascist organizations avoided “everything that could disturb relations between Italy and the United States,” and maintained “a rigid respect for the laws and desires of all countries.”

At this point, the Italian-American fascist movement had spread out of New York City, and organizations popped up in various other locations, including Schenectady, Buffalo, Albany, Syracuse (New York); Cleveland, Columbus and Youngstown (Ohio); and Philadelphia,
Pennsylvania. By April 1923, thirty fascist organizations had been established in North America. The spread of the Italian-American fascist movement in North America was met with the arrival of the Italian-American anti-fascist movement in mid-1923, which brought a new issue for Mussolini. He feared that with the arrival of a contrasting Italian-American anti-fascist movement, the Italian-American fascist movement would resort to violence to deal with them, as they already had in Philadelphia in a series of clashes. These acts of violence and hostility would taint the American perspective of Italian fascism and would undo all the careful work Mussolini had done in cultivating a positive opinion. Mussolini and his foreign advisors debated strongly whether or not to abandon the Italian-American fascist organizations, to order them to shut down, or to continue to support them. It was decided that the Italian-American fascist organizations would continue to exist, with even more restrictions that dictated that they were not to “create divisive situations” in Italian communities, and were to “avoid any acts, gestures, or words that [could] diminish the prestige of [Italy’s] diplomatic representatives.”

This was accompanied by an announcement to American officials that stated that “the Fasci abroad are not nor were they ever considered to be sections of the party, [and therefore] have no party functions to carry out.” Thus, under the careful eye of Italy, the Italian-American fascist movement was free to continue to spread and develop.

Like fascist support, the foundations for anti-fascism in Italian American communities were established years before Mussolini took power in 1922, taking root in the Italian American labour movement. Whereas fascism originated as reaction against communism, socialism, and the left in general, the Italian-American anti-fascist movement began with the support of a small group of anarchists, socialists, syndicalists, and labour organizers. As Italian immigrants were

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50 Cannistrano, *Blackshirts in Little Italy*, 43.
51 Cannistrano, *Blackshirts in Little Italy*, 43.
some of the last to arrive in America during the late-19th-century wave of European immigration, they found themselves “at the bottom economically of the occupational ladder,” and thus, a good number “gravitated toward the Socialist Labour Party.” By 1900, there were at least twenty Italian Branches of the Social Labour Party. More commonly, many Italian Americans found themselves dispersed throughout unions, specifically in clothing, fur, textile and leather industries, and construction trades. Also, for decades proceeding Mussolini’s rise to power, America had been a place of refuge for a great number of Italian radicals with a background of labour militancy. It was from these left-leaning Italian Americans that the anti-fascist movement began to emerge in the early 1920s in response to news of Mussolini’s growing power in Italy. Amongst these pioneers of the movement were: Vittorio Vadali (leader of the Italian Federation of the Worker’s Party of America), Carlo Tresca (editor of the syndicalist Il Proletario and prominent member of the Industrial Workers of the World), Girolamo Valenti and Vincenzo Vacirca (members of the Italian Socialist Federation), Frank Bellanca (leader of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers Union), and Luigi Antonini (general secretary of Local 89 of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union). In April 1923, in response to the March on Rome and Mussolini being named Prime Minister of Italy, a coalition of leftist groups and major labour unions, including the New York Federation of Labour, the Amalgamated Clothing Workers Union, and the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, came together to create the first official anti-Fascist organization, the Anti-Fascist Worker Alliance of North America (later renamed the Anti-Fascist Alliance of North America (AFANA)).

With the creation of the AFANA, the Italian-American anti-fascist movement took off and emerged into American society. For the most part, the anti-fascist movement followed a two-

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52 Diggins, Mussolini and Fascism, 111.
pronged approach to assaulting fascism: one was to expose the tyranny of Mussolini, and the other was to halt the spread of fascism in the United States. After the AFANA announced its manifesto, calling upon Italian-American workers to come to the aid of fellow workers in Italy, the Italian Chamber of Labour responded by pledging the support of 150,000 members. The AFANA also began to distribute pamphlets, give speeches denouncing Mussolini, and organize rallies and street demonstrations to expose the unfolding fascist Movement and urge the threat of its spread to America. In response to the growing number of fascist propaganda infiltrating into America, anti-fascist propaganda began to appear within labour organization newspapers and in dailies like Frank Bellanca’s *Il Nuovo Mondo*, established in New York City in 1925, which was exclusively dedicated to anti-fascist propaganda. Other prominent leaders like Antonini, worked to integrate the Italian-American anti-fascist movement in the United States within the European anti-fascist community. He encouraged European anti-fascist leaders to visit America, sponsored a speaking tour for Italian socialist Giuseppe E. Modigliani, and attended an anti-fascist congress in Brussels. Despite the strength of their small movement (10 percent of the total Italian-American population of 4,600,000 in 1930), the anti-fascist movement found it difficult to successfully attack Mussolini without earning themselves the stigma of being “un-Italian.” As the fascist movement had already stolen the rhetoric of patriotism for its propaganda, it was an uphill battle for the Italian-American anti-fascist movement to gain support in some Italian-American communities.

The next chapter will address how the Italian-American communities in both Philadelphia and New York City reacted to the arrival of the Italian-American fascist and anti-fascist movements. It will explore the reception of fascism in each city’s Italian-American community by looking at how they were reflected in local press organizations, religious organizations, social organizations, and labour organizations.
Chapter III

The Response of Italian Americans in Philadelphia and New York City to Fascism

"The power base for Mussolini's Italian American empire was the institutional infrastructure of the immigrant community, with the press, consulate, schools, clubs, radio programs and social and cultural organizations all succumbing to the influence of Mussolini's regime, becoming de facto transmission belts of fascist propaganda."56

The goal of this chapter will be to analyze various Italian-American press organizations, religious organizations, labour organizations, and social organizations in both New York City and Philadelphia in order to see how they embody the reactions of each city’s Italian Americans to Fascism. The chapter will address the way in which Italian Americans in Philadelphia and New York City expressed their feelings toward fascism through the content and goals of each localities’ Italian-American press. An important note to make is that most Italian-American newspapers from this period of time have yet to be digitized, nor are they in English, making them inaccessible to distant, non-Italian speaking researchers. This makes their translation and inclusion in other secondary sources a valuable source of information on the topic, which I will rely greatly on in this chapter. Across the United States, the Italian-American press heavily showed support in favour of fascism: in a 1923 survey of 136 Italian-American newspapers, only

eight were critical of fascism.\textsuperscript{57} In New York City, the most prominent pro-fascist Italian-language newspapers were \textit{Il Progresso Italo-Americano}, \textit{Il Carroccio}, and \textit{Il Grido dell' Stirpe}. Though the daily, \textit{Il Progresso Italo-Americano}, was founded in 1879, it was not until Generoso Pope bought and took over the newspaper in 1928 that it reached a massive circulation of 200,000, making it the largest Italian-language daily in America. Pope, an avid supporter of Mussolini and fascism, transformed the paper into what was described as “leading propagandist for fascism in the United States.”\textsuperscript{58} New York City was also home to a handful of newspapers with anti-fascist sentiments, the most well-known being the daily \textit{Il Nuovo Mondo}. \textit{Il Nuovo Mondo} was founded in 1925 by Frank Bellanca, with the support of several unions in eastern cities. The daily featured the writing of Italian exiles and American fascist critics, covering themes of repression, terror, corruption, and war. The paper also frequently included “dramatic cartoons poking fun at Mussolini and his corrupt regime” done by Italian American immigrant, Fort Velona.\textsuperscript{59} For example, one of Velona’s caricatures portrayed Mussolini, Pope Pius XI, and King Vittorio Emanuele III standing next to each other with the caption “The curses of Italy are three: The Pope, Il Duce,

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\textbf{Figure 1}
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\textsuperscript{57} Philip V. Cannistraro and Gerald Meyer, \textit{The Lost World of Italian American Radicalism: Politics, Labor, and Culture} (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 2003) 54.


\textsuperscript{59} Bencivenni, \textit{Italian Immigrant Radical Culture}, 187.
and the king” (Figure 1). By doing so, Velona hoped to “expose Mussolini’s characteristic tendency to temporize and compromise with powerful groups to consolidate.” Velona also “accused the church and the monarchy of providing support for the fascist regime.” Another one of his well-known caricatures featured the question: “Why do Italian-booish newspapers vie to prostitute themselves to Fascism?” pointing criticism at the Italian-language newspapers that had become fascist propaganda organs backed by financial support from the fascist regime in Italy (Figure 2). In his cartoons, Velona frequently used the common insignia of the Black Shirts, including skulls, crossbones, and the manganello (short club used to beat enemies), reversing the symbolism to represent “horror and doom for the future of Italy.” Also to represent the repressive nature of fascism, Velona would use images such as “Freedom” being “crucified” or a woman representing “Liberty” being gagged and tied on a cross (Figure 3). Cartoons like these from the

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60 Bencivenni, *Italian Immigrant Radical Culture*, 199.
61 Bencivenni, *Italian Immigrant Radical Culture*, 199.
64 Bencivenni, *Italian Immigrant Radical Culture*, 206.
newspaper were often reproduced onto gigantic posters and used at anti-fascist protests and rallies. As scholar Bencivenni states in his book on the topic, “growing awareness of the threat of fascism stimulated artistic expression, while art served as the means through which ideological strategies against fascism were articulated.”

As in New York City, Philadelphia was home to a number of fascist-supporting Italian-language newspapers, which included *L’Opinione* and *La Libre Parola*. *L’Opinione* had been established in 1906 by Charles C. A. Baldi Sr., a banker, undertaker, and real estate holder in Philadelphia. As Philadelphia’s only Italian-language daily at the time, *L’Opinione* was tasked with the responsibility of serving a “socially stratified community made up of professionals, common laborers, clothing and radio factory workers.”66 The weekly newspaper, *La Libre Parola*, was established in 1917 by Italian born journalist, Arpio Giuseppe Di Silvestro, as the official organ of the Pennsylvania Grand Lodge of the mutual aid organization, the Order of Sons of Italy. After his death in 1927, his son, Anthony Di Silvestro, inherited the paper. The overt pro-fascist attitude of both papers is evident in a number of its articles. For example, both papers showed their support to Italy’s involvement in Ethiopia.67 As well, upon Italy’s entrance into the Second World War on Germany’s side, both papers “espoused Mussolini’s assertion that Italy had declared war on France and Great Britain because these former allies in World War One were determined to check Italy’s alleged illegitimate development.”68 As the fighting in Europe began, they both celebrated the Italian army’s early victories in France. Both papers also took on the anti-American sentiments of fascism. This can be seen in a June 1st, 1932, *L’ Opinione* article

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65Bencivenni, *Italian Immigrant Radical Culture*, 188.
67 Ethiopia invaded by Italy on two separate occasions resulting in war: First Italo Ethiopian War (1895-96) and Second Italo-Ethiopian War (1935-37)
68 Luconi, "The Italian-Language Press,” 1038.
on the meaning of democracy in America, which states: “American people had gotten rid of kings and emperors in the late 18th century only to fall prey to trusts and corporations by the early twentieth century.” Other articles in *L’Opinione* and *La Libera Parola* described American election campaigns as “betray[ing] democratic principles because candidates usually abandoned their stands after winning elections,” making average citizens “pawns in the hands of the ruling class without the power to make significant changes by means of the ballot.” This attitude is seen again in a September 30, 1933, article of *La Libre Parola* which states that “unless American voters [are] offered a clear cut choice between socialism and fascism at the polls, rotation in government between the two traditional major parties [can] not cause any remarkable variation in the life of ordinary people, because the Democratic and Republican parties [are] only different labels under which the plutocracy yoke[s] the forgotten man to the cart of serfdom and hunger.” These attitudes were not exclusive to those who wrote for the papers: in a letter to the editor of *L’Opinione*, an anonymous Italian American reader agreed that “almost all-American politicians were unqualified sponges.” The pursuit of such fascist interests placed editors in an adversarial position with the American political parties they were to represent, as they discouraged Italian-Americans from registering to vote in American elections. Baldi Sr. the owner of *L’Opinione*, was a broker of the Philadelphia Republican Machine within the city’s Italian American community. While a key pillar of the Republican party in Philadelphia was the defense of American protectionist legislation, as it suited the industrial interests of the state, Baldi took on the stance of the Italian fascist government in 1929, which wanted free trade. Against his parties’ wishes, he led an unsuccessful campaign against

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70 Luconi, "The Italian-Language Press," 1040.  
the Hawley-Smoot Tariff Bill, legislation proposed by a senator from Pennsylvania, which would increase duties to an all-time high for exports. In this campaign, *L’Opinione* urged readers to “threaten their congressmen with an electoral rebuff unless they vote down the bill.” 73

In addition to newspapers, religious organizations also reflected the reaction of Italian Americans in both Philadelphia and New York City to rising fascism in Italy. In Italy itself, with few exceptions, the Italian Catholic clergy supported fascism, a support that had only increased after 1929 with the Lantern Pact, which had resolved outstanding issues between Mussolini and the Pope. This pattern extended to New York City, Philadelphia, and the United States as whole, where the American Catholic hierarchies “bestowed [their] blessing on Mussolini and his works.” 74 This was seen especially in Italian American parishes, where the support for fascism could be heard in sermons, religious celebrations, societies, and parochial schools. In New York City in 1943, when Msgr. Stephen H. Donahue was appointed auxiliary bishop of New York City, the fascist *Il Carroccio* regarded the event “with the most respectful friendship and most heartfelt devotion” as he [Msgr. Donohue] was a friend of the Italians/fascists.” 75 Cardinal Dougherty, the archbishop of Philadelphia, was given similar recognition by fascist supporters, even receiving decoration from Mussolini himself. Another example of these American Catholic fascist affiliations can be seen in 1926 at the inauguration of an Italian parochial school in Philadelphia, where speeches that "very enthusiastically applauded…Fascist Italy" were given by Cardinal Dougherty, archbishop of Philadelphia, and Reverend Tonini, who "referred to the admirable work of the Duce and the fascist Government, [with] emphasis on the wise work of

73 Luconi, "The Italian-Language Press,” 1042.
Fascism in strengthening and revitalizing religious sentiment.”\textsuperscript{76} Many Italian American Catholic churches in New York City were also led by Italian American clergy with strong fascist ties. For example, in 1934, Gaenato Arcese of the Holy Rosary in Manhattan, received compliments from the director of the Bureau of Italians.\textsuperscript{77} There was also Victor Bassi of the Our Lady of Grace in Bronx, who was deemed “notorious for his fascist activities” by the anti-fascist weekly \textit{La Parola}.\textsuperscript{78} During the time of Italy’s war in Ethiopia, he collected rings from Italian-American women to be sent to Italy to help boost gold reserves, as well as organized, within the city, a demonstration of support for the war where the fascist anthem was played. Reverend Francis P. Grassi, of the Saint Anthony Church in Bronx, held a golden anniversary of priesthood celebration which featured the fascist anthem and speeches that “hailed the patriotism of the guest of honor who had been one of the first enthusiasts of the fascist movement in Italy.”\textsuperscript{79} He also received telegrams of greeting from three ministers in Mussolini’s cabinet, and two cardinals from Italy. In response to the clergy’s support for the fascist regime, New York City based anti-Fascist paper, \textit{Il Mondo}, suggested that:

“If anyone should gather together all the utterances of American cardinals and bishops about Mussolini, all the sermons, all the articles, and essays of Catholic priests and monks, and all the effusions of the Jesuits of America, and of the minor organs of Catholic thought in this country, one would have the most impressive and astounding anthology of fascist glorification.”\textsuperscript{80}

\textsuperscript{76} Salvemini, \textit{Italian Fascist Activities}, 147.
\textsuperscript{77} Salvemini, \textit{Italian Fascist Activities}, 151.
\textsuperscript{78} Salvemini, \textit{Italian Fascist Activities}, 151.
\textsuperscript{79} Salvemini, \textit{Italian Fascist Activities}, 154.
\textsuperscript{80} Salvemini, \textit{Italian Fascist Activities}, 146.
Similar to both newspapers organizations and religious organizations, Italian American labor organizations and activities reflected the reactions of Italian Americans in New York City and Philadelphia to fascism. As discussed in the previous chapter, the mainstay of fascist opposition within Italian America was the Italian-dominated labour organizations/ unions. It was only in New York City where Italian Americans dominated a handful of union locals by the early 1910s, thus making them organizations sympathetic to the unique issues of Italian American workers. This included Local 63 (Italian Coat makers) of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America (ACWA) led by August Bellanca, Local 48 (Italian Cloak makers) of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU) led by Salvatore Ninfo and Eduardo Molisani, and Local 89 (Italian Dress and Waist Makers) of the ILGWU led by Luigi Antonini. These Italian-American-dominated locals were not small: Local 48 and 89 controlled around 4,200 workers, while Local 89 had 33,500, making it one of the largest in the country.\textsuperscript{81} As ardent anti-fascists, Frank Bellanca and Luigi Antonini, led their locals in mass anti-fascist rallies, attended by thousands of members. In 1924, at one of these rallies, Local 89, under Antonini, declared that “hundreds of emissaries of the Italian Tyrant have been unleashed in the United States…for the avowed purpose of terrorizing the American workers of Italian extraction into seceding and withdrawing from the ranks of the bona fide American Labour Movement!”\textsuperscript{82} From there, Antonini and his local urged the Central Trades and Labour Council to condemn Italian fascism and sent delegates from Local 89 to the 1924 ILGWU in Boston to present a motion that committed the Union, as a whole, to the anti-fascist movement.\textsuperscript{83} Antonini and his local were also a part of an anti-fascist group that attacked Italian fascists at a Carnegie Hall protest rally in

\textsuperscript{81} Cannistraro, \textit{The Lost World of Italian American Radicalism}, 25.  
\textsuperscript{82} Cannistraro, \textit{The Lost World of Italian American Radicalism}, 145.  
\textsuperscript{83} Cannistraro, \textit{The Lost World of Italian American Radicalism}, 148.
June 1924, urging for the strengthening of American efforts to defeat them. This participation earned them the support of the American Federation of Labour’s William Green. As the New York City Italian locals continued their push throughout the 1930s, they ran into violent clashes with fascists. For example, the locals and their supporters found themselves launching violent attacks on Mussolini supporters during Columbus Day activities and Garibaldi Day celebrations throughout the early years of the decade. These violent clashes continued until a young anti-fascist union member was killed in 1933 in Queens after he heckled a group of fascists at a Khaki Shirt meeting, which turned the organization’s activities to be less radical and violent.

While it can be assumed that the ILGWU locals made up of Italian American workers in Philadelphia had pledged their support to the anti-fascist movement, since the ILGWU had done so collectively in 1924, no specific mention of Italian-American locals in Philadelphia and their participation in anti-fascist or fascist activities was found. It is important to note that while archives for a number of Philadelphia’s union organizations do exist, none of their holdings have been digitized, and thus, were inaccessible for this research. With this lack of information, it can be assumed that in comparison to New York City, Italian Americans were not as numerous or involved in unions and labour organizations in Philadelphia, an important characteristic that distinguishes the two cities from each other.

Additionally, Italian-American social organizations and their associations with fascism and anti-fascism in New York City and Philadelphia offered clear reflections of each community’s reactions. In November 1925, at the Fascist Convention of Philadelphia, the Central Bureau for Propaganda announced its next task would be to set up “fascist infiltration into social organizations and mutual aid societies so as to create friendly ties.”

1928, the Fascist League of North America announced that it had gained the support of a number of social organizations, including the Order of the Sons of Italy, the Tiro a Segno Nazionale, the Dante Alighieri Society, the Italian American Chamber of Commerce, the War Veterans, the Maimed War Veterans, the Blue Ribbon, and the Italian Historical Society. Of all of these Italian-American social organizations, the reaction to fascism, both for and against, could be most obviously seen within the Order of the Sons of Italy. This fraternal organization was founded in 1905 in New York City by Dr. Vincenzo Sellaro, with the goal of helping Italian immigrants assimilate to American society during the immigration boom. By the 1920s, the organization had developed close political relations with Italy, and became known as “the voice of the Italian” in America.  

During this decade, ten additional grand lodges and 572 local lodges were organized across the country, including one of the first grand lodges in Philadelphia, which was headed John Di Silvestro, the Supreme Venerable, until 1935. It was Di Silvestro who first gave the organization a fascist affiliation in 1922, when, following the March on Rome, he telegraphed Mussolini to pledge the loyalty of the whole OSIA to the fascist regime. The actions of Di Silvestro on behalf of the entire organization outraged “even the most devout fascists,” who agreed that he had acted improperly in pledging the loyalty of the 300,000 Sons of Italy members. The greatest animosity against Di Silvestro came from the Grand Lodge of New York City and its leaders, Judge Salvatore Cotillo and Congressman Fiorello La Guardia, both anti-Fascists, who deemed Di Silvestro’s actions as “compromising Italian Americans” and led them to temporarily remove their Lodge from the OSIA organization in resistance.  

Recognizing Di Silvestro and his lodges’ support to the fascist cause, in 1929, the fascist league

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87 Salvemini, *Italian Fascist Activities*, 93.
sent a message to him from their annual convention, wishing “brotherly thoughts toward the Order of the Sons of Italy” and urging the OSIA to display “even greater activity on behalf of the fatherland.”\textsuperscript{88} In the following months, the unanimously re-elected Di Silvestro led 800 Sons of Italy members on a pilgrimage to Italy to express “their devotion to Italy, the Fascist regime, and Premier Mussolini.”\textsuperscript{89} With this increasing fascist support of the OSIA, in 1935, during Italy’s campaign in Ethiopia, the OSIA as a whole worked to ensure that Ethiopia “received no economic assistance from Congress and the White House” as well as “collected large sums to aid the Italian campaign there.”\textsuperscript{90} As one of New York City’s pro-fascist papers stated in an August 17, 1929 issue: “[the OSIA] is the only institution which was always conspicuous for its patriotism and for its unconditional support of fascism.”\textsuperscript{91}

While the pro-fascist reaction of Philadelphia’s Italian Americans is clearly seen in the actions of the OSIA lodge, a number of other New York City-based Italian-American social organizations show that Fascist support was evident among New York City’s Italian Americans. The New York City branch of the Dante Alighieri Society, a non-profit organization with the goal of promoting and fostering the Italian language and culture, can be seen as having fascist sympathies, demonstrated by the fascist affiliations of those who were its directorates from 1924 to 1929. For example, Dino Bigongiari, both a member of the fascio of New York, president of the New York Association of War Veterans (which also had fascist ties), and a promotor of the fascist Italian Union of American. As well, there was Mario Cosenza, an admirer of the ardently pro-fascist \textit{Il Carroccio}, an American delegate from the Italian Inter-Universitarians Institute of Rome (a fascist institute), and a recipient of decoration from Mussolini. As well, the Italian

\textsuperscript{88} Salvemini, \textit{Italian Fascist Activities}, 103.
\textsuperscript{89} Salvemini, \textit{Italian Fascist Activities}, 102.
\textsuperscript{90} Salvemini, \textit{Italian Fascist Activities}, 103.
\textsuperscript{91} Salvemini, \textit{Italian Fascist Activities}, 103.
Chamber of Commerce of New York City showed similar pro-fascist attitudes from within. Its secretary, A. Bonaschi, boasted that the organization “was one of the first pledges sent to the New Regime from Italian associations in America,” while in January 1923, the Chambers’ president Vitelli instructed its members to “be worthy of what is expected of Italians abroad by the man who, having formed Italian youth into one indissoluble fascio, has united into one fascio, equally indissoluble, the spirits of all Italians.”

As seen above in the resistance of the OSIA’s New York City grand lodge to support fascism, not all Italian-American social organizations displayed fascist sympathies. For example, the Mazzini Society, an anti-fascist political association, had been founded in 1939 by Italian anti-fascist exiles Gaetano Salvemini and Max Ascoli in Massachusetts, with a branch soon established in New York City in 1940. In addition to seeking ways to help with internal resistance in Italy, the Mazzini Societies also sought to persuade influential American opinion makers of the threat to American democracy posed by Mussolini’s regime.

The next chapter will address the findings of this chapter and will compare the reactions of each city’s Italian American communities to the rise of fascism as reflected through the various organizations discussed.

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Chapter IV

Conclusions

Between 1880 and 1920, America received approximately four million Italian immigrants during what was known as the “Great Migration” from Italy. These immigrants, mostly agricultural workers and their families fleeing an Italian agricultural economy in crisis, began to settle in major port cities, including Philadelphia and New York City. By 1920, Italian Americans were the second largest nationality group in Philadelphia (behind German Americans), with 136,793 residents of Italian descent (first and second-generation Italian immigrants).93 Meanwhile, New York City had become home to the largest settlement of Italians outside of Italy itself. By the end of the mass immigration period in 1930, one sixth of the city’s population was made up of first, second, or third generation Italian American immigrants.94 In both cities, the Italian American communities found themselves severely divided according to regional, provincial and local allegiances. Many lived in communities of those from the same regions of Italy, joined mutual aid societies dedicated to the members of those regions, and attended churches named for those regions. These divides remained strong until around 1919, when the Red Scare swept through America, bringing discrimination against Italian Americans. Italian Americans began to be associated with things like radicalism, labor violence, and anarchy, such as in the Sacco and Vanzetti case, resulting in their rejection and isolation from

94 Bailey, Immigrants in the Lands of Promise, 47.
mainstream American society. With this collective experience of discrimination, many Italian Americans, for the first time, were able to look past their regional divides, and came together to form a united “Italian-American” identity. Under this identity, they formed new inclusive organizations, such as Italian-American press organizations, religious organizations, labour organizations and social organizations.

Feeling unwelcome in their new country, which had promised them so much upon their arrival, many Italian Americans began to look back nostalgically to Italy, where Mussolini was busy spreading his fascist ideology and rising to power. Mussolini promised to revitalize Italy and restore the grandeur it once held as the home of the Roman Empire. With this, Mussolini and his fascism gave many Italian Americans a newfound sense of pride in a country that had rejected them and made them feel ashamed of their identity. These feelings facilitated fascism to easily make the jump across the ocean and into American society nearly as quickly as it had risen to power in Italy. By May 2, 1921, the first Italian-American fascist organization in the United States was established in New York City, marking New York City as the foci of fascism in America. Just two years later, the number of fascist organizations in North America had reached thirty, most of which operated autonomously from Mussolini’s fascist Italy. Alongside these fascist supporting Italian-American organizations, came the formation of Italian-American organizations that opposed Mussolini and his fascism. With a great number of Italian American immigrants, especially in New York City, finding work in low paying, low skilled jobs, many found themselves becoming affiliated with socialist parties and labour unions. It was these Italian-American labour organization members, anarchists, socialists, and syndicalists, who came together against the fascist ideology and formed a united anti-fascist effort. In April 1923, a coalition of these leftist groups and major labour unions came together in New York City to form
the first official anti-fascist organization, the Anti-Fascist Worker Alliance of North America, transforming New York City into the main battleground for the contest between fascism and anti-fascism. Meanwhile, Philadelphia had neither of these explicit fascist and anti-fascist organizations.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the ways in which Italian Americans in Philadelphia and New York City reacted to fascism were expressed through their press organizations, religious organizations, social organizations and labour organizations. Regarding press organizations, due to its position in the spotlight, New York City had a number of Italian-American papers which expressed both dedication to the fascist and anti-fascist cause. Among the city’s pro-fascist supporting Italian language papers was the country’s largest Italian-American daily, *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*. In addition to its numerous pro-fascist Italian-American newspapers, New York City was also home to a number of anti-fascist Italian-American newspapers, like the notorious *Il Nuovo Mondo*, which often featured caricatures that critiqued Mussolini and his fascist regime.

Like New York City, Philadelphia had a number of ardently fascist sympathizing Italian-language newspapers, like *L’Opinione* and *La Libera Parola*, both of which urged Italian Americans to get involved in American politics to sway them toward the Italian fascist foreign agenda. An examination of papers in Italian-American Philadelphia of the period reveals no specifically anti-fascist Italian-American newspapers in the city, suggesting that if any, they were not as numerous, or as well circulated as the ones in New York City.

In both New York City and Philadelphia, Italian-American religious organizations were overwhelmingly tied to the fascist cause, as was the Catholic clergy in Italy following the 1929
Lantern Pact between the Pope and Mussolini. This was most evidently seen in the way in which Italian American Catholic clergy in both cities received decoration and recognition from the Italian fascist regime and Mussolini himself for their work in supporting the fascist cause. On the opposite end of the spectrum, the bulk of Italian-American anti-fascism came from Italian-American labor organizations. In New York City, the Italian-American dominated Local 63 of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America (ACWA), and Locals 48 and 89 or the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU), who, as mentioned above, came together with other socialist organizations to form the Anti-Fascist Worker Alliance of North America. These locals held anti-fascist rallies and protests and convinced the ILGWU collectively to commit themselves to the anti-fascist cause in 1924.

In Philadelphia, union participation, both in general, and within Italian American communities, was much less. There is evidence that some Italian Americans in Philadelphia were a part of smaller, craft and artisan-like unions, such as the Granite Cutters’ International Association and the Journeymen Tailors International Union of America. Regarding larger unions, two locals amongst Philadelphia’s ACWA locals were explicitly Italian: Local 139 (Italian-speaking coat makers) which was chartered in 1916 and was Italian-speaking in its business, and Local 122, which was chartered in 1930 and had a membership of 5,000 that was 98 percent Italian. Still, the number of Italian Americans in Philadelphia that were active in these unions made up a small fraction of its total population, and such participation was usually

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95 Treaty signed between Italy (on behalf of Benito Mussolini) and the Vatican (on behalf of Pietro Gasparri); its ratification represented the Papacy’s recognition of the state of Italy under Mussolini.

short-lived. Italian Americans and the unions they were involved in also did not show any
evidence of anti-fascist attitudes as they did in New York City: in fact, Italian Americans in the
ACWA displayed support for Italy during the rise of fascism and outbreak of war.

Italian-American social organizations in Philadelphia and New York City had mixed
reactions regarding fascism, sometimes creating division within branches of the same
organization. For example, the fraternal organization, the Order of the Sons of Italy in America
(OSIA) experienced conflicting ideas from within after the head of the Philadelphia branch’s
Grand Lodge, John di Silvestro, pledged the loyalty of the entire organization to the fascist
regime in Italy in 1922. While the organization as a whole felt that di Silvestro overstepped his
boundaries, the greatest outrage came from New York City’s Grand Lodge, whose anti-fascist
leaders, not agreeing to support fascism, pulled the lodge out of the organization. In addition to
the ardent support of Philadelphia’s OSIA Grand Lodge, many New York City Italian-American
social organizations expressed their support for Fascism, including the Dante Alighieri Society
of New York City and the New York City Italian Chamber of Commerce. Like its OSIA Grand
Lodge, other New York City Italian-American social organizations supported the anti-fascist
cause, including its Mazzini Society. Again, this research did not come across any Italian-
American social organizations in Philadelphia that explicitly promoted anti-fascism, suggesting
that if any existed, they were not as numerous or outspoken as in New York City.

With New York City’s numerous fascist and anti-fascist Italian-American press
organizations, its fascist supporting religious organizations, its anti-fascist labour organizations,
and its mix of fascist and anti-fascist orientated social organizations, it can be said that Italian
Americans in New York City reacted to fascism with a strong division of support and rejection.
Meanwhile, Philadelphia’s handful of fascist supporting Italian-American press organizations,
religious organizations, and social organizations, and its lack of anti-fascist organizations of any kind, suggest that Italian Americans in the city reacted to fascism with much less expression of support and rejection. In this way, it can be concluded that a difference between the reactions of the two Italian-American communities regarding Fascism did, in fact, exist. This difference in the reaction of Italian Americans in New York City and Philadelphia to fascism can in part be explained by some of the unique characteristics of each city that its Italian-American populations encountered.

Italian Americans in New York City faced a number of specific conditions and challenges that orientated them to become strongly divided between fascist support and anti-fascism. Italian immigrants in New York City had arrived to become absorbed into a population that was around 5.6 million by 1920, with nearly half being immigrants. As mentioned in the first chapter, this resulted in most Italian immigrants being pushed to find housing in “immigrant zones,” notorious for their high densities and high mortality rates. Due to the city’s dense population, and waves of immigrants that had come earlier than the Italian immigrants, New York City’s Italian immigrants found themselves at the bottom of the occupational ladder, taking up whatever work they could find. Due to this, a majority found themselves working for low wages in low-skill jobs, such in the construction of subways, as painters, as paper hangers, and largely, in garment factories, all plaguing them with unsafe labour conditions and long hours. Faced with such horrendous living and labour conditions, Italian Americans were the perfect recruits for labour organizations and other leftist organizations, who offered them a way to protest and try to obtain change. They began to participate in strikes to demand higher wages and

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97 Baily, *Immigrants in the Lands of Promise*, 47.
shorter hours, such as in 1912 when they joined the New York garment workers in a city-wide walkout.

As an effort to find a remedy to their conditions, many Italian Americans started to join established unions in mass numbers: by the mid 1930s, 100,000 of the ILGWU’s 250,000 members in New York City were either Italian immigrants or their children.\(^98\) As well, New York City was home to a large number of Italian exiles (among whom were socialists, communists, or anarchists, and others associated with the left). Thus, New York City’s Italian Americans were heavily involved when these labour and leftist organizations launched their anti-fascist effort. New York City’s staggering overall population size, its Italian-American population size, and position in the world as America’s most well-known city, also helped it to become the main stage for fascism and anti-fascism in America, influencing Italian Americans to choose a side and react much more strongly. As the originating center for both fascism and anti-fascism, Italian Americans in New York City would have been exposed to both sides, chosen a side, and manifested their stance in numerous press organizations, social organizations, religious organizations and labour organizations. With exposure to each side’s argument and propaganda in so many different organizations, Italian Americans in the city would have found it impossible to stay neutral, further increasing the strength of each side and the divide between them.

Philadelphia’s Italian Americans also encountered specific conditions that caused them to be less vocal or intense in their support or rejection of fascism. Italian immigrants in Philadelphia found themselves in a city with a much smaller population than New York City: while still large, in 1910, Philadelphia had a population of just 1.8 million.\(^99\) At this time, Philadelphia also had a

total immigrant population much less than other major cities, at just 25 percent of its total population.\textsuperscript{100} Thus, unlike in New York City, Italian immigrants in Philadelphia found a city with many more employment opportunities to accommodate them. During the period of the Italian immigration to America, many industries in Philadelphia “were experiencing substantial growth” supplying the immigrants with “an excellent occupational climate” to find work that fit their interests and skills.\textsuperscript{101} Among the wide range of work settings Italian immigrants found themselves in were: mining, railroad construction, cigar factories, barber shops, restaurants, milk companies, bakeries, banks, insurance firms, street-car manufacturing, groceries, and even the government.\textsuperscript{102} Another unique feature of the Philadelphia job market was the possibility that one could move freely within the market, allowing Italian immigrants to “shop around” in search of more enjoyable work or better wages. As well, due to unique land rent contracts in Philadelphia, Italian Americans were not only able to build and own their own homes, but also open their own shops for things like barbering, tailoring, groceries and shoe-repairing. With comfortable jobs, wages, and housing being the norm across the city, as a whole, Philadelphia during the early twentieth century had an anti-union climate.\textsuperscript{103} These anti-union attitudes were seen amongst most Italian Americans, who found labour organizations and the things they advocated for of little use to them. Still, some Italian Americans in Philadelphia participated in labour unions: in 1900, 800 Italian barbers were a part of the 4,000-member Philadelphia local of the Barbers International for a short period of time, before dropping out after disagreeing with the goals of a major strike.\textsuperscript{104} Some were also active in labour unions through the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century.

\textsuperscript{100} Fenton, “Italians in the Labour Movement,” 135.
\textsuperscript{101} Juliani, \textit{The Social Organization of Immigration}, 188.
\textsuperscript{102} Juliani, \textit{The Social Organization of Immigration}, 194.
\textsuperscript{103} Juliani, \textit{The Social Organization of Immigration}, 189.
century, such as the Granite Cutters’ International Association, the Stonemasons’ International Union of America, the Journeymen Tailors International Union of America, and the Journeymen Barbers’ International Union of America.\textsuperscript{105} Italian Americans even formed a majority in two ACWA locals, Local 139 and Local 122, the latter of which had a sizable membership in the thousands. Not only was Italian-American activity in unions in Philadelphia substantially smaller than in New York City, but also, some who were involved in the city’s unions expressed slight pro-fascist sentiments rather than anti-Fascist ones. For example, Italian-American members of the PHILCO company radio workers’ union organized a rally to celebrate Italy’s victory in Ethiopia.\textsuperscript{106} Phillip De Luca, an Italian-American member of the Philadelphia Joint Board of the ACWA and national vice president of the Free Italy American Labour Council, was also active in an effort to pressure the American government to recognize Italy as an ally after they declared war on Germany.\textsuperscript{107}

With Philadelphia’s much smaller population size in comparison to New York City and its position as a more peripheral city on the world stage, the fascist supporting movement in Philadelphia was much less powerful than it was in New York City. This, in combination with a lack of an anti-fascist front from within labour organizations, provided Italian Americans in Philadelphia with much less exposure to fascist and anti-fascist messages, leading them to be more likely to express much less outspoken support or opposition to fascism.

Future directions for this research could be to look at the reactions of Italian Americans in cities beyond Philadelphia and New York City, to get a better understanding of the national Italian-American community’s response to fascism and anti-Fascism. This national reaction to

\textsuperscript{106} Luconi, \textit{From Paesani to White ETHICS}, 77.
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid., 98.
the rise of fascism in Italy could then be compared to the reactions of Italian-American communities in other countries, such as in Bueno Aires in Argentina, a hub for Italian immigrants during the 1880s-1920s, much like the United States.

**Bibliography**


