The American Dream is Made of Pasta: Italian Immigration to the United States, Food, and Racial Stereotypes, 1880-1939

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Introduction

In 1900, Rosolino Mormino and his brothers left Sicily to work on a sugarcane plantation in Napoleonville, Louisiana. Being part of one of the greatest mass migrations in history, Rosolino wrote his mother in Sicily: "In America, il pane è molle, ma la vita è dura"[1]

(In America, bread is soft, but life is hard)

Italian cuisine landed on the shores of the United States with the first Italian immigrants in the latter half of the nineteenth century. However, it was not until much later that Italian cuisine began to gain widespread appreciation, leading to the emergence of a distinct Italian-American culinary culture. Both newly arrived Italians and those who had already settled in their new homes clung to their cultural identity through their culinary practices. Initially, American people were repulsed by the unfamiliar flavors and ingredients of Italian cuisine.[2] Nevertheless, by the 1960s, Italian food had become fully integrated into the mainstream American diet.[3] As this thesis argues and aims to demonstrate, even though Italian ingredients and food had been adopted by the majority of Americans after World War II, American people had started accepting Italians and their culture through food since the end of the Progressive Era.

The influx of Italian immigrants to the United States occurred predominantly between 1880 and 1910, surpassing any other ethnic group in terms of numbers.[4] During these peak migration years, over four million Italians entered the United States, with a staggering

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[1] Communication from Gary Mormino, grandson of Rosolino Mormino, to author, Oct. 25, 1999. in *Hungering for America*

[2] Gemma Horowitz. "The Illustrated History of Italian-American Food." *First We Feast*, June 1, 2018. https://firstwefeast.com/features/illustrated-history-of-italian-american-food.

[3] William J. Connell, "Introduction: A New History for a New Millenium," in *The Routledge History of Italian Americans*, eds. William J. Connell and Stanislao G. Pugliese (New York, NY: Taylor & Francis, 2018), 3.

[4] Roger Daniels, *Coming to America: A History of Immigration and Ethnicity in American Life*, (Princeton, NJ: Harper Collins Publisher, 1990).

2,045,374 arrivals recorded between 1901 and 1910 alone.[5] These hardworking Italians originated mostly from the *Mezzogiorno*, an area encompassing the south of the country, Sicily, and Sardinia.[6] Harsh living conditions in this area forced them to seek a better life in the New World. While Italian laborers dispersed worldwide in pursuit of economic opportunities, the United States became a particularly attractive destination due to its thriving economy and higher wages. The majority of Italian emigrants were male, finding employment in industries such as construction, mining, manufacturing, and agriculture.[7]

The Italian immigrant population, mainly composed of agrarian peasants from southern Italy, quickly grew to become one of the largest ethnic groups in the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century. By 1910, Italians accounted for approximately 10% of the foreign-born population in the country. Once settled, Italians moved to urban areas and established tight-knit communities, also referred to as "enclaves," which replicated their familial and social life as they coexisted alongside fellow Italians in the United States.[8] Initially, southern Italians primarily settled along the Atlantic coast in urban centers such as New York before gradually expanding westward to Chicago and eventually reaching California. This migration pattern gave rise to localized communities known as "Little Italies," which became hubs for imported Italian products, commercial establishments, eateries, and communal institutions.[9] These enclaves not only facilitated the availability of Italian food imports but also played a significant role in the preservation of culinary traditions. The fusion of Italian and American cultures within these neighborhoods became an integral part of the transformative journey of modern America.

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[5] Frank J. Cavaioli, "Patterns of Italian Immigration to the United States," *Catholic Social Science Review* 13 (2008), 214.
[6] Ian MacAllen, *Red Sauce: How Italian Food Became American*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2022), 12.
[7] Patrizia Fama Stahle, *The Italian Emigration of Modern Times: Relations Between Italy and the United States Concerning Emigration Policy, Diplomacy and Anti-immigrant Sentiment, 1870-1927* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), 18.
[8] Ian MacAllen, *Red Sauce: How Italian Food Became American* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2022), 1.
[9] Ibid, 12.

Consequently, Italian immigration during the Progressive Era brought an influx of laborers alongside a rich cultural heritage. Many Italians successfully ventured into the food industry, establishing restaurants, stores, and even developing frozen and canned food products. Food had an important impact on how Italians were perceived as a community in their new country. In fact, as Macallen argues, "the perception of Italian food in the United States has evolved alongside the perception of Italian Americans."[10] Italian-American cuisine has diverged considerably from its Italian roots and has become firmly ingrained in the American culinary landscape. The influence of Italian immigrants on American food culture has been profound, fundamentally reshaping American eating habits and transforming dishes into beloved staples. This thesis will delve into both the extensive Italian migration and its profound impact on shaping American culture to its present state. It will explore how immigrants, who were initially considered "undesirable" in the United States, ultimately made an enduring mark on American society and culture, particularly through food and culinary hybridity. Therefore, the research question asked is: How did Italian migrants in the United States navigate the racial stereotypes they were exposed to during the early twentieth century, and to what extent did food play a role in facilitating their assimilation and integration into the modern American identity?

In order to reply to this question, this thesis employs a cultural and historical approach that allows for a better investigation of how Italians overcame racial stereotypes through food in the first part of the twentieth century. The study utilizes both primary and secondary sources, including books, restaurant reviews, and cookbooks. The primary sources will include archival materials such as letters, newspaper articles, and magazines. These will provide the necessary insight into the historical and cultural context of Italian food in the United States during the first part of the twentieth century. Furthermore, both restaurant

[10] Ian MacAllen, *Red Sauce: How Italian Food Became American* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2022), 12.

reviews and cookbooks will be used to better understand Italian Americans' food and culinary traditions during this period. Secondary sources that will be used include scholarly articles, books as well as other relevant literature that provide background information and theoretical frameworks for the study. The methodology employed in this thesis adopts a historical approach, wherein the selected sources will be meticulously contextualized and critically evaluated within the socio-cultural and historical framework of the time period. By employing this historical perspective, the research aims to provide a thorough understanding of the nuances and significance of the examined sources, shedding light on their broader implications within the socio-cultural context. Eventually, this research will offer a qualitative analysis of Italians' cultural reception and adaptation in the United States that will speak to the fields of social and migration history, and transnational and cultural studies.

The first chapter of this thesis will focus on Italian migration and settlement patterns in the United States. It will explore the causes of this mass migration and the destinations of the millions of Italians who decided to leave their home and family behind. It will investigate how their migration and settlement played a crucial role in shaping the nation's demographic, economic, and social landscape, all while facing challenges in their new home. Furthermore, it will also analyze their settlement in urban areas and the establishment of communities in their new homeland, the famous "Little Italies" spread all over the United States. In this section, the examination of primary sources such as immigration records and census data will help shed light on the Italian immigrant experience in the United States. Moreover, this chapter will explore the establishment of racial stereotypes as well as the attempts by Italians to overcome them through such socio-cultural interactions as music and art.

The second chapter will reconstruct the process through which Italian food became an integral part of American cuisine and culture. This chapter will examine the impact of Italian immigration on American food culture and trace how it became a central component of the

American culinary landscape. Through a detailed analysis of both primary and secondary sources, such as articles, newspapers, and cookbooks, this chapter will dive into how Italian immigrants managed to overcome racial stereotypes initially connected to their own culinary traditions and eventually affected the development of American food culture.

In exploring the interconnections between migration and food, with a specific focus on Italians' experiences in the United States, this thesis will originally contribute to several strands in the historiography of US society, politics, and culture. In fact, Italian migration and immigrant presence in the United States have been the subject of a massive scholarly outpouring for several decades. *The Routledge History of Italian Americans* edited by William Connell and Stanislao Pugliese, chronicles the struggles and victories of one of the country's main ethnic groups.[11] This book addresses many themes related to the Italian immigrant experience and also explores how Italian American history and culture made this ethnic group essential to the American experience. The chapter titled "Italian Migration" by Daniela del Boca and Alessandra Venturini in editor Klaus F. Zimmermann's 2005 book *European Migration: What do We Know?* describes the Italian emigration patterns and what affected their decision to migrate.[12]

On a different note, Iorizzo and Mondello analyzed the Italian American experience.[13] They discovered that when Italians first began traveling to the United States, they faced a myriad of both social and economic difficulties. This work not only sheds light on the acceptance and transformation of Italian cuisine in the United States but also delves into the unique struggles faced by Italians compared to other immigrant groups. It offers valuable insights into the domestic lives of Italian Americans, examining their experiences and

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[11] William J. Connell and Stanislao G. Pugliese, eds., *The Routledge History of Italian Americans* (New York, NY: Taylor & Francis, 2018).
[12] Daniela Del Boca and Alessandra Venturini, "Italian Migration," in *European Migration: What do We Know?*, ed. Klaus Zimmermann (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005).
[13] Luciano J. Iorizzo and Salvatore Mondello, *The Italian Americans*, 3rd ed. (Boston, MA: Cambria Press, 2006).

challenges within the context of the broader relationship between the United States and Italy. By exploring these aspects, these authors try to provide a comprehensive understanding of the Italian American experience and their distinct journey in the United States is provided. However, they do not explain how Italians were affected by racial stigmatization and the role of food in it. Del Boca and Venturini analyze the hows and the whys of Italian emigration and settlement as well as policies that have affected this mass migration. Unfortunately, they leave out the crucial component of cultural hybridization that this migration favored and fostered.

In Nancy Foner's book *In a New Land: A Comparative View of Immigration*[14], she compares the Italian immigrant experience in New York City to the Jewish one. In this section of the book, Foner uses a comparative approach to show how these groups were stigmatized based on their religion and skin color and how society's understanding of race has changed and evolved in the last hundred years. Similar to Foner's book, which focuses on the negative aspects of the Italian immigrant experience in the United States, Stefano Luconi's paper "Discrimination and Identity Construction: The Case of Italian Immigrants and Their Offspring" focuses extensively on the immigrant experience of Italian Americans after their arrival in the United States all while detailing how this immigrant group fought against anti-Italian prejudice and discrimination.[15]

Among the analyses that do focus on the role of cuisine and Italian American culinary traditions, Ian MacAllen's book *Red Sauce: How Italian Food Became American*[16] examines the evolution of how Italian traditions came to be integrated into a different Italian-American cuisine. The book offers social and culinary history and not only focuses on the integration of Italian food into the American mainstream but also on how the Italian immigrants were

[14] Nancy Foner, *In A New Land: Comparative View of Immigration* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2005).
[15] Stefano Luconi, "Discrimination and Identity Construction: The Case of Italian Immigrants and their Offspring in the USA," *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 32, no. 3 (June 2011).
[16] Ian MacAllen, *Red Sauce: How Italian Food Became American* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2022).

assimilated into the national American identity. Juliani's research provides evidence for the significance of food in the Italian-American community, as he explores how Italian cuisine played a crucial role in shaping the American way of life.[17] By incorporating food into their daily lives, Italian immigrants were able to both adapt to American culture and sustain their families through employment in the food industry. This incorporation allowed them to maintain their cultural identity through their food practices.

Thomas J. Ferraro's book, *Feeling Italian: The Art of Ethnicity in America*, provides a comprehensive examination of the culinary practices of Italian immigrants and Italian-Americans, shedding light on the profound cultural significance of Italian food within the United States.[18] While Italian cuisine has achieved immense popularity and established its own distinct culture in America, it is important to recognize that the Italian dishes widely enjoyed today differ significantly from the food consumed by Italian immigrants in the early 1900s. In the context of this thesis, which primarily centers on the process of assimilation, it is worth noting that Ferraro's exploration leans more toward the latter part of the twentieth century. Consequently, it deviates from the specific focus on assimilation that this thesis aims to address. Nonetheless, Ferraro's comprehensive analysis of Italian-American culture contributes valuable insights into the evolution of the Italian-American experience and its enduring influence on American society.

Harvey Levenstein's influential 1985 article "The American Response to Italian Food, 1880-1930" examines American culinary culture between the late 1800s and early 1900s reveals the evolution of taste and cooking practices related to Italian cuisine.[19] The review highlights the tendency of Italian immigrants to consume their native cuisine, the widespread adoption and adaptation of Italian food by the American public, the unsuccessful efforts to

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[17] Richard N. Juliani, *Building Little Italy: Philadelphia's Italians Before Mass Migration* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1998).
[18] Thomas J. Ferraro, *Feeling Italian: The Art of Ethnicity* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2005), 34.
[19] Harvey Levenstein, "The American Response to Italian Food," in *Food and Foodways*, no. 1–2 (1985).

improve the dietary habits of Italian Americans, and the rise of Italian restaurants serving pasta dishes and attracting non-Italian diners. The analysis also features anecdotes that showcase the reactions and influences on Italian food practices during different historical periods, such as World War I and prohibition. The rising interest in cultural history has revealed the notable impact of food traditions on the integration of immigrants and their eventual recognition by native-born Americans.

In her book titled *Hungering for America: Italian, Irish, and Jewish Foodways in the Age of Migration*, Hasia R. Diner explores and highlights how food served as a driving force for numerous immigrants, including Italians.[20] Simone Cinotto's book *The Italian American Table: Food, Family, and Community in New York City* takes a look at how food increasingly became a tool for negotiating the integration of impoverished Italian communities into the greater American society during the first Great Wave of Italian immigration.[21] Though Cinotto mainly writes about the emergence of the Italian American culinary tradition between the two World Wars, he argues that the popularization of Italian food happened after World War II and only became a mainstream culinary tradition in the 70s. The present thesis posits that the role of food was instrumental in facilitating the integration of Italians into the American mainstream during the initial half of the twentieth century, despite its prevalence not yet reaching the level it would achieve in subsequent decades. Through an exploration of racial stereotypes and their transcendence, this thesis aims to delve deeper into this premise, thereby expanding the existing lines of inquiry.

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[20] Hasia R. Diner, *Hungering for America: Italian, Irish, and Jewish Foodways in the Age of Migration* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).
[21] Simone Cinotto, *The Italian American Table: Food, Family, and Community in New York City* (Urbana, Chicago and Springfield, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2013).

Chapter 1

The Great Italian Migration, Race, and Cultural Hybridization

The Great Italian Migration to the United States marked a significant historical turning point that profoundly impacted American society as a whole. As Italian immigrants sought new opportunities and a chance for a better life on American soil, they encountered numerous

obstacles upon arriving on American shores. The pervasive issue of race in early twentieth-century America, as well as the demeaning stereotypes about Italian immigrants, made their daily lives difficult. This chapter aims to explore the arduous journey of Italian immigrants as they confronted prejudice and discrimination while simultaneously examining their subsequent accomplishments in reshaping their collective identity and culture through various transformative processes. Despite these challenges, Italian immigrants worked hard to become an integral part of American society, contributing to the growth of the country's economy, culture, and politics. Today, their legacy can be seen in the large Italian-American communities that still exist throughout the United States.

1.1 The Great Italian Migration

Between the years 1880 and 1920, a substantial influx of Italian immigrants, numbering over four million individuals, arrived in the United States.[22] This wave of migration propelled Italian Americans to become one of the largest ethnic groups in the country. The following paragraphs will examine the historical backdrop of the Great Italian Migration and the settlement of Italians in the United States while also exploring the impact of structural racism on Italian immigrants in their newfound home. This chapter aims to elucidate the factors that motivated a significant number of Italians to depart from Italy in the decades before the immigration quotas imposed by the United States.

In order to better understand why Italians settled in the United States, it is crucial to understand the underlying causes of this mass migration. Following Italy's unification in 1861, the country experienced economic disturbances resonating across its social and political landscape. The southern region of Italy particularly suffered from these disruptions, negatively affecting vulnerable sharecroppers and laborers. As a result, from 1880 to 1915,

[22] Roger Daniels. *Coming to America: A History of Immigration and Ethnicity in American Life* (Princeton, NJ: HarperCollins Publisher, 1990).

over 13 million Italians left their home for opportunities elsewhere, with roughly four million ultimately ending up in the United States by 1914.[23] Italian migration to the United States persisted until the implementation of immigration restrictions in 1924 through the passage of the Johnson Act.[24] The dire circumstances prevailing in southern Italy, exacerbated by continued agricultural depression during the 1880s and 1890s, shed light on the struggles faced by laborers and peasants. The allure of a more prosperous existence in the United States drove these individuals to migrate in significant numbers. Notably, Italians dispersed across the globe in pursuit of employment and better wages more than any other European group during this period. From 1875 to 1928, emigration from Italy reached its peak with approximately 17 million emigrants abroad, with 74% finding refuge in European countries bordering Italy and the remaining 24% opting for transoceanic emigration.[25] Between 1876 and 1885, more than 400.000 Italians settled in France and about 100.000 in Switzerland. According to the Italian National Institute of Statistics (Istat), in the decade between 1886 and 1905, 57% chose transoceanic emigration, whereas 43% moved to other European countries. Brazil, Argentina, and the United States had become the main receivers of the Great Italian Migration.[26] In Europe, France remained the preferred destination during those decades.[27] In her chapter "The Great Migration and Creating Little Italies" in *The Routledge History of Italian Americans*, Tirabassi also states that migration from northern Italy was oftentimes to other European countries, whereas the most common destination for emigrants

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[23] Mark I. Choate, *Emigrant Nation: The Making of Italy Abroad* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).
[24] Monte S. Finkelstein, "The Johnson Act, Mussolini and Fascist Emigration Policy: 1921-1930, in *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 8, no. 1 (University of Illinois Press, 1988).
[25] Daniela del Boca and Alessandra Venturini, "Italian Migration", *SSRN Electronic Journal* (2003), 3.
ISTAT, "Tavola 2.9 - Espatriati e rimpatriati per destinazione e provenienza europea o extraeuropea - Anni 1869-2005," (2011). http://seriestoriche.istat.it/fileadmin/allegati/Popolazione/Tavola_2.9.xl
[26] ISTAT, "Tavola 2.9 - Espatriati e rimpatriati per destinazione e provenienza europea o extraeuropea - Anni 1869-2005," (2011). http://seriestoriche.istat.it/fileadmin/allegati/Popolazione/Tavola_2.9.xl
[27] Patrizia Audenino and Maddalena Tirabassi, *Migrazione Italiane: Storia e Storie dall'Ancien Régime a Oggi* (Milan: Bruno Mondadori, 2008).

from the southern part of Italy was the United States.[28] According to Franzina, economic growth and the demand for labor played crucial roles in determining the destination of Italian emigrants.[29]

While there were many reasons to leave their home behind, material necessity was the driving force behind most of the departures. The majority of Italians, particularly those coming from southern Italy, embarked on their journey out of necessity rather than choice. An Italian peasant reflected on the gravity of the situation: "It is either starvation or emigration. If America did not exist, we would have to invent it for the sake of our survival."[30] Moreover, Italian-American historian Dino Cinel highlighted a correlation between successful harvests, imports, exports, and immigration rates, with poor harvests in Italy prompting a significant increase in migration to the United States as a means to counterbalance unemployment, financial constraints, and resource scarcity.[31]

The so-called *Grande Migrazione* or Great Migration to the United States involved all the Italian regions.[32] In fact, Gabaccia shows that before 1880, workers and farmers were primarily leaving from northern regions of Italy, mainly the Piedmont and Veneto. After 1890, the migration rates from southern Italy exceeded and replaced the ones from northern regions.[33] Italian migration to the United States surged during the Progressive Era, replacing the influx of immigrants from northern Italy with those from the southern regions. The immigrant population no longer consisted primarily of northern Italian artisans and shopkeepers looking to expand their market; rather, it transitioned to include southern Italian

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[28] Maddalena Tirabassi, "Why Italians left Italy: The Physics and Politics of Migration, 1870-1920," in *The Routledge History of Italian Americans*, eds. William J. Connell and Stanislao G. Pugliese (New York, NY: Taylor & Francis, 2018), 123.
[29] Emilio Franzina, *Gli italiani al Nuovo Mondo: l'Emigrazione Italiana in America, 1492-1942* (Milan: Mondadori, 1995).
[30] Dino Cinel, *From Italy to San Francisco: The Immigrant Experience* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1982), 41.
[31] Ibid, 38.
[32] Piero Bevilacqua, Andreina De Clementi and Emilio Franzina, *Storia dell'emigrazione italiana: Arrivi* (Donzelli Editore, 2001), 225.
[33] Donna Gabaccia, *Italy's Many Diasporas* (London: Routledge, 2000), 3.

laborers and farmers in search of any available work opportunity to support their families. A combination of economic, political, and social factors drove them to migrate. Motivated by the poverty and unemployment they were suffering in Italy, many Italians chose to pursue a better life for themselves and their family in the United States. In the early twentieth century, the United States experienced unparalleled industrial growth, making its economy vastly superior to that of Italy. These changes, combined with a growing population and limited job opportunities, led countless Italians to leave their home country in pursuit of a brighter future.

The economic disparity between the northern and southern regions of Italy was stark. The predominantly agricultural south struggled while the industrial north flourished. The challenges began following Italy's unification in 1861 when southern Italian farmers were suddenly burdened with feeding a significantly larger population while still using outdated methods of agriculture. Unification also led to a high taxation system, with Italy having the highest tax rates in Europe, further worsening the difficulties faced by ordinary workers. Income tax in Italy amounted to 30%, compared to 12% in France, 8% in Germany, and 6% in England.[34]

The majority of these immigrants entering the United States originated from the *Mezzogiorno* in the south of the country, the southern region of Italy that bore the brunt of economic and social hardships. Additionally, malaria and other epidemics ravaged southern Italy during those years.[35] Not only did disease lead to death, but earthquakes and volcanic eruptions of Mount Etna and Mount Vesuvius in the early 1900s destroyed surrounding cities and killed thousands of people. All of these factors, according to immigration historian Robert Foerster, had devastating effects on the Italian economy but "of all the consequences, the most serious is probably psychological, the creation of a mood of helplessness, or even

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[34] Francis E. Clark*, Why Italians Emigrate: Our Italian Fellow Citizens in Their Old Homes and Their New* (Boston, MA: Small, Maynard, 1919), 74.
[35] Michael Burgan, *Immigration to the United States: Italian Immigrants* (New York, NY: Facts On File, 2005), 42.

worse, apathy, restraining at once the impulse of progress and the energies needed for accomplishment."[36]

In Italy, most workers earned low wages despite their demanding jobs and harsh working conditions. Even when agricultural work was available, the compensation remained pitifully low. A comparison between the wages of carpenters in Italy and the United States illustrates the stark disparity. In Italy, carpenters earned between 30 cents and $1.40 per day, amounting to approximately $8.40 per week. On the other hand, carpenters in the United States earned an average of $18.00 per week during the same period. In some of the poorest regions of southern Italy, workers earned as little as twelve to twenty cents per day. [37] The substantial wage discrepancy between Italy and the United States served as an important incentive for Italians to leave their homeland. In addition to the wages often reaching three times the amount individuals would have earned in their home country, the living and working conditions offered in the United States were considerably more favorable.

1.2. Arrival in the United States

From 1820 to 1880, the influx of Italian immigrants to the United States followed at a relatively slow pace. In fact, only about 80,000 Italians entered the United States during those years.[38] The 1880s were characterized by intense immigration from Italy, particularly from southern regions of the country, as economic crises and widespread poverty drove many individuals to seek a better life abroad.[39] Archdeacon notes that between 1880 and 1920,

[36] Robert F. Foerster, *The Italian Emigration of Our Times* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1919), 59.
[37] Luciano J. Iorizzo and Salvatore Mondello, *The Italian Americans*, 3rd ed. (Boston, MA: Cambria Press, 2006), 60.
[38] Roger Daniels, *Coming to America: A History of Immigration and Ethnicity in American Life* (Princeton, NJ: HarperCollins Publisher, 1990),
[39] Daniela Del Boca and Alessandra Venturini, "Italian Migration," in *European Migration: What do We Know?*, ed. Klaus Zimmermann (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005), 304.

approximately 80% of Italian immigrants to the United States originated from the southern regions, with 30% coming from Sicily and roughly 27% from areas surrounding Naples.[40]

One notable aspect of Italian immigration that must be underlined is that in addition to regional provenance, the vast majority of Italians who emigrated to the United States were *contadini* (peasants).[41] They initially arrived as temporary workers and regularly traveled back and forth between the US and Italy, only choosing to settle permanently after a prolonged stay, often prompted by the hardships of wartime Europe. Due to them being largely unskilled and thus having limited preparation for employment in the New World, these contadini were faced with many difficulties upon their arrival. Furthermore, Italian immigrants, especially those from southern regions, exhibited some of the highest illiteracy rates among all immigrant groups entering the United States. They faced conditions marked by poverty and limited education, resembling a quasi-feudal system. Between 1899 and 1910, of the 1.7 million Italians who relocated to the United States, 54% were unable to read or write.[42] These circumstances left Italians with little to no choice but to take a job as unskilled laborers at the bottom of the job hierarchy upon their arrival in the United States. Seasonal employment opportunities were common, especially in construction projects involving buildings, railways, streets, roads, and tunnels. [43]

These seasonal migrant workers were often referred to as "birds of passage."[44] They worked in the United States for part of the year and sent money back to their families in Italy.[45] Statistical analyses indicate that between 1895 and 1914, 75% to 83% of Italian

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[40] Thomas J. Archdeacon, *Becoming American: An Ethinc History* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1983).
[41] Maddalena Tirabassi, "Why Italians left Italy: The Physics and Politics of Migration, 1870-1920," in *The Routledge History of Italian Americans*, eds. William J. Connell and Stanislao G. Pugliese (New York, NY: Taylor & Francis, 2018), 121.
[42] Silvano M. Tomasi, *Piety and Power: The Role of Parishes in the New York Metropolitan Area, 1880-1930* (New York, NY: 1975), 22.
[43] Donna Gabaccia, *Italy's Many Diasporas* (London: Routledge, 2000), 77.
[44] Vincent J. Cannato, "How America Became Italian." *Washington Post*, October 9, (2015). https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/how-america-became-italian/2015/10/09/4c93b1be-6ddd-11e5-9bfe-e59f5e244f92_story.html.
[45] Michael Burgan, *Immigration to the United States: Italian Immigrants* (New York, NY: Facts On File, 2005), 42.

immigrants to the United States were adult males, primarily between the ages of 14 and 44, and were likely to be economically active.[46] A study on international migrations by the National Bureau of Economic Research not only concluded that the majority of Italians emigrated alone but also revealed that the primary reason for returning to Italy was to reunite with family members after earning money abroad.[47] Moreover, as the peasants brought back modest savings to Italy, this enthusiasm for overseas travel and subsequent short-term employment in America increased and rapidly spread among other peasants. Between 1891 and 1900, 34% of Italians arriving in the United States returned to their home country, whereas from 1901 to 1910, 57% returned to Italy. Furthermore, about 15% of Italians who arrived in the United States between 1899 and 1910 had previously been there. Most Italian immigrants did not stay continuously in the United States for 15 to 20 years; instead, they took trips back to Italy. Only 38% of Italian immigrants stayed in the United States for the entirety of their initial stay, with nearly half of all Italian immigrants being categorized as "birds of passage" who eventually returned to Italy.[48] These temporary workers showed little to no interest in acquiring knowledge of the English language and familiarizing themselves with the customs and lifestyle in the United States.[49]

Many Italians who chose to remain in the United States, even permanently, often settled in close-knit ethnic neighborhoods characterized by low-income living conditions. These ethnic enclaves helped strengthen their sense of belonging to a group that was excluded and struggling to integrate into American society. Chain migration, driven by the migration of individuals to areas where their fellow villagers had already settled, resulted in the clustering of relatives and community members in urban regions such as Boston, New

[46] Daniela Del Boca and Alessandra Venturini, "Italian Migration", in *European Migration: What do We Know?*, ed. Klaus Zimmermann (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005), 307.
[47] Walter F. Wilcox, ed., *International Migrations, Volume II, Interpretations, Edited on Behlf of the National Bureau of Economic Research, Inc., Demographic Monographs* (New York, NY: 1969), 453.
[48] Francesco P. Cerase, "A Study of Italian Migrants Returning from the U.S.A," *International Migration Review* 1, (1967), 63.
[49] John S. Macdonald and Leatrice D. Macdonald, "Chain Migration, Ethnic Neighborhood Formation and Social networks," *The Milbank Memorial Fund Quarterly* 42, (1964), 85 .

York, and Chicago.[50] Interestingly, even though all immigrants had to pass the test of Ellis Island and considered New York City to be merely a stop on their way to settle somewhere else in the country, over one-third of the Italians who arrived during the peak migration years never got past New York City and made it their new home.[51] In certain instances, the entire population of a particular Italian village settled near each other in New York, sometimes even in the same apartment building or block. There, they could maintain their social institutions, religious practices, resentments, and social hierarchies from their homeland. This sense of unity and loyalty to their village was referred to as *campanilismo* in Italy, namely the attitude by which people's sense of allegiance failed to extend beyond the area in which the sound of the bell tower could be heard, which is called a *campanile* in Italian.[52] As a consequence, Italians took over entire neighborhoods, though not in a homogenous manner: there were the Sicilian streets, the Neapolitan streets, the Calabrese streets, etc.

In Boston, the Italian community established their residence within the North End region, while in Providence, they predominantly settled in the locality known as Federal Hill. In San Francisco, their settlement was concentrated in North Beach, adjacent to Chinatown and Fisherman's Wharf, which served as a significant employment hub for many Italians. In Chicago, Sicilian immigrants primarily occupied the vicinity surrounding Taylor Street, while Tuscan migrants found their home in a neighborhood on the South Side referred to as the Heart of Italy.[53] It was New York City's Little Italy, located in the area surrounding Mulberry Street on Manhattan's Lower East Side, that dominated over all the others.[54] This is where individuals from Calabria, Campania, Abruzzo, Bari, Puglia, and Sicily had to initially adapt to coexist with each other and subsequently integrate into the American society with the

[50] Edward C. Banfield, *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society* (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1958), 117.
[51] "A City of Villages," Library of Congress, https://www.loc.gov/classroom-materials/immigration/italian/a-city-of-villages/
[52] Stefano Luconi, "Discrimination and Identity Construction: The Case of Italian Immigrants and their Offspring in the USA," *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 32, no. 3 (June 2011), 296.
[53] John F. Mariani, *How Italian Food Conquered the World* (New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), 32.
[54] Michael Burgan, *Immigration to the United States: Italian Immigrants* (New York, NY: Facts On File, 2005), 33. John F. Mariani, *How Italian Food Conquered the World* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), 32.

americani.[55] In these neighborhoods, various Italian regional cultures blended with American traditions, which therefore resulted in a distinct Italian-American culture. While migrants felt a strong sense of belonging to their specific community, the broader American society inevitably influenced their cultural and social identities. Scholars like Gleason highlight the dual aspects of identity construction, one shaped by an individual's cultural heritage and the other influenced by the relationship between the individual and the environment. This perspective recognizes the impact of American culture on foreign populations while acknowledging the significance of maintaining ties to their home country. Consequently, the change in environment led to a renegotiation of the migrants' identities.[56]

Even though Italian migrants may have identified strongly with a particular community, the broader host culture inevitably influenced them on a cultural and social level. Living together reduced the feeling of isolation and alienation as well as the cultural shock that often came hand in hand with the drastic change in environment. The phenomenon facilitated the gradual assimilation of immigrants into the dominant Anglo-American culture. It allowed them to adopt certain customs and norms without having to overly compromise their own identities and habits.

Once settled in America, some Italians took it upon themselves to lure thousands of their compatriots to the United States who were looking for jobs.[57] Due to the fact that a significant number of Italians immigrating to the United States during this time had limited English proficiency, they required help and assistance in various areas such as finding work, accommodation, and other general support. These so-called *padroni* promised great wealth by Italian standards to many Italian peasants desperately trying to flee “poverty, overcrowding, and other harsh conditions in their native villages.”[58] Unsurprisingly, patronage was

[55] John F. Mariani, *How Italian Food Conquered the World* (New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), 32.
[56] Philip Gleason, “Identifying Identity: A Semantic History,” *The Journal of American History* 69, no. 4 (March 1983), 910.
[57] Edward C. Banfield, *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society* (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1958), 114.
[58] Ibid.

strengthening the image of Italian newcomers as docile, ignorant, and uneducated, and therefore a threat to organized labor's aspirations for a higher American standard of living. During the period from 1880 to 1920, the padroni were responsible for securing employment for numerous migrant peasants who worked as laborers in various regions of North America. The padrone not only financed immigration but also provided employment and other services, which in turn isolated new arrivals from the rest of American society and kept them dependent on the padrone. In return for his services, the Italian boss took a percentage of the money the workers earned in the United States. This, therefore, led to a lot of padrones taking advantage of the workers they had recruited. Before it was common practice for the family to join the men in Italy, the padrone system took the place of the traditional family system for Italian workers in the United States.[59] Once immigrants were settled in the United States and even learned English, the padrone system slowly lost its power, and the immigrants themselves were able to help others come to America. Once these males helped male relatives and friends immigrate and settle in the New World, the new arrivals relied on them for lodging as well. In most cases, they stayed in a room that was conveniently located close to the main markets of unskilled labor.[60]

The rise of industry in the United States during the Progressive Era offered Italian workers many job opportunities in industries such as construction, manufacturing, and agriculture. Italian workers coming to the United States needed jobs in order to make money to send back to their family members who remained back in Italy. All in all, heavy taxation, low wages, and high unemployment rates made it difficult for southern Italians to make a living in their home country. By the turn of the century, immigration seemed like the only solution to their unbearable life, thus leading millions of Italians to the United States.

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[59] John S. Macdonald and Leatrice D. Macdonald "Chain Migration, Ethnic Neighborhood Formation and Social networks," in *The Milbank Memorial Fund Quarterly* 42 (1964), 86-87.
[60] Ibid, 88.

1.3. Racial Stereotyping in the United States

For contemporaries, the differences between southern and eastern Europeans and their predecessors were based on physical characteristics such as skin color, cultural values, religious beliefs, economic position, political views, and other factors. Italian immigrants who came from southern Italy after Italy's unification already faced the stigma of being racially inferior. Southern Italy, including Sicily, was perceived as a social and political issue in Italy and was viewed as separate and inferior as the southern regions were seen as drastically different from the more modern, industrialized northern regions. The racial classifications in Italy neatly aligned with those prevailing in the United States.[61]

Despite benefiting from the 1790 immigration law that allowed "free white persons" to legally enter the United States and naturalize as citizens, southern Italian immigrants often occupied an in-between racial position during this period. Racially set apart, and deemed inferior to northern and western European immigrants, Americans consistently questioned southern Italians' racial and color status.

Since their mass immigration, Italian Americans have not been viewed as "a classic case of 'straight-line' assimilation," a direct result of the construction of American society, due to their slower process of integration.[62] Straight-line assimilation disregards the possibility that ethnicity can be incorporated into the middle class. In addition, straight-line assimilation has little approval for "the role of ethnicity and ethnic culture in facilitating upward mobility."[63] The huge influx of Italians caused worry in the host society, since they did not know how Italians would assimilate. As a result, Italian Americans had to make

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[61] Peter G. Vellon, "Italian Americans and Race during the Era of Mass Immigration," in *The Routledge History of Italian Americans*, eds. William J. Connell and Stanislao G. Pugliese (New York, NY: Taylor & Francis, 2018), 213.
[62] Peter Kivisto, ed., *The Ethnic Enigma: The Salience of Ethnicity for European-origin Groups* (Philadelphia, PA: Balch Institute Press, 1989), 24-25.
[63] Ibid.

greater efforts to abandon their culture in order to gain prestige and increase mobility in the workplace.

According to Cavaioli, Italian emigration policies have had little to no consequences for Italians wanting to leave their country.[64] Changes in the economic activities and the migration policies that were implemented in their countries of destination had a larger impact. There had been attempts to exclude immigrant groups flowing in from southern and eastern Europe before 1860 by nativists, such as the "Know Nothings," but restrictive immigration laws were only set in place a few decades later.[65]

In fact, in 1917, the United States instituted a ban on entry to the illiterate, which had an impact on the pool of eligible immigrants from southern Italy. This bill was signed into law by President Wilson that mandated a literacy test, which barred any immigrants over sixteen years old who was unable to read English or any other language from entering the United States. It was clear that the test was biased against impoverished and undereducated immigrants. Nativists who aimed to limit the influx of "new" immigrants relied on literacy tests as a tool. These nativists were concerned about the large number of foreign language speakers settling in American cities and the apparent foreignness of areas like Manhattan's Lower East Side.[66] As a result, language became a key indicator used to stigmatize those who were considered unable to assimilate. As an attempt to justify this law, advocates of the literacy test claimed that only about 3% of previous immigrants were illiterate and that more than half of the immigrants from Sicily and Italy were illiterate as a way to rationalize the

[64] Frank J. Cavaioli, "Patterns of Italian Immigration to the United States," *Catholic Social Science Review* 13 (2008), 215.
[65] Frank J. Cavaioli, "Patterns of Italian Immigration to the United States," *Catholic Social Science Review* 13 (2008), 215.
[66] Peter G. Vellon. "Italian Americans and Race During the Era of Mass Immigration," in *The Routledge History of Italian Americans* (New York, NY: Taylor & Francis, 2018), 219.

implementation of the test upon entry to the United States.[67] The discourse surrounding immigration policy, which started in the late nineteenth century, culminated in the 1920s.

In May of 1921, President Warren G. Harding enacted the inaugural bill that instituted a restrictive immigration policy set in place to target European immigrants. The legislation established a quota system that lasted three years, which consequently limited the number of new immigrants to 3% of the population of that nationality already residing in the United States in 1910. Three years later, in 1924, President Calvin Coolidge ratified the National Origins Quota Act of 1924, which restricted each country's annual quota to 2% of that national population in the United States in 1890. In 1924, the US implemented the quota system that restricted the number of Italians permitted to enter American soil to about 5,000 individuals. This new legislation effectively decreased immigration from southern, central, and eastern Europe.[68]

The laws created in the 1920s were the immediate result of decades-long, intense anti-immigrant sentiment accompanied by a renewed emphasis on native-born American identity. Even though Italians were viewed as productive and hard-working individuals by some, they were also considered to be dangerous agitators who were often prone to trouble-making. This created a contradictory image of the Italians and thus led to discrimination and widespread anti-Italian attitudes in the United States.

Upon arriving in the United States, Italians encountered severe prejudice in their new country. While their experience of discrimination shared similarities with that faced by other immigrant groups in the US, it is noteworthy in that it was preceded by an overwhelming amount of negative attitudes and pessimism.[69] Initially, both federal and state statistics made

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[67] Carol J. Bradley, "Restrictionist Immigration Laws in the United States," in *The Italian American Experience: An Encyclopedia*, eds. Salvatore J. LaGumina, Frank J. Cavaioli, Salvatore Primeggia, and Joseph A. Varacalli (New York, NY: Garland, 2000).
[68] Frank J. Cavaioli, "Patterns of Italian Immigration to the United States," *Catholic Social Science Review* 13 (2008), 217.
[69] Salvatore J. LaGumina, "Discrimination, Prejudice and Italian American History," in *The Routledge History of Italian Americans*, eds. William J. Connell and Stanislao G. Pugliese (New York, NY: Taylor & Francis, 2018), 223.

a clear distinction between northern and southern immigrants. In fact, in 1891, Senator Henry Cabot Lodge differentiated between northern and southern Italians and described northern and central Italians as being "sober and industrious and therefore desirable;" those from southern Italy and Sicily were considered undesirable due to the perceived absence of these virtues.[70] Relying upon the Italian anthropologists Sergi and Niceforo, the Italian race was neatly separated into northern and southern in the United States, declaring that "these two groups differ from each other materially in language, physique, and character."[71] Due to this differentiation, many southern Italians faced harsh racism and discrimination in Italy and in the United States.

Consequently, despite their diverse regional origins, Italian immigrants from the Mezzogiorno underwent a collective ordeal of extensive prejudice and discrimination. This means that even though the Italians who migrated at the turn of the century had little to nothing in common since the unification of the Italian nation was hardly accomplished and since their system of socialization relied on the previously explained term *campanilismo*, they were collectively labeled as "Italians" in the United States. The general public commonly viewed them as a single, inferior group characterized by a communal way of life, subpar living standards, and a tendency towards violent and criminal behavior.[72]

The phenomenon of ethnic bias had a significant impact on individuals with Italian heritage, particularly within the realm of employment. Discriminatory signage featuring the derogatory term "Guineas" was prevalent in workplaces, aiming to dissuade individuals of Italian and Italian-American backgrounds from pursuing job opportunities.[73]

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[70] Ibid.
[71] United States Immigration Commission: Dictionary of Races or Peoples, prepared for the Commission by Daniel Folkmar, assisted by Elnora C. Folkmar. Senate document - United States Congress, 61st, 3rd Session (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1911), 3.
[72] Stefano Luconi, "Forging an Ethnic Identity: The Case of Italian Americans" (2003), 92.
[73] Stefano Luconi, "Discrimination and Identity Construction: The Case of Italian Immigrants and their Offspring in the USA," *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 32, no. 3 (June 2011).

Consequently, those who were able to secure employment were often assigned to lower-paying occupations.[74] In addition to being discriminated against in the world of employment, Italians were also discriminated against because of their religious background. The majority of Italians were Roman Catholics and were thus traditionally considered as being conservative. Since the orientation of most American colleges and universities was liberal, Italian Americans, as well as other Catholics, often experienced both ethnic and religious discrimination in the educational sphere.

Even other immigrants qualified themselves as being superior to Italians in the United States, hinting at the fact that there was a clear hierarchy between immigrants in the new country they called home. Southern Italians comprised about 80% of the Italian immigrant population and were subjected to racial and social discrimination from Anglo-Americans and the Irish, who were considered an "old immigrant" group.[75] Rosario Ingargiola remembered that "the Irish were prejudiced against the Italians, and they thought themselves superior to the Italians because they knew the language and controlled the politics."[76] The Irish Americans' control of the Democratic Party in most major cities caused the exclusion of Italian Americans from a fair share of political power until the early 1930s, even though Italian Americans sometimes even made up about a quarter of the population.[77] They were accused of being part of an inferior race, being poor, and having questionable Catholic beliefs. According to Candeloro, "When Italians reached American cities in the 1890s and after, they found a Roman Catholic Church dominated by the Irish, who sent them to the

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[74] Stefano Luconi, "Forging an Ethnic Identity: The Case of Italian Americans" (2003), 92.
[75] Salvatore J. LaGumina, *WOP! A Documentary History of Anti-Italian Discrimination in the United States*, (Toronto: Guernica, 1999).
[76] Ibid.
[77] Sergio Bugiardini, "Stretti tra gli irlandesi e la non partecipazione… : Gli italo-american di New York City e l'accesso in politica," in *Storia e Problemi Contemporanei* 46 (Bologna: Edizione Quattro Venti, 2006), 115-136.

church basement to pray."[78] Italian immigrants, especially those from the south, were considered inherently lower class by other groups and were a common target of abuse.

Outside of the discrimination Italian immigrants faced in their daily life and at their workplaces, new Italian immigrants also fell victim to overt violence. During the year 1910, Italian Americans experienced several cases of lynching. Two Italian American laborers were accused of killing an accountant for a well-known cigar company in Tampa, Florida, and were among the numerous Italian Americans who were lynched between the 1880s and 1910, with at least 34 recorded cases of lynching.[79] Additionally, the death of the police superintendent of New Orleans, David Hennessy, led to the killing of 11 Italian inmates by a mob of townspeople who broke into the jail. The victims were dragged out of the prison and lynched outside. There were additional hangings throughout the South in places such as Mississippi, Arkansas, and West Virginia. The ethnicity of the victims was often the main reason for the violence.[80] This harmful stereotyping and outright violence made survival even more challenging for the Italian-American community.

Italian immigrants to the United States continued to face widespread racial stereotyping and discrimination throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The media played a big role in Italians' portrayal and solidification as overall bad people. In fact, in the early twentieth century, *The New York Herald* and *The New York Times* frequently portrayed Italian immigrants as a dangerous class of ignorant peasants, beggars, and naturally dishonest people.[81] They were often depicted in popular media as violent, criminal, and uneducated, with the media perpetuating the stereotype of the "mafia" and the "Black Hand." The term

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[78] Dominic Candeloro, "Italian Americans," in *Multiculturalism in the United States: A Comparative Guide to Acculturation and Ethnicity*, eds. John D. Buenker and Lorman Ratner (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2005), 240

[79] Stefano Luconi, "Tampa's 1910 Lynching: The Italian-American Perspective and Its Implications," in *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 88, no. 1 (2009), 31.

[80] Ibid, 33.

[81] Salvatore J. LaGumina, *WOP!: A Documentary History of Anti-Italian Discrimination in the United States* (San Francisco, CA: Straight Arrow Books, 1973), 28, 40, 45, 62.

"WOP," which stands for "without papers" or "without passport," was often used as a derogatory term for Italians.[82] The term "Black Hand" was extensively used by journalists when covering the activities of Italian criminals.[83] Through sensationalized narratives and graphic illustrations in investigative newspapers, the public was made aware of certain undesirable traits associated with Italians, including a tendency towards criminal activities, a lack of education, apparent laziness, and a preference for begging instead of seeking honest work. These media portrayals served to reinforce negative stereotypes of Italians in the eyes of the American public.[84] Other negative impressions of Italians were also present in books written by major American writers. One such example can be found in the writings of Theodore Dreiser, a prominent novelist and journalist in 1904. Dreiser claimed to have personally witnessed Italians engaging in violent "love feuds" that escalated into stabbings and shootings. His book, *The Love Affairs of Little Italy*, depicted Italians residing in East Harlem as individuals characterized by their volatile temperament, passionate nature, and propensity for violence.[85]

These portrayals have become the building blocks of an American cultural imagination that has petrified a stereotype. This never-ending reproduction of negative stereotypes led many Americans to immediately link anything Italian to violence and ignorance. To become American, Italians would have to do everything in their power to show how they were different from the gangsters and buffoons who dominated the public representation of their culture. Consequently, Italian Americans have had to exert greater

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[82] Thomas J. Ferraro, *Feeling Italian: The Art of Ethnicity* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2005), 51.
[83] Peter Carravetta, "The Silence of the Atlantians: Contact, Conflict, Consolidation (1880-1913," in *The Routledge History of Italian Americans*, eds. William J. Connell and Stanislao G. Pugliese (New York, NY: Taylor & Francis, 2018), 139.
[84] Salvatore J. LaGumina, "Discrimination, Prejudice and Italian American History," in *The Routledge History of Italian Americans*, eds. William J. Connell and Stanislao G. Pugliese (New York, NY: Taylor & Francis, 2018), 225.
[85] Salvatore J. LaGumina, "Discrimination, Prejudice and Italian American History," in *The Routledge History of Italian Americans*, eds. William J. Connell and Stanislao G. Pugliese (New York, NY: Taylor & Francis, 2018), 226.

efforts in abandoning their own cultural heritage in order to attain respect and enhance their social and occupational mobility. From this perspective, the Italian-American experience can be regarded as an ongoing endeavor aimed at overcoming a negative stereotype.

1.4 Socio-cultural Hybridization

"Cultural hybridization may be said to occur when an individual or group is exposed to and influenced by more than one cultural context."[86] It is the blending of two or more distinct cultural traditions to create a new cultural identity. Once in the United States, those who had decided to stay indefinitely and had children had to transform their cultural identity. This led to the construction of an unprecedented identity among Italian migrants. Its construction is both a multifaceted and intricate process that emerged from the interaction between the immigrants and their host society. Therefore, when attempting to define this identity, one must consider the various historical periods, generational differences, and geographic locations that influence its development.

Through the process of cultural hybridization, a new Italian-American identity was formed by creating a unique culture and social standing for the children of Italian immigrants. As they rose in social status, joined the labor force, achieved higher levels of education, became part of the national Catholic Church, and identified more closely with Italian culture, they began to be seen as "white." They redefined their racial status and renegotiated their identity, leading to greater integration into mainstream American society and the emergence of a new type of person.

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[86] Daphna Oyerman, Izumi Sakamoto, and Armand Lauffer, "Cultural Accommodation: Hybridity and the Framing of Social Obligation," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 74, no.6 (1998), 1606–1607.

As large groups of people emigrated from various European countries during the Great Migration between 1880 and 1920, America became a melting pot of different cultures and ethnicities. These groups sought to maintain some aspects of their original cultures but also recognized the need to adapt to American culture in order to succeed in their new home. Like many others, the Italian immigrants had to make sacrifices and give up certain aspects of their cultural heritage to assimilate into American society. This process formed a distinct Italian-American culture, symbolic of socio-cultural hybridization, resulting in the emergence of unique and diverse cultural expressions.

In his influential work *Italian Americans: Into The Twilight of Ethnicity*, Richard Alba highlights the dynamic interaction between the first and second generations of Italian immigrants as they navigated the process of assimilation in America. While the initial generation demonstrated a reluctance to embrace American customs and values, later generations recognized the necessity of adopting Americanized norms to thrive in their adopted homeland.[87] In order to be accepted into mainstream American society, Italian Americans needed to change their image by identifying themselves as "white" and adopting middle-class values and lifestyles.

This can be seen later on in the twentieth century, when many Italian Americans, along with other European migrant descendants such as the Irish and the Poles, turned to the Republican Party and became more conservative and racially aware, particularly concerning immigration from non-European countries. They disagreed on liberal measures aimed at helping the poorest members of society and settled in predominantly white suburban areas, distancing themselves from the ethnic enclaves established by their parents. While they sought to assimilate into American society, they also maintained a sense of pride in their Italian ancestry and would showcase it on relevant occasions to prove that Italian food is

[87] Richard Alba, *Italian Americans: Into the Twilight of Ethnicity* (Eaglewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1985), 76.

better than bland American food, such as cultural celebrations, or to demonstrate their artistic talents, while still maintaining their American identity.[88]

The process of transculturation facilitated the emergence of a distinct Italian-American identity that involved the creation of a new culture and social position for the children of Italian immigrants. This process of ethnic identity construction involved a renegotiation of their social status and facilitated their integration into mainstream American society, resulting in the emergence of a new type of individual.[89] However, this was a regrettable cost that many immigrants had to pay to evade the discrimination and ridicule that other ethnic groups faced in the new country. Despite losing their original cultural identity, they managed to establish a new culture in America, ultimately leading to the formation of the contemporary Italian-American culture we can observe today.

Italian immigrants played a significant role in shaping American society and culture during the early twentieth century. In their pursuit of acceptance and success, they refused to allow themselves to be defined solely by the prejudices imposed upon them. Instead, they turned to powerful means of cultural expression, namely opera and fashion, which helped Italian immigrants establish their place in American society while preserving their cultural heritage. These efforts showcased their determination to break free from stereotypes and reshape the perception of Italian immigrants, ultimately leaving an indelible mark on the fabric of American society.

In 1903, opera singer Enrico Caruso made his debut in a production of Giuseppe Verdi's *Rigoletto* at the Metropolitan Opera in New York. Even though opera had been a part of America since the birth of the republic, and as American cities and towns developed a national musical culture throughout the nineteenth century, audiences came to know the

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[88] Helen Barolini, *Festa: Recipes and Recollections of Italian Holidays* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), p. xii.
[89] Marie-Christine Michaud, "The Italians in America, from Transculturation to Identity Renegotiation," *Diasporas* 19, no. 19 (2011), 48.

works of not only Italian but also French, German, and English composers. Back then, opera was a popular art form enjoyed by audiences of all social classes at various public venues. However, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, opera became associated exclusively with classical music and was primarily funded by the wealthy elites of the Gilded Age.[90]

Caruso's kind and generous character stood in stark contrast to the negative stereotypes of southern Italians prevalent in the hostile anti-immigrant environment of the United States. The stereotypes portrayed southern Italians as unsociable, violent and prone to criminal behavior. However, Caruso's image embodied a different and more positive view of Italians, which was prevalent among Anglo/Nordic societies.[91] This view portrayed Italians as intrinsically musical, emotionally expressive, sensual, and primal.

During the 1940s, wedge heel shoes, also known as “wedgies” or “lifties,” became a popular fashion trend for women and have remained so ever since. These shoes were first patented by Salvatore Ferragamo, a renowned Italian shoemaker who earned the nickname “the shoemaker of dreams.” Despite being born into a poor peasant family in a small village outside Naples, Ferragamo rose to prominence by making extravagant shoes for Hollywood celebrities. However, the design of the Ferragamo wedge was not inspired by Hollywood's glamour but rather by Italy's economic hardships between the wars and Ferragamo's strategic emphasis on patenting. Ferragamo began making shoes at the age of ten and moved to the United States at fifteen to join his siblings, who ran a shoe repair shop in Santa Barbara, California. He started designing shoes for historical films, demonstrating his ability to create shoes that were modern in both fit and material while still fitting the styles of historical productions. Ferragamo eventually followed the American Film Company to Hollywood in

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[90] John Gennari, “Groovin’: A Riff on Italian Americans in Popular Music and Jazz,” in *The Routledge History of Italian Americans*, eds. William J. Connell and Stanislao G. Pugliese (New York, NY: Taylor & Francis, 2018), 415.
[91] John Gennari, “Groovin’: A Riff on Italian Americans in Popular Music and Jazz,” in *The Routledge History of Italian Americans*, eds. William J. Connell and Stanislao G. Pugliese (New York, NY: Taylor & Francis, 2018), 415.

1919 and continued making shoes for them.[92]

Ferragamo's success in the United States helped to challenge negative stereotypes and promote a more positive image of Italians throughout the country and especially in the highly regarded film industry. Due to his designs' sophistication and modernity, they were perfectly in line with American tastes at the time. [93]

It can be unequivocally said that Italians in America in the late nineteenth and start of the twentieth century were the victims of xenophobia, racism, and discrimination in various facets of their life. Although individual experiences may have varied, their pursuit of acceptance and escape from prevailing negative stereotypes demanded considerable resilience. Cultural hybridization and assimilation played critical roles in achieving acceptance, transcending stereotypes, and forging an Italian-American identity that extended beyond mere caricatures. A sense of community and the preservation of Italian heritage through family ties and culinary traditions provided Italian-Americans with strength and resilience. The subsequent chapter will explore in depth how Italians forever transformed America's culinary landscape and how their culinary traditions served as a powerful tool to counter racial stereotypes before the advent of World War II.

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[92] Claudy Op Den Kamp and Dan Hunter, eds., *A History of Intellectual Property in 50 Objects* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 201.
[93] Claudy Op Den Kamp and Dan Hunter, eds., *A History of Intellectual Property in 50 Objects* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 202.

Chapter 2

Mangiare in America: The Story and Importance of Italian Food in America

While many immigrant communities brought their cuisine to America, the Italian story is one of particular importance. In 1881, a *New York Times* correspondent noted, "I have never during many years of discourse on culinary topics, disguised my opinion that the modern Italian 'cuisine' is, next to the Spanish, the most detestable in Europe."[94] Historically, their cuisine was often dismissed or ridiculed by mainstream American society. This ridicule may have stemmed from prejudices against Italian Americans rather than any objective evaluation of their cuisine. Nevertheless, food and food-related customs play a central role in shaping social identities, especially within the Italian-American community, and serve as a powerful tool for ethnic self-identification in the United States. Unfortunately, this strong association between Italian-American culture and food has not gone unnoticed by mainstream American society. It has even become a prominent element in the stereotypical portrayal of Italian Americans. The use of derogatory terms such as "macaroni" or "spaghetti eater" is an example of the food-related slurs employed to belittle Italian Americans.[95]

In recent years, food has become an important topic of study in various academic fields such as social sciences, history, and literature as a means of understanding the experiences of Italian Americans. Cooking, eating, and sharing meals are viewed as a way of expressing one's identity, social status, and economic standing and navigating one's position within the immigrant community and the broader U.S. society. Therefore, to understand

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[94] *New York Times*, "Beefsteak in Rome," December 5, 1881, 3.
[95] Ira Torresi, "Identity in a Dish of Pasta: the Role of Food in the Filmic Representation of Italian-Americanness" (2004), 230.

American identities and how they are constructed, exploring the symbolic power of food is vital to understanding cultural or social affinities in moments of change or transformation.[96]

Racial politics have certainly influenced the evolution of Italian-American cuisine. Initially, Italian-American restaurants were highly regional due to the absence of a unified "Italian" cuisine, especially during a time when Italy had recently been unified. With the rise of American racism, Italian cuisine became more practical and catered to southern Italian-American communities. These innovations paved the way for the development of a new and authentic Italian-American cuisine. As Italian Americans gained more cultural acceptance, their cuisine became more mainstream and remains so today. As MacAllen states in his book, "The evolution of Italian American cuisine is the story of immigrants finding acceptance, evolving from ethnic foreigners into mainstream American."[97]

The forthcoming chapter will explore the food customs and practices of Italian immigrants residing in the United States, clarifying the significant role of food as both sustenance and a useful mechanism for challenging and surpassing racial stereotypes. Italian immigrants effectively communicated to their host society that their identity extended beyond preconceived clichés by introducing their culinary heritage, adapting to American tastes, and establishing eateries. Consequently, Italian cuisine underwent a transformative process, evolving into a distinctive Italian-American culinary tradition that gained widespread acceptance throughout the United States.

2.1. Italian Foodways in the United States

[96] Donna Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat: Ethnic Food and the Making of Americans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 9.
[97] Ian MacAllen, *Red Sauce: How Italian Food Became American*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2022), 8.

Approximately two-thirds of Italian immigrants who arrived in New York City were peasants or farmers from southern Italy.[98] According to a study conducted in 1899, their diet in their homeland was limited and monotonous, consisting of "bread in the day and a vegetable soup at night." Moreover, an agrarian crisis that occurred in southern Italy in the late nineteenth century led to an even more limited diet, which mainly comprised black bread and quantities of vegetables, legumes, cheese, salted fish, and lard.[99] In contrast, America was idealized as a land of abundance and plenty. In Italy, the availability of food was scarce, and acquiring it was difficult, but the significance and understanding of food were extensive and meaningful.[100] Calabrian anthropologist Vito Teti writes that "the desire to leave the 'land of hunger' and the dream of a world where food was plentiful were decisive factors in creating a mass exodus."[101]

While food serves a fundamental role as a source of nourishment and energy, Italian-American culture often views it as a ritualistic activity that begins with its preparation and carries an almost religious undertone. Food not only facilitates communication but also provides solace and refuge. Additionally, food helped Italian immigrants in the United States to recreate an Italian identity outside of their homeland and helped them understand what it meant to be Italian. Notably, food within Italian-American communities tended to resist assimilation but allowed for hybridization, resulting in Italian-American food diverging from traditional Italian cuisine. While certain Italian dishes have undergone adaptations or have even been invented on American soil, such as spaghetti and meatballs, Chicago deep-dish pizza, Fettucine Alfredo, and the popular mac and cheese, Italian-style food served on American tables has allowed Italian immigrants to resist the complete erasure of their cultural

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[98] Simone Cinotto, *The Italian American Table: Food, Family, and Community in New York City* (Urbana, Chicago and Springfield, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 115.
[99] Simone Cinotto, *The Italian American Table: Food, Family, and Community in New York City* (Urbana, Chicago and Springfield, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 115.
[100] Hasia R. Diner, *Hungering for America: Italian, Irish, and Jewish Foodways in the Age of Migration* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 34.
[101] Vito Teti, "La cucina calabrese è un'invenzione Americana?" *I viaggi di Erodoto* 6, no.14 (1991), 66-67

identity outside of their homeland and facilitated their integration into the American mainstream.

It is worth mentioning that Italian Americans of northern Italian origin, who had already achieved affluence in the United States, existed prior to the influx of southern Italian immigrants. However, the influence of southern Italian immigrants on the development of Italian-American cuisine far surpassed that of their northern counterparts.[102] For those Italians who arrived during the first waves of the mass immigration of the late nineteenth century, food was more meant for survival rather than pleasure. Many could not afford to purchase Italian food staples in the United States. However, with the later immigration waves also came a better understanding of what it meant to be Italian, accompanied by more money to afford to make food the Italian way. Italian immigrants were introduced to American food during a time of severe economic hardship. Nonetheless, the financial struggles of most immigrants were not a permanent circumstance. Immigrants within the working class experienced a certain degree of upward social mobility as they moved from low-skilled to moderately-skilled positions and from one working-class area to slightly better ones. A significant number of immigrants even embarked into small-scale entrepreneurship, with food-based establishments being a particularly attractive option.[103] Cooking Italian dishes became a way to remember the motherland. Italian-born immigrants spent a significant proportion of their income on food. Despite sending remittances back to their family Italy, many Italian immigrants in America were willing to pay a higher price for imported goods such as Italian cheese, olive oil, and macaroni.[104]

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[102] Ian MacAllen, *Red Sauce: How Italian Food Became American* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2022), 43.
[103] Hasia R. Diner, *Hungering for America: Italian, Irish, and Jewish Foodways in the Age of Migration*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 50.
[104] Massimo Montanari, *Italian Identity in the Kitchen, or Food and the Nation* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2010), 37–38.

In the early twentieth century, Italian immigrant dishes were looked down upon and even became the source of derogatory terms such as "spaghetti bender" and "garlic eater."[105] Consuming pasta, perceived by the broader American society as a distinguishing factor from other ethnic groups, effectively overshadowed the more intricate aspects of Italian cultural identity. As a consequence, the initial depreciation of Italian food customs, related to various instances of prejudice or xenophobia, can be presented as a factor that promoted the development of a collective ethnic identity within the Italian-American community. Back then, garlic's strong smell and pungency were considered un-American and therefore uncivilized, and its strong smell was seen as proof of Italian inferiority.[106] During that period, nutrition experts argued that the Italian immigrant diet was indigestible, overstimulated the nervous system, and encouraged alcohol consumption.[107] Teachers blamed immigrants' ignorance for Italian schoolchildren's high malnutrition rates, rickets, and tuberculosis. Cinotto mentions that "young generations (...) grew up with the awareness that racism against southern Italians found a powerful expression in the language of food."[108]

In the 30s, however, Italians' food habits were reexamined, and Italian specialities grew in popularity outside of ethnic markets. During that period, Italian restaurants attracted an unprecedented amount of non-Italian customers.[109]

In this hostile environment, Italian food slowly took on a "new meaning and new powers."[110] For Italian Americans, food became a means to maintain a distinct identity on

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[105] Joseph Sciorra, "Italians Against Racism: The Murder of Yusuf Hawkings (R.I.P) and My March on Bensonhurst," in *Are Italians White?*, eds. Jennifer Guglielmo and Salvatore Salverno (New York, NY: Routledge, 2003), 196.
Ian MacAllen, *Red Sauce: How Italian Food Became American* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2022), 93.

[106] Ian MacAllen, *Red Sauce: How Italian Food Became American*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2022), 4.
[107] Simone Cinotto, *The Italian American Table: Food, Family, and Community in New York City* (Urbana, Chicago and Springfield, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 80.
[108] Ibid.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Jane Ziegelman, *97 Orchard: An Edible History of Five Immigrant Families in One New York Tenement* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2010), 193.

foreign soil and a way to protect themselves from being attacked, all while slowly assimilating into American culture. Put differently, food served as a means for Italian Americans to establish emotional ties with their community and to manifest their cultural legacy, enabling them to build a distinct sense of national identity outside their country of origin. Donna Gabaccia states that even if Italians had plenty of food to choose from in the United States, it did not mean that they wanted to start eating American. As a matter of fact, she points out that for many Italians abandoning "immigrant food traditions for the food of Americans" was like abandoning their community, family, and even religion.[111] This is especially true when considering every aspect of life that was changing for Italians once they settled in the United States. Even though they had to change and forget about their habits of the Old World, food could remain a lasting marker of what it meant to be Italian.[112]

The creation of Italian-American cuisine was shaped by the availability of some ingredients in the United States that were previously out of reach for most Italians in their motherland. Despite the challenges they faced in the United States, life in America was generally considered to be more plentiful than back home. In Simone Cinotto's book *The Italian American Table*, he draws attention to the fact that products such as beef, sugar, coffee, bread, and even pasta were out of reach for many Italians when they were back in Italy. The abundance experienced by Italian immigrants in the United States was not exclusively due to their higher wages but also the availability of cheaper food. In Italy, peasant families had to allocate nearly 10% of their yearly income towards food taxes and even had to pay taxes on the vegetables they grew.[113] In contrast, food in the United States

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[111] Donna Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat: Ethnic Food and the Making of Americans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 81-82.
[112] Colleen Leahy Johnson, *Growing up and Growing Old in Italian-American Families* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1985), 39.
[113] Carol Helstosky, *Garlic and Oil: Food and Politics in Italy* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2004), 25. Hasia R. Diner, *Hungering for America: Italian, Irish, and Jewish Foodways in the Age of Migration*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 61-62.

was relatively inexpensive due to elements such as industrialization, the expansion of railroads, and improvements in American production techniques.[114]

The availability of sugar became a valuable and cherished aspect of the Italian immigrant experience. The generation born in America developed a strong liking for sugary treats like candy, donuts, and cakes. Due to this excessive consumption, social workers attributed the widespread malnutrition among Italian schoolchildren to sweets.[115] Despite this, immigrants did not discourage their children's habits because sugar, similar to meat, held great cultural significance in southern Italy as a rich and celebratory food. Access to sugar was seen as a symbol of achieving a higher social status.

In the United States, Italian immigrant families went from enjoying meat once a year to something they could always purchase. While they often transitioned into the same labor-based jobs available in southern Italy, their wages could be up to seven or eight times higher. For this reason, meat became more common in their cooking, and even their portion sizes grew.[116] One nutritionist stated that: "A taste for meat… is acquired in this country" after observing America's Italian immigrants in 1922.[117] Buying meat thus became a marker of social status.[118] All accounts of the Italian adaptation to American food culture include the incorporation of meat. Louise Boland More conducted a study of dietary habits among New York's wage earners in 1904. She found that all the Italians she studied consumed meat, with beef, veal, mutton, ham, pork, bacon, chicken, and fish constituting the largest expense in their diets. One example showed a family of an Italian stone-cutter, who spent $9.00 a month

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[114] Ian MacAllen, *Red Sauce: How Italian Food Became American*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2022), 14.
[115] Lucy H. Gillett, "Factors Influencing Nutrition Work among Italians," *Journal of Home Economics* 14, 1 (Jan. 1922), 16.
[116] Gemma Horowitz, "The Illustrated History of Italian-American Food," *First We Feast*, June 1, 2018. https://firstwefeast.com/features/illustrated-history-of-italian-american-food.
[117] Lucy H. Gillett, "The Great Need for Information on Racial Dietary Customs," *Journal of Home Economics* 14 (June 1922), 260.
[118] Simone Cinotto, *The Italian American Table: Food, Family, and Community in New York City* (Urbana, Chicago and Springfield, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 80.

on rent, $5.36 on beef, veal, and mutton, $2.45 on chicken, and $2.07 on macaroni.[119] The same thing happened to sugar, coffee, and bread — these products all became status symbols. This shows that Italians used food to keep their distinct identity and showcase their newfound success and wealth after having experienced hunger in the motherland. Italians "invented new dishes that used ingredients that they had always associated with the wealthy. Italian food in America became 'richer and more complicated' than ordinary meals had been in the old country."[120] The food and life made available to immigrants became known as the *abbondanza* (abundance). This concept had a significant impact on the way Italian-American recipes evolved. "American variations celebrations celebrate bounty and quantity, where more is always better."[121]

In the United States, Italian immigrants integrated familiar but previously unattainable foods into their diets, which had been associated with the elite in their homeland. The Italian immigrants in the United States were able to eliminate the social stratification that was present in their homeland, at least in the realm of food. Their subversive actions towards the traditional hierarchies in the Old World had a significant impact on their perspectives towards America, Italy, and their identity.[122] The behavior of Italian immigrants in America can be seen as a reflection of their wealthy counterparts back in their hometowns, who had a strong influence on their daily lives. By taking advantage of the abundance of resources in America, they adopted a rhetoric that aligned with the values of choice and abundance prevalent in American culture. The change from authentic Italian food to hybrid Italian-American food was not drastic, but it was enough of a change that it took on its own identity.

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[119] Louise More Boland, *Wage-Earners' Budgets: A Study of Standards and Cost of Living in New York City* (New York, NY: Henry Holt, 1907), 218–219.
[120] Hasia R. Diner, *Hungering for America: Italian, Irish, and Jewish Foodways in the Age of Migration*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001),
[121] Ian MacAllen, *Red Sauce: How Italian Food Became American* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2022), 13.
[122] Hasia R. Diner, *Hungering for America: Italian, Irish, and Jewish Foodways in the Age of Migration* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 49.

2.2. A Taste of Italy: The Lucrative Industry of Italian Food and Cookbooks

America and its economy were undergoing great change around the turn of the century. Once a country with a primarily agricultural economy, the United States would increasingly find itself a growing industrial power. As a result of industrialization, the shift which would alter America's cooking habits most dramatically during the twentieth century was the increase in the production and consumption of prepared and processed foods. What once was made from scratch could increasingly be bought in a can or pulled from the shelf in the supermarket's frozen food aisle. The commercialization of prepared food would drastically influence the way in which Americans cooked their meals. These changes heavily influenced the story of Italian cuisine in the United States. Even though Italians continued their Italian home cooking practices, the introduction to canned and processed products closely resembled American dietary standards.

In an 1889 article from *The Ladies' Home Journal*, the writer praises canned goods for their affordability and ease: "These in great variety are so good, cheap and easily prepared that a section should be kept on hand… Among these vegetables, tomatoes take the lead as being the most useful."[123] Americans from all walks of life were making use of prepared foods and incorporating them into their daily lives. This included Italian Americans, who would use canned tomatoes to popularize tomato sauce in America. Italian immigrants established businesses in the food industry, such as restaurants and farming, that produced and traded cultural food products. Ettore Boiardi, more commonly known as "Chef Boyardee," played a pioneering role in the mass production of canned Italian cuisine, including canned spaghetti in tomato sauce, and created "heat and eat" food products under his brand. As a result, Americans began to familiarize themselves with the consumption of spaghetti accompanied by tomato sauce, which became increasingly popular. Advertisements

[123] Lilian S. Wells, "Aids and Accessories," *The Ladies' Home Journal* (1889-1907) 1889: 14.

for his products promote their affordability, with slogans such as "Only about fifteen cents a serving."[124] Americanized versions of Italian food had also spread to non-Italian tables thanks to the increasing sophistication of the food-processing industry.

Moreover, the Great Depression led to renewed concerns for frugality in the kitchen, and pasta and thus Italian spaghetti was well placed to become one of the mainstays of American cooking.[125] In fact, pasta became increasingly popular between the First and Second World Wars as a widely consumed product in the United States. In 1929, the number of pasta factories in the country had grown significantly to over 550, with 377 of them operating on a large-scale industrial level.[126] This new acceptance coincided with the growth and expansion of Italian restaurants specializing in pasta and catering to non-Italians.

Italian immigrants developed a comprehensive system for producing, importing, and selling food from their home country after they arrived in the United States. This industry provided a rare chance for Italian immigrants to establish independent businesses, and they quickly created economic niches in this trade where both employers and employees were Italian. According to Robert Foerster, the food business became a favored alternative to unskilled labor, and many laborers, miners, and others were lured into entering "*bisinisse.*"[127] Due to the capitalization on the role of foodways in Italian culture, Italian Americans are overrepresented in food-related businesses.

In New York City, many immigrant food shops and factories were located in the most densely populated and disease-prone neighborhoods. Non-Italian observers often found the conditions of pasta-making repugnant and reported that "Inside the shops are also rows of poles loaded with spaghetti, and with the often filthy conditions prevailing in these shops and

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[124] John F. Mariani, *How Italian Food Conquered the World* (New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), 70.
[125] Harvey Levenstein, "The American Response to Italian Food, 1880-1930," in *Food in the USA*, (1985), 87.
[126] Silvano Serventi and Françoise Sabban. *Pasta: The Story Of a Universal Food* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2003), 171.
[127] Robert F. Foerster, *The Italian Emigration of Our Times* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1919), 338.

the dirt blown on the macaroni hanging outside, one can imagine that the great amount of filth, disease germs, and other impurities the Italians take unto their systems through this medium alone."[128] Italians were under much scrutiny by outsiders because of their apparent unhygienic practices, which resulted in the food sold in these macaroni shops and bakeries almost exclusively being consumed by Italians. This also led to Italian small-scale industry becoming the target of anti-immigrant and anti-Italian regulators.

During the 1920s and 1930s, Italian American entrepreneurs in the food industry did not only focus on establishing a distinct Italian American community of taste. Instead, they developed innovative communication tactics to capitalize on the intersection between American modernity, progressive capitalism, and the production of "traditional" Italian foods. The agency of ethnic food entrepreneurs also created Italian American consumers, on the one hand, by showing immigrants how to express their ethnic affiliation through consumption, on the other hand, by modernizing immigrants through regular encounters with advertising, branding, and other features of mass consumerism. The integration of an enclave market economy into the national industrial system redefined Italian American identities. The history of Italian food entrepreneurs, products, and consumers in the interwar years is one of the making and remaking of identities in which industrial modernity played a decisive part.

The wealthy individuals' dietary habits were associated with the newly formed Italian nation in the perception of both themselves and foreigners. Pellegrino Artusi's cookbook, *La Scienza in Cucina e l'Arte di Mangiar Bene*, (Science in the Kitchen and the Art of Eating Well) published in 1891, reduced the importance of regional variations and instead put more importance on the cuisine of the middle class as the epitome of Italian food. His book combined recipes from across the Italian peninsula and is considered to be the foundation for much of contemporary Italian cooking. Artusi's work contained some 790 recipes and has

[128] Joseph H. Adams," In the Italian Quarters of New York" (New York, NY: Congregational Home Missionary Society, 1903), microfilm, Pennsylvania Historical Society, Philadelphia.

long been considered the cornerstone of the Italian culinary tradition. By creating a collection of regional dishes into a homogenous and homogenizing cuisine, Artusi created a work that unified Italians at a time when the idea of unity seemed hopeful and yet somehow impossible.[129]

As a result of incorporating pasta, meats, cheeses, oils, wines, and fruits into their meals, Italian cooking became associated with a refined taste among high-class society in both Europe and the United States.[130] In the United States at that time, many domestic cookbooks were being published featuring regional foods and cuisines from northern Europe. Italian pasta dishes, especially spaghetti and tomato sauce, were still considered ethnic foods and did not appear in an American recipe book until 1912. In that year, Antonia Isola published *Simple Italian Cookery,* offering the first Italian recipes in English for Americans. The collection "shows that Italian cooker is far from being all 'garlic and macaroni.'" according to a widely syndicated review of the collection.[131] In 1939, Diane Ashley authored a book titled *Where to Dine in Thirty-Nine*, which served as both a restaurant guide and recipe collection featuring dishes from various restaurants and chefs in New York City.[132] Ashley wrote the book in response to frequent requests from her friends looking for restaurant recommendations in the city. The establishments featured in the collection catered to the upper and middle class of New York City, including steakhouses, French bistros, haute cuisine, as well as Italian restaurants. This book provides a glimpse into prewar restaurant dining and is frequently cited for covering not just Italian restaurants but all available cuisines in New York City at the time. The era marked the golden age of red sauce cuisine, which was no longer limited to ethnic ghettos but rather served to respectable middle-class diners. The

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[129] Donna Gabacia, "Food, Recipes, Cookbooks, and Italian-American Life", *Italian Americana* 16, no.2 (1998: 7.
[130] Piero Camporesi, *Indian Broth, Exotic Brew: The Art of Living in the Age of Enlightenment*, Christopher Woodall, tr. (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 1990).
[131] Hearst Corporation, "Simple Italian Cookery," Harper's Bazar 46 (January 1912): 362.
[132] Ian MacAllen, *Red Sauce: How Italian Food Became American*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2022), 37.

inclusion of Italian restaurants in Ashley's book demonstrates the growing significance of Italian cuisine in American dining culture at the time.

2.3. The Popularization of Italian-American Cooking

Even though Americans were initially not fond of Italian food and its ingredients, this attitude started changing in the first quarter of the twentieth century. In the late 1800s, Americans associated Italy and its cuisine with "Renaissance palaces and happy gondoliers," and Italian immigrants ran some of the country's most famous restaurants.[133] However, the influx of impoverished and unskilled immigrants changed the perception of Italians and their food. They were now associated with poverty, crime, and violence. To make Italian cuisine more appetizing to Americans, dishes, such as spaghetti, were often listed on menus as "à l'Italienne," with the French spelling providing a sense of refinement.[134]

The perception of Italian cuisine underwent a remarkable transformation during and after World War I, which was driven by the growing need to find more frugal food options. The deep changes in the American dietary landscape resulting from commercial, social, and economic upheavals around the turn of the century, along with the influence of World War I and lastly, the Great Depression, played a pivotal role in laying the groundwork for the acceptance and adoption of Italian cuisine. Italian recipes became more common in articles about food conservation and preparation, and Italian cuisine was no longer associated exclusively with crime-ridden neighborhoods. Instead, it was recognized as the food of America's ally in the war against Germany.[135] Americans developed a new appreciation for the Italian people, as well as their food. *Good Housekeeping Magazine*, for instance, wrote: "Ravioli, favorite dish of our Italian ally, should be served on every American table."[136]

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[133] Harvey Levenstein, "The American Response to Italian Food, 1880-1930," in *Food In the USA*, (1985), 77.
[134] Ibid.
[135] Ibid, 83.
[136] Elsinore Crowell, "Peppers and Garlic," *Good Housekeeping*, (1918), 121.

Furthermore, the need to conserve meat during the war, together with scientific advancement in nutrition and the discovery of vitamins during this era, generated a shift in the perspectives of social reformers and nutritionists regarding Italian food. Fruit and vegetables, which had always been popular in Italian cuisine, garnered positive regard, while pasta was praised as a nutritious and affordable dish.[137]

The change in the mindset of Americans can also be seen in food writers' attitudes toward both Italians and their food. Selden wrote: "What makes Italian food so good? Because of the true artist's blood in every Italian's veins. Good cooking requires vision, imagination, a sensitiveness to fine shades of flavor, beauty and color and form and composition. That is where the Latins have the advantage over us."[138]

However, it was not until the 1920s that middle-class Americans became more familiar with Italian food culture, and the breakthrough occurred in the 1930s. The early adopters of Italian food were artists and politicians. Ralph's Restaurant in Philadelphia, which has been open for over a century, was popular with President Theodore Roosevelt and has hosted many celebrities since its opening in 1915.[139] With entrepreneurs of Italian origin making progress in the food industry and Americans becoming more receptive to the idea of flavor, Italian-American food entered the mainstream. Italian immigrants found great satisfaction in their newfound appreciation for their cuisine and their American experience, which allowed them to overcome hunger and achieve a more prosperous life. This achievement served to heal the social, cultural, and physical wounds inflicted by discrimination experienced both in Italy and the United States.

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[137] Harvey A. Levenstein and Joseph R. Conlin, "The Food Habits of Italian Immigrants to America: An Examination of the Persistence of a Food Culture and the Rise of "Fast Food" in America," in *Dominant Symbols in Popular Culture*, (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1990), 242.
[138] Grace S.Selden, "Vegetable Victories," *Good Housekeeping*, October 1918, 50.
[139] Harvey A. Levenstein and Joseph R. Conlin, "The Food Habits of Italian Immigrants to America: An Examination of the Persistence of a Food Culture and the Rise of "Fast Food" in America," in *Dominant Symbols in Popular Culture*, (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1990), 242.

As mentioned previously, the Great Depression served to increase the popularity of spaghetti with tomato sauce, particularly in its canned form, as a practical and affordable option in tough times.[140] In times of economic hardship, pasta proved itself as a cost-effective food option, providing substantial caloric content at a low price point, thereby catering to the value-conscious consumer. Italian-American cuisine in general, experienced widespread popularity within Depression-era kitchens due to its roots as a cuisine of people experiencing poverty.[141] American pasta manufacturers undertook vigorous marketing campaigns to show consumers how spaghetti was "healthful and economical."[142]

During the course of the twentieth century, Italian-American food traditions expanded from catering to immigrants residing in ethnic enclaves to Americans of all sorts, of all races, and of all ethnicities.[143] Therefore, Italian immigrants were able to attain upward social mobility in American society through their involvement in the food industry. The Italian immigrants' sense of collective victory through food contributed to their rise in the ethnic and racial hierarchy, helping them to distinguish themselves from the Black population and to connect whiteness with the rewards of citizenship.[144] As American culinary practices underwent transformations in the early twentieth century, notably due to the emergence of the prepared foods industry, Italian home cooking experienced widespread acceptance and adoption among American households. Spaghetti accompanied by tomato sauce became an established element of the American diet, marking Italian cuisine as the pioneering ethnic gastronomy to be embraced broadly by American domestic cooks.

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[140] Harvey Levenstein, *Paradox of Plenty: A Social History of Eating in Modern America* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), 30.
[141] Ian MacAllen, *Red Sauce: How Italian Food Became American* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2022), 29.
[142] Harvey Levenstein. *Paradox of Plenty: A Social History of Eating in Modern America*. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), 29.
[143] Ian MacAllen, *Red Sauce: How Italian Food Became American* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2022), 4.
[144] Simone Cinotto, *The Italian American Table: Food, Family, and Community in New York City* (Urbana, Chicago and Springfield, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 80.

2.4. Cultural Hybridization in Food Culture

In his work "The American Response to Italian Food, 1880-1930," Levenstein states: "Wave upon wave of European, African, and Oriental immigration has washed unto America's shores with remarkably little impact on the food habits of the vast majority of native-born Americans. Within one or two generations the children and grandchildren of immigrants usually adopted Anglo-Saxon eating habits, often rejecting outright the food preferences of their parents and grandparents."[145]

He then adds that the only exception to this is the Italian Americans as "Italian food was the first major foreign cuisine to find widespread acceptance among native-born Americans."[146] The migration of Italians to America, a land of plentiful and affordable food, not only allowed the newcomers to improve their standard of living but also to do so while maintaining their Italian identity. By adapting to the American food culture, immigrants established a distinct Italian-American cultural system that placed significant emphasis on food.[147] The narrative of how Italian Americans resisted assimilation and instead modified their food habits to suit the American surroundings, resulting in a cuisine that kept its original flavors yet became appealing enough to impact the tastes of the dominant culture, is a compelling and educational tale.[148]

Italian Americans used two distinct strategies to resist culinary assimilation in the United States. Firstly, they maintained their loyalty to Italian products and staples, such as various types of pasta, polenta, and olive oil, which were not commonly used in mainstream American cuisine at that time. Secondly, they created a unique Italian-American cuisine, featuring a diverse range of recipes and products that were not traditionally used in Italy but were more widely recognized and appreciated by American society. This innovative approach

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[145] Harvey Levenstein, "The American Response to Italian Food, 1880-1930," in *Food in the USA* (1985), 75.
[146] Ibid, 76.
[147] Hasia R. Diner, *Hungering for America: Italian, Irish, and Jewish Foodways in the Age of Migration*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 53.
[148] Harvey Levenstein, "The American Response to Italian Food, 1880-1930", in *Food in the USA* (1985), 76.

was crucial to the economic success and cultural acceptance of Italian-American cuisine.[149] Their loyalty to Italian products is witnessed by the large quantities of wine, pasta, olive oil, cheese and tomato products which were imported from Italy in the first decade of the twentieth century and up until World War I.[150]

This culinary transformation involved a fusion of staple foods from southern Italy with a diverse range of dishes and ingredients from other regions, integrated with American consumption habits, particularly the consumption of meat. Through this process, the immigrants incorporated new and unfamiliar foods into their daily diet while innovating and preserving traditional culinary practices at the same time. They skillfully blended new food items and practices with the traditions of their home country, thereby creating a unique cuisine. Italian Americans seemed to share the native-born WASP's enthusiasm for the Americanized version of their cuisine.

To cater to the preferences of the American population, certain regional dishes and flavors were substituted with stereotypical Italian dishes that were deemed more acceptable. Some flavors were considered undesirable and unappealing to American palates. Consequently, numerous regional dishes, particularly those originating from southern Italy, were narrowed down to a limited selection, including popular choices like spaghetti, ravioli, minestrone, and veal scaloppini.[151] This process resulted in a deliberate blending of Italian and American culinary elements, leading to the cultural hybridization and creation of Italian-American cuisine.

In the 1920s, Italian cuisine began to be adopted by American cooks of various backgrounds, who even attempted to cook Italian dishes at home. Cookbooks such as I*n*

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[149] Ira Torresi, "Identity in a Dish of Pasta: the Role of Food in the Filmic Representation of Italian-Americanness" (2004), 231.
[150] Simone Cinotto, *The Italian American Table: Food, Family, and Community in New York City* (Urbana, Chicago and Springfield, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 169-170.
[151] Giovanna Constantini, "Italian Food: The Pride of a People without Borders," in *Who Decides: Competing Narratives in Constructing Tastes, Consumption and Choice,* ed. Nina Namaste and Marta Nadales (Baltimore, MD: Brill, 2018), 45

Foreign Kitchens: With Choice Recipes from England, France, Italy and the North by Helen Campbell and *Simple Italian Cookery* by Mabel Earl McGinnis provided them with guidance. However, it is unlikely that the dishes produced by these American cooks were as authentic as those served in Italian immigrant households.[152] Recipes from that time period often included tomato sauces with non-traditional ingredients like Worcestershire sauce, beef suet, and horseradish, but never included garlic.[153]

The transformative nature of Italian-American cuisine is evidenced by the strong negative reactions expressed by middle-class Italian travelers toward the food served in America's Little Italies. While Italian immigrants were developing a taste for their hybridized diasporic cuisine and embracing its unique flavors as markers of their emerging identity, middle-class visitors found Italian-American food to be excessively spicy, garlicky, and greasy. They saw it as a vulgar and demeaning imitation of authentic Italian cuisine, which exposed the lack of sophistication of rural people who were exposed to the mass consumerism of the American marketplace.[154]

Americans' preparations of spaghetti and pasta sauce by Americans deviated significantly from the recipes employed by the mothers and grandmothers who settled in the United States. Canned sauce and even ketchup were commonly used as substitutes for homemade tomato sauce, and the incorporation of "dreaded garlic," a characteristic element in traditional Italian versions of the dish, was often disregarded in early American adaptations.[155] However, a notable development occurred in 1938 when the American cookbook *Thoughts for Food* featured a recipe for "Italian Meat Balls and Spaghetti" that more closely resembled the traditional Italian renditions of the dish. This recipe incorporated

[152] Donna Gabaccia, "Food, Recipes, Cookbooks, and Italian-American Life," in *Italian Americana* 16, no.2 (1998), 18.
[153] Harvey Levenstein, "The American Response to Italian Food, 1880-1930," in *Food in the USA* (1985), 86.
[154] Simone Cinotto, "Culture and Identity on the Table: Italian American Food as Social History", in T*he Routledge History of Italian Americans*, eds. William J. Connell and Stanislao G. Pugliese (New York, NY: Taylor & Francis, 2018), 183.
[155] Harvey Levenstein, *Paradox of Plenty: A Social History of Eating in Modern America* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), 30.

an “Italian Sauce” crafted from canned tomatoes, “Italian Tomato Paste,” olive oil, and, remarkably, garlic, which was served over spaghetti and topped with a package of grated Parmesan cheese.[156] In a significant milestone — one of the first instances in American history — an immigrant cuisine was being embraced by American culture, with the food of Italy seamlessly transitioning into the food of America. This narrative underscores the evolution and assimilation of spaghetti and tomato sauce.

As specific Italian ingredients gained broader acceptance among the general American population, Italian cuisine practiced in the United States underwent a transformation, giving rise to a unique culinary style known as Italian-American cuisine. This cuisine diverged from the traditional diets of most immigrants from the Mezzogiorno region and represented a novel addition to American palates. While rooted in Italian culinary traditions, Italian-American cuisine incorporated American preferences and swiftly developed its own distinct identity.

“The practices of daily life and face-to-face interaction in the immigrant enclave, together with the unprecedented quantity and variety of foods available in the New York market, defined a community food pattern utterly American upon which immigrants built an important part of their new identity as Italians.”[157] The idea of Italian-American food was beginning to form within the Italian community and the American population at large. It is important to note that there has been little to no recognition of cultural appropriation regarding Italian-American cuisine. This suggests that Italian Americans have fully integrated into American society so that even portrayals of their culture that may come across as disrespectful are deemed acceptable. These representations are now perceived as parodies of American culture as a whole, rather than specific to an ethnic group that has historically faced marginalization and discrimination. While this indicates progress in eliminating racism

[156] Samuel Pepys, “Thoughts for Food: A Menu Aid” (Chicago, IL: The Institute Publishing Co., 1938), 264.
[157] Simone Cinotto, "Leonard Covello, the Covello Papers, and the History of Eating Habits among Italian Immigrants in New York," *The Journal of American History* 91, No. 2 (September 2004): 511.

towards Italian Americans, it also limits culinary creativity by relying heavily on a cultural stereotype. This overwhelming success of Italian food in the United States provides an interesting angle on assimilating Italian-American cuisine in America.

2.5. The Rise of Italian-American Restaurants

During the transitional period around the beginning of the twentieth century, the majority of Italian restaurants originated as modest establishments situated within Italian communities, primarily catering to successive waves of unmarried male immigrants by offering affordable and familiar dishes.[158] Initially, many of these establishments had humble beginnings, often starting as boarding houses that specifically catered to men from specific regions of Italy, providing them with meals prepared in the culinary style of their respective areas. However, as the 1920s unfolded, there was a noticeable shift in attitudes, marked by a decreasing significance of local and regional affiliations and an increasing emphasis on a broader Italian national identity.

Consequently, those boarding houses that had transformed into restaurants began to lose their regional associations, opting instead for a more encompassing Italian identity.[159] By fostering a sense of cohesion and unity, America facilitated the formation of a collective identity among Italian immigrants originating from diverse regions of the Italian peninsula and Sicily. Parallel to the evolution of their unified identity, the culinary practices and food consumed by Italian immigrants in America also became more standardized. While diets in Italy exhibited certain commonalities, each region and town boasted its own distinct culinary traditions. Although numerous unique dishes from various regions persisted in the United States, Italian immigrants found common ground in shared dishes such as spaghetti and tomato sauce, no matter where they were from.

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[158] Simone Cinotto. *The Italian American Table: Food, Family, and Community in New York City* (Urbana, Chicago and Springfield, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 182.
[159] Harvey Levenstein, "The American Response to Italian Food, 1880-1930," in *Food in the USA* (1985), 87.

As it was, Italian-American food would achieve its greatest fame not in the apartments of Italian *nonnas* or the kitchens of American homemakers but in Italian-American restaurants. With New York City as the core of this growing industry, Italian-American restaurants would soon become a favorite of American diners. Italian restaurants emerged in urban areas where there was a significant concentration of Italian immigrants. New York City possessed a distinctive quality in the United States since it served as the main port of entry for nearly all Italian immigrants, a significant proportion of whom were able to secure employment and housing there. As mentioned previously, the city had the highest concentration of Italians in the country, which led to the establishment of the greatest number of Italian restaurants. In 1910, out of the 2.1 million Italians in the US, including both native-born and foreign-born, more than a quarter, or over 540,000 lived in New York City, with tens of thousands more residing just across the river in northern New Jersey.[160] Consequently, it was natural for the Italian restaurant to evolve primarily in New York, particularly in its commercial hub of Manhattan, from its beginning to the present day.

By the 1880s, cities with a large Italian population, such as New York, Boston, New Haven, Providence, and San Francisco were able to sustain ethnic restaurants serving food from their home country.[161] The earliest Italian restaurants established on American shores were initially intended to serve the needs of single, working men. Over time, these eateries became some of the first Italian restaurants in the nation. Due to the dominance of southern Italian immigrants over those from the north, they exerted the most significant influence on the development of Italian-American cuisine. When analyzing the foodways of Italians in America, Cinotto notes that Italian immigration being halted during World War I and resumed afterward resulted in the emergence of "rustic" Italian restaurants that mainly

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[160] Mike Riccetti, "The History of Italian Restaurants in America" http://www.mikericcetti.com/italian-restaurant-history.html.
[161] William Grimes, *Appetite City: A Culinary History of New York* (New York, NY: North Point Press, 2009), 96.

catered to immigrants. With restricted immigration, the market among birds of passage, single men who returned to Italy after a temporary stay in the United States, practically dried up, and an increasing number of first- and second-generation families came to constitute the clientele of those who survived. Restaurants serving the foods of Campania and Sicily, the regions that provided the bulk of the immigration, came to dominate in the largest cities.[162]

Around 1905, New York City was introduced to what would become one of the most influential dishes in American history — pizza. Though many dishes played a significant role in popularizing Italian cuisine, none held as much significance as pizza in solidifying Italian gastronomy's enduring presence in the collective imagination of the American population. Although the first American pizzeria is a subject of debate, Lombardi's Pizza in Little Italy was the first registered pizzeria in public business records. Gennaro Lombardi, born in Naples in 1887, came to New York on the S.S. Calabria in 1904 and opened Lombardi's a year later, selling pizza for five cents per slice to the local working class. While records indicate that Gennaro had made pizza in Naples, his innovation was driven by scarcity and necessity. Traditional Neapolitan pizza is rooted in a strong tradition, made with mozzarella di bufala, mozzarella cheese made from the milk of buffaloes indigenous to Campania, and specific flours to ensure a light and fluffy crust. These ingredients were not available in the United States, so Gennaro substituted them with Fior di Latte mozzarella and high-gluten bread flour. As most of his customers were workers who needed their pizza to be portable, Gennaro switched to low-moisture mozzarella, leading to the creation of the New York-style pizza.[163] Gennaro's influence has significantly shaped American cuisine.

Italian restaurant owners may have had little to no difficulty persuading other Italians to dine at their establishments, but attracting an American clientele was a more difficult task.

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[162] Gemma Horowitz "The Illustrated History of Italian-American Food." First We Feast. December 7, 2016. https://firstwefeast.com/features/illustrated-history-of-italian-american-food.

[163] Lenny Falcone, "The First Pizzeria in NYC, and the U.S., Lombardi's", *Whalebone*, April 27, 2018 https://whalebonemag.com/interview-first-pizzeria-nyc-u-s-lombardis/.

However, one group of Americans — Bohemian artists, writers, and musicians — discovered the quaint and charming ethnic trattorias and found these restaurants quite attractive. These upwardly mobile diners sought out and valued the rustic aesthetic these restaurants offered, even if it was artificial. The popularity of red sauce restaurants is partly attributed to the rising desire among the middle class to try ethnic foods.[164] These original food enthusiasts were eager to taste new and different flavors, which they found in ethnic enclaves. In cities on the East Coast, middle-class Americans with disposable income and a thirst for adventure mingled with ethnic immigrant communities. As the United States became more established on the world stage, the upwardly mobile sought new ways of comparing themselves to the old world. Italian food was also affordable, making it more accessible to the young bourgeois to experiment with new flavors at a low risk. The urban bourgeois of that era, the hipsters of their day, were tempted by exotic flavors like garlic, and thus immigrant-owned restaurants in places like Manhattan's West Village began to attract these adventurous Bohemians. Their appreciation for Italian-American food and culture was a pivotal moment for Italian-American restaurant cuisine. Although popular with Bohemians and East Coast elites, the broad appeal of Italian American restaurants to non-immigrants did not reach a larger public until after the First World War.[165]

The culinary landscape of New York City underwent a significant expansion, with restaurants emerging as popular dining destinations. Delmonico's no longer held a monopoly on popularity, and the clientele extended beyond the city's elite. An illustration of this transformation can be observed in Gonfarone. This modest subterranean eatery emerged around the turn of the century, predominantly catering to Italians with its limited number of tables offering Italian cuisine. Under the skilled management of the renowned Anacleto

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[164] Ian MacAllen, *Red Sauce: How Italian Food Became American* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2022), 8.
[165] Ian MacAllen, *Red Sauce: How Italian Food Became American* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2022), 68-69.

Sermolino, the restaurant gained acclaim through its fifty-cent (sixty-cent on weekends) table d'hôte, presenting a comprehensive seven-course menu comprising antipasti, soup, spaghetti with meat sauce, salmon, sweetbreads, chicken or roast prime rib, accompanied by various side dishes and wine.[166] Its popularity soared quickly, especially among the city's bohemian crowd, with an average nightly attendance of five hundred people, often doubling on weekends. [167] It became evident that there was a noticeable increase in the American appetite for Italian-American food.

These eccentric early patrons were crucial in opening the way for a larger, more mainstream clientele. Although the bohemian clientele might have seemed off, they came predominantly from well-to-do Anglo-Saxon families, and their presence helped to change the face of an otherwise unexceptional ethnic neighborhood. Subsequently, a more upscale clientele became aware of this trend, exemplified by the Italian restaurant Mamma Leone's clients. This restaurant pioneered the Italian restaurant for non-Italians.[168] Initially situated above a wine cellar located behind the Metropolitan Opera in 1906, the establishment eventually relocated to a more spacious venue on West 48th Street in 1914, adorned with ornate Italian-inspired decor. Over time, it gained popularity among New York's social elites and celebrities from the music and show biz world, offering a dining experience characterized by opulence and grandeur, embodying a distinctly American interpretation in terms of magnitude and creativity: “Its theme was that of an Italian-American fantasy that had absolutely no basis in reality back in the Old Country, where the majority of Italians were still economically deprived of the pleasure of going out to dinner.”[169]

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[166] William Grimes, *Appetite City: A Culinary History of New York* (New York, NY: North Point Press, 2009), 128.
[167] Ibid, 128-129.
[168] Steve Cuozzo, “The 7 Restaurants That Changed New York City,” *New York Post*, October 8, 2016. https://nypost.com/2016/10/08/the-7-restaurants-that-changed-new-york-city/.
[169] John F. Mariani, *How Italian Food Conquered the World* (New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), 55-56.

During the 1920s, changes in US immigration laws and efforts by the Italian fascist government to limit emigration resulted in a decline in the number of incoming immigrants. This decrease in the number of new immigrants forced restaurants owned by immigrants to look beyond their ethnic communities for customers to stay afloat. This situation created intense competition, and as a result, menu innovation became crucial for survival. In order to attract a larger customer base, ethnic restaurants had to modify or reinvent their dishes to appeal to nonethnics. Italian restaurants, for instance, catered to non-Italian patrons by offering affordable deals. As a result, patrons came to expect large portions of food at low prices when dining at Italian restaurants, and value became a distinguishing feature of Italian American cuisine.[170]

In the 1930s, Italian restaurateurs consciously marketed a dining "experience," not just ethnic food. In San Francisco, the Italian Chamber of Commerce advertised that "the Italian Food Shops and Delicatessen Stores of San Francisco's Latin Quarter are the Meeting Places of the Bohemians and of those who Love 'La Cucina Italiana.'"[171] In contrast, guidebooks for visitors to New York during the same period made a clear distinction between the dingy, poorly-lit eateries located in the basements of Little Italy and the more upscale Italian restaurants in midtown that had recently undergone an improvement in their menu and transformation in atmosphere, drawing a more diverse clientele.[172] Italian restaurants played a crucial role in shaping the way Italians and their food were perceived by non-Italian American consumers, as well as in popularizing images of pleasure and exoticism associated with Italian cuisine. Although early-twentieth-century imaginaries about Italian immigrants in urban America were often negative, some were positive, particularly when seen through the

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[170] Ian MacAllen, *Red Sauce: How Italian Food Became American* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2022), 88.
[171] Italian Chamber of Commerce, *Hidden Treasures* cited in Donna Gabaccia *We Are What We Eat: Ethnic Food and the Making of Americans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 102.
[172] Donna Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat: Ethnic Food and the Making of Americans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 102.

lens of ethnic tourism or "slumming," which was a developing trend at the time. Early tourist guidebooks to New York portrayed Italian neighborhoods as poverty-stricken and chaotic but emphasized picturesque details such as religious processions, street vendors, and singing barbers.

The Prohibition era provided an opportunity for Italian restaurants to enter the urban American dining scene, as the failure of competing for Irish and German American saloons and high-end restaurants created a space for Italian immigrant restaurateurs. Prohibition introduced a peculiar and ultimately advantageous role for the burgeoning Italian-American restaurant industry. While the industry had already found some support from non-Italian customers in the first decades of the century, the onset of Prohibition laws in 1919 presented a new and even more widespread source of patronage. This newfound patronage exemplified the Italian-American community's ability to capitalize on American demand. Italian boarding house owners had long been producing their own alcoholic beverages, including wine, beer, and grappa, which they served to residents and acquaintances. Consequently, when the "Dry Decade" spanning from 1919 to 1933 took effect, non-Italians flocked to Little Italy in search of alcohol, readily available at Italian establishments during Prohibition.[173] Due to a loophole in prohibition that permitted families to produce up to 200 gallons of wine a year, a change in how Americans viewed Italians and their restaurants was facilitated.[174] California-based Italian winemakers shipped grapes to their compatriots in eastern cities who exceeded their limit and sold it in Italian restaurants. This helped distinguish these establishments from their competitors and attracted a new clientele who viewed Italian immigrants' cultural differences as exotic and European rather than problematic and dangerous. This shift was extremely important for the integration and acceptance of Italians into American society. As a result,

[173] Simone Cinotto, *The Italian American Table: Food, Family, and Community in New York City* (Urbana, Chicago and Springfield, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 190.
[174] Ibid, 146.

Italian restaurants became the preferred dining venues for many individuals during this period.

In the 1920s and 1930s, Italian restaurants significantly impacted the formation of Italian-American identities. The restaurateurs selectively drew upon southern Italian rural immigrant culture, Italian national culture, and American popular culture to design and present their restaurants. By deftly combining elements from different cultural contexts, they were able to construct an original and captivating ethnic narrative. Through the theatrical settings of these restaurants in New York, Italian Americans were no longer viewed as uncivilized immigrants or dangerous criminals but rather as family-oriented, artistically-inclined, and emotionally expressive people. The cuisine, which was often standardized in familiar preparations and menus, embodied these cultural values and helped create a new Italian imaginary — one that represented abundance, artistry, and tradition instead of crime or poverty.[175] By 1930, there were 409 Italian restaurants in Manhattan and 204 in Brooklyn.[176]

The sustained prosperity of Italian restaurants throughout the 1930s and 1940s can be largely attributed to the clientele base that was established during the Prohibition era. Affordable Italian dining establishments emerged as both a practical and a favored option among Americans from various social backgrounds who desired to dine outside their homes. Italian restaurants attracted non-Italian patrons by offering good deals, and value became a symbol of Italian-American cuisine. Additionally, their past as bohemian hangouts combined with exuberant ethnic appeal helped popularize Italian restaurants.[177]

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[175] Simone Cinotto, *The Italian American Table: Food, Family, and Community in New York City* (Urbana, Chicago and Springfield, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 181.
[176] Harvey Levenstein, *Paradox of Plenty: A Social History of Eating in Modern America* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), 51.
[177] Simone Cinotto, *The Italian American Table: Food, Family, and Community in New York City* (Urbana, Chicago and Springfield, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 192.

The question arises, what attracted so many Americans to Italian restaurants? "Whatever 'atmosphere' existed sprang from the fact that papa, and Madame Gonfarone, his partner, and the waiters and bus boys and cooks, and the bartender and the dishwashers, and musicians, spoke and thought and acted 'Italian.' This little Italian world was friendly, pleasant and gay."[178] The allure of many Italian restaurants in New York can be attributed, in large part, to their ability to provide a complete cultural experience, satisfying the desires and fantasies of non-Italian customers. Italians were more easily assimilated into American society during the interwar era and beyond thanks to the narratives of *Italianità* that flourished within these establishments, emphasizing positive traits like solid familial ties, artistic talent, and an occasionally ambiguous connection to a culture considered the birthplace of Western civilization.[179]

According to Sermolino, the cooks and waiters played a vital role in constructing a comforting version of "being Italian" that aligned with the expectations of American customers.[180] Examining the social dynamics within Italian restaurant kitchens and dining rooms provides insights into the racialization and agency processes that influenced Italian Americans' social status. The staff of Italian restaurants employed stereotypes and racial narratives about themselves, not only for economic gain from their white middle-class clientele but also to challenge and redefine interethnic power dynamics. In the 1920s and 1930s, New York's Italian restaurants allowed immigrants to reclaim an identity that blended the rustic, primal qualities of the "dark" southern Italy with the timeless traditions of beauty and sophistication associated with the "white man's Italy" of ancient Rome and the Renaissance. By blending their diverse culinary traditions into a new Italian cuisine and crafting a visually striking aesthetic with typical Italian symbols like gondolas, the

[178] Sermolino, *Papa's Table d'Hôte*, 15.
[179] Simone Cinotto, *The Italian American Table: Food, Family, and Community in New York City* (Urbana, Chicago and Springfield, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 194.
[180] Sermolino, *Papa's Table d'Hôte*, 15.

Colosseum, and Vesuvius, Italian immigrants transcended divisions between northern and southern Italy, high and low cultures, and common and bourgeois classes. In this process, they formed a meaningful and empowering concept of nationhood.[181]

Initially, middle-class Americans who frequented Italian restaurants held a dual perception of Italian American identity. On the one hand, they harbored stereotypes of volatile, deceitful masculinity and cunning, superstitious femininity. On the other hand, they also associated Italians with a pleasurable character characterized by sentimentality, sociability, a natural inclination toward family, an appreciation for beauty, and artistic inclinations.[182]

Over the following decades, Italian cuisine experienced an ongoing rise in popularity, solidifying its importance and prestige. The Italian-American identity became inextricably linked to a sense of pride in Italian food. The success of their culinary heritage on American soil "would, in turn, reinforce their own tendency to use food as a distinctive source of ethnic pride."[183] Italian cuisine, transitioning from a source of shame and the demand for assimilation, played a pivotal role in facilitating the integration of Italian Americans into the fabric of American society. The popularity of Italian food among American diners was widely understood and appreciated. The story of Italian-American restaurants is a unique one in this country, for no other immigrant group would see their cuisine rise to such popularity and thus acceptance from the public in their host country.

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[181] Simone Cinotto. *The Italian American Table: Food, Family, and Community in New York City* (Urbana, Chicago and Springfield, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 194.
[182] Ibid.
[183] Harvey Levenstein, "The American Response to Italian Food, 1880-1930," in *Food in the USA* (1985), 76.

Conclusion

To conclude, it is of significant importance to mention that for the Italian migrant community in the United States, food was inextricably linked to the construction of their identity as Italian Americans and, thus, their way into being accepted into the broader American society. It is impossible to exaggerate how closely the Italian immigrant community's experience and food are related. Food was crucial in forming both their acceptance in American culture and their identity as Italian Americans. Due to the apparent unfamiliarity with Italian cuisine, other ethnic groups initially treated it with ridicule and scorn, but with time this has evolved into true appreciation and admiration.[184] The story of food reveals how Italians acquired acceptance via this cultural interchange as well as how they assimilate through their palates.

[184] Janice Therese Mancuso, "A Brief History of Italian Food in America," *La Gazzetta Italiana*, November 2010, https://www.lagazzettaitaliana.com/food-and-wine/7627-a-brief-history-of-italian-food-in-america.

This thesis explores and sheds light on the acceptance of Italian cuisine in the United States, revealing that its popularity began even before World War II. The journey of Italian food to American plates closely mirrored the journey of Italian immigrants and their offspring, as their success in the food industry and their business practices paved the way for their complete integration into American society.

By the start of World War II, an important change in American eating habits had occurred, with dishes like spaghetti, tomato sauce, and meatballs becoming a staple in American homes. Italians resisted efforts to assimilate their culinary traditions and watched their Americanized cuisine gain popularity in American households and restaurants, outperforming other non-British immigrant groups. This success led to further reinforcement of their sense of ethnic pride associated with food. The fact that the Italian food they cherished was a product of the interactions between different cultural influences within the Italian immigrant community and the possibilities and constraints of the New World was hardly important to them. For Italian Americans, the Americanized version of "spaghetti and meatballs," which is practically unknown in Italy, has turned into a source of ethnic pride. [185]

The first chapter provided the necessary foundation to better understand the reasons behind why Italians migrated to the United States and the difficulties they encountered as immigrants in a foreign country. Their complicated situation as both immigrants and racially ambiguous individuals highlighted the significance of preserving their traditions, particularly food-related ones, to preserve their cultural identity and create a sense of belonging in a new country.

[185] Harvey Levenstein, "The American Response to Italian Food, 1880-1930," in *Food in the USA* (1985), 88.

The second chapter of this research sheds light on how Italian immigrants gained acceptance in the United States through their culinary contributions. Italian home cooking gained popularity among American households and became a mainstay as Americans changed their cooking habits in the early twentieth century, especially with the growth of the prepared food business and the Great Depression. Nevertheless, the largest and longest-lasting impact on American dining habits came from the booming Italian restaurant industry following World War I. Italian food's popularity in the restaurant business is due to its capacity to appeal to both traditional American eating customs and introduce entirely new dining experiences.

The availability of home-style Italian cuisine in restaurants that were both affordable and inviting helped Italian immigrants connect with American diners and further solidified the significance of food as a tool for assimilation. While this thesis predominantly focused on the experiences of Italian immigrants in New York due to the considerably larger number of Italian immigrants, it is important to acknowledge the broader influence of Italian cuisine throughout the United States. Even before the Great Italian Migration, the culinary contributions of Italians in states like California and Louisiana have shaped regional food scenes and enriched American cuisine's multicultural tapestry. Exploring the fascinating history of Italian food in these states would offer valuable insight into Italian immigrants' diverse and enduring influence throughout the nation. Investigating the unique history of Italian cuisine in various states would provide important insight into the varied and persistent effect of Italian immigration across the country.

The history of Italian cuisine in the United States is a testament to the strength of culinary traditions and to their capacity to cross boundaries while reconciling cultural differences. Through their culinary contributions, Italians nourished and changed Americans' taste buds as well as a sense of cultural diversity and inclusion. It is a story that serves as a

reminder of the significant role that food can play in defining both personal and societal identities. Significantly, Italian-American cuisine's assimilation mirrors Italian immigrants' integration into American culture. Until today, Italian food has had an unmatched influence on American culinary traditions, and has influenced how people eat and thus contributed significantly to the country's larger cultural landscape.

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