Research talk, reverse order

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17 January 2024

Good afternoon, and thank you for giving me some of your time and attention today. Before I get going in earnest, if any of you would prefer to view the slides on your own device, you may direct your browser to this `url` and follow along. I'll leave it up there in the middle of the slide for a moment, and if you don't use it now but decide you'd like it later, I'll keep it at the bottom of the frame for the rest of the talk.

While those of you who want it are copying it down, let me remind you, inasmuch as you may be sitting through a series of talks by various people today, which one I am: my name is Eric Rauchway and I'm Distinguished Professor of History at the University of California, Davis. My historical writing focuses on the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, mainly the period from the Civil War through the Second World War, though lately I've been venturing a little further forward still; my focus for some time has been on the 1930s and 1940s, or the period of the New Deal and the Second World War. I'll have a bit more to say about that broader program of research later, but for now I'll just say that my major contributions have had to do with looking at material, international factors and their role in the development of the American state.

But as I say I'll return to those broader themes later; as this is a research talk and I'm currently in the middle of researching a new project, I'll start with the basic stuff of historical research: some archival documents. And as you've heard from my co-author, Kathy Olmsted, already, I'll take a different tack than she did.

You're looking here at a record of the Bureau of Industrial Alcohol, part of the US Treasury department, from 1933. It's a transcript of a hearing with a petitioner seeking a

permit to establish a winery in Etiwanda, California, which is east of Los Angeles, just south of the San Gabriel mountains.

So, a few observations: because this is September 1933, we know that repeal of Prohibition is about to take full effect. The person seeking a permit is one of many Americans who want to take advantage of the new legality of alcohol as soon as possible.

That it's a federal agency conducting the hearing is a useful reminder of an important but neglected fact: with the repeal of Prohibition, the US government didn't get out of the business of regulating alcohol manufacture, distribution, transportation, and consumption: far from it. Rather, it went into the business of deciding how to regulate this industry, which had been almost entirely banned, and would now have to contribute to the prosperity and maybe even health of Americans.

Let's turn to the person being interviewed, a man called John Colombero. He testifies here that he came to the United States from Guasti, Italy—that's in the North, up near Pisa—in about 1908, and was naturalized as a citizen in 1927. He was of good character, with no arrests, and modest credit—a loan secured on his forthcoming crop. He's a grape farmer on a middling scale, with 100 acres. He does have the necessary tanks and equipment to begin making wine, though he had built them himself based on what he remembered from his youth in Italy—"it was a case of have to," he says in this hearing.

So Colombero's kind of an interesting character, but he's also representative of a lot of other Americans. As Tony Kushner says in *Angels in America* of the "ones who crossed the ocean," Colombero is not just a person but a whole kind of person. More than 2 million people immigrated from Italy to the United States in the first decade of the twentieth century; it was by far the largest source of international migration in those years.[1]

[1] Walter F. Willcox, ed., *International MIgrations*, vol. 1: Statistics (New York: National Bureau of Economic Research, 1929), table III, 389–391.

And the vast majority were, like Colombero, were young men seeking economic opportunity. Many of them brought with them skills or commercial knowledge of an industry like wine-making, that they were prepared to apply in the New World. Many of the California grape farmers who applied to become lawful winemakers upon repeal were Italian, too. So Colombero represents a whole series of social and economic trends. But also, he's a little unusual, as we can see in this [CLICK] part of the interview.

As you can see there, he intends to make only dry wines—table wine, what you might think of as wine—and there, he's bucking the trend. Far the larger part of the wine consumed by Americans for a long time after Prohibition was sherry, port, muscatel—highly alcoholic, sugary wines. During Prohibition, that's what people got used to—it afforded bang-for-buck, and the sugary flavor concealed impurities.

What Colombero is saying here is that he wants to be a quality winemaker.[2]

And he succeeds; and like his fellows who succeed he emphasizes the alleged health-giving powers of wine (in his case he maybe overstates it). But he's part of a trend, to distinguish wine from liquor or beer, to describe wine as food. Although winemaking is an industrial process, winemakers prefer to call themselves "wine-growers." They want their product sold in grocery stores. They undertake campaigns of education to teach people which wine goes with which dish. And they get the state to help them do it; both the state of California and the federal government. Even the non-drinker Eleanor Roosevelt allows as how she's going to serve American wine with dinners.

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[2] Bureau of Industrial Alcohol, "Colombero Pre-Hearing," September 12, 1933, folder "Basic file number 1, 2 of 2," box 81, BATF Papers, UC Davis.

Colombero is, as I say, part of a group of winemakers who want to make these claims. And not only do they want the help of the state, the state wants their help, as well. In an effort to emulate the French system of place-name control, the US government begins to map wine-growing areas. Just as the French designate Burgundy, Bordeaux, Champagne, and so forth, the Americans begin to identify wine districts. In this case, Cucamonga. But they don't do it by having bureaucrats in Washington issue maps saying what the boundaries of the viticultural areas are; no, they go to people like Colombero and ask him to do it for them. They depend on local knowledge. And Colombero is happy to oblige.[3]

Now, there were limits to this solicitude of local tradition and knowledge, and we can see them in a case dealing with some different Italian American winemakers, the Cella brothers, whose Roma winery had a series of labels including this one. The Treasury had approved its use in 1939, but by 1941, the phrase had different associations—the isolationist America First Committee had been established in September of 1940 to oppose American aid to Britain in the war against Nazi Germany. Having this phrase on the label now, with the depiction of the US Capitol, suddenly caused some US Treasury agents, in June 1941, to realize the use of this label and imagery violated Treasury rulings against implying federal endorsement for a product.[4]

[3]W.W. Barron to John B. Columbero, July 5, 1939, folder "FAA W-157," box 81, BATF Papers, UC Davis; John B. Columbero and W.W. Barron, August 5, 1939, folder "FAA W-157," box 81, BATF Papers, UC Davis.

[4]F.L. Krieger and J.H. Maloney, July 16, 1941, folder "Inspection Report, 1941," box 5, BATF Papers, UC Davis.