

**Abuse to Acceptance:
Cleveland's Italian Community from 1880-1920**

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Contents

Abstract	iv
Acknowledgements	v
Abbreviations	vi
Introduction	1
Chapter I: “The foreign population grows by natural increase”	9
Chapter II: “The worst classes that come from Europe”	27
Chapter III: “With the passing of time this condition improves”	43
Conclusion	67
Appendix	71
Bibliography	74

Abstract

Each successive wave of immigrants to America has faced prejudice founded in fear and uncertainty. Immigrants from Italy were particularly discriminated against in the early years of their arrival, from 1880 through 1920. They faced violence, racial slurs, and media attacks based on an unsubstantiated stereotype of criminality. This project set out to discern how the Italian immigrant community in America, through the case study of the city of Cleveland, evolved from being despised and racialized to being accepted as white Americans. Archival research, historical newspaper articles, and manuscripts such as letters and Americanization pamphlets largely inform the writing, in addition to secondary scholarship and memoirs. The paper lays out first the context in which Italian immigrants came to Cleveland and where in the ethnic fabric they fit, then the negative reputation and stereotyping that the Italian population faced, and finally the Americanization processes of the Italian community in Cleveland. Economic mobility, support from hometown societies, individual community leaders, and the racial dynamics of Italians' white skin and subsequent discrimination against African Americans each contributed to the evolution of Americanization for Italian immigrants. That trajectory is a pattern that every European ethnic group has faced to some degree through the history of American immigration. The arc of shifting 'whiteness' and gradual Americanization may provide a framework for understanding present-day immigration and ethnically based discrimination.

Keywords: Italian-Americans, immigration, Cleveland, Northern industrial, whiteness.

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Abbreviations

AH Records: Alta House Records

CC Records: Carabelli Company Records

CPL-PAL: Cleveland Public Library- Public Administration Library

GCEM Collection: Greater Cleveland Ethnographic Museum Collection

HHSS Records: Hiram House Social Settlement Records

LIHM Collection: Little Italy Historical Museum Collection

TAP: Theodore Andrica Papers

WRHS: Western Reserve Historical Society

Introduction

When Angela DiBlasio¹ was born on September 6, 1913, in the village of Sant'Angelo in Grotte² in Campobasso, Italy, her father, Michael, had already immigrated to and from North America. Michael, the son of peasants, came to Canada at the age of fifteen to build railroads and then moved to Cleveland to work as a laborer, but returned to Italy to find a wife and marry. When his wife, Mary,³ became pregnant, Michael returned to America and lived as a single boarder at 1962 Coltman Road in the Little Italy neighborhood of Cleveland.⁴ At the age of seven, Angela boarded the *SS Presidente* with her family and sailed to America.⁵ When the DiBlasios arrived in Cleveland carrying only their clothing, a friend met them in a car—the first Angela had ever been inside. They lived with friends for a month before they moved into their own apartment above one of the many grocery stores in Little Italy.

Angela dropped out of school to care for her sister while her parents worked, and educated herself by reading library books at the Alta House settlement house. Michael ran a machine with other Italian workers at the Warner & Swasey manufacturing company, while Mary worked as a domestic servant cleaning houses in the wealthy suburbs of Cleveland Heights and Shaker Heights. According to Angela's husband, Joseph Vaccariello, whenever Italians tried to go into the Heights suburbs for any reason other than cleaning or working, "they'd used to be chased out. And they used to really chase them, and say, 'Get away, you little Dagos. Go back where you belong.'"⁶ Angela and Joseph married in 1934 and their

¹ Also spelled De Blasio in various records.

² See Appendix 1.

³ Mary's family, the Bertonis, had been nobility in Italy, but gambled away everything they had.

⁴ See Appendix 2.

⁵ The DiBlasios entered through Ellis Island. Angela had a temperature when they arrived and was briefly quarantined, but ultimately released.

⁶ Angela Vaccariello, interview by Annette Fromm, transcript in box 7, folder 8, GCEM Collection, WRHS.

marriage was celebrated in the February publication of Little Italy's *East Side Journal*.⁷ On May 9, 1940, at the age of twenty-seven, Angela petitioned for naturalization—something her father, Michael, had never successfully done.

By the middle of the twentieth century, Joseph was employed as a presser in a clothing factory and the couple bought the house at 1962 Coltman Road—the very same house where Michael had stayed as a single boarder decades earlier. Angela's story illustrates the arc of many in the Italian community in Cleveland in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Having emigrated from Italy with very little, Angela and her family were treated poorly and called racial slurs by non-Italian Clevelanders. However, through economic mobility, Italian societies, and community settlement house resources, Angela gradually became naturalized and assimilated into American society.

White Clevelanders initially looked down upon the Italian immigrants due to their unfounded reputation for violence and criminality, which newspapers and media extensively propagated. The criminal reputation lingered during the twentieth century through popular culture, but nonetheless, the Italian community almost entirely assimilated into white American society. The evolution of Americanization and the reduction of negative stereotyping and subsequent societal discrimination was due to resources from external organizations like community settlement houses, the role modeling of Italian community leaders, the stability of hometown societies that supported Old World traditions, and racial dynamics and discrimination against African Americans. Institutions like the Catholic Church, Republican and Democratic political parties, and the public education system contributed to assimilation as well, but not as consistently or as clearly as the other elements.

⁷ *East Side Journal*, February 1934, in *Little Italy, Cleveland, Ohio: Our Roots, Your Roots, Our Home, Your Home, Family, Friends, Neighbors*, ed. Joseph A. Pignataro (Alta House Alumni Retirees, 1983), 30.; Angela is referred to as Angie DiBiasio and the text implies that Joseph used the nickname "Larry."

There are several studies of Italian immigrants in Cleveland, but they are incomplete. In 1950, William Ganson Rose published *Cleveland: The Making of a City*, a sweeping survey history of the city, in which he discussed the role of immigrants, including that of Italians, primarily in the context of their arrival to the city and the rapid growth in population.⁸ His discussions of immigrant communities are informative, but lack nuance due to the sheer breadth of history that Rose covers—the book is more than a thousand pages long. Several works focus specifically on the immigrant communities of Cleveland, without the vast context that Rose provides. Donald Levy at Cleveland State University authored *A Report on the Location of Ethnic Groups in Greater Cleveland* in 1972, taking a geographic location-based approach to tracking immigrant and ethnic groups in the city.⁹ Levy's work is crucial to understanding the establishment of and shifts in ethnic neighborhoods, but it does not analyze these communities much beyond their physical locations.

Two other works further examine Cleveland's many ethnic communities: Michael S. Pap's 1973 *Ethnic Communities of Cleveland: A Reference Work* and Karl Bonutti and George Prpic's 1974 *Selected Ethnic Communities of Cleveland: A Socio-Economic Study*.¹⁰ Pap's reference work contains a brief chapter on the Italian community, including comprehensive documentation and analysis of their role in Cleveland history. As a socio-economic study, Bonutti and Prpic's work focuses more explicitly on the role of ethnic groups, including Italians, in the Cleveland economy. They also cover the communities' origins and their status at the time of writing in 1974. However, their study focuses on individual neighborhoods rather

⁸ William Ganson Rose, *Cleveland: The Making of a City* (Cleveland: World Publishing Company, 1950).

⁹ Donald Levy, "A Report on the Location of Ethnic Groups in Greater Cleveland" (Cleveland: Cleveland State University Institute of Urban Studies, 1972).

¹⁰ Michael S. Pap, *Ethnic Communities of Cleveland: A Reference Work* (Cleveland: Institute for Soviet & East European Studies at John Carroll University, 1973); Karl Bonutti and George Prpic, *Selected Ethnic Communities of Cleveland: A Socio-Economic Study* (Cleveland: Cleveland State University, 1974).

than ethnic communities across the city. They studied an East Side “white ethnic island” Slovenian/Croatian population, an East Side “dying” Hungarian neighborhood, a newly established West Side Puerto Rican area, and the Italian community near St. Rocco’s church in the Clark-Fulton neighborhood on the West Side as an example of an “aging” neighborhood. Bonutti and Prpic provide a valuable analysis of the socioeconomic growth of the Italian community, but it is largely restricted to this single West Side neighborhood, which has never been central to or representative of the broader Cleveland Italian community.

Several works expressly address the Italian community in Cleveland at great length. Charles Ferroni’s 1969 PhD dissertation at Kent State University, “The Italians in Cleveland: A Study in Assimilation,” explores the methods of integration of Italian immigrants before 1920. He asserts that churches, Italian organizations, public schools, and settlement houses were the most salient elements in the community’s Americanization. This thesis supports parts of his arguments regarding Italian organizations and settlement houses. However, Ferroni focuses overwhelmingly on the Little Italy neighborhood of Cleveland. Consequently, the emphasis he places on churches and public schools is not generalizable to the broader Cleveland Italian community. For example, in his chapter titled “The Role of the Public School,” Ferroni writes solely about Murray Hill School, the public school in Little Italy. Murray Hill School was comprised almost exclusively of Italian students, making it an outlier from other public schools in Italian neighborhoods and thus not an appropriate representation of the greater Cleveland Italian community.¹¹

Josef Barton’s book, *Peasants and Strangers: Italians, Rumanians, and Slovaks in an American City, 1890-1950*, focuses on the experiences of Southern and Eastern European

¹¹ Charles Ferroni, “The Italians in Cleveland: A Study in Assimilation” (PhD diss., Kent State University, 1969), 209.

immigrants to Cleveland.¹² Barton wrote particularly about the process and patterns of migration and the social mobility that these three communities achieved. He framed his arguments through economic status and intergenerational mobility, rather than cultural reputation and assimilation, and he generally neglected the distinct ethnic neighborhoods in the city, besides discussing the different Italian regional origins in each. Gene Veronesi's book, *Italian Americans and Their Communities of Cleveland*, is the most extensive and thorough study of the Cleveland Italian community thus far.¹³ He focused on Italian culture and its evolution from Italy, through early America and the wave of Italian immigration, into the present at the time of his writing in 1977. He paid great attention to anti-Italian sentiments and stereotypes, provided remarkable details and narratives, and placed the Cleveland experience within a wider American context. However, because Veronesi covered such a broad history, ranging from the history of Italy to the role of Italians in America from 1600 through World War II, his book lacks much critical analysis of the history it outlines.

There also exists a broad literature on the history and meaning of whiteness.¹⁴ These works provide context for the transition that Italian immigrants made from being an "othered" ethnic group to being white Americans. This process occurred to some degree for every group of European immigrants; Germans, Irish, Jews, Poles, Slavs, and others all started as separate and shunned ethnicities until American society gradually began to regard them as white Americans. The dynamics discussed in these works complicate the story of the Italian

¹² Josef J. Barton, *Peasants and Strangers: Italians, Rumanians, and Slovaks in an American City, 1890-1950* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975).

¹³ Gene P. Veronesi, *Italian Americans and Their Communities of Cleveland* (Cleveland: Cleveland State University, 1977), accessed October 17, 2016, Michael Schwartz Library eBook Collections.

¹⁴ See: David R. Roediger, *Colored White: Transcending the Racial Past* (University of California Press, 2002); Jennifer Guglielmo and Salvatore Salerno, ed., *Are Italians White?: How Race is Made in America* (New York: Routledge, 2003); Nancy Foner and George M. Fredrickson, ed., *Not Just Black and White: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on Immigration, Race, and Ethnicity in the United States* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2004); Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003).

immigrants who began as an “in-between” race in the traditional American race binary—not black, but also not quite white. These books and essays on whiteness and race also contextualize the Italian-American community’s treatment of African Americans as a pretext for their claim to whiteness.

Cleveland at the turn of the nineteenth century represented Northern industrial cities in several ways. As Josef Barton wrote in *Peasants and Strangers*, “by 1950 Cleveland exhibited the typical social patterns of the older cities of the East and the north central states.”¹⁵ It was the sixth largest urban center in 1910 and was thus vibrant and relevant in the economic and cultural landscape of America at that time. Cleveland not only represented the industrial Midwest at the turn of the century, but it was also crucial to the economic backdrop of the country due to its primacy in the steel industry. Because of its economic consequence and exemplification of Northern industrial urban social patterns, studying changes in a Cleveland immigrant community can be considered broadly applicable to similar communities in other Northern industrial cities.

The time period from 1880 to 1920 marked an intersection in the history of American immigration. The late nineteenth to early twentieth century covered the waning of the first major wave of migration (English, German, and Irish from 1845-1895), the height of the second (Eastern and Southern Europeans: Italians and Poles from 1900-1914 and Jews from 1882-1924), and the beginning of the third (Southern African Americans northward from 1910-1970).¹⁶ This was a period of demographic upheaval in which people were arriving—in Northern cities especially—and reshaping the structure of urban life. 1920 is an appropriate year with which to end this study, because, as Charles Ferroni wrote in his PhD dissertation,

¹⁵ Barton, *Peasants and Strangers*, 20.

¹⁶ Reuel Rogers, "Urban Politics." Lecture, Urban Politics, Northwestern University, Evanston, IL, fall 2016.

“this period represents a turning point in the history of Cleveland’s Italian community as events such as the restrictive immigration legislation, prohibition, the depression and World War II stimulated Italian assimilation.”¹⁷ Contemporary negative stereotypes of Italian Americans after 1920 were typically associated with Prohibition. Popular culture through the twentieth and into the twenty-first centuries perpetuated stories of Italian bootleggers, mobsters, and organized crime, which largely stem from the 1920s. However, stereotypes of Italians as criminal and violent existed in the decades prior to Prohibition, ever since Italian immigrants began to arrive in force in 1880.

The following chapters will focus primarily on the decades from the initial influx of Italian immigrants in 1880 until 1920, when national immigration restriction laws interrupted the flow of immigration and Prohibition-era organized crime and bootlegging lent more rationale to stereotypes of criminality. Chapter I will outline the context in which immigrants came to Cleveland and where in the cultural fabric they fit, including the ethnic neighborhoods they set up and the values and identities they brought from Italy. Chapter II will illustrate the negative reputation and stereotyping that the Italian population faced, largely based on a belief that they were inherently more violent and prone to crime than their non-Italian neighbors. Chapter III will discuss the Americanization processes of the Italian community in Cleveland and the ways in which they shed their negative reputations. Specifically economic mobility, Italian hometown societies and community leaders, settlement houses, and the racial dynamics embedded in American culture allowed the Cleveland Italian community to improve their reputation and begin to Americanize, though Prohibition would later complicate that evolution.

¹⁷ Ferroni, “The Italians in Cleveland: A Study in Assimilation,” 1.

Chapter I

“The foreign population grows by natural increase”¹⁸

At the turn of the twentieth century, Cleveland was a vibrant city of steel, iron, and immigrants. The early major wave of immigration into Cleveland and other Northern industrial cities brought Irish and German populations in the second half of the nineteenth century. The Irish established communities on Cleveland’s near Northwest side and the Germans both in East Side and West Side neighborhoods.¹⁹ Immigrants were arriving in such great numbers that the city had to establish infrastructure to learn about and manage the influx. In 1874, the city government dispatched special Immigration Officers to train stations to record the numbers of incomers and their places of origin.²⁰ Almost four decades later, in 1913, the flood of foreign arrivals was still so great that Cleveland’s Department of Public Safety established a Bureau of Immigration under its direction to begin managing and assimilating the “200,000 resident foreigners, 50,000 of whom were not citizens.”²¹ The city government established the Bureau of Immigration in direct response to a Cleveland Immigration League investigation that revealed immigrants to be “at the mercy of any who would misuse and misdirect them.”²² The Bureau’s first interaction with incoming immigrants was at the train depots. Bureau officers were sent to help immigrants with luggage and passage, to ensure that they arrived at their ultimate destination and avoided people who would extort money. According to Gene Veronesi, cabmen and chauffeurs were especially “ruthless.” One

¹⁸ H.A. Schauffler, “Address of Rev. H. A. Schauffler, of Cleveland Ohio,” *Home Missionary*, October 1, 1884, accessed October 15, 2016, EbscoHost American Antiquarian Society Historical Periodicals Collection.

¹⁹ Levy, “A Report on the Location of Ethnic Groups in Greater Cleveland,” 13 and 20

²⁰ Veronesi, *Italian Americans and Their Communities of Cleveland*, 178.

²¹ Ibid., 179 and 182.

²² *Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*, s.v. “Immigration Bureau,” modified July 17, 1997, <http://ech.case.edu/cgi/article.pl?id=IB>.

illustration is a group of three Italians who were “welcomed to the city with a charge of \$28.00 for a fare [from Union Depot] to the Collinwood section.”²³ The equivalent of this fare in 2016 would be approximately \$690 for a nine-mile drive. To help immigrants avoid such extreme extortion, Bureau officers would issue “Cabman’s Receipts,” on which were written the intended destination and the correct charge. The officers would then pay the cabman in advance on behalf of the immigrants, who paid the officers in turn.²⁴

Not only were the Bureau officers there to help immigrants avoid such blatant exploitation, but they also gave directions or encouraged others to give directions. Some immigrants arrived on regular trains and others on “immigrant coaches,” which were defunct coaches brought back solely for runs between Cleveland and Buffalo. Most Italian immigrants, however, arrived in Cleveland on “special trains” that ran on ambiguous schedules, often overnight. In 1914, more than half of the 305 trains that arrived in Cleveland carrying immigrants came on these “special trains.”²⁵ When the immigrants debarked, Bureau officers met them and verified that the friends or relatives they were meeting were legitimate. If they were not met by anyone, an officer tagged the immigrant with a card, shown in Figure 1 on the following page.

²³ Veronesi, *Italian American and Their Communities of Cleveland*, 179.

²⁴ Ibid., 180.

²⁵ Ibid., 179.

CITY IMMIGRATION OFFICE
<p>This person is going to the address below. Will citizens, conductors and policemen please give any guidance or other help needed? Report any difficulties to R.E. Cole, Immigration Officer, City Hall, Telephone Maine 4600.</p> <p>Address _____</p> <p>Remarks _____</p>

Figure 1. Immigrant Card from the Bureau of Immigration.

Source: "Report of the Emigrant Police" in the Annual Report of the City of Cleveland, 1913.²⁶

After the Irish and Germans, the second wave of immigration from the 1890s through 1920s was one of Southern and Eastern Europeans. This brought some of Cleveland's most significant and lasting nationality groups like the Hungarians, Poles, Greeks, Jews, Slovaks, and Italians.²⁷ The third wave was the internal migration of African Americans from the South around World War I. Strict federal immigration laws, namely the Quota Acts of 1921 and the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924, established quotas that severely limited the flow of new immigrants, particularly those from Southern and Eastern Europe.²⁸ These laws caused employers to look elsewhere for new sources of labor and many actively recruited African-American workers to Northern industrial cities to fill the gap. This movement noticeably transformed Cleveland's ethnic makeup as the African-American community soon became the largest in the area.

The immigration of Southern and Eastern Europeans and the migration of African Americans complicated the ethnic fabric of Cleveland. The early immigrants from Northern

²⁶ Cited in Veronesi, *Italian Americans and Their Communities of Cleveland*, 180.

²⁷ Veronesi, *Italian American and Their Communities of Cleveland*, 179.

²⁸ Bonutti and Prpic, *Selected Ethnic Communities of Cleveland: A Socio-Economic Study*, 9-10.

Europe—England, Germany, Ireland, and Scandinavia—began to climb the socioeconomic ladder and “when their economic conditions substantially improved, their surplus labor disappeared.”²⁹ Employers looked elsewhere out of a need for additional cheap labor, but many first wave immigrants still relied on the jobs. This often resulted in resentment between groups. The Newburg Rolling Mill strike exemplified this phenomenon. In 1880, the mill employed 1,700 laborers, nearly all of who were Irish. They went on strike to push for a raise from \$11.75 per week to \$12 and for reduced work hours from eighty-four hours per week.

In response to the strike, the owner of the mill, Amasa Stone, closed the factory temporarily. He then left the country to travel and stopped in Danzig, Poland, where he met unemployed Poles. Stone offered these workers free passage to Cleveland and a wage of \$7.25 per week, a fraction of what he had paid the Irish. Thousands of Polish workers accepted the offer and settled next to the Newburg Rolling Mill. In the five years after the Irish strike, over six hundred Polish families settled near the mills and became a source of Irish resentment towards the Polish population.³⁰ The later waves of immigrants arrived in America, and particularly in industrial cities, already at a disadvantage, often viewed as taking jobs from native-born Americans and already-settled immigrants.

Several immigrant populations, predominantly in the second wave, came to Cleveland through chain migration. Chain migration was a system, both formal and informal, in which people from certain towns in the Old World moved over person by person, essentially creating “a near-replica of their home town, adhering more or less to the social customs, dialect, and

²⁹ Bonutti and Prpic, *Selected Ethnic Communities of Cleveland: A Socio-Economic Study*, 9.

³⁰ Ibid.

family patterns of the old country.”³¹ The Italian community in Cleveland followed this pattern, because Italian cultural values are deeply rooted in family and local ties and these principles drove decisions about immigration and settlement. Charles Coulter quoted an immigrant in the Haymarket district as saying, “We Italians like to live with people from our own province who speak our own dialect and will help us if we get into trouble.”³² Veronesi estimated that about three-quarters of Italian immigrants to Cleveland came through well-traveled passages and chain migration, settling in certain neighborhoods in the city.³³ Barton claimed that ninety percent of immigrants hailed from the two regions of Sicily and Abruzzi and that seventy percent came specifically from the districts of Patti and Palermo in Sicily, Benevento in Campania, and Campobasso in Abruzzi, illustrated in the map in Appendix 1.³⁴

The motivation of Italian immigrants to come to America around the turn of the century was primarily economic in nature, caused by the social and political situation in Italy at the time. The Italian community in Cleveland was largely from Central and Southern Italy.³⁵ Early immigrants came from the north between Giuseppe Garibaldi’s unification of Italy in 1861 and the early 1880s, but they were primarily landowners, professionals, and students “seeking political asylum from the war torn northern provinces.”³⁶ Because these men were few in number and almost exclusively skilled workers, there was no need for them to band together in large-scale ethnic neighborhoods or to create the same system of chain migration that would later emerge. In the 1880s, immigration from Central and Southern Italy began to increase,

³¹ Dominic Candeloro, “Italian Americans,” in *Multiculturalism in the United States: A Comparative Guide to Acculturation and Ethnicity*, ed. John D. Buenker and Lorman A. Ratner (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2005), 234, accessed December 8, 2016, ABC Clio eBook Collection, 234-235.

³² Charles Wellsley Coulter, *The Italians of Cleveland* (Cleveland: Cleveland Americanization Committee, 1919), 12, accessed November 8, 2016, HathiTrust.

³³ Veronesi, *Italian American and Their Communities of Cleveland*, 173.

³⁴ Barton, *Peasants and Strangers*, 57.

³⁵ See Appendix 1.

³⁶ Bonutti and Prpic, *Selected Ethnic Communities of Cleveland: A Socio-Economic Study*, 110.

“with Abruzzi-Molise, Calabria, Basilicata, Campania, Sicily, and Marches [sic] representing the primary localities of departure.”³⁷ Southern Italy at this time operated under an “agricultural system of exploitation” in which Sicilian farmers often had to “loan’ their sons to the owners of sulphur mines in payment of debt.”³⁸ Clara Corica Grillo, the daughter of immigrants and later a social worker for immigrant populations, spoke about “the point where more people came from Sicily. It emptied the fields. There was a drive, ‘Go to America. You’ll find your fortune.’”³⁹ The conditions in Central and Southern Italy contributed to the idea in the minds of the immigrants that America was a land of better economic opportunity.

Some Italian immigrants bore the nickname “birds of passage,” meaning they came to America to make money and returned to Italy as soon as they had done so. This type of immigration bred resentment among Americans. Howard Grose wrote about it in his 1906 book, *Aliens or Americans?*, saying, “they come and go, earning money here and going back home to spend it and then returning to earn more.”⁴⁰ Americans saw immigrants who operated this way as leeching on the economic opportunities that America offered, but contributing nothing in return. Many Italians immigrated with the intention of being “birds of passage,” but ended up staying indefinitely, often due to an inability to accumulate enough money. The concept of “birds of passage” supports the notion that countless immigrants came with economic motivations, whether or not those objectives were realized.

Chain migration from Italy was actively facilitated by the *padrone* system. Nearly all immigrant groups had some version of recruiting agents to encourage immigrants from their

³⁷ Bonutti and Prpic, *Selected Ethnic Communities of Cleveland: A Socio-Economic Study*, 110. See Appendix 1 for an illustration of the provinces; Marches is typically written “Marche,” “Le Marche,” or in English “The Marches.”

³⁸ Bonutti and Prpic, *Selected Ethnic Communities of Cleveland: A Socio-Economic Study*, 110.

³⁹ Clara Corica Grillo, interview by Annette Fromm, transcript at Cleveland Memory Project, accessed November 28, 2016, <http://images.ulib.csuohio.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/ethnomuseum/id/36/rec/5>, 5.

⁴⁰ Howard B. Grose, *Aliens or Americans?* (Dayton, Ohio: Home Missionary Society of the United Brethren Church, 1906), 135. accessed January 17, 2017, Archive.org.

country to come to America and for the Italian community these were the *padrones*, translated as “bosses”.⁴¹ *Padrones* served as middlemen between American employers and Italian immigrants. They received a commission from the employers, the workers, and the steamship companies to facilitate getting the immigrants “passage, a job and an elementary sense of security.”⁴² *Padrones* also encouraged immigrants to learn English and become naturalized, while still writing back to Italy and maintaining connections there. Many effects of the *padrone* system were positive, but the *padrones* also intensified and exploited rumors of economic fortune in America. Those employed through the *padrone* system got jobs, but they were almost always low-wage manual labor positions like digging ditches and laying railroad tracks. This disillusioned many Italian immigrants, because, as Clara Grillo said, “the stories they heard about the street paved with gold turned out to be that they had to pave the streets.”⁴³

The tendency of immigrants to follow relatives and neighbors to the same city and neighborhood meant that each Italian enclave in Cleveland was overwhelmingly from one region or another; the area that became known as Little Italy was primarily Neapolitan, while Big Italy was largely Sicilian. Ethnic neighborhoods, illustrated in Appendix 2, were crucial to the Cleveland social and cultural landscape in this period. During phases of heavy immigration, which 1880 through 1920 certainly was, cities often fractured into neighborhoods by ethnicity and economic status.⁴⁴ The Italian neighborhoods were distinct and segregated, much more so than those of the first-wave Irish and German immigrants. Italians, Russians, and African Americans were notably more segregated in 1910 than their other immigrant counterparts.⁴⁵ However, many of these neighborhoods frequently shifted, like most ethnic enclaves through

⁴¹ The term *padrone* was used later to refer to mob bosses, often translated as “godfather.”

⁴² Veronesi, *Italian American and Their Communities of Cleveland*, 101.

⁴³ Clara Corica Grillo interview, 10-11.

⁴⁴ Barton, *Peasants and Strangers*, 18-19.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 20.

Cleveland's history. For instance, Italians often moved into formerly Jewish neighborhoods, as did many African-American communities in the twentieth century.

Italian enclaves fluctuated across decades, but two neighborhoods in particular influenced and exemplified the Cleveland Italian community: Big Italy and Little Italy. In the mid-1800s, the first Italian immigrants settled in the market district near Woodland Avenue and E 40th Street from Ontario Street to Orange Avenue, in what would become known as Big Italy.⁴⁶ The neighborhood's residents were ninety-three percent Sicilian around the turn of the century.⁴⁷ Another settlement that remains the center of Italian-American life in Cleveland to this day was Little Italy on Murray Hill and Mayfield Roads from E 119th Street to E 125th.⁴⁸ This settlement was ninety-six percent Italian-born in the year 1911 and of the remaining residents half had Italian-born parents.⁴⁹ The Little Italy neighborhood grew out of concentrated employment in the marble works on Mayfield Road, right next to the well-known Lake View Cemetery.⁵⁰ The marble works, founded by Joseph Carabelli and designated in the map in Appendix 2, provided the initial employment opportunities that catalyzed chain migration of primarily Neapolitan and Abruzzi immigrants.⁵¹ Several other, slightly smaller, Italian neighborhoods were scattered around Cleveland, including an enclave from Bari and Sicily on the west side near Clark Avenue and Fulton and one near Lake Erie in the Detroit

⁴⁶ Levy, "A Report on the Location of Ethnic Groups in Greater Cleveland," 21.; Veronesi, *Italian Americans and Their Communities of Cleveland*, 183.; See Appendix 2.; This neighborhood is interchangeably called Haymarket, Woodland, and Big Italy. "Big Italy" will typically refer to the area during the period when it was overwhelmingly Italian. However, all three terms indicate the same geographic area.

⁴⁷ Veronesi, *Italian Americans and Their Communities of Cleveland*, 183.

⁴⁸ See Appendix 2.; This neighborhood is interchangeably called Lake View, Little Italy, and occasionally Murray Hill or Mayfield. All terms refer to the same geographic area.

⁴⁹ Veronesi, *Italian Americans and Their Communities of Cleveland*, 196.

⁵⁰ Levy, "A Report on the Location of Ethnic Groups in Greater Cleveland," 21.

⁵¹ Veronesi, *Italian Americans and Their Communities of Cleveland*, 196.

Shoreway area.⁵² The last significant Italian enclave grew prior to World War I in the Collinwood neighborhood, annexed into the city of Cleveland in 1910.⁵³

The Sicilian population in the Haymarket/Big Italy neighborhood was poorer than that of Lake View/Little Italy.⁵⁴ A 1906 *Plain Dealer* article about Cleveland neighborhoods described the area: “foreigners with large families live out miserable existences here...”⁵⁵ Letters between George Bellamy, the founder of the Hiram House Social Settlement in the Haymarket district, and Samuel Mather, a major donor and Cleveland philanthropist, reveal the living conditions of the Haymarket immigrants. Bellamy wrote on January 5, 1912, about several Haymarket families, “Miserable home. Destitute of all comforts of life,” “Man a barber but badly crippled with rheumatism. Live in two small rooms,” and “Father sick for two years with tuberculosis.”⁵⁶ Another letter one month later reads, “Lived in most unsanitary, cold and dismal rooms—ice on walls—water pipes burst and water all over floor. Man sick most of the time. Rent not paid for four months, and landlady threatening eviction.”⁵⁷ These descriptions are of the bleaker households in the neighborhood, but they are not solitary cases. The neighborhood was poor and crowded with immigrants, the most similar to the notorious New York tenements in the city of Cleveland. William Ganson Rose mentioned the neighborhood in his immense book of Cleveland history: “Italians, Slavs, Syrians, and other immigrants were crowding into the Haymarket district in the vicinity of Central and Broadway. Nearby on ‘Whisky Hill’ were the worst tenements in Cleveland. It was an impoverished area, with the

⁵² See Appendix 2.

⁵³ Veronesi, *Italian Americans and Their Communities of Cleveland*, 199.

⁵⁴ The name of the neighborhood is written both as Lakeview and Lake View. The latter is observed more frequently in documents, so that is what will be used throughout this thesis, with the exception of direct quotes spelled otherwise.

⁵⁵ Stanley L. McMichael, "Queer Villages- a Score of Them Go to Make up the City." *Cleveland Plain Dealer*. September 16, 1906, accessed March 12, 2017, Readex, Newsbank.

⁵⁶ Bellamy to Samuel Mather, January 5, 1912, box 20, folder 2, HHSS Records, WRHS.

⁵⁷ Bellamy to Samuel Mather, February 9, 1912, box 20, folder 2, HHSS Records, WRHS.

largest birth and death rates, and the greatest number of saloons.”⁵⁸ Stanley McMichael’s *Plain Dealer* article said of Haymarket, “Rather does it picture in the memory rows of dilapidated houses among which are wandering half-clad children and parents. Farmers line the streets of the neighborhood and poverty stalks abroad.”⁵⁹ The article illustrates the poor physical and social conditions that were common among immigrant populations during this time, but were more prevalent in this particular Cleveland neighborhood than others.

A section of the Haymarket/Big Italy neighborhood was torn down in January of 1928 to build new railroad tracks through the city. This section included a tenement block on Race Street known as the Ginney Block, indicated in the map in Appendix 2. Edward D’Alessandro, who would later become the director of the Cleveland Public Library, grew up there and wrote about his childhood in a memoir. The nickname of the street originated from the racial slur “ginney.” The slur likely came from the phrase “guinea negro,” originally referring to African Americans from the 1740s to the late 1800s. By the 1890s, the term was used to refer to Italians, as a commentary on their darker skin and the comparisons that were often drawn between the two groups. Henry and John Newcomb built the Ginney Block tenement originally as one-story, four-room frame houses, which they ultimately split in half to accommodate more immigrant families. The Newcomb brothers then built a three-story red brick tenement along half of the Race Street block. This tenement building consisted of twenty-seven four-room flats with relatively large kitchens for this type of housing, because “the Newcomb brothers had learned that the Italians like big kitchens.”⁶⁰ D’Alessandro’s father moved to the block in

⁵⁸ Rose, *Cleveland: The Making of a City*, 362.

⁵⁹ McMichael, “Queer Villages- a Score of Them Go to Make up the City.”

⁶⁰ Edward A. D’Alessandro, *The Ginney Block: Reminiscences of an Italian-American Dead-End-Street Kid* (Baltimore, MD: Gateway Press, 2000), xiii.

November of 1900. He had lived in New York City and worked as a tailor in the Garment District sweatshops for three months between emigrating from Italy and settling in Cleveland.

D'Alessandro described where he grew up as "a cold water, walk up flat in a three-story tenement."⁶¹ This tenement was a breeding ground for tuberculosis, which killed nearly the entire Girolamo family in 1925. Most residents of the Ginney Block were laborers, but the second generation brought progress; D'Alessandro's younger brother, Art, became a general surgeon and founded a hospital in a Cleveland suburb and Edward himself got a degree in library science, worked up through the Cleveland Public Library, and eventually joined the staff at the Library of Congress.⁶² D'Alessandro described the shift in the ethnicity of the neighborhood from Italian to African American when he observed that many of the frame houses at the edge of the property were "abandoned by some of the Italian families who had decided to move to Little Italy... These houses were now inhabited by colored folk."⁶³ Italians moved out of the tenement neighborhood when it was financially viable, causing the shift in demographics. D'Alessandro's family moved out at the end of 1927 and rented a six-room unit in a Hungarian neighborhood in the Kinsman area. His father was making fifteen dollars per week working for a custom tailor downtown and the rent for their new apartment was four times the rent in the Ginney Block.⁶⁴ Some families, like the D'Alessandros, moved out of Italian areas all together, but many moved across town to the other Old World enclaves, like Collinwood and Little Italy.⁶⁵

⁶¹ D'Alessandro, *The Ginney Block*, ix.

⁶² Ibid., 13.

⁶³ Ibid., 15.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 86. The D'Alessandros paid ten dollars per month for their Ginney Block unit and the new unit in the Kinsman neighborhood cost forty dollars per month.

⁶⁵ *Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*, s.v. "Big Italy," modified July 21, 2003, <http://ech.case.edu/cgi/article.pl?id=BI2>.

Lauretta Nardolillo remembered the distinction between Big Italy and Little Italy in a newspaper interview: “The Sicilians settled in Big Italy—along Woodland Avenue, near the food terminals. The [other] Italians settled [in Little Italy]. When the supermarkets opened and they closed down the food warehouses, some of the Sicilians moved [to Little Italy], to the foot of the hill.”⁶⁶ The Lake View/Little Italy neighborhood was more ethnically cohesive than Haymarket, with its ninety-six percent Italian makeup, and it has maintained its Italian identity well into the twenty-first century. Stanley McMichael described visiting Little Italy as “like being transported to a land across the seas. The houses, the people, the stores, everything is entirely different in character from the city a half a mile away.”⁶⁷ Even as late as 1971, the longtime nationalities editor of *The Cleveland Press*, Theodore Andrica, observed, “one of the few nationality neighborhoods in Cleveland still maintaining its original identity is ‘Little Italy’ around Mayfield and Murrayhill Roads [sic]. The area’s principal attractions, the Italian restaurants, not only help to keep the neighborhood Italian but also add color. Old Italian specialties, ranging from spumoni to wedding almonds and pizza bread, are still to be had on Mayfield Rd. The old Italian love for home and garden is evident on every side street.”⁶⁸ Geographic and infrastructure barriers helped Little Italy maintain its ethnic homogeneity. A 1947 Standard Oil Company publication called Little Italy a “cultural island” and explained, “Wealthy suburbanites live on the heights above; a railroad bounds another side; a cemetery the third; and the Western Reserve University campus closes in the fourth. No public transportation crosses this island in the heart of the city.”⁶⁹ Little Italy’s cultural sameness

⁶⁶ Walter Topp, “Little Italy looms large,” *The Plain Dealer*, August 26, 1998, box 3, folder 43, LIHM Collection, WRHS.

⁶⁷ McMichael, “Queer Villages- a Score of Them Go to Make up the City.”

⁶⁸ Theodore Andrica, “Little Italy,” *Cleveland Press*, July 6, 1971 in Pignataro, *Little Italy, Cleveland, Ohio*, 260.

⁶⁹ F. M. Paulson, “The House by the Side of the Road,” *The Sohioan*, October, 1947, box 2, folder 11, LIHM Collection, WRHS.

allowed entities like the Alta House social settlement to have a more uniform impact on the community's assimilation.

Creating culturally consistent neighborhoods in Cleveland made sense to the immigrants, because Italians arriving in Cleveland would not have self-identified as Italians. They came as Neapolitans, Lombards, Campanians, and Sicilians, to name a few. The regional identities were distinct from one another, both to immigrants and to external observers, and were influential for outsiders' perceptions of all Italians. The *Cleveland Plain Dealer* wrote in its obituary for Joseph Carabelli, a key figure in the Cleveland Italian community, that he was "mourned by groups of Italians, Neapolitans, Sicilians and Lombards," implying that regional identities were more salient than referring to all mourners as Italians.⁷⁰ Even the languages that immigrants spoke were distinct. Standard Italian, evolved from the Tuscan regional language, was adopted by the state following Garibaldi's unification of Italy in 1861. Before the unification, only three percent of the Italian population spoke standard Italian; the rest spoke their respective regional dialects.⁷¹ Joseph Carabelli would have spoken Lombard, while other Italians in Cleveland would have spoken Central Italian, varieties of Neapolitan, and Sicilian. Italian immigrants in Cleveland from different regions would have had little in common, including the ability to communicate with one another.

The *padrone* system transmitted the Italian regional distinctions to America. Clara Grillo noted two different *padrone* agencies in Cleveland which focused solely on facilitating the travel and employment of people from their own town or region: Vincent Campanella's agency took care of the Campobassiani, while Leo Coppolino "started out only by helping his

⁷⁰ "Little Italy Loses Leader and Friend," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, April 20, 1911, box 4, folder 12, LIHM Collection, WRHS.

⁷¹ Michele Alonzo, "The Italian Language and its Origins." (*La Gazzetta Italiana*, November 2012), accessed April 20, 2017, <http://www.lagazzettaitaliana.com/history-culture/7736-the-italian-language-and-its-origins>.

paisani, his people who came from the same town” in Sicily.⁷² The process of chain migration helped to maintain regional differences and identities, even in a new country with a new social structure.

Regional identities in Italy were intimately linked to social class, which complicated perceptions of certain regions. According to Charles Coulter’s 1919 publication for the Cleveland Americanization Committee, Italy had four distinct social classes: aristocracy, clergy, middle class, and peasantry. The two classes of ordinary working people, the middle class and the peasantry, were largely split between the North and the South of Italy. Coulter claimed that the middle class, which consisted of the “professional and military casts [sic] of society,” was “confined to Neapolitan and northern Italy.”⁷³ The peasantry, or *contadini*, existed in both the northern and southern regions, but “in the North they own the land, live comfortably, take an interest in education, and participate actively in political life, so that their lot is not intolerable,” whereas in the South, “the peasant’s life is quite the reverse.”⁷⁴ Coulter noted that Southern Italian peasants rarely owned land and worked hard for little money. He also observed that this lowest social class of peasantry was the source of four-fifths of Italian immigrants, making this group especially salient in understanding American feelings towards Italians.

Southern Italian regions like Sicily had long histories of “colonial subjugation and subaltern politics,” including occupations from African, Arab, Greek, Norman, and Spanish forces.⁷⁵ The history of occupation by racial others, Southern Italy’s location between Europe, Africa, and the East, and the Southerners’ “dark complexions and ‘primitive’ cultural

⁷² Clara Corica Grillo interview, 7.

⁷³ Coulter, *The Italians in Cleveland*, 5.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁷⁵ Guglielmo and Salerno, *Are Italians White?*, 8-9.

practices” served as “evidence of their racial inferiority” in the eyes of Northern Italians.⁷⁶ The reunification of Italy in the late nineteenth century exacerbated the racialization of the South. Northern political leaders “attempted to discipline the ‘barbarous’ South” through military occupation, tax impositions and mass arrests of all who opposed them, and private land-owning practices.⁷⁷ When Southern resistance movements sprung up to challenge these measures, Northern politicians used rhetoric of peasants as “criminal members of a racially inferior people” to discredit them.⁷⁸ Positivist anthropologists like Cesare Lombroso, Giuseppe Sergi, and Alfredo Niceforo validated those beliefs. Niceforo wrote in his popular 1898 study, *L’Italia barbara contemporanea* (translated as “the barbaric contemporary Italy”), that there were two fundamentally and racially different Italies, making true unification impossible. He wrote, “One of the two Italies, the northern one, shows a civilization greatly diffused, more fresh, and more modern. The Italy of the South [however] shows a moral and social structure reminiscent of primitive and even quasibarbarian times, a civilization quite inferior.”⁷⁹ Sergi produced pseudoscientific studies using skull measurements to “trace the various origins and desirability of the Italian people” and concluded that Northern Italians were of Aryan origins, while Southern Italians were “primarily of inferior African blood.”⁸⁰ These anthropologists used the veneer of science to assert a Southern Italian and Sicilian racial inferiority that traveled to America with the immigrants.

The racialized distinction of Sicilians bled over from Italy to America, where it contributed to the racializing of all Italians. Clara Grillo described her own Sicilian people as

⁷⁶ Guglielmo and Salerno, *Are Italians White?*, 9.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Alfred Niceforo, *L’italia barbara contemporanea* (Milan: Remo Sandron, 1898), quoted in Thomas Guglielmo, “‘No Color Barrier’: Italians, Race, and Power in the United States,” in Guglielmo and Salerno, *Are Italians White?*, 33.

⁸⁰ Guglielmo, “‘No Color Barrier’,” in Guglielmo and Salerno, *Are Italians White?*, 33.

having “an independent and rebellious spirit, that drove them to America in the first place....they were not about to be kicked about by these people who didn’t realize that some of them had a glorious heritage.”⁸¹ The same rebellious spirit that brought them to America also brought them a bad reputation, whether or not it was deserved. In a report on immigration from the consular officers of the United States, Sicilians were described as “frequently hot-tempered...quarrels often end in bloodshed.”⁸² The same report also recognized “the prevalent opinion that the Southern Italian laboring classes are lazy.”⁸³ The report, as well as common American thought at the time, lumped together Northern and Central Italians as good—“sober and industrious, and as a rule trustworthy and moral”—and Sicilians and Southern Italians as bad—“a less favorable view can be taken of [them].”⁸⁴ These regionally-based stereotypes are crucial to understanding the perception of Italians in Cleveland, as the majority of Italian immigrants were from the disparaged southern regions. A 1906 estimate by a mission study committee put the number of Southern Italians at five-sixths of the overall Cleveland Italian population.⁸⁵

The Catholic Church had a major influence on transforming regional identities into a cohesive Italian national identity. The flood of Eastern and Southern European immigrants altered the religious landscape of America. Not only did it bring large numbers of Jewish immigrants, but it also introduced new eastern rite Catholic churches and greatly increased the presence of Roman Catholic churches, to which a vast majority of Italian immigrants

⁸¹ Clara Corica Grillo interview, 7-8.

⁸² *Emigration and immigration: Reports of the consular officers of the United States* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1887), 255, accessed November 6, 2016, Archive.org.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 254.

⁸⁵ David E. Green, *The Invasion of Cleveland by Europeans* (Cleveland: Mission Study Committee of the Cleveland Pastor’s Union and Young Peoples’ Organizations, 1906), accessed December 16, 2016, Cleveland Public Library Digital Gallery.

belonged.⁸⁶ The Catholic diocese in Cleveland formed in 1847 under Louis Amadeus Rappe, a French-born Roman Catholic Bishop. However, the Cleveland diocese under Rappe “sought to Americanize its people, resisting a call for nationality-related parishes.”⁸⁷ This outlook faced pushback from the German and Irish Catholics in the mid-1800s, and their complaints to the Vatican caused Rappe to resign in 1874. Rome’s intervention allowed the next wave of immigrants to form nationality churches; Italian immigrants could now establish their own Italian Catholic parishes, rather than worshipping alongside Irish Catholics and others. The following decade, a group of five hundred Italians from the Haymarket district successfully petitioned the Bishop of Cleveland to find an Italian priest—Father Pacifico Capitani arrived in Cleveland from Rome in July of 1886.⁸⁸ By 1910, there were sixty Roman Catholic parishes in the greater Cleveland area. The birth of nationality churches caused the Italian community to identify more nationally than regionally; regional *paesani*⁸⁹ subcommunities did not have the funds or numbers to establish their own churches, and thus resorted to pooling resources and joining cross-regional Italian parishes. As Bonutti and Prpic noted in their socio-economic study, “the nationality churches became catalysts for solidifying the various *paesani* into a uniquely Italian-American ethnicity.”⁹⁰

The constancy of certain regional Italian identities in each enclave and the growth of the neighborhoods demonstrate the importance of chain migration to the Italian communities in Cleveland. Chain migration created insular Italian communities and helped to carry Italian racialized prejudices, specifically those regarding Sicilians and Southern Italians, to America. These phenomena, as well as the influence of undue negative stereotypes and rhetoric, enabled

⁸⁶ Knepper, *A Brief History of Religion in Northeast Ohio*, 11-12.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 12.

⁸⁸ Bonutti and Prpic, *Selected Ethnic Communities of Cleveland: A Socio-Economic Study*, 113.

⁸⁹ *Paesani* is translated as townspeople and typically refers to people from the same township as one another.

⁹⁰ Bonutti and Prpic, *Selected Ethnic Communities of Cleveland: A Socio-Economic Study*, 116.

an environment of discrimination and segregation for the Italian Americans in Cleveland around the turn of the twentieth century.

Chapter II

“The worst classes that come from Europe”⁹¹

The Italian immigrant community in Cleveland in its formative period from the 1880s to the 1920s was a microcosm of the widespread stereotyping of and revulsion towards immigrants across the country. Anti-immigrant sentiment at the turn of the century was not exclusively targeted towards Italians, but was widespread and pervasive. An essay printed as “Address of Rev. H. A Schauffler of Cleveland, Ohio” in October of 1884 illustrated the fear of the rapidly rising flood of foreigners. Reverend Schauffler’s address to the American Home Missionary Society was intended to encourage “the evangelization of the foreign population of those cities.”⁹² He feared an immigrant takeover, citing a sermon that reads “the descendants of those who originated this Government are a fast dwindling minority in the vast bulk of its growing population.”⁹³ Schauffler likened the rising tide of immigration to a volcano and compared the arrival of the Bohemian (modern-day Czech) immigrant population to a siege by Mohammed II on the tower of Constantinople, using the parallel to label the immigrants as “the enemy.”⁹⁴ Schauffler rarely mentioned the names of particular immigrant groups, with the exception of the Bohemians, and it is clear that he simultaneously looked down upon and wanted to redeem all ethnic groups that had recently arrived.

The prevailing feeling toward immigrants was fear. David Green, the author of a 1906 ethnic survey, *The Invasion of Cleveland by Europeans*, recalled a conversation he had with “a cultured American” on a train car in Cleveland regarding the incoming immigrants. Green and

⁹¹ “Chinese and Japanese Immigration, Oberlin College Affirmative and Western Reserve University Negatives Speeches,” (Cleveland: January 19, 1917), 182.

⁹² Schauffler, “Address of Rev. H. A. Schauffler, of Cleveland Ohio,” 231.

⁹³ C.T. Collins, “The Modern Migration of Nations”, cited in Schauffler, “Address of Rev. H. A. Schauffler, of Cleveland Ohio,” 231.

⁹⁴ Schauffler, “Address of Rev. H. A. Schauffler, of Cleveland Ohio,” 232.

his neighbor on the train observed a pair of Bohemian immigrants on their way to temporary housing, carrying their belongings in wooden boxes. The elite stranger leaned over to Green and said “Those young fellows left their home and friends and traveled a quarter of the way around the world to make their fortune in Cleveland. They are ignorant of our language and customs and yet I believe they will succeed where I have failed. *Why is it?*”⁹⁵ This illuminates a common underlying cause of the fear of immigrants. Particularly in America, a country built on immigrants’ capacity for upward mobility and economic success, many citizens feared that each successive wave of immigration would push them out of the way, that they would take jobs, money, and housing from those who were already there; they feared the immigrants would succeed where they could not.

The anxiety regarding immigration was not unique to the early 1900s, but this time period was one of intense unease, unique in its sheer scale. Between 1880 and the Immigration Restriction Act of 1924, almost 4.5 million Italian immigrants alone came to the United States through Castle Garden and Ellis Island.⁹⁶ Nearly half, about 2 million, came during the span of one decade, from 1900 to 1910.⁹⁷ By 1903, there were 1.2 million Italians in the United States and the influx peaked when 286,000 Italian immigrants came through Ellis Island and Castle Gardens in New York alone over the course of a single year in 1907.⁹⁸ By the time the first national immigration quota act passed Congress in 1921, the Italians had surpassed the Irish as the second largest foreign-born group in the United States, second only to the Germans.⁹⁹ In Cleveland and the surrounding Cuyahoga County, the Italian population more than doubled in the decade from 1900 to 1910, as illustrated in Table 1.

⁹⁵ Green, *The Invasion of Cleveland by Europeans*, 2.

⁹⁶ Veronesi, *Italian Americans and Their Communities of Cleveland*, 177.

⁹⁷ Candeloro, “Italian Americans,” 234.

⁹⁸ Veronesi, *Italian Americans and Their Communities of Cleveland*, 120.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

Table 1. Italian Percentage of Cuyahoga County Population

<i>Year</i>	<i>Total Population</i>	<i>Population of Italian Origin</i>	<i>Italian % of Total Population</i>
1880	196,943	N/A	N/A
1890	309,970	956	0.31
1900	439,120	3,251	0.74
1910	637,425	17,803*	2.80
1920	943,495	19,438	2.06
1930	1,201,455	26,218	2.18

Source: Cuyahoga County Census data, mapserver.lib.virginia.edu.

* Recorded as white persons born in Italy and native persons with both parents born in Italy

All immigrant groups were loathed to some extent, but Italians were among the worst in the eyes of many Americans. Ralph Waldo Emerson, in a lecture titled “The Anglo-American,”¹⁰⁰ expressed satisfaction that the first wave of immigration was made up of those with “the light complexion, the blue eyes of Europe,” as opposed to “the black eyes, the black drop” of Italy.¹⁰¹ The American philosopher John Fiske, while traveling through Italy, similarly wrote, “the lowest Irish are far above the level of these creatures.”¹⁰² Views like these were not exclusive to writers and thinkers during this time. In 1891, a construction boss told a congressional committee investigating Chinese immigration that “you don’t call...an Italian a white man...an Italian is a Dago.”¹⁰³ Italians, especially Southern Italians and Sicilians, were often seen as “the worst classes that come from Europe,” as Cleveland-based college debaters said in January of 1917 as part of the Ohio Intercollegiate Debating League.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ See Ronald A. Bosco and Joel Myerson, ed., *The Selected Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2005), 186. Emerson gave variations of this lecture from 1852 through 1855, first under the name “The Anglo-Saxon.” He changed the name to “The Anglo-American” and added new material in early 1853. Emerson drew from the lecture for years following, furthering lectures like “Anglo-American Character” and “American Life.”

¹⁰¹ Quoted in Veronesi, *Italian Americans and Their Communities of Cleveland*, 121.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Veronesi, *Italian Americans and Their Communities of Cleveland*, 122.

¹⁰⁴ “Chinese and Japanese Immigration, Oberlin College Affirmative and Western Reserve University Negatives Speeches” 182.

Italians in the American South were nearly as marginalized as African Americans and were often the victims of lynching themselves. One Italian American told a Louisiana scholar that during the early twentieth century, he and his family “had been badly mistreated by a French plantation owner” and “made to live among the Negroes and were treated in the same manner.” This man relayed to the interviewer that he did not mind this segregation so much until he “learned the position that the Negroes occupied in this country.”¹⁰⁵ In July of 1899, five people of Italian origin were lynched in Tallulah, Louisiana, two of whom were Italian citizens. The immediate cause was a conflict between a white doctor and his Italian neighbors, the Difatta brothers, because the Difattas’ goat often climbed on the doctor’s porch and interrupted his sleep. However, N. Piazza, an Italian consul agent, noted in his report that there was a plot against the Difatta brothers “among rival storekeepers and others, from a spirit of rivalry in trade, and from a desire to prevent the Italians from voting.”¹⁰⁶ An African-American former employee of Frank Difatta, Joe Evans, told officials that he could identify the lynchers. However, Louisa Governor Murphy Foster “chose not to follow up upon Evans’ testimony” and “the grand jury...later declared its inability to discover the names of the lynchers.”¹⁰⁷ The President at the time, William McKinley Jr., wrote a message addressing the attack and offering a provision to the heirs of the Italian citizens. The message states, “No indictment has been found nor other steps taken resulting in the apprehension and punishment of the guilty parties”.¹⁰⁸ The three Italian-American victims were never mentioned in the message itself and

¹⁰⁵ Roediger, *Colored White: Transcending the Racial Past*, 163.

¹⁰⁶ Vincenza Scarpaci, “Walking the Color Line: Italian Immigrants in Rural Louisiana, 1880-1910,” in Guglielmo and Salerno, *Are Italians White?*, 72.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ US Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations. *Lynching of Italian Subjects at Tallulah, LA*, 56th Cong., 2d sess., Document 125, January 29, 1901, accessed October, 2016, ProQuest Congressional.

by the admission of the President the attackers were not punished, demonstrating the ambivalence of Americans towards their new Italian residents.

Lynchings like Tallulah were happening all across the South in cities like New Orleans, where the largest mass lynching in American history took place. Eleven Italians were lynched after nine of them were tried and found not guilty of the murder of New Orleans Police Chief David Hennessy.¹⁰⁹ The lynchings showed a prevalent and deep-seated hostility towards Italians that could bubble over into extralegal violence when incited. The similarities between Italian lynchings and the widespread African-American lynchings demonstrate that non-Italian white Americans thought Italians to be inferior; they were not quite black, but they were certainly more deserving of violent punishment than whites.

In Louisiana in 1898, the year before the Tallulah lynchings,, there was a debate at the state constitutional convention regarding disenfranchisement of African Americans and certain white populations, particularly Italians, who were considered racially ambiguous. Some lawmakers argued for Italian disenfranchisement, despite the fact that their skin “happens to be white,” while others argued that “according to the spirit of our meaning when we speak of ‘white man’s government,’ [the Italians] are as black as the blackest negro in existence.”¹¹⁰ Over two decades later, Southern Italians were still viewed as racially in between white and black. In a 1922 Alabama court case, *Rollins v. State*, Jim Rollins, an African American, was acquitted on charges of miscegenation because his Sicilian partner, Edith Labue, was not “conclusively white.”¹¹¹ The non-white status that Italians held was tied inextricably to the African-American experience. In the early years of Italian immigration, Italians were seen as

¹⁰⁹ Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 56.

¹¹⁰ Quoted in Roediger, *Colored White: Transcending the Racial Past*, 144.

¹¹¹ Roediger, *Colored White: Transcending the Racial Past*, 144; Frank W. Sweet, *Legal History of the Color Line: The Rise and Triumph of the One-drop Rule* (Backintyme, 2005).

more similar to African Americans than they were to whites. This was partially fostered by the stereotypes of both groups as criminal. Italians were branded as inherently prone to crime in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; African Americans were and still too often are labeled as such.

Gene Veronesi asserted, “The most lasting and vicious image created in America is the Italian-as-criminal myth.”¹¹² Veronesi also wrote in reference to this myth, “the stigma of criminality has been attached to the Italians even though there is empirical evidence which points to the contrary.”¹¹³ Crime-based rhetoric continued throughout the twentieth century, even after Italians were widely assimilated and seen as white Americans. The ubiquitous legends of Italian mobsters like Al Capone, Frank Nitti, and Vito Genovese are pervasive in American culture and perpetuate the stereotype of Italians as criminals. In 1970 in New York City, a man named Hugh Mulligan was arrested for massive organized crime operations involving the New York police force. When asked how such a substantial operation could go undetected for so long, a spokesman for the Manhattan District Attorney’s office replied, “We never really heard about him before two years ago. When we went after organized crime we only went after Italians.”¹¹⁴ The stereotype of Italians as inherently more criminal than other groups had permeated society such that it biased law enforcement efforts and endangered the security of the American people.

Despite the widely accepted stereotypes, the numbers simply do not hold up, especially in regards to Cleveland. The Italian population was “consistently ranked among the lowest in terms of welfare relief among all groups, native and foreign born.”¹¹⁵ Not only were the

¹¹² Veronesi, *Italian Americans and Their Communities of Cleveland*, 126.

¹¹³ Ibid., 223.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 126.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 169.

Italians not among the poorer immigrant communities and thus less inclined to resort to crime as a means of survival, but also Cleveland's Italian community had "possibly the lowest crime rate for Italians of any major city in the country."¹¹⁶ Statistics, like the data on Cleveland arrests in Table 2 below, demonstrate that Italians in Cleveland were not proportionally more violent or more draining on the city's resources. Some newspapers even acknowledged the lack of actual crime in Italian populations. In McMichael's 1906 article, he noted that, in Little Italy, "there is but one policeman on guard...and he has comparatively little to do but parade his beat."¹¹⁷ Acknowledgements like these were infrequent, but revealing.

Table 2. Italian Arrests in Cleveland, 1890-1902

Year	Total Arrests	Total Foreigners Arrested	Total Italians Arrested	Italian % of Foreign Arrests	Italian % of Total Arrests
1890	9,616	4,199	55	1.31	0.57
1891	11,133	4,967	66	1.33	0.59
1892	10,717	4,941	81	1.64	0.76
1893	9,368	4,227	56	1.32	0.60
1894	9,751	4,016	85	2.12	0.87
1895	11,006	4,449	80	1.80	0.73
1896	13,491	5,302	107	2.02	0.79
1897	14,481	5,601	121	2.16	0.84
1898	14,452	5,571	193	3.46	1.34
1899	15,674	5,679	176	3.10	1.12
1900	19,923	7,227	205	2.84	1.03
1901	19,219	7,385	237	3.21	1.23
1902	18,236	7,350	261	3.55	1.43

Source: Veronesi, *Italian Americans and Their Communities of Cleveland*, 337 (Table F).

The numbers notwithstanding, Clevelanders largely believed that Italians were inherently more violent than other immigrant groups and than native Clevelanders themselves. The college debaters of Oberlin College and Western Reserve University in January of 1917 alleged, "no other element matches the Italians in their inclination for personal violence. They

¹¹⁶ Veronesi, *Italian Americans and Their Communities of Cleveland*, 169.

¹¹⁷ McMichael, "Queer Villages- a Score of Them Go to Make up the City."

lead the foreign born in respect to lawlessness. The Italians furnish a large per cent of our criminals.”¹¹⁸ Assertions like these were common during this period. Government records seemed to confirm the beliefs, such as the New York report on “Immigration and Crime,” which used five data sets—New York City’s magistrates’ courts, the New York Court of General Sessions, New York state’s county and supreme courts, Chicago’s police department, and Massachusetts penal institutions—to draw generalized conclusions about the criminality of immigrant groups.¹¹⁹ They used the five institutions to assert, “homicide, assault, robbery, and rape all occurred in larger proportion among the crimes of the Italians than among those of any other group of prisoners, native or foreign, white or colored.”¹²⁰ Not only was the sample size for the report unreasonably small and skewed with a mere five institutions from three locales, but also the report tallied arrests for crimes, rather than indictments. Police disproportionately arrest discriminated-against groups like the Italians, and thus they will appear more often in a report such as this, skewing the figures against them.

Police forces began to discriminate against Italian Americans even before the major wave of Southern and Eastern Europeans began. In 1877, Antonio Basso, an Italian immigrant first mentioned in Cleveland records as a day laborer in 1874, was arrested by city police. Basso had a permit to build a fruit stand near Public Square downtown, but City Council found the occupation to be a nuisance. Basso was acquitted in September of the same year, but was soon arrested again under the same charge. This time, the police went so far as to destroy his stand and the produce on the stand, causing one thousand dollars worth of damages. The

¹¹⁸ “Chinese and Japanese Immigration, Oberlin College Affirmative and Western Reserve University Negatives Speeches,” 161.

¹¹⁹ US Congress, Committee on Immigration, *Reports of the Immigration Commission: Immigration and Crime*, 61st Cong., 3d sess., Document 750 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1911), accessed January 29, 2017, HeinOnline.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 230.

second charge against him was dropped two months after the first, in November of 1877.¹²¹ Practices like these continued for decades, becoming more apparent in the 1920s as organized crime formalized. Charles Ferroni wrote in his section of *The Encyclopedia of Cleveland History* that as newspapers increasingly “linked Italians to organized crime, the local police force engaged in questionable practices—at one point stationing officers at all entrances to Little Italy and searching automobiles, without warrants, for illegal liquor.”¹²² Problematic police behavior transpired in other cities as well, including Buffalo, New York. In 1888, Buffalo’s Superintendent of Police, an Irishman named Captain Kilroy, arrested nearly every Italian resident of the city in response to a knifing of one Italian by another.¹²³ Arrests and actions like these by police forces showed excessive response to fears of Italian crime, which served as a feedback loop with media reports and public stereotyping.

A contemporary scapegoat for the crime-ridden reputation of Italian Americans is the Mafia, which provided a simple way for Clevelanders to typecast Italian immigrants. C. Richard Calore wrote in his memoir about a lecture he attended where the master of ceremonies was Sicilian. When the man mentioned in his introduction to the event that he was born in Sicily, an elderly woman sitting behind Calore remarked, “Oh, he is Sicilian; he must be in the Mafia.”¹²⁴ Many of the enduring stereotypes of Italian mob families and organized crime are born from Prohibition-era activity. Prohibition and the Great Depression did have a lasting impact on perception of the Italian-American community and are often blamed as the catalysts for their reputations of criminality, but in the early decades of the twentieth century,

¹²¹ Veronesi, *Italian Americans and Their Communities of Cleveland*, 171.

¹²² *Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*, s.v. “Italians,” modified March 4, 1998, <http://ech.case.edu/cgi/article.pl?id=I7>.

¹²³ Veronesi, *Italian Americans and Their Communities of Cleveland*, 129.

¹²⁴ C. Richard Calore, *Nostalgia: my boyhood years in Cleveland’s Little Italy, 1926-1940* (Los Angeles: *Voice of the Voiceless Magazine*, 1986), 120.

prior to Prohibition, organized crime in Cleveland was more complex than legend suggests.

The Mafia was born on the island of Sicily as “a secret society that provided the poor, oppressed Sicilians with protection, stability and pride” in response to centuries of perceived abuse from ruling powers; the island had seven different governments in the century prior to Italy’s 1861 unification.¹²⁵ The early Mafia origins were not akin to the flashy greed and violence of Prohibition-era mobs, but they did develop a culture of handling conflicts on one’s own terms, without legal intervention.

The Cleveland mob was not a structured operation until soon after Prohibition was enacted with the Eighteenth Amendment in 1920, but there were precursors to organized crime in the years prior. For example, around 1913, the major newspapers in Cleveland, like many other major cities at the time, began participating in circulation wars with each other. In Cleveland, this manifested itself through the hiring of two Irishmen as circulators: Thomas Jefferson McGinty at *The Plain Dealer* and Arthur B. “Mickey” McBride at *The Cleveland News*. They hired tough-guys, often Irish and Italian, to fight for choice intersections and defend the newspapers’ respective territories.¹²⁶ This was an instance in which Italian men were employed purely for their ability to intimidate. It also laid the foundation for more structured organized crime that found a foothold in the illegal liquor industry in the following years.

The philosophy of extralegal conflict resolution, coupled with the difficult living conditions and poverty that immigrants faced upon arrival to America, resulted in a tendency towards violence among a certain subsection of Italian immigrants, such as the Lonardo and Porrello families. The two families were good friends, hailing from the same sulfur mines in

¹²⁵ Rick Porrello, *The Rise and Fall of the Cleveland Mafia: Corn, Sugar, and Blood* (New York: Barricade Books, 1995), 23.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 27.

Sicily, and they followed Joe Lonardo to America after he immigrated to New York in 1901 and on to Cleveland in 1905.¹²⁷ They settled in the Haymarket/Big Italy district, the more Sicilian-heavy of the Italian enclaves. Beginning in typical Italian immigrant trades, they worked as fruit and vegetable peddlers, laborers, and barbers, and they later ran their own wholesaling fruit business and confectionary company. However, their future as founding families of the Cleveland Mafia was predictable early on.

Joe Lonardo spent three years in the Ohio State Reformatory for stabbing a man in 1906, the year after he arrived in Cleveland. Soon after his release from the reformatory, he was arrested in connection with a robbery and, seven years later in 1916, he was charged with murder—though not convicted.¹²⁸ Several of his future Mafia associates showed similar tendencies in the decade leading up to Prohibition. Carmelo Licarti and Tony Lombardo, also future members of the mob, were wanted for years for their 1917 murder of Cleveland policeman Elmer Glaefke.¹²⁹ Frank Milano, who would later become the boss of a rival Cleveland mob family, immigrated to America in 1907 and to Cleveland in 1913 and had a long history of arrests, despite no convictions.¹³⁰ These pre-Prohibition violent behaviors give context to the fear that some Americans held about Italian immigrants. While broadly speaking, there was no statistical evidence that Italians were more criminal—and in fact there was evidence to the contrary—Clevelanders witnessed violent acts like these ones and associated them with the Italian origin of the perpetrators.

The idea that all Italians were violent was often confirmed for some people, as many stereotypes are, from personal observation and the effects of confirmation bias. Confirmation

¹²⁷ Porrello, *The Rise and Fall of the Cleveland Mafia*, 25.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 30.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 44 and 89.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 128.

bias is the “tendency to search for or interpret information in a way that confirms one’s preconceptions.”¹³¹ Sometimes when a person hears a stereotype about a group of people and then sees that with their own eyes, they see it as confirmation that the stereotype is true in a general sense. Thus, the occasions of violence that did occur in the Italian community were often used as proof that all Italians were inclined towards violence. For example, Nashur Romano, a former vendor at the West Side Market in Cleveland, “recalled times when the melting pot [of the market] bubbled with violence.”¹³² In a *Plain Dealer* interview in 1981, Romano told a story from decades earlier in which a disgruntled customer complaining about a watermelon called him a “dago.” In response to this insult, “Romano instantly decided to restore his grumble.”¹³³ Romano himself said, “I came over the top of that stand and was on him. A cop had to pull me off. One of the other guys had pulled a knife on the kid, but he already had a gun out. Nobody got hurt that time, but I think the kid had to go to jail.”¹³⁴ Romano’s story demonstrates the type of event that might cement a stereotype in the mind of an observer. It also proves that Italians were not the only ones capable of violence. As Romano said, while he did physically jump on the customer, another man in the market pulled a knife, and the customer (presumably not an Italian, given the racially-charged name-calling) had pulled a gun.

Print media, predominantly newspapers, provided substantial fodder for the public’s confirmation bias. In 1923, an Italian immigrant, S. D’Anna, wrote a letter to the editor of *The Cleveland News* that appeared in the Cleveland neighborhood periodical *East End Topics* titled

¹³¹ “Confirmation Bias,” ScienceDaily, accessed January 24, 2017, https://www.sciencedaily.com/terms/confirmation_bias.htm.

¹³² Carl Romansky, “The Hearts and Hands of the West Side Market: Nashur and Rose Romano,” *Plain Dealer Magazine*, November 22, 1981, 6. CPL-PAL.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

“A Demand for Justice.”¹³⁵ D’Anna complained about the unequal treatment that newspapers gave Italians involved in crimes. He compared two headlines in a recent issue: ‘Girls Tells [sic] How Father Killed Man, Cut Up Body’ and ‘Italian Who Shot Woman is Sought’, noting that no ethnicity is stated in the former. D’Anna addressed the editor and the media at large, writing, “there never has been a time when an Italian was involved in a crime that you failed to state the fact that the guilty person was an Italian. This very often appears in very large type.”¹³⁶ He pushed this concept further, to ask, “Why is the name Italians always linked with murder? Why have we been suppressed socially?” and then provide an answer: “The answer is plain. Your paper clearly states the nationality of an Italian and an Italian only....The News doesn’t bother letting the world know how many Germans, Jews, English, etc., commit crimes, but it does take great pleasure to announce the nationality if it is an Italian.”¹³⁷ The article that D’Anna referred to described the perpetrator, Mr. Muto, as “the Italian” repeatedly, while identifying the victims, Mrs. Gertrude Grubb and her escort, Mr. Smith, by their names. Muto is mentioned twice, once as “Muto, an Italian, who shot Mrs. Gertrude Grubb possibly fatally” and “the Italian.”¹³⁸

D’Anna’s letter to the editor was published in 1923, three years after the introduction of Prohibition. However, newspapers began broadcasting negative views of Italian immigrants as soon as they started arriving in the late nineteenth century. In 1888, in response to the lynching of eleven Italian immigrants in New Orleans, the *Chicago Tribune* justified the attacks by writing, “Murder is the foundation-stone of the social fabric in Sicily. Terrorism pervades

¹³⁵ S. D’Anna, letter to the editor, “A Demand for Justice,” *East End Topics*, October 13, 1923 in Pignataro, *Little Italy, Cleveland, Ohio*, 1983, 20.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Untitled, in Pignataro, *Little Italy, Cleveland, Ohio*, 20.

every function of Sicilian life.”¹³⁹ In 1890, a *New York Times* article referred to Italian immigrants as “sneaking and cowardly Sicilians, the descendants of bandits and assassins, who have transported to this country the lawless passions, the cut-throat practices, and the oathbound societies of their native country, [who] are to us a pest without mitigation.”¹⁴⁰ The local newspapers in Oswego, New York, dedicated ample column space to a “War in Little Italy” in 1901, in which two Italian residents fought over “who was more influential among his countrymen and threatened each other with revolvers,” though neither was shot and no blood was shed.¹⁴¹ Mondello and Iorizzo noted in their article on Italian criminality, “from the 1880s through Prohibition, the local papers [in Oswego] continued to feature these ‘wars’ in which Italians slashed, wounded with firearms, and occasionally killed fellow countrymen.”¹⁴² Newspapers overstated the criminal stereotypes that already existed regarding the Italian community and broadcast them across America.

Italian Americans expressed frustration about several aspects of the media’s handling of their community. C. Richard Calore wrote in his memoir, “The press is quick to print anything pertaining to crime that has an Italian name. This is unjust.”¹⁴³ A letter to the editor from later in the century blamed hiring discrimination across the city on newspapers’ assertions that “the average Italian doesn’t like to work in factories because only music, art, science and romance are in his mind.”¹⁴⁴ The author, Leonard Ferrante, entreated writers to “stop and think before writing anything so ridiculous and so hinder the Italians in getting jobs.”¹⁴⁵ Theodore Andrica

¹³⁹ Cited in Luciano Iorizzo and Salvatore Mondello, “Origins of Italian-American Criminality: From New Orleans through Prohibition,” *Italian Americana* 1, no.2 (Spring 1975): 219.

¹⁴⁰ Iorizzo and Mondello, “Origins of Italian-American Criminality,” 218-219.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 223.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ Calore, *Nostalgia: my boyhood years in Cleveland’s Little Italy, 1926-1940*, 121.

¹⁴⁴ Leonard Ferrante, letter to the editor, “Says Italian Is Also Handy with Machine,” *Cleveland Press*, April 10, 1941, box 1, folder 10, TAP, WRHS.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

recognized this widespread Italian-American suspicion of the press when he jotted a note describing the Italian population: “Very sensitive about the reputation of being gangsters, racketeers, etc. They believe the newspapers are ‘out to get the Italians.’”¹⁴⁶

Cleveland newspapers occasionally expressed positivity about the Italian-American communities, but it was usually with a tone of surprise. The *Cleveland Leader* published an article about Little Italy and its winemaking tradition in 1912, in which the author wrote, “Little Italy prides herself on two things. Those things on which she prides herself shatter beliefs of Americans. Lawlessness does not exist there as we think, and handsome girls do exist there, which we might doubt.”¹⁴⁷ He spoke to the assumptions of criminality and the unease that other Americans felt towards this community when he wrote, “Have no fear. The Black Hand won’t get you. And Petro and his trained monkey won’t be transformed into brigands at your approach.”¹⁴⁸ The article addressed the reputation of lawlessness and the fear of “the Black Hand”, shorthand for the mafia, more than seven years before Prohibition and the formalization of the Cleveland mob.

Non-newspaper sources also validated this pre-organized crime reputation to the non-Italian public. A report from the Cleveland Public Library in April of 1912 printed a picture from a Home Library in the Italian district of Murray Hill/Mayfield (Little Italy). The caption of the photo refers to the district as “that much-maligned spot where public opinion would have it that the casual wayfarer must invariably run the gauntlet of gleaming stilettos wielded by swarthy Italian villains, ‘No good things cometh out of Hill Street.’ they say...”¹⁴⁹ Even non-

¹⁴⁶ Theodore Andrica Notes, box 1, folder 18, TAP, WRHS.

¹⁴⁷ “Grape is Sovereign in ‘Little Italy’,” *Cleveland Leader*, October 13, 1912, box 1, folder 48, LIHM Collection, WRHS.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Cleveland Public Library, *The Work of the Cleveland Public Library with the Children and the Means Used to Reach Them* (Cleveland: Cleveland Public Library, April 1912).

newspaper publications, like public institute reports, had the means with which to acknowledge and legitimate negative stereotypes.

General anti-immigrant sentiment around the turn of the nineteenth century converged with negative racial attitudes towards Italians to create an unjustifiable and damaging reputation for criminality and violence. Newspapers, other print media, and institutions like libraries, police departments, and even college debaters perpetuated the trope of “Italian as criminal.” They sensationalized news stories, singled out Italians by their ethnicity, and actively compared Italians to African Americans, allowing much of the forceful discrimination against African Americans to apply in turn to Italians. Italians were seen as an “in between” race; they were not black, but also less than white. Racial attitudes fed accusations of criminality, and accusations of criminality in turn confirmed that Italians were unfit to be labeled “white,” in a destructive feedback loop. This cycle of prejudice needed to be overcome in order for Italians to assimilate into American society and for them to succeed economically in their new country.

Chapter III

“With the passing of time this condition improves”¹⁵⁰

Amid the atmosphere of hostility and discrimination, there were efforts from within and without to improve the Italian immigrant community. Americanization was the word used during this period by social workers, government officials, pamphlets, and immigrants themselves. While different people had different expectations as to what an Americanized immigrant should be, the word largely referred to the process of becoming more American through learning English, becoming economically self-sufficient, understanding and participating in the governmental structure, and assimilating into American culture. Americanization is often interchangeable with assimilation, though assimilation held a stronger connotation of losing Old World traditions in the process of adopting American culture. Russell A. Kazal recognized in his article “Revisiting Assimilation” that the traditional use of the word implies a “sense of recasting newcomers in a uniform American mold.”¹⁵¹ Some who spoke of Americanization held a desire for immigrants to shed their own traditions and customs in the process, but this was not true of all who used the term.

Efforts to Americanize came from within and without; some were intentional and some were side effects of the immigrants’ urge for self-improvement. Settlement houses, social workers, and government initiatives pushed for Americanization through community improvement. They largely believed that the way to liberate immigrant communities from poverty, poor living conditions, and what were often considered subpar cultural values, was to

¹⁵⁰ May M. Sweet, *The Italian Immigrant and His Reading* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1925), 7.

¹⁵¹ Russell A. Kazal, “Revisiting Assimilation: The Rise, Fall, and Reappraisal of a Concept in American Ethnic History,” *The American Historical Review* 100, no.2 (1995): 437. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2169006>.

help them acculturate into Cleveland and American society. Immigrants also took actions to improve their negative reputation and assimilate, both intentionally and inadvertently.

One individual in the Cleveland Italian community who disproportionately helped improve the reputation of the early immigrant population through intentional actions and through his role as a community leader and role model was Joseph Carabelli. Carabelli was born on April 9, 1850, in a small town called Porto Ceresio on Lake Lugano, near Italy's northern border with Switzerland.¹⁵² In 1870, at the age of twenty, he immigrated to America to work as a stonemason and sculptor in New York City. Carabelli became successful in New York, carving statues for the city's Post Office and Federal Building, but after six years in New York and four more in Boston, he decided to move to Ohio in 1880. He used his earnings from the east coast to start a business with an Italian stonemason in Cleveland named James Broggini. The company they christened Carabelli and Broggini was soon renamed Lakeview Granite Works and was located across the street from the prominent Lake View Cemetery and is indicated in the map in Appendix 2. By 1886, Carabelli's partnership with Broggini had disbanded and Carabelli owned the business on his own.¹⁵³

Carabelli's business, the Lakeview Granite & Monumental Works, became a magnet attracting Italian immigrants to the Lake View neighborhood (also known as Mayfield, Murray Hill, and, much later, Little Italy). The earliest immigrants to join Carabelli in Lake View were stonemasons from Campobasso in the region of Molise.¹⁵⁴ In the three decades between Carabelli's arrival in Lake View and 1911, the neighborhood's population grew to become ninety-six percent Italian-born. According to the U.S. Immigration Commission, another two

¹⁵² See Appendix 1.

¹⁵³ "Joseph Carabelli." The Johns Carabelli Company, accessed February 5, 2017. <http://www.jcmemorials.com/about-us/biographies/joseph-carabelli/>.

¹⁵⁴ *Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*, s.v. "Carabelli, Joseph," modified June 30, 2011, <http://ech.case.edu/cgi/article.pl?id=CJ3>; See Appendix 1.

percent of the Little Italy/Mayfield Road District was born from Italian parents and the remaining two percent were of “other nationalities.”¹⁵⁵ By 1911, many residents were from Naples, but the largest group remained from Campobasso due to chain migration; many also hailed from the towns of Ripamolisano, Madrice, and San Giovanni in the neighboring central region of Abruzzi-Molise.

Joseph Carabelli’s position as a significant employer and a catalyst for the growth of Lake View’s Italian population cemented his role as a leader of the community, “known familiarly among the Italians as ‘the old man.’”¹⁵⁶ After his death, the *Plain Dealer* remembered him as “the confidential advisor and friend of every Italian in Cleveland” and noted, “many young men from the ‘Sunny Peninsula’ who have gained distinction in business or art in this country owe their positions to his efforts in thier [sic] behalf.”¹⁵⁷ A collection of clippings and essays from Little Italy’s Alta House retirees contains a piece about Carabelli that illustrates his stature in the neighborhood: “every Italian, regardless of what province he came from, went to Carabelli for advice and help, and never in vain.”¹⁵⁸ His role as community leader allowed Carabelli to work for Italian improvement within the immigrant population and simultaneously serve as their advocate and spokesperson to the greater Cleveland public.

Carabelli spoke on behalf of the Italian immigrant community to a broader audience on a number of occasions. On February 22, 1900, he wrote to Mrs. Louise Rawson¹⁵⁹ in a letter that reads: “The Italians of Lake View wish me to extend to you personally their thanks for the

¹⁵⁵ Coulter, *Italians of Cleveland*, 11.

¹⁵⁶ “Little Italy Loses Leader and Friend,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Anthony Gambatese, “A-Tie-to-Our-Background: Joseph Carabelli – Founder of Little Italy,” in Pignataro, *Little Italy, Cleveland, Ohio*, 137.

¹⁵⁹ *Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*, s.v. “Rawson, Louise R. Barron,” modified May 13, 1998, <http://ech.case.edu/cgi/article.pl?id=RLRB.;> Louise Barron Rawson was the third president of the Cleveland Day Nursery and Free Kindergarten Association and served on the first board of trustees for the nursery that would become Alta House.

part you have taken in praising us...I do not exagerate [sic] in stating that you are now the Maria Vergine, the Virgin Mary of the Italians."¹⁶⁰ He explicitly wrote here that he is relaying a message from the Italians of Lake View, acting as their liaison to a different class of Clevelanders—in this case rich, white, and non-Italian. In another letter, this one dated June 6, 1909, he wrote to Mr. G. E. Corver at the Cleveland Department of Police. A certain patrolman, E. W. Boulton, had been stationed in the Lake View Italian district for about a decade and Carabelli was writing to protest Boulton's removal from that beat. In the letter, Carabelli wrote about "how successfully Mr. Boulton has handled the Italians in that section" and asserted that Boulton should be kept in Lake View "for the sake of peace and good order," because "the Italians have learned to respect and obey him."¹⁶¹ The language that Carabelli used demonstrates his role as spokesman and advocate for the Italian population, but it also reveals a degree of paternalism and perhaps even condescension, implying that the Italians need special handling and management.

While Carabelli was the most prominent and effectual leader of the Cleveland Italian population at the time, he saw himself as above the rest of the community. He traveled back to Italy in the summer of 1903, largely to take care of legal and property business, and kept a detailed journal of his trip. In this journal, he frequently described Italian towns as dirty or otherwise inferior to American cities. Carabelli referred to Naples as a "great old city cleanly kept but not as much commerce eather [sic] in the city or in the harbor as you would see in a city of that size in America."¹⁶² He commented, also regarding Naples, that the "people at the harbor rather steal than eat," privately perpetuating the stereotype of Italians as inherently criminal. He closed his journal by proclaiming, "Italy is the country that is well represented in

¹⁶⁰ Carabelli to M. E. Rawson, February 22, 1900, box 4, folder 2, AH Records, WRHS.

¹⁶¹ Carabelli to G.E. Corver (Dep't of Police), June 6, 1909, box 9, folder 17, CC Records, WRHS.

¹⁶² Travel Journal by Joseph Carabelli, 1903, box 9, folder 21, CC Records, WRHS.

history etc. but its people a hungry lot of leaches whos [sic] aim is to bleed strangers for all they are worth." Carabelli saw himself now as thoroughly American, removed from his Italian roots. Thus, his actions and involvement in the improvement of the Italian community can be partially compared with those of non-Italian Cleveland philanthropists.

Despite his tendency towards paternalism, Carabelli served as a role model to the Italian immigrant community and exemplified the success they could achieve. According to an obituary in a Cleveland newspaper, he "stood as a forceful example of how useful a citizen of this country a man of foreign birth may become...and he served to remove much blind prejudice against the sons of his native land."¹⁶³ In addition to serving as a passive example to native Clevelanders and improving Italian immigrants' reputations that way, Carabelli's letters and fundraising efforts demonstrate that "his predominant idea was to make the immigrant Italian into a good American citizen."¹⁶⁴ His position as a successful Northern Italian in a community of largely Central and Southern Italians, as well as the paternalism that laced his writings, suggests that his desire to shape the Italian immigrants into good Americans went hand in hand with a belief that the Italian community needed improving.

Perhaps Carabelli's most famous and lasting philanthropic effort culminated in the development of the Alta House social settlement in the Lake View/Little Italy neighborhood.¹⁶⁵ Notes from the Alta Nursery Association, the settlement house's predecessor, show that Carabelli donated twice, perhaps once on behalf of his company, in the amounts of \$27.33 and \$12, which, in 2016 currency, equals approximately \$770 and \$340 respectively. No one else on this particular donation list gave more than \$12. Beyond simply fundraising, however,

¹⁶³ Obituary for Joseph Carabelli, *The Week in Cleveland: A Journal of Approval and of Protest*, April 22, 1911, box 4, folder 12, LIHM Collection, WRHS.

¹⁶⁴ "Jos. Carabelli Dies by Stroke of Apoplexy," *Cleveland Press*, April 19, 1911, box 4, folder 12, LIHM Collection, WRHS.

¹⁶⁵ See Appendix 2.

Carabelli helped conceptualize Alta House. Carabelli and Reverend A. B. Christy, the pastor of the then neighborhood church, Lakeview Congregational Church, approached the president of the Cleveland Day Nursery and Free Kindergarten Association and “asked that something be done for the children of the Italian quarter of the city.”¹⁶⁶ Carabelli’s friendship with John D. Rockefeller was also essential to the creation of Alta House. Carabelli convinced Rockefeller to support the settlement house and motivated Rockefeller’s ongoing support for the Lake



Figure 2. Alta House Social Settlement, original design

Source: Division of Special Collections, Michael Schwartz Library, Cleveland State University. The Cleveland Memory Project. Accessed March 13, 2017.

family, helped the Cleveland Italian population charter a path towards Americanization.

Alta House was a pillar of the Lake View Italian community ever since its groundbreaking in February of 1899. While the prevailing principle was that Alta House “grew out of the needs of its neighbors,” it operated like many settlement houses of that era in that there was minimal, if any, leadership participation by community members.¹⁶⁷ The governing

View Italian community. The Rockefeller family provided a majority of funds for the settlement house and named it after John D. Rockefeller’s daughter, Alta. Carabelli’s intentional acts to improve the wellbeing of the Italian community, together with the patronage of Cleveland philanthropists like the Rockefeller

¹⁶⁶ 20 Anniv. Rep. by Mrs. R., 1902, box 5, folder 1, AH Records, WRHS.

¹⁶⁷ Paulson, "The House by the Side of the Road."

body and board of directors contained no Italian names in 1900; neither did the full list of staff and volunteers in 1902.¹⁶⁸ This began to change in successive decades. In a 1936 annual report to the board of trustees, the Alta House Headworker expressed a desire “to see the development of some fine Italian leadership to carry on this work from the professional standpoint when Alta House steps out.”¹⁶⁹ This attitude appears to have paid off, as the Alta Community Council leadership inscribed on 1948 official letterhead is almost entirely Italian.¹⁷⁰ There was an initial impulse towards paternalism within the Alta House social workers, but a willingness to evolve and embrace Italian community values and input.

The extreme concentration of Italians in the neighborhood around Alta House meant that the social workers were able to gear their actions and goals specifically to the Italian immigrant community. As a 1912 report from the Cleveland Public Library noted, “six thousand Italians are living in the neighborhood of Alta House, and there are practically no children other than Italian who come to the library.”¹⁷¹ The relationship between the Italians in the community and the non-Italian Clevelander who volunteered and worked to improve the community is an interesting representation of Americanization efforts. A journalist in 1929 compared the relationship to one between a sculptor and his clay, writing, “as a sculptor deftly moulds his clay into the perfect work of art, so nearly a score of men and women who are directly interested in the Alta Social Settlement are moulding better and better citizens daily out of the large group of Italians who visit the place.”¹⁷² The idea of shaping citizens as a sculptor would shape clay encapsulates the way some Americans viewed immigrants—as

¹⁶⁸ Alta House Folder, box 2, folder 11, LIHM Collection, WRHS; Report 1900-1902, Alta House Social Settlement, box 2, folder 12, LIHM Collection, WRHS.

¹⁶⁹ “Excerpt from Annual Report to the Board of Trustees of Alta House,” January 15, 1936, box 4, folder 6, AH Records, WRHS.

¹⁷⁰ Alta Community Council letterhead, May 10, 1948, box 2, folder 11, LIHM Collection, WRHS.

¹⁷¹ Cleveland Public Library, *The Work of the Cleveland Public Library with the Children and the Means Used to Reach Them*, 25-26.

¹⁷² “The House by the Side of the Road...” newspaper clipping, AH Records, WRHS.

blank slates waiting to be fashioned into American citizens. It discounted the culture that the immigrants had brought to America as unessential and worth being disregarded in favor of American values. Despite what the journalist wrote, Alta House did not subscribe to the philosophy of molding citizens—at least not explicitly. They took care, especially as the decades wore on, to respect Italian culture and to incorporate it into their programming. However, the settlement house and those who worked there were operating in a time when inherent American supremacy was saturating society.

Alta House, like most external sources of Americanization, conflated improvement of reputation with improvement of community and saw the immigrant population as a problem to solve. The settlement house was a community pillar and knew the population intimately, but nevertheless wrote sentences like “many of the homes have no sense of virtue or integrity” and “the boy must build from the bottom.”¹⁷³ Despite—or perhaps because of—this paternalistic outlook, Alta House was steadfast in its desire to foster dignity in the community they served. Charles Ferroni noted in his dissertation the generally positive relationship between the social workers and the community. Ferroni lauded Alta House’s efforts in this regard and wrote, “by stocking [library] shelves with both English and Italian language books, and by providing adequate personnel whose interest in the Italian people was such that it even involved mastering the Italian tongue, the library had proved itself to be a means of assimilation without loss of self-respect.”¹⁷⁴

The value of self-respect permeated Alta House’s work. In a 1925 book she wrote for the American Library Association, the first Alta House librarian, May Sweet,¹⁷⁵ wrote, “How

¹⁷³ Edward Hudson, “Boys Work, January, 1928,” box 1, folder 6, AH Records, WRHS.; Edward Hudson, “Boys Work, February, 1928,” box 1, folder 6, AH Records, WRHS.

¹⁷⁴ Ferroni, “The Italians in Cleveland: A Study in Assimilation,” 258-259.

¹⁷⁵ Spelled Mae in some records.

can the foreigner be expected to embrace American ideals with enthusiasm...when that country looks upon him coldly and condescendingly, and treats him as an inferior being?

‘Americanization’ does not appeal to him under such circumstances...”¹⁷⁶ She applied that principle towards her management of the library, writing, “when Giuseppina comes, if she talks loudly, never mind, she will soon adjust herself to the library atmosphere; and if Sandro doesn’t remove his hat, say nothing; it would mortify him very much to be thought guilty of courtesy; he will learn quickly. The great thing is that they should come.”¹⁷⁷ Sweet also made the effort to learn fluent Italian, until she was able to translate books like *Pinocchio* into English and curate Alta House’s own Italian-language book collection.¹⁷⁸ Other social workers echoed May Sweet’s efforts to connect with the Italian community on the immigrants’ own terms. In 1929, in addition to English classes, Alta House began hosting an Italian language class every Wednesday evening, primarily for social workers and nurses.¹⁷⁹

Alta House provided invaluable services and opportunities to the Lake View Italian community. They offered English and citizenship programming for the Italian immigrants. In 1928, the head Girls’ Worker, Marion Borden Nail, reported “the begining [sic] of the English Classes for Mothers on Thursday, November 1st. ”¹⁸⁰ English classes were fundamental to the immigrants’ ability to fully function in American society and attracted some immigrants to Alta House in the first place. Ferroni wrote about the Alta House library at great length in his dissertation, observing, “since the Alta House Library provided free source materials as well as classes in English to aid them in removing the language barrier, the immigrants approached the

¹⁷⁶ Sweet, *The Italian Immigrant and His Reading*, 16.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 18.

¹⁷⁸ Becky Gaylord, “Little Italy’s Alta House provides lifelong support,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, undated. Box 2, folder 11, LIHM Collection, WRHS.

¹⁷⁹ Katherine L. Trout, “Girls’ Work, March, 1929,” box 1, folder 6, AH Records, WRHS.

¹⁸⁰ Marion Borden Nail, “Girls’ Work Department, Oct. 1928,” box 1, folder 6, AH Records, WRHS.

library for help.”¹⁸¹ Tony Di Sabato had only been in America for three years by 1925 when he wrote an article for the *Murray Hill School Chronicler* titled “Improve Your English.” He urged his fellow immigrants to “speak correct English. Then you’ll be more sure of success here in America than the person who cannot speak it correctly... You will be a better citizen, a better American, and that will bring to you honor.”¹⁸² This mentality was common among Italian immigrants who genuinely wanted to be a part of their newly adopted country.

In contrast, Italian immigrants without easy access to English classes struggled to learn the language, especially living around other Italians in ethnic enclaves. Sam Spenika emigrated from Sicily to the Woodland/Haymarket neighborhood in October of 1912 at the age of fifteen. He worked as a barber and was a member of the Sons of Italy and St. Anthony’s Church congregation. Later in life, Spenika became involved with Alta House as an Alta House Italian Golden Ager, but he grew up in a neighborhood with a less active settlement house. He noted in an interview with the Greater Cleveland Ethnographic Museum that it was hard for him to learn English when he was around Italian people all the time.¹⁸³ An inability to learn fluent English meant an inability to communicate with potential employers, government officials, or anyone outside of the Italian community; it meant an inability to fully Americanize.

The settlement house that Sam Spenika lived near in the Woodland/Big Italy neighborhood was Hiram House.¹⁸⁴ Hiram was founded by a group of college students from nearby Hiram College, led by George Bellamy. The emphasis in the press and in later historical accounts was on the settlement house as Bellamy’s passion project, illustrated in a headline

¹⁸¹ Ferroni, “The Italians in Cleveland: A Study in Assimilation,” 258.

¹⁸² Tony Di Sabato, “Improve Your English,” *Murray Hill School Chronicler*, April, 1925 in Pignataro, *Little Italy, Cleveland, Ohio*, 121.

¹⁸³ Sam Spenika, interview by Annette Fromm, transcript in box 6, folder 15, GCEM Collection, WRHS.

¹⁸⁴ See Appendix 2.

from 1936 about Hiram House that reads “A Country Boy’s City Dream Comes True.”¹⁸⁵

Bellamy formed the first executive committee and board of trustees by assembling a group of almost exclusively high society Cleveland philanthropists with no Italian or ethnic involvement, as was also the case with Alta House. Also like Alta House, Hiram House viewed the immigrant communities it served as a problem to be fixed. Even as early as their Articles of Incorporation, drafted in 1899, Hiram listed that one of their core purposes was “moral instruction and improvement,” explicitly stating that the moral fiber of the immigrant populations in the area, largely Jews and Italians, was fundamentally inferior to that of native-born Clevelanders.¹⁸⁶ Hiram also seemed lack a clear method for this improvement. In the board minutes from the May 25, 1898 meeting in which the Executive Committee was officially established, the committee listed no specific objectives besides planting flowers in the area.¹⁸⁷

Unlike Alta House, Hiram House’s neighborhood was ethnically complex, making it more difficult for the social workers to achieve their ambitions of education and Americanization. When Bellamy opened the doors in 1896, “the community was 90 per cent Jewish and conservative parents distrusted this new house and its strange program...Circulars in Hebrew and Yiddish were distributed urging that children be kept away from the mysterious newcomers.”¹⁸⁸ By 1912, the ethnic makeup of the neighborhood was shifting. A letter from Bellamy to donor and trustee Samuel Mather detailed the effect of this population shift. Dated April 24, 1912, the letter reads, “the changing population—the Italians moving in and the Jews

¹⁸⁵ Grace Coulter, “A Country Boy’s City Dream Comes True,” 1936, box 5, folder 4, AH Records, WRHS.

¹⁸⁶ Hiram House Social Settlement Articles of Incorporation, March 10, 1899, box 1, folder 1, HHSS Records, WRHS.

¹⁸⁷ Hiram House Social Settlement Board Minutes, box 1, folder 1, HHSS Records, WRHS.

¹⁸⁸ Coulter, “A Country Boy’s City Dream Comes True.”; The “newcomers” in the Hebrew and Yiddish pamphlets referred to the Hiram House social workers.

moving out—has given us increasing difficulties. It was a hard fight to bring the different races together and get them to play with each other, to handle all the crowds that came, to keep the standards high, and at the same time to actually progress and get somewhere.”¹⁸⁹

One decade later, by 1922, the ethnic fabric had shifted even more, to primarily Italian and African-American residents. A letter from Bellamy that lists the attendance for the Hiram House Girls’ Department illuminates this change: “Italian-256, Colored-162, Slavish-109, Jewish-47, Polish-16, Bohemian-14, all others less than 10.”¹⁹⁰ The neighborhood that Hiram House served was ninety percent Jewish in 1896; twenty-five years later, Jews made up less than ten percent. Hiram House struggled to adjust to the new demographics of their neighborhood. Although the Woodland area was largely Italian—earning the nickname Big Italy—Hiram House had no full-time staff members who spoke Italian and only six part-time volunteers who did. Jews still made up the majority of settlement house officials, even when their community had left the neighborhood. According to Veronesi, “Italians participated in a social settlement house which made little attempt to understand or supply their particular needs.”¹⁹¹

The local public library branch struggled with this ethnic shift as well. The Cleveland Public Library report in 1912 wrote, “the Russians are going farther out and the Italians are replacing them. The varying traditions of the Jewish children and the Italian cause peculiar problems of management and book selection.”¹⁹² Within one generation, the Woodland/Haymarket neighborhood swung from majority Jewish to largely Italian and then to increasingly African American. The census data in 1920 and 1930 notes a drop in the number

¹⁸⁹ Bellamy to Samuel Mather, April 24, 1912, box 20, folder 2, HHSS Records, WRHS.

¹⁹⁰ Bellamy to F. F. Prentiss, February 7, 1922, box 21, folder 4, HHSS Records, WRHS.

¹⁹¹ Veronesi, *Italian Americans and Their Communities of Cleveland*, 191.

¹⁹² Cleveland Public Library, *The Work of the Cleveland Public Library with the Children and the Means Used to Reach Them*, 26.

of Italians in Big Italy from 4,074 in 1920 to 2,063 in 1930.¹⁹³ The trend mimicked the overall shift of American cities, as immigrant trends transitioned from largely Irish, German, and Jewish immigrants to Southern Europeans, and then African Americans following the immigrant restriction laws of the 1920s and mass labor recruitment from the South. The ethnic shift was often due to economic mobility and older immigrant groups' increasing ability to afford to move out of previous—and often less desirable—neighborhoods.

The shift in the ethnic makeup of Cleveland and other Northern industrial cities created another dynamic in the evolution of the Italian immigrant community—that of racial prejudice against African Americans. Prejudices often stem from the psychological “tendency to see social change as a zero-sum outcome in which ‘we are losing’.”¹⁹⁴ Because people are naturally risk averse and “tend to weigh possible losses more heavily than equivalent potential gains,” Italians and other white immigrant groups generally saw any potential improvement to African-American social status as a potential threat to their own.¹⁹⁵ Given that African Americans tended to move into former Italian and Jewish neighborhoods, “Italians felt the influx of blacks into [areas like] “Big Italy” to be an encroachment.”¹⁹⁶ Holding and acting upon prejudices also allowed Italians to actively improve their own standing in the racial order. According to Baron and Branscombe’s textbook on social psychology, “holding prejudiced views of an outgroup allows group members to bolster their own group’s image...By ‘putting down’ members of another group, we can affirm our own group’s comparative value.”¹⁹⁷

The relationship between the Italian and African-American communities was complicated by the role that race played in determining economic and social privileges in

¹⁹³ Veronesi, *Italian Americans and Their Communities of Cleveland*, 192.

¹⁹⁴ Robert A. Baron and Nyla R. Branscombe, *Social Psychology*, 13th ed. (Pearson, 2011), 181.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 180.

¹⁹⁶ Veronesi, *Italian Americans and Their Communities of Cleveland*, 192.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 198.

America. According to Nancy Foner and George M. Fredrickson, the racially structured society began “in the seventeenth century, when the colonists began to identify themselves as ‘white’ in distinction from the Indians whose land they were appropriating and the blacks they were enslaving.”¹⁹⁸ The social position that African Americans held in America “has been an essential element in how ethnic or racial groups of immigrant origin define themselves and their position in American society” and the Italian community was no exception.¹⁹⁹ By the 1920s, the Italians were no longer newcomers. They had been maligned in the press and in public perceptions as criminal and violent for the past forty years, but had also spent that time working within settlement houses, the food industry, and community involvement to Americanize and improve their reputation. Now, in the increasingly large African-American community, Italians subconsciously found another opportunity to elevate their status.

Part of the Italian wariness towards African Americans may have stemmed from racial unfamiliarity. Clara Grillo remembered in her oral history interview that, upon arrival in America in 1905, her mother “had never seen a black person, with nostrils so distended.”²⁰⁰ Italian animosity towards the African-American community may have partially been “prejudice stemming from recollection of the discrimination suffered by the Italian themselves. The sore lingers, not easily dismissed. Just as in other areas, the mistrust is generalized and is passed on.”²⁰¹ The economic and social privileges that stem from whiteness in American society, the comparisons frequently made between Italians and African Americans, and the geographic proximity of the two communities in many cities, including Cleveland, gave “Italians a particular anxiety to assert a white identity in order to effectively distance

¹⁹⁸ Foner and Fredrickson, *Not Just Black and White*, 3.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 8.

²⁰⁰ Clara Corica Grillo interview, 9.

²⁰¹ Joe Crea, “Little Italy,” *Sunday Plain Dealer Magazine*, August 1, 1976, box 3, folder 43, LIHM Collection, WRHS.

themselves from their Brown and Black neighbors and receive the ample rewards that come with being white.”²⁰²

While Italians gradually learned to assert their whiteness, they also created societies with which to maintain their Italian heritage; these societies served to uphold Old World traditions, but also provided a sense of stability and security that encouraged Americanization. One of Joseph Carabelli’s enduring acts was the role he played in founding the Italian Fraternal Society (IFS) in 1888. IFS served as a model for many other “Italian benevolent groups.”²⁰³ Following the founding of IFS, Gaetano Caito and Cosimo Catalano founded the Sicilian Fraternal Society in 1896, further illustrating the distinction between Italians and Sicilians. Fraternal and hometown societies were a major part of Italian immigrant life in Cleveland in this period. Between 1900 and 1912, more than fifty Italian societies formed in Cleveland, many of which were based around hometown or region of origin, including Fraterna Sant’Agata, La Calabrese, and San Nicolo Society.²⁰⁴ As Michael Pap wrote in his reference work, “it seems as though there are a thousand and one Italian fraternal organizations...the tendency to overcount results from the large number of ‘brotherly’ bars and ‘hometown’ social clubs situated in the ethnic neighborhoods.”²⁰⁵ Theodore Andrica noted in an article that the emphasis on hometown societies in the Italian community was far greater than any other immigrant group.²⁰⁶

Rather than a small number of societies with large membership, there were many societies with relatively low membership in each one; few had numbers above two hundred.

²⁰² Guglielmo and Salerno, *Are Italians White?*, 4.

²⁰³ “Joseph Carabelli.” The Johns Carabelli Company.

²⁰⁴ Veronesi, *Italian Americans and Their Communities of Cleveland*, 175.

²⁰⁵ Pap, *Ethnic Communities of Cleveland: A Reference Work*, 191.

²⁰⁶ Theodore Andrica, Around the World in Cleveland column, “Italians Among the First in Organizing ‘Home Town’ Societies in Cleveland,” *Cleveland Press*, no. 69, 34, box 1, folder 10, TAP, WRHS.

For example, Societa' Gildonese (or the Freedom Civic Association) was founded in 1917 by seven men from Gildone, Campobasso and, by the publication of Andrica's article, had a membership count of one hundred. Similarly, Societa' Bruno Chimirri delle Tre Provincie Calabresi, founded in November of 1909, had 125 members. In a different article, Andrica wrote about Societa' Liberta e Progresso, founded in 1917 with a mid-century membership of 215, and Societa' Italo-American Figli di Faeto (the Italo-American Sons of Faeto society), founded in 1926, with a smaller membership of around fifty.²⁰⁷ The Sons of Faeto society serves as more testimony to the Italian propensity for chain migration. Faeto is a tiny *comune*, or township, in the Foggia province in Italy that had a disproportionate representation in Cleveland.

The primary purpose of hometown societies was to maintain *paesani*, or townspeople, identity and avoid "being absorbed by Cleveland's greater Italian community"²⁰⁸; it was not to isolate themselves from American life and culture. However, some people had doubts about the true objective of the organizations. The well-known conservative columnist Westbrook Pegler titled one of his syndicated "Fair Enough" columns, "Societies Retard Assimilation."²⁰⁹ He asked rhetorically, "What purposes do these societies serve which have alien titles but are composed of immigrants enjoying the rights of American citizenship except to segregate their members from the native of the country and retard their assimilation?" Some societies did in fact confirm Pegler's suspicions of isolation and restricted assimilation, like the Trentina Club and Noicattarese Club in the Clark-Fulton neighborhood, which never spoke English in

²⁰⁷ Theodore Andrica, Around the World in Cleveland column, "Italians Show Provincial Loyalty Here in Sectional Hometown Group Activity," *Cleveland Press*, no. 72, 4, box 1, folder 10, TAP, WRHS.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Westbrook Pegler, Fair Enough column, "Societies Retard Assimilation," July 25, 1941, box 1, folder 20, TAP, WRHS.

meetings on principle.²¹⁰ However, as Gene Veronesi contended, the stability that societies provided was a “strong factor in the acculturation of the *paesani* into the society of twentieth century Cleveland.”²¹¹ The first of the five principle objectives listed in the constitution of the Ripa Club, or Ripalimosani Social Union, was the promotion of good American citizenship.²¹² Societies also allowed their members to “relieve the frustrations and loneliness they experienced in America.”²¹³ They offered the Italian community an outlet for the emotional stress of immigration and helped them ease their way into Americanization, while maintaining ties to the values and customs of their Italian hometowns.

Societies also offered tangible gains in the form of mutual-aid or insurance benefits. They cared for widows and orphans and found employment and housing for the struggling members of their community. By supporting each other in these ways, hometown societies kept Italian immigrants off of government welfare, improved living conditions for families, and ensured that community members were less likely to resort to crime for survival. The societies also gave some portion of the Italian community impetus for American political involvement. In 1934, Alexander “Sonny” DeMaioribus became the first Italian-American president of the Cleveland City Council, due in large part to “support from hometown societies which allowed him to win as a Republican in an Italian community that supported the Democratic Party.”²¹⁴ Ferroni wrote in his dissertation, “The hometown societies helped keep the *paesani* from becoming public charges by facilitating for them the acquisition of housing, employment, and also by encouraging them to master the new language while at the same time promoting

²¹⁰ Bonutti and Prpic, *Selected Ethnic Communities of Cleveland: A Socio-Economic Study*, 121.

²¹¹ Veronesi, *Italian Americans and Their Communities of Cleveland*, 177.

²¹² Ferroni, “The Italians in Cleveland: A Study in Assimilation,” 127.

²¹³ Ibid., 125.

²¹⁴ Bonutti and Prpic, *Selected Ethnic Communities of Cleveland: A Socio-Economic Study*, 122.

American citizenship.”²¹⁵ The stability and cohesion that hometown societies provided served as a launching pad for engagement with the greater Cleveland community, in addition to the explicit Americanization efforts that the societies often provided, like English language and citizenship classes.

In addition to community establishments like societies, individual Italian immigrants took advantage of economic mobility to improve their reputation and situation in Cleveland. The food and grocery industry was overwhelmingly dominated by Italians and served as an avenue for Americanization and self-improvement. Veronesi wrote about the concentration of Italians in the food industry and noted, “the potential in the restaurant business was, at that time at any rate, limitless, and so the possibility became the attraction, the magnet which pulled an immigrant such as Giuseppe Z. Botta toward success.”²¹⁶ Botta immigrated to America in 1902 and found work as a waiter in Cleveland. Only seven years later, in 1909, he opened his own restaurant, in which he employed other Sicilian immigrants. Immigrants like Botta across Cleveland used the food industry as a stepping-stone to upwards economic mobility. By 1920, four of Cleveland’s finest restaurants were owned by Italians and Italian chefs ran the kitchens at high-end establishments like Hotel Statler, Hotel Cleveland, Hotel Hollenden, and the Shaker Heights Club. Across the city, seventy percent of all cooks were of Italian descent in the 1920s.²¹⁷ The Italian community entered the food industry, worked their way up to manage it, and remained there for many years.

Over the decades they spent dominating the Cleveland food industry, the Italian community left a legacy. A newspaper article by Eleanor Prech from 1976 substantiated their disproportional involvement, saying, “Italians have no competition. This is the food business.

²¹⁵ Ferroni, “The Italians in Cleveland: A Study in Assimilation,” 159.

²¹⁶ Veronesi, *Italian Americans and Their Communities of Cleveland*, 217.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 218.

No other group has had its people leave such a definite imprint on eating habits of Clevelanders as have Italians.”²¹⁸ The Italian community boasts many grocery and food industry success stories, including that of Carl and John Fazio. Their family began in the food industry, like countless Italian immigrants, selling fruits and vegetables from a pushcart in the streets.²¹⁹ Their parents then owned a fruit and vegetable store in Cleveland Heights. Carl and John worked their way through the industry to build a multimillion-dollar business, Fisher Foods. At the time of Veronesi’s writing in 1977, Fisher Foods was the thirteenth largest food chain in America. In Prech’s article, she observed that Carl, the chairman of the board, was born in Italy and John, the president of Fisher Foods, was born only three days after his parents arrived in America.²²⁰ The Fazios’ story is extreme, but not unique. Josef Barton described the “typical Italian immigrant businessman” as someone who “opened a small fruit stand, worked his way up to a small grocery store, and acquired about \$5,000 in property.”²²¹ The average Italian immigrant was able to make a steady living in the food industry, whether by pushing a vendor’s cart, owning a produce stand or grocery store, or serving or cooking in a high-end restaurant.

The West Side Market, a well-known public market in Cleveland’s Ohio City neighborhood, was a prime example of Italian food industry dominance. The market had operated in a wooden structure since the 1840s, but a grand and much-anticipated formal building was inaugurated in 1912. The central hall sold primarily meat and dairy products, while open stands around the outside walls sold fruit and vegetables. The exterior produce stands were almost entirely Italian-owned from its inception in 1912 through the 1980s. The

²¹⁸ Eleanor Prech, “Sons of Sunny Italy Brought Color and Clout to Cleveland,” *Cleveland Press*, November 17, 1976. A10. box 3, folder 43, LIHM Collection, WRHS.

²¹⁹ Bonutti and Prpic, *Selected Ethnic Communities of Cleveland: A Socio-Economic Study*, 16.

²²⁰ Prech, “Sons of Sunny Italy Brought Color and Clout to Cleveland.”

²²¹ Barton, *Peasants and Strangers*, 128.

founders of the DeCaro Produce stand, Augustino and Rose Lucido DeCaro, immigrated to Chicago from Sicily in the early 1900s. They married in 1919, but soon after, the Chicago Mafia tried to recruit Augustino as a mob hitman.²²² The DeCaros ran from Chicago to Cleveland and Augustino got a job loading and unloading boxcars at the food terminal in the industrial center of Cleveland. By 1934, Augustino and Rose bought a produce stand at the market and, in 2017, the third generation of DeCaros is still selling fruit and vegetables.²²³

Italian involvement in the food industry was not unique to Cleveland and had a logical birth in the Old World. Food was a major pillar of Italian culture and, in his chapter of a textbook on American multiculturalism, Dominic Candeloro asserted, “Italian Americans are overrepresented in food-related businesses” because they “capitaliz[ed] on the role of foodways in Italian culture.”²²⁴ However, the food industry’s role in Italian mobility was nuanced. It provided an avenue for economic and cultural mobility for Italian immigrants, but in earlier days, it also equated them with a profession that was not respected. In the nineteenth century, there was widespread disgust for street vendors, particularly those who peddled fruits and vegetables, as many Italians did.²²⁵ It is unclear which aversion came first; whether vendors were disliked because they were typically foreigners, or whether foreigners were disrespected in part because they took low-end jobs like street vending. In either case, their presence in the food industry reflects their growth in society at large; they started from the bottom and made their way up the ranks.

The Italian community also used community institutions to better their reputation, in addition to external settlement house and philanthropist aid. Cleveland’s Italian nationality

²²² Melissa Lau, interview by author, Cleveland, December 14, 2016.

²²³ “History,” DeCaro Produce, accessed April 30, 2017, <http://decaroproduce.com/history.php>.

²²⁴ Candeloro, “Italian Americans,” 243.

²²⁵ Helen Tangires, *Public Markets and Civic Culture in Nineteenth-century America* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 19.

newspaper, *La Voce del Popolo Italiano*, translated as “The Voice of the Italian People,” was at the forefront of these internal institutionalized Americanization efforts. They wrote bilingual columns and advertisements, interpreted American law for their readers, advertised institutions like Hiram House, advised their readers to naturalize, and provided an incentive for English literacy.²²⁶ In 1909, *La Voce* encouraged their readers to “register as citizens and to vote for certain Republican candidates” and “provided typical questions and answers in English and Italian relating to governmental operations in the US.”²²⁷ The church also played a significant institutional role in the assimilation of Italian immigrants. To support Italian immigrants in their Americanization efforts, the Holy Rosary Church in Lake View used their temporary chapel to build a school site in which to offer American citizenship classes for men and catechism taught only in English for children.²²⁸ Institutional self-improvement efforts within the community were effective in complementing external efforts by settlement houses and natural economic mobility through channels like the food industry.

World War I sparked an intense feeling of American patriotism in the Italian community, which helped to drive them further towards Americanization. The Cleveland Italian community prided their role in the “famed volunteer Lakeside Unit,” the first American expeditionary forces unit to land in Europe in World War I.²²⁹ The Lakeside Unit was formally designated U.S. Army Base Hospital No. 4 and provided medical care to Allied troops. Eleven men from Little Italy were a part of this unit and photos of them were printed in newspapers, published in the Alta House Retirees’ scrapbook, and hung in the Little Italy Historical

²²⁶ *Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*, s.v. “Italians.”

²²⁷ Veronesi, *Italian Americans and Their Communities of Cleveland*, 222.

²²⁸ Lynette Filips, “Cleveland’s Italian Immigrants Settle ‘Little Italy’ after ‘Big Italy’,” *Old Brooklyn News*, October, 2007. 8. box 3, folder 43, LIHM Collection, WRHS.

²²⁹ Pignataro, *Little Italy, Cleveland, Ohio*, 171; *Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*, s.v. “Lakeside Unit, World War I,” modified May 13, 1998, <http://ech.case.edu/cgi/article.pl?id=LUWVI>.

Museum.²³⁰ Charles Coulter wrote in his pamphlet just after World War I, “In the present war no group has lent its aid in men and money with greater abandon than Cleveland’s Italian subjects.”²³¹ He noted that, according to parish records, fourteen hundred Italian Clevelanders “were with our expeditionary forces, besides the volunteers who went back to join the Italian ranks in the same cause.” One hundred and six Italian Clevelanders were either killed or wounded during the war and thus, “it is not surprising that at nearly every public gathering of Italians [through 1917 and 1918] appeals were made and opportunity given to financially support America’s army overseas.”²³² Coulter professed, “Nothing could tie them to America more closely than the sacrifice they have made for her honor, and nothing could better facilitate their Americanization.”²³³

Their World War I patriotism was a source of great pride to the Italian community, but it also affected the way non-Italian Clevelanders saw them. The greater Cleveland community, including people like Coulter himself, took note of the Italians’ sacrifice and patriotism. David Green wrote in his Mission Study Committee survey, “at the patriotic demonstrations in ‘Little Italy’ . . . it is not unusual to hear hurrahs for Vittorio Emmanuele, Garibaldi, Washington and Roosevelt all in one breath.”²³⁴ Demonstrated patriotism for their new country both illustrated the Americanization that had already taken place to inspire such feelings of loyalty and advanced the process, showing non-Italian Clevelanders that the immigrants were here to stay and that they intended to participate.

Resistance to negative stereotypes took many forms. Some were intentional efforts by the Italian community and outside entities, like the role of settlement houses and hometown

²³⁰ Pignataro, *Little Italy, Cleveland, Ohio*, 9; Military Photos, box 3, folder 38, LIHM Collection, WRHS.

²³¹ Coulter, *The Italians of Cleveland*, 42.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Ibid., 43.

²³⁴ Green, *The Invasion of Cleveland by Europeans*, 8.

societies and their active encouragement of English language learning. Others were reflexive and natural, like the economic success and mobility Italian Clevelanders found through businesses like the food industry. Some were in between, like the patriotism shown through World War I involvement and sacrifice and the privileges afforded the Italian Americans for their white skin and discrimination against African Americans. Community leaders like Joseph Carabelli and, later on, people like Sonny DeMaioribus and Anthony Celebrezze (the four-term mayor of Cleveland beginning in 1953), were a crucial factor in guiding the Italian Cleveland population away from their negative reputation and stereotypes and towards Americanization. None of these elements would have singlehandedly changed American minds regarding their new Italian residents, but all of them together noticeably improved the reputation of Italian immigrants in Cleveland.

Conclusion

When Angela DiBlasio and Joseph Vaccariello's daughter, Mary Arlene, was born in November of 1934, Prohibition had been over for almost a year, Sonny DeMaioribus had just been elected as the first Italian president of the Cleveland City Council, and the first Clevelander to win an Olympic gold medal was a boy from Little Italy named Carmen Barth.²³⁵ The Italian community was in the process of Americanizing, economically prospering, and attempting to recover from the negative reputations they had secured over the past half-century. Prohibition-era organized crime, bootlegging, and an increase in Italian violence complicated this image. In the mid-twentieth century, World War II-related American patriotism helped put the Italian community back on track towards full Americanization. Later in the century, the next major wave of immigration—primarily Asian, Latin-American, and Caribbean in origin—offered a new scapegoat on whom the American people could peg their anti-immigrant anxieties.

Prohibition created a cultural touchstone for how Italians were perceived going forward. The Cleveland Mafia organized shortly after Prohibition was enacted in 1919 as a direct response to the potential profit in bootlegged alcohol and the Lonardo and Porrello families created a monopoly over selling corn sugar to those who wished to make their own illegal alcohol. The first story of a bootleg-related murder was published two weeks after the passage of the Volstead Act in 1920 and “the newspapers in their dramatic style reported that the murders were Sicilian Black Hand killings...”²³⁶ Despite the increase in formal organized crime and subsequent publicized violence, Italians continued to Americanize. The Immigration

²³⁵ Pignataro, *Little Italy, Cleveland, Ohio*, 201.

²³⁶ Porrello, *The Rise and Fall of the Cleveland Mafia*, 42.

Restriction Act of 1924 and consequent “sudden reduction of immigration,...enabled assimilation to proceed generation by generation.”²³⁷ According to Josef Barton, although Italians were significantly segregated by ethnicity in 1910, by the 1930s through the 1950s, they “began to disperse through the city.”²³⁸ As African-American migration increased after 1910 and European immigration fell radically in the 1920s, many white Clevelanders who could afford to began to leave the city for the suburbs and Italians were no exception.

According to Michael Pap’s ethnic community reference work, second, third, and fourth generation Italians were moving out of their historical ethnic neighborhoods “in a steady stream.”²³⁹ He posited several causes of this phenomenon, including the belief that suburban high schools were better than those in the city of Cleveland. Pap determined that the neighborhoods were changing demographically and no longer existed as insulated Italian enclaves, as “lower-class Blacks and Appalacian [sic] Whites” moved into Collinwood and Little Italy and “lower-class Puerto Ricans and Appalacian [sic] Whites are now a substantial population” of West Side neighborhoods like Clark-Fulton.²⁴⁰ Most telling in the context of this thesis, however, is Pap’s observation that “the Americanized third and fourth generations, those who do not feel the ‘clanishness’ or ‘familism’ [sic] so characteristic of the first...desire to move out to the newer suburbanized areas.”²⁴¹ Even Little Italy, which superficially maintains its roots as Cleveland’s hub of Italian restaurants, bakeries, groceries, and the widely popular Feast of the Assumption street festival every August, has lost the core of its identity. According to Anthony J. Garofoli, a former city council representative of Little Italy’s ward, “The illusion that the 19th Ward is Italian is allowed to be perpetuated, but it is really a mixture

²³⁷ Barton, *Peasants and Strangers*, 4.

²³⁸ Ibid., 20.

²³⁹ Pap, *Ethnic Communities of Cleveland: A Reference Work*, 193.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

of every socio-economic group of America today...the ethnic background is being cut away every day.”²⁴² One estimate suggests that, in 1994, less than half of the approximately 2,500 residents of Little Italy were of Italian origin—most of the remaining population was and is associated with nearby Case Western Reserve University and is largely Asian and Middle Eastern.²⁴³ The ethnic shift in Little Italy illuminates the outcome of the Italians’ Americanization efforts. They succeeded in embracing their new culture, to the point of shedding the old and leaving behind the ethnic neighborhoods that had been so important to the community mere decades before.

Italian Clevelanders were active in World War II, both abroad and at home. Pat Columbro from Little Italy worked in army intelligence, helping to break Japanese code, while Art D’Alessandro from Big Italy served in five campaigns as a battlefield surgeon, before returning home to found a hospital.²⁴⁴ Cleveland’s Italian community, like many Italian Americans in the lead up to the Second World War, was divided over their allegiance. Many fostered pro-fascist sympathies and pride regarding “the new Italy that Mussolini had forged.”²⁴⁵ As soon as the United States entered the war, however, these sentiments immediately and widely “shifted to American patriotism.”²⁴⁶ The widespread and enthusiastic patriotism had the same effects as the World War I patriotism—it reflected the Americanization that had already occurred and demonstrated to the broader Cleveland and American community that the Italians were here to stay and were all in.

²⁴² Ferroni, “The Italians in Cleveland: A Study in Assimilation,” 13.

²⁴³ *Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*, s.v. “Little Italy,” modified April 07, 2015, <https://ech.cwru.edu/cgi/article.pl?id=LI1>.

²⁴⁴ Pignataro, *Little Italy, Cleveland, Ohio*, 134; D’Alessandro, *The Ginney Block*, 13.

²⁴⁵ Ferroni, “The Italians in Cleveland: A Study in Assimilation,” 4.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

Prohibition and World War II complicated the picture for Italian immigrants, but they did not introduce anything entirely new to the community. Italian immigrants in Cleveland and across the country had been the victims of ethnically-based prejudice and discrimination as soon as they began to arrive in America en masse around 1880. The public believed them to be inherently violent and more inclined towards criminal activity, and newspaper and public institutions preserved and perpetuated those beliefs. However, amid this climate of intolerance, the Italian community ultimately achieved full assimilation. Economic mobility, hometown society support, community leaders like Joseph Carabelli, and the racial dynamics of Italians' white skin and subsequent discrimination against African Americans each contributed to the development of Americanization for Italian immigrants. This evolution is a pattern that every European ethnic group has faced to some extent throughout the history of American immigration. There was a continuous expansion of white ethnic assimilation, beginning with the Germans, then the Irish, then Eastern and Southern Europeans, including Poles, Jews, and Italians. The ability of the immigrant groups to successfully assimilate, due in large part to their white skin, speaks volumes about the racial dynamics of American culture.

Another pattern that the Italians of Cleveland exemplify is the unjustified fear of immigrants. Non-Italian Clevelanders saw them as criminal and violent, despite evidence to the contrary. Similar unfounded anxieties have cycled through each successive wave of immigrants in America's history. According to Foner and Fredrickson, the two major waves of immigration—Southern and Eastern European immigrants from 1881 to 1930 and Asian, Latin American, and Caribbean immigrants from 1965 to 2000—"differ in how the race and ethnicity of the majority of the new arrivals have been perceived, but the contrast is not as

sharp as is commonly believed.”²⁴⁷ The most recent immigrants to America, largely of Asian and Latin American origin, “are classified as nonwhite or as ‘people of color,’ both by themselves and by other Americans,” as Italians themselves once were.²⁴⁸ Historians and sociologists “have yet to determine whether—and in what ways—the experiences of European immigrants and their descendants in the past are a guide to what is happening today and to what may happen in the years ahead among new arrivals and their children.”²⁴⁹ The definition of what it means to be white in America changed to the benefit of the Italians—perhaps it will do so again, or perhaps the term “whiteness” will cease to carry any import as Americans grasp its history and understand both the arbitrary and fluid nature of the term and the harm and lasting consequences it has had throughout American history.

²⁴⁷ Foner and Fredrickson, *Not Just Black and White*, 1.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 15.

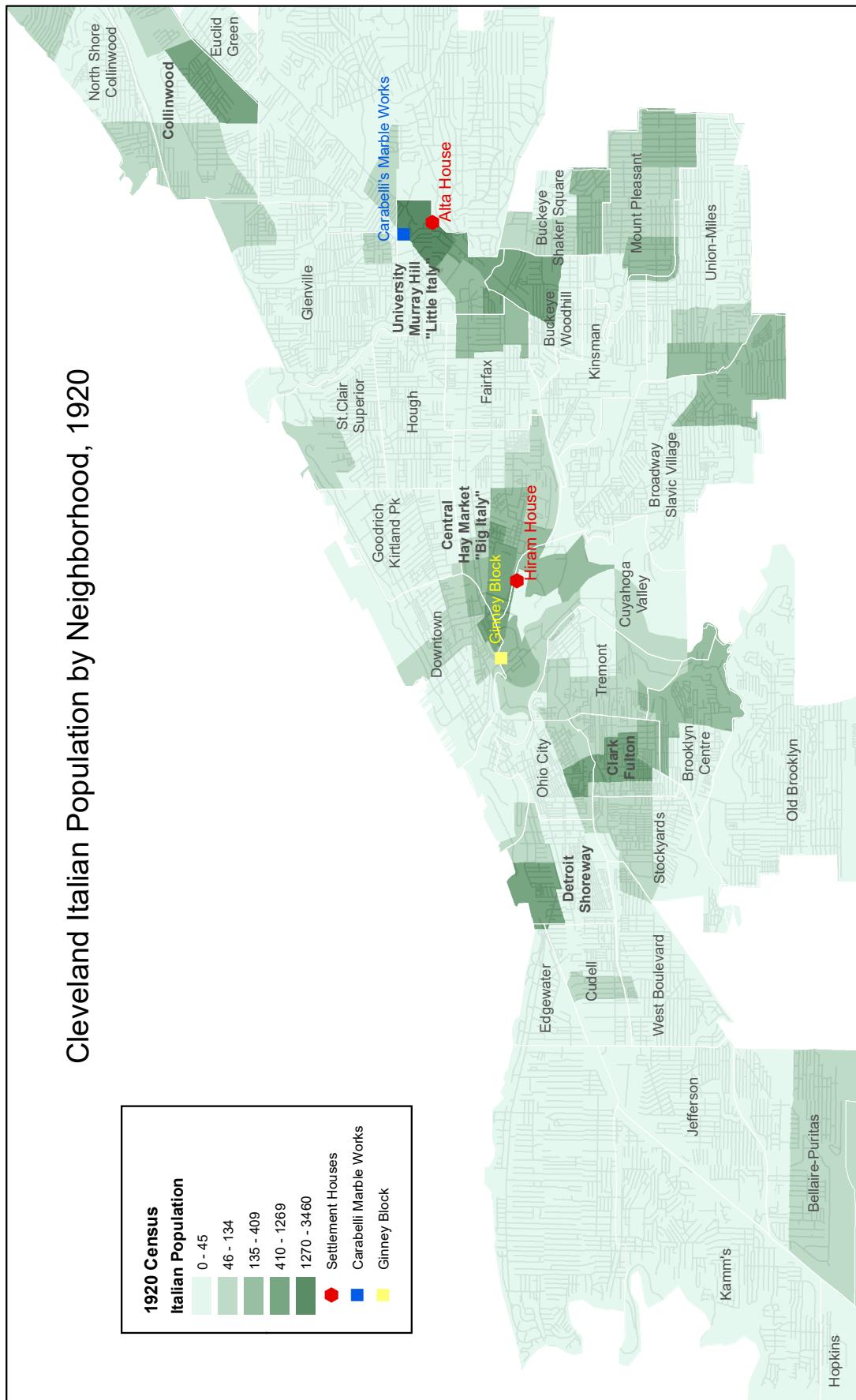
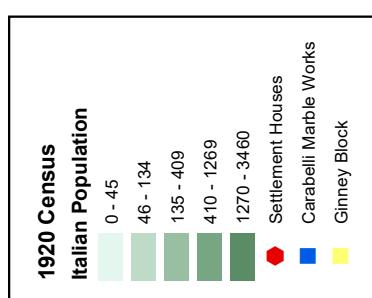
Appendix 1



Source: Geographic coordinate data.

Appendix 2

Cleveland Italian Population by Neighborhood, 1920



Source: United States Census data.

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