WWII and Identity in Italian-American Philadelphia

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This thesis examines the changing ethnic identity of the Italian-Americans of Philadelphia during the years leading into and during WWII. The hope of this study is to trace the evolution of the community's identity to see how Italian-Americans responded to the pressures of the war by strategically emphasizing aspects of their identity and by actively changing their group representation, especially through the press, cultural organizations and community leaders. Italian-Americans in Philadelphia entered the war with a dual identity that could simultaneously include loyalty to America along with loyalty to an Italian national identity. Individuals may have identified stronger nationally or culturally with one side, but the overall community identity was characterized by duality and hybridity that allowed for multiple variations of Italian-American identity. Yet irreconcilable conflict between the dual loyalties that Italian-American identity often incorporated did not happen until the U.S. entered the war against Italy in WWII. Through analysis of Philadelphia's Italian-Americans, it is clear that the war provoked the development of the identity of Italian-Americans in two different ways: it solidified their American national and political identity while limiting their Italian identity to cultural manifestations. It is this process that transformed the earlier dual Italian-American identity into a new cultural hybrid: an ethnic American identity that allowed for the realization of American identity without the loss of Italian cultural identity and helped move Italian-Americans into the mainstream of American society.
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INTRODUCTION

The World War II period is considered a turning point in the history of European immigrants in the United States, especially those from South-Eastern Europe. The conditions of war obliged the South European immigrants groups that had arrived in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century to display American loyalty at unprecedented levels. Immigrants had expressed similar patriotism during WWI, but WWII found immigrants with more exposure to Americanization campaigns in the 1920s and 1930s, more generational depth, greater social mobility and loss of contact with their homeland that made them more receptive to change in their ethnic identity.

This thesis examines the Italian-American experience during WWII and the ways that community managed to be accepted as part of American society despite having to overcome historical obstacles and their enemy status during WWII. Comparatively, the Greek community benefitted from the fact that Greece was a U.S. ally and the two countries shared the same goals. For the Greeks supporting the homeland meant supporting the US and being, as well as appearing, to be “American”. Not surprisingly, the 1940s were an era in which the assimilation of the Greek Americans was furthered in substantial ways. The Italian-Americans, however, were in a much more difficult position because Italy and the U.S. were members of opposing alliances.

Adding to the problem, many Italian Americans who maintained close ties with their homeland had openly embraced the fascist regime of Mussolini that had ruled Italy since 1922 and had led Italy into World War II as a major factor in the Axis alliance. Thus at the beginning of the war, maintaining close ties to the homeland put Italian-
Americans in a difficult position. It was only after Italy withdrew from the war in 1943 and sided with the Allies that Italian-Americans were able to openly side with their country of origin and their host country. However, those few years saw a process of cultural negotiation that changed their hyphenated Italian and American identities into a new, dual Italian-American ethnic identity that was wholly American. While still developing in the post-war years, this identity proved that it was possible to create an ethnic identity for a community that found American acceptance but managed to retain ethnic identity as an integral, and equally accepted, part of the whole identity.

Theories in Immigration Theory

Recent developments in immigration history appear to validate an approach that considers immigrant identity, or “ethnicity”, to have a dual nature, described by specialists as a dual cultural identity or “hybridity.” These developments can be summed up as a third phase in an evolution that began by considering the immigrant experience as “uprootedness,” a straightforward process of assimilation, later followed by a sense that the experience was more akin to “transplantedness” in which assimilation also meant retention of an ethnic identity that contained elements of homeland identity. Currently, immigration historians have gone beyond those two stages and focus on either how racial considerations made the Southeastern European immigrants “white” or on how they balanced both homeland and host society characteristics in a dual identity that progressed only gradually toward assimilation.

The evolution of American immigration scholarship is evident in the changes found between Oscar Handlin’s seminal The Uprooted, first published in 1951, John
Bodnar's *The Transplanted* in 1985, and the work of contemporary scholars on dual identity and white ethnics. In his work, Handlin chronicles the immigrant struggle from their arrival, detailing the restrictions placed on them and their adaptations to their new situation. A key element of their experience is separateness and alienation from both American culture and their original society. In Handlin's analysis, assimilation proves to be the solution to this problem, although the transition is not without pain and complications. Handlin is useful for understanding the negative forces that made immigrant identity problematic and for his description of immigrant settlement and social patterns. However, he universalizes the immigrant experience in the U.S. and in almost fully externalizing them, oversimplifies the forces acting on the community and their eventual result. In the 1973 second addition, Handlin evaluates his work with regard to immigration post-1950, "There now seemed an advantage to identification, just as earlier there had been an advantage to assimilation."¹

Bodnar's *The Transplanted* follows in the tradition of Handlin, but takes a much more structured approach to immigration by focusing on the common immigrant experience of confronting capitalism. Unlike Handlin, Bodnar goes to greater lengths to recognize the disagreement and contestation within immigrant communities and the differences between immigrant groups. Additionally, while Handlin tried to represent immigrants as reacting to their conditions, he did not emphasize the limits and boundaries imposed on them by American society: "In practice, the free structure of American life permitted them with few restraints to go their own way, but under the shadow of a

consciousness that they would never belong." Conversely, Bodnar sees immigrants as fundamentally limited but yet capable of creating a greater voice and agency for themselves than would be expected. They maintained traditional, ethnic culture because it was all they had control of, yet "ironically, in doing so they actually generated a degree of power and social control of their own and transcended a status simply as victims."

Furthermore, he describes the immigrant "culture of everyday life" as a "mediating culture" between ethnic communal and kinship ties, economic change and urban growth. It is this view of the immigrant as restricted, but with in-group agency that creates external influence that I see as important to the development of Italian-American identity.

While Bodnar acknowledged the retention of ethnic identity, to him its content was primarily static. Traditional Italian identity was a tool for adaptation, but it did not become altered or reconfigured for any new manifestation of that identity. A new set of immigration historians have explored the transformation of ethnic identity as it melded with American identity into a new, dual ethnic identity. Lawrence H. Fuchs sees this dualism in the concept of voluntary pluralism, where immigrants are free to maintain ethnic affections and loyalties while claiming an American identity. This freedom is allowed as long as the immigrants display that they are good citizens through support and participation in American civic culture, a process Fuchs calls "ethnic-Americanization". In his view, because of the strengthening of American civic culture and unity through immigration "The hyphen had triumphed, not in defiance of Americanism but as an

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3 Bodnar, 210-12.
expression of it." Immigrants gain an acceptable hyphenated identity that is not a product of dual loyalty, but is a distinct new American identity. The hyphen does not represent a divide or forced juncture, but a merging and complementary relationship. Fuchs accepts that aspects of the melting pot metaphor such as assimilation, adaption and integration occurred, but found a kaleidoscope to be a better description, where “the parts give the appearance of rapid change and extensive variety in color and shape and in their interrelationships.”

Another view of immigration that has received coverage is the discussion of “white ethnics”. In their respective studies, Working Toward Whiteness (2005) and How the Irish Became White (1996), authors David Roediger and Noel Ignatiev seek to combine the history of immigration and of race to understand the journey of European immigrants from racialized nationality groups to fully accepted in American society as whites distinguished, but not limited, by their hyphenated identities. Like Handlin and Bodnar, Donna Gabaccia argues that current scholarship is reconsidering assimilation, but in limited and less linear ways. This cautious acceptance of assimilation has meant “At most, the last generation of immigration historians have established that adopting an ethnic (or “hyphenated”) identity was itself a form of Americanization.” These studies of dual identity and white ethnics accept the existence of some assimilation in the development of dual or hyphen identities. Yet they challenge assimilation’s scope and outcomes by presenting dual ethnic identities not as a halfway point between the

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5 Fuchs, 276.
immigrant and the American identity, but as a distinct and complete possibility of American identity.

The definition of ethnicity has necessarily changed along with conceptions of ethnic identity. According to David R. Roediger, one significant early definition of ethnicity was Caroline Ware's 1931 definition in the Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences. She began by saying that in its strict meaning ethnic denotes race, but that ethnic communities were more loosely defined as "bound together by common ties of race, nationality or culture, living together within an alien civilization but remaining culturally distinct." Roediger notes that while contemporary scholarship distinguishes ethnicity more clearly from race, that Ware's definition anticipated modern definitions. In their 1963 critique of assimilation and ethnicity in New York City, Beyond the Melting Pot, Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan add to Ware's definition. They view ethnicity as something continually recreated by new experiences in America. As a result, even after distinctive characteristics such as language, customs and culture are lost, ethnicity retains salience as a marker of an interest group bounded by ties of family and social organization. Further stressing the shifting nature of ethnic identity in their work Reshaping Ethnic and Racial Relations in Philadelphia (1994), Judith Goode and Jo Anne Schneider write: "Ethnic culture combines traits and habits from the country of origin with U.S. ideas of progress, idealized views of the "home" country, and a whole host of economic and social conditions in the United States." This modern conception of ethnicity as receptive to change is important for understanding dual identities. The

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9 Roediger, 24.
view of ethnicity as able to combine U.S. ideas and conditions along with those of the home country shows that ethnic identity does not have to erode when faced with American identity, but that there is ground for incorporation of the ethnic identity into that of the American.

In his article "Contadini in Chicago: A Critique of The Uprooted" (1964), Rudolph J. Vecoli provided an influential challenge to the scholarship of Handlin with his examination of the persistence of "Old World" Italian culture in Chicago immigrants. Vecoli's observations of these Italian immigrants in Chicago and Italy are placed against Handlin's generalized views throughout the article to show how each ethnic group must be studied individually. Otherwise, incorrect assumptions are made about immigrant adjustment patterns and cultural character. For example, Handlin thought that the experience of immigration disrupted the social organization of immigrants and that it was forced to change. Conversely, Vecoli sees this social organization as surviving emigration and as providing a resistant framework for adapting to life in Chicago, showing that Handlin overemphasizes the power of environment while underestimating the resilience of cultural heritage.

Continuing with the idea that ethnic communities need separate study was Josef J. Barton's *Peasants and Strangers: Italian, Rumanians, and Slovaks in an American city, 1890-1950* (1975). As in other studies, an urban city, Cleveland, was used as the focus of the study and as the unifying thread. Whereas previous studies had looked at inclusive community characteristics such as family, labor organization, etc., Barton chose to look at immigration as also a force for change and differentiation in American society due to a

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continued relationship between ethnicity and social status as immigrants assimilated. Barton concludes that while his three ethnic groups had varied upward mobility, through each new generation ethnic attachments were transferred to new broader religious groupings in a “widening of the Anglo-American community.”

Another important study, Ronald H. Bayor’s *Neighbors in Conflict: The Irish, Germans, Jews and Italians of New York City, 1929-1941* (1978), looked at multiple ethnic groups in New York City as groups in conflict instead of only comparatively. This work represented a new way of looking at immigration history as a process of intergroup conflict instead of the efforts of each ethnic group to assimilate into an otherwise homogenous American society. The study of conflict provides insight into the actions of ethnic groups and how conflict is heightened by both the group relations and their positioning in American society. Bayor also looks at the interests of groups and understanding these, instead of only motivations to assimilate, gives a more complete look at ethnic communities and their actions.

Using the increasingly common community study and following in the vein of Vecoli’s work was Virginia Yans-McLaughlin’s work *Family and Community: Italian Immigrants in Buffalo, 1880-1930.* (1982) Focusing on the changes in family life, McLaughlin follows the survival of the Italian extended family in Buffalo and its aid to adjustment. However, while arriving at the same conclusion as Vecoli, she thinks that his approach is too static and linear: it attributes present immigrant behavior to past experiences rather than seeing that along with this retention, adaptation still required

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some changes. Overall, she describes the family changes as “a dynamic process of give and take between new conditions and old social forms as the immigrant families made their transition from Europe to America.”

In “The Twilight of Ethnicity Among Americans of European Ancestry: the Case of the Italians” (1985), Richard D. Alba, a notable author on contemporary American ethnicity, argues that the ethnic identity of Italian-Americans, like other ethnics, is in its final decline, or “twilight”. He also thinks that it will move individualistic conceptions of ethnicity that use assimilation are one-directional and assume a static background to the individual’s decisions. Part of this study and some of Alba’s other work uses the idea of changing ethnic boundaries, eschewing the idea of linear assimilation. This conceptualization of ethnicity allows for assimilation, but not in the traditional, linear approach of earlier authors. In the context of group boundary shifting, a certain level of assimilation can occur when ethnic boundaries weaken or are redefined in more inclusive ways.

George Pozzetta provides a deeper look at identity formation in his article “My Children Are My Jewels: Italian American Generations During World War II.” (1995) In this work, Pozzetta argues that identity formation is actually a complex, multipart process of negotiation within the group and between the group and the larger society, and that to interpret it simply as a step in the continuum of foreign to American is a mistake. He also believes that to approach ethnic identity from only the foreign policy and political implications of ethnic loyalties leads to a limited perspective. He proposes that more work on in-group contestation, in this case generational conflict, needs to be explored.

Otherwise these limited studies support linear views of assimilation which are misleading and, ultimately, inaccurate.  

*Are Italians White?: How Race is Made in America*, (2003) a collection of essays edited by Jennifer Guglielmo and Salvatore Salerno approaches Italian-American history and identity from the perspective of race. Although the question of race has been fundamental to many studies, these essays progress the subject from the race ascribed to immigrants to also understanding “the role that immigrants and their descendants play in making race – that is, confronting and implicating themselves in U.S. racial systems.” In addition, the authors tend to conclude that the development of an Italian-American “white consciousness” was not inevitable. Instead this outcome belies moments of oppositional culture and cross-racial alliances that existed at different moments among Italian-Americans before they adopted a white identity out of choice and coercion. In these essays, “whiteness” is significant not as a racial designation, but as indicative of full acceptance in American society, implying that there is a Anglo-centered, hegemonic American society that remains exclusive and is more complex than either melting pot or cultural pluralism can explain.  

This study cannot examine the Italian American as a whole and instead it focuses on the Italian American presence in Philadelphia around the WWII years, a period often identified as a crucial moment for ethnic identity. The Italian Americans have featured prominently in American immigration history and there are several studies that address the period that alternately address issues of Italian-American ethnicity and identity. One

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study, "A Tale of Three Cities: Blacks and Immigrants in Philadelphia: 1850-1880, 1930, and 1970" by Theodore Hershberg (1979), uses group comparison to question whether blacks could be considered the "last immigrants" and thus able to undergo assimilation similar to Old immigrants like the Irish and New immigrants like the Italians. The authors conclude that blacks are subject to different conditions and structures of opportunity and dissimilar to immigrant groups. What is interesting about this article is that although it uses a black/white racial dichotomy, unlike current white ethnic studies it accepts full structural and cultural assimilation – including that of Philadelphia’s Italian-Americans.

The most prolific author on the ethnic identity of Italian-Americans in mid-twentieth century Philadelphia is Stefano Luconi. The author of several essays on Italian-American voting behavior in Philadelphia and other cities, his work is often concentrated on the New Deal coalition voting during the Roosevelt administration. One work, “Anti-Italian Prejudice and Discrimination and the Persistence of Ethnic Voting Among Italian-Americans; 1928-1953” (1992) chronicles the draw of the Democratic New Deal in the 1930’s for Italian-Americans, who then largely switched allegiance to the Republicans in the 1940’s and 50’s. Luconi sees this shift as occurring on ethnic lines: Italian-Americans, conscious of their ethnic membership, displayed an "ethnic defensiveness" as they mobilized their votes in the perceived interest of the community. This depiction of Philadelphia’s Italian-Americans as politically responsive to an Italian ethnic identity but nonetheless American was continued in his later book, From Paesani to White Ethnics: The Italian Experience in Philadelphia (2001). This ethnically defined political behavior

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continued from the New Deal through WWII and into the following decades. While these voting patterns did not change, the interests and treatment of Italian-Americans did as they transformed from the regionally identified immigrant, the paesani, to their modern white ethnic status. Luconi thus provides a greater ethnic history for his political work and a localized version for the race analysis of Roediger and Ignatiev.

Richard Juliani provides an analysis of Philadelphia’s Italian-Americans at their earliest arrival in the eighteenth century to the late nineteenth century in Building Little Italy: Philadelphia’s Italians before Mass Migration (1998). His stated goal is to explore the oft overlooked “protocommunities” that were established before the mass migration of the late 1870’s and their influence on migration patterns, the city and the organization of the future Little Italies. He sees the transformation of immigrant identity as a two-way process: immigrants became American, but their inclusion changed the definition of American, all while Old World events “paradoxically” continued to resonate within their society. Furthermore, Juliani himself sees his work as part of the resurgence of ethnic history that contests the inevitability of prior views of acculturation and assimilation.

Joseph Bonocore’s Raised Italian-American: stories, values and traditions from the Italian neighborhood (2005) mixes sections on general Italian-American history with anecdotes and impressions from Bonocore’s own experience growing up as a third generation Italian in South Philadelphia during the 1950’s. While his work lacks the theoretical framework of historical works, it serves as a good primer to Italian-Americans and their communities. His personal narrative of the prevalence of “Italian-American


values" also provides insight into how Philadelphia's Italian-Americans conceptualized themselves as a distinct ethnic entity.\textsuperscript{22} The description of cultural institutions and practices adds to this image of Italian-American ethnic practice and how it coexisted with American ideals and institutions.

According to historians like Luconi, Italian-Americans in Philadelphia entered the war with a dual loyalty to America and to their newly formed national Italian identity. They were Italian-American in their variety of national expressions: they vacillated between or simultaneously supported and incorporated themselves within the politics of the U.S. and Italy. Certain individuals may have identified nationally and politically with one country, but the presses and institutions of the community represented multiple variations and so the overall community identity can be characterized as one of duality and hybridity. There was American and Italian political conflict, but also limited intergroup cultural or identity contestation that could have risen from the inconsistency and contradictions of supporting the two national identities. For instance, newspapers could campaign for Republican candidates but at the same time support fascism in Italy. Yet these problems were not brought into view or in need of reconcilement until the U.S. entered the war against Italy. The war provoked the development of the identity of Italian-Americans on two fronts: it solidified their American national and political identity while limiting their Italian identity to cultural manifestations and interest in Italian affairs that drew from an American perspective of democracy or in concern for the citizens and relatives instead of the previous nationality basis. While it can be assumed this identity has continued to develop in the years since WWII, it is this period that

defined Italian-Americans as a distinct American ethnic group with a dualistic national identity.

Sources

The research for this thesis contains a large collection of the primary resources from the Balch Institute for Ethnic Studies Manuscript Collection at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Within the Collection, the majority of my research comes from two Philadelphia Italian-American newspapers: *La Libera Parola* (1927-1966) and *Ordine Nuovo* (1936-1959). Other research from this collection includes the papers of Elba Farabegoli Gurza. The papers cover 1920-1985, and include personal correspondence and organizational material from her time with the Philadelphia Committee for Italian Relief, contributing a personal and organizational perspective on Italian-Americans. The Collection records of the Da Vinci Art Alliance, an association of Italian-American artists in Philadelphia from 1939 - 1991, similarly provide an organizational example of the display and understanding of Italian-American culture. Along with the research from the Balch Collection, *The New York Times* provides historical context and quotes from political leaders. Although published in 1978, the memoir of Jerre Mangione, *Ethnic at Large*, is used as a primary source because of his first person experience with many events and figures surrounding WWII. In addition to these personal accounts, I have drawn from other personal testimonies and essays from the period, many of which appear in the collection *A Documentary History of the Italian Americans*, edited by Wayne Moquin.
SECTION I: ITALIAN-AMERICAN ETHNIC IDENTITY

(1870s-1930s)

Historical Background

In the late 19th and early 20th century, Italians immigrated in large numbers to the United States. Upon arrival, they faced discrimination, competition with other immigrant groups and overall low standards of living. The hostility directed towards Italians based on their perceived race and nationality was produced as a reaction to them as an inferior group in the American class and race system of the 19th century. This system was based on group antagonisms that placed individuals into social, racial and national ancestry classes that determined their characterization. In comparison to the older immigrant groups and the white “Americans”, Italians were of a lower rank and so withdrew to Little Italy. These communities were further organized through religious societies, mutual aid societies, and fraternal organizations based on the “local peasant communities” they came from in Italy.23 The organization and existence of these institutions along with housing patterns indicates that for Italian immigrants of the early 20th century, regional Italian identities were more visible and actively maintained than a single national identity.

Hugo Maiale explains that the lack of Italian national identity was a result of peasant origins, but was altered by the immigrant experience. His discussion of Italian immigration begins in the 1870s and focuses on the greatest period of their immigration.

from 1890 to 1910. The unification of Italy into the Kingdom of Italy had only occurred in 1861, and so for immigrants that were largely uneducated and disconnected from the state the question of Italian nationalism was too recent to challenge their regional identities. Moreover, it seems that the process of migration aroused a consciousness of nationality in the Italian immigrants. The American reception of Italians into its group-defined system as a single entity that was then characterized through stereotype would have also influenced the development of this consciousness.

The Italian immigrants in Philadelphia from the mass migration period of the 1870s to 1920s were of a majority Southern, provincial origin that followed the same pattern of community formation as in other American cities. Italians had immigrated to Philadelphia in small numbers since the eighteenth century, but Philadelphia’s Little Italy fully rose in the mid-19th century. It was located in the southern section of the city that held a mixed population including Irish and German immigrants. In the 1850’s, the Italian colony contained eight square blocks; by 1950, it was calculated to be two hundred eighty square blocks. Along with this expansion in size, the Italian population (“Italian foreign stock”, comprising first and second generations) of Philadelphia increased from 1,656 in 1880 to 182,368 in 1930, representing approximately 9% of the city’s population. By 1940 in South Philadelphia, Italians still comprised 56% of the foreign population, although their population had declined by 7,000 people from 1930. That number continued to decrease in 1950 but since other ethnic groups were also becoming upwardly mobile and moving to the suburbs, they rose to 59% of the white foreign population.  

In the late part of the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth century, the Italian-American organizations in Philadelphia were village, family and occupational organizations. For instance, mutual aid societies such as the Unione Abruzze and Christopher Colombus Mutual Aid Society extended membership only to their representative regions. Parish affiliation was another important aspect of the community, especially for women otherwise excluded from ethnic organizations. Many of these organizations were headed by local prominenti ("prominent ones" or community elite), who maintained contacts and influence in both Italian-American and American circles. Rising to prominence in the years after WWI, the prominenti relied on public events and positions for visibility that would demonstrate their connections and importance. Philip V. Cannistraro writes that "The prominenti encouraged naturalization in order to create an ethnic voting bloc, but it was also in their interests to keep their constituencies tied sentimentally and culturally to Italy, for total integration could spell the end of Italian identity and therefore of their electoral compactness." The cohesiveness of Italians as a voting bloc was aided by the strengthening of their Italian identity after the 1920's, demonstrated in the rise of organizations that filled similar social and political roles, but were increasingly becoming national Italian-American groups whose membership was built on Italian identity instead of regional identity.

**Italian-American Identity through WWI**

What became complicated in the Italian experience were the American conceptions of nation, race and ethnicity and what place Italians had in this ongoing

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25 Luconi, 31.
26 Dickinson, 459.
27 Cannistraro, 81.
social discourse. Another impact of the close timing of Italian unification and Italian immigration into the U.S. was the conceptualization of Italian nationality. According to Donna R. Gabaccia, European nationalists in the 19th century used biological descent to define their new nations. Furthermore, many romantic nationalists saw the vast amount of Italy’s peasants as outside of the nation; the nation would be civilized but could still contain barbarous peoples. During this period, anthropologists also worked to determine the racial differences between Northern Italians and their more savage Southern counterparts. By the early 20th century, the quest for proof of racial difference had subsided as race was conflated with nation. Southerners still remained “racially backward” but they were seen as part of the Italian race and so the state could still promote civilizing efforts on their behalf.

While the European concept of nation moved towards this biological and ethnic basis, Garbaccia argues the U.S. had to create its nation on civic values rather than common descent because of its plural nature. However, a racial component remained to the American nation: “In the United State, social Darwinism rooted consensual citizenship not just in whiteness (as it had been since 1790), but in the Anglo-Saxon race, thus segmenting the nation into those racially more and less fit for citizenship.” In addition, beginning in 1899 all immigrants to the U.S. were categorized into thirty-six different races, including separate races for northern and southern Italians. Thus, Italians came into a highly racialized American setting that castigated them as different, despite their European heritage. Furthermore, access to citizenship rights was open to all of the races of Europe, but limited immigration opportunities such as the restrictive immigration

29 Ibid, 52.
30 Ibid, 57.
quotas of the 1920’s were influenced by nativist fears of less desirable European races, including southern Italians.\textsuperscript{31}

Thomas A. Guglielmo offers another perspective on the conflicting racial and national reception of Italians. He provides description of the discrimination faced by Italian around WWI in Chicago, but notes that while significant, it paled compared to the treatment of African-Americans and Asians. From this he concludes: “Thus, even in this early period when the “colored races” remained a small fraction of the city’s population, a distinct and pervasive color line separated them from “whites”. And for all their alleged racial inadequacies, Italians were placed firmly among the latter.”\textsuperscript{32} Italians were stigmatized and treated as a different race, yet according to Guglielmo, they were always “white”. The government encoded Italian racial difference, as Gabaccia discussed, but they were always officially white. To acknowledge color difference would throw into question the “whiteness” of a portion of Western Civilization and would not allow Italian naturalization as “free white male persons.” It would also require a reconfiguration of the accepted five racial categories, because if Italians were not white (Caucasian) it was not clear what other category they would fit.\textsuperscript{33} Guglielmo sees the occurance of the final evolution of Italians to white in the interwar and postwar years, conferred largely by the federal government. Nonetheless, before then they were arguably white only in comparison to other groups and not of their own accord. This conflicting treatment as racially inferior by Anglo-American society and government led to the discrimination that would define much of the Italian immigrant experience. Yet the acceptance of the Italian race as white in an official capacity was also important for later arguments from

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid, 56
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid, 37.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid, 40-41.
the community about their fitness as Americans. It also would lead to conflicts with other race groups, especially African-Americans that would further demonstrate the movement of Italian-Americans into a less stigmatized place in American society, in this case through comparison in the U.S. racial hierarchy.

However, before discussing Italian-Americans as white ethnics, the development of Italian identity among immigrants needs to be understood. One explanation for the discarding of the regional identities among Italian-Americans is the decreased immigration quotas of the 1920’s. With fewer new immigrants, the Italian-American communities and organizations had less contact and ties to Italy, diminishing their capacity to maintain their regional identities.34

Additionally, national fraternal societies were created that had the power to strengthen Italian national identity. Despite their involvement with Italian culture, according to Bodnar, they also had a simultaneous role of Americanization:

“Once the embryonic national organizations took shape, goals had to be established which would transcend the parochial interests of individual members and lodges and sustain a measure of national identity among newcomers from diverse regional and social backgrounds. It was precisely this need that moved national fraternals to become one of the chief forces for generating a strong attachment to the group’s commons ethnic origins, an attachment which was rather looses and underdeveloped at the time of immigration...National fraternals reached forward under the banner of Americanization and backward under the guise of ethnic identity in order to sustain the loyalty of large portions of immigrant communities.”35

The most powerful national fraternal organization was The Order Sons of Italy in America (OSIA), founded in 1905 by Vincenzo Sellaro in New York City. Among its goals was the defense of Italian-American rights against unjust discrimination and

34 Luconi, 51.
marginalization in the U.S.\textsuperscript{36} In a 1960 history of the OSIA, written by prominent Philadelphia member Ernest Biagi, the unifying role of the Order is identified as key to the success of Italian-Americans because the community division represented by regional societies was the cause of many "evils" such as infighting. It also was the greatest obstacle to external affirmation of the Italian communities in America. While the organization operated on local, state and national levels, the national imperative matched other changes in the developing consciousness of Italian-American identity. The OSIA, as the largest and most politically connected fraternal society during WWII are an essential component of Italian-American identity because of their role in directing and disseminating it as an institution.

\textit{Italian-American Identity 1920s-1930s}

While the change of the primary identity of Italian immigrants and their children from regional identities to an Italian national identity may have begun through a path of discrimination and assimilation, according to many scholars it is also concurrent with the rise of fascism in Italy. They contend the national Italian consciousness that had been developing among Italian-Americans was completed by the rise of fascism and the nationalistic attachment it formed. The mentality of Italian-Americans after WWI is commonly termed as one of inferiority and it is through the restored pride in Italian heritage that Fascism found its hold.\textsuperscript{37} The sense of inferiority developed because Italian immigrants were confronted with American nativist policies and attitudes, pressure to

\textsuperscript{36} The \textit{Purple Aster}: A History of the Sons of Italy. Dublin: Veritas, 1961. 9-10.

\textsuperscript{37} Luconi, 84.
assimilate, and the humiliation of Italy’s ‘mutilated victory’ in WWI. This framework of defeat is used by John P. Diggins to explain the appeal of Fascism for Italian-Americans: “Pressures both external and internal, then, left Italian-Americans ripe for Fascism...Inasmuch as Fascism was an answer to these psychic tensions, the Italian-American reaction to it as more a socially conditioned reflex than a politically conscious response.” The influence of fascism was not a meditated political choice but more as a response to the social conditions of Italian-Americans. Fascism created success and international importance for Italy, and support of Fascism integrated Italian-Americans into this accomplishment. Biagi powerfully illustrates this point, writing that after the Fascist siege of power: “nobody called us wops.” Furthermore, since support of Fascism had become associated with Italian national identity, incorporation into Fascism presented the final and fullest articulation of Italian nationality for Italian-Americans. For its part, the Italian government also reached out to Italian-Americans in the U.S., creating a positive relationship to the Italian state that was new, especially to the predominantly Southern immigrants.

In Diggins’ view, support of fascism was an emotional rather than ideological attachment to many Italian-Americans. However, disentangling the different motives for supporting Fascism is complicated by the conflation of devotion to Italy with allegiance to Fascism and Mussolini. In addition to tracing the cause of fascist support, it is also difficult to count accurately what portion of the Italian-American population was pro or

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39 Diggins, 80-81.
41 Luconi, 84.
42 Diggins 108.
anti Fascist because available figures range widely depending on methodology and political bias. Nonetheless, it can be surmised that the institutions and prominenti that represented the Italian-American communities were decisively pro-Fascist. For example, Diggins states the Italian-American press was almost 90% pro-Fascist.

The press, along with other community institutions, was an important part of Fascist propaganda aimed at Italian-Americans. It functioned to provide information about Italy, but also drew parallels between Italy and the U.S. Thus at times it reconciled the conflicts that occurred between American loyalties and Italian identity and between fascism and democracy by glossing over difference with talk of shared goals or cultural accomplishments. However, as Francesca De Lucia notes, the relationship was always changing and adapting to shifting relations between the U.S. and Italy:

"Newspapers with a clear Fascist perspective tend to minimize the Americanized aspect of immigrant identity, implying a strong link with the old country. The Fascist newspapers' relationship with the United States as an adopted homeland is ambivalent and contradictory, being possibly complicated by mainstream America's own shifting attitude towards Mussolini's regime. While these newspapers like to complain that Italian Americans, especially members of the second generation, deny their Italian roots, they also point at the existence of a strong connection between Italy and the United States, implying that the ostentation of fascist patriotism was not completely incompatible with American identity."

The evolving relationship of the United States and Americans to Mussolini and Fascism that De Lucia mentions was also a factor in determining the limits of the relationship of Italian-Americans and Fascism. If the government and mainstream society supported something, it was compatible with American identity and acceptable for immigrants.

43 Diggins, 106.
44 Diggins, 107.
However, if that favor changed, then those who still showed support were suspect and again marked by their foreignness. Despite these shifting attitudes, from Mussolini’s March on Rome until the mid-1930’s, Americans held a relatively favorable view of Fascism. They thought it might be a successful experiment in government, and moreover, a strategically viable response to communist threats in Europe.

Diggins offers that along with the strategic, there were nativist underpinnings to this support, as Mussolini appeared to be “Americanizing Italy” by instilling values of hard work and enterprise that Italians lacked.\footnote{Diggins,316.} Constantine M. Panunzio, an Italian immigrant and professor of sociology at UCLA wrote a paper in 1942 about the Italian-American relationship to Fascism. Speaking of the 1930’s he wrote “At that time, there was a sort of “Teddy Rooseveltian big stick” element in Mussolini; and there was such an ardent, messianic condemnation of communism and defense of capitalism in fascism...that not a few Americans were swept off their feet.”\footnote{Moquin, Wayne. \textit{A documentary history of the Italian Americans,.} 2nd Edition. ed. Connecticut: Praeger, 1974. 395-6.} Thus, Italian-Americans were able to herald Mussolini and fascism with little consequence to their security in the U.S., especially in comparison to leftist groups.\footnote{Diggins,316.} Additionally, the Italian-American press did not report that fascism was in conflict with supporting American values or an American identity. The approach of some Italian-Americans was that the success of both countries indicated the need for different political systems in each country to best meet its needs. Furthermore, because of these different needs, support of fascism and support of American democracy were not incompatible in the Italian-American consciousness.\footnote{“U.S. Italians Choose Democracy,” \textit{Ordine Nuovo}, 4 July 1942}
In 1928, the Italian ambassador Baron Giacomo de Martina, speaking at a luncheon in New York echoed this idea that fascists did not want fascism for the U.S. but just recognition of its success in Italy. *The New York Times* reporting his speech, wrote "Concluding, the Ambassador made a plea for a better understanding of modern Italy and Fascism. Italy has no desire, he said, to persuade America that Italian institutions are good for this country." However, the lack of hostile public opinion and the diplomatic relations that had been cultivated between Italy and the U.S. were irreversibly altered by Italy’s invasion of Ethiopia in 1935. During this event, as the U.S. tried to maintain neutrality, the American press became more critical of Mussolini’s actions. Italian-Americans supported the invasion and cast British criticism as hypocritical because Italy was finally just getting its "place in the sun" as Britain had done. In addition to demonstrating the aggressive, imperialistic power of Fascism, in the U.S. the conflict created tensions between Italian-Americans and black Americans, who largely supported Ethiopia.

Fascism would continue to decline in American public opinion with Italy’s involvement in the Spanish Civil War beginning in 1936 and the implementation of the Italian Race Laws in 1938. Despite these developments and Mussolini’s continued association with Hitler, up until even 1939 it appeared that he might still hold importance as “an essential counterweight to German expansionism.”

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50 "De Martino Asks Fairness to Italy," *New York Times*, 12 April 1928
52 Diggins, 322.
53 Diggins, 319
54 Jenkins, 90.
In Philadelphia, the Italian newspapers with some of the highest readership were pro-fascist and local notable Giovanni Di Silvestro, as Grand Venerable of the Order Sons of Italy in America (OSIA) declared the full support of the Order’s three hundred thousand members as early as 1922. In addition to his position within the OSIA, Silvestro served as acting Italian consul in the city and was national head of the OFDI from 1921 to 1935. Jenkins explains that the fascist concentration in fraternal and cultural societies developed because due to their non-militant nature they became the safest points of pro-fascist expression amid American fears of an Italian “invisible empire” controlled by Rome within the U.S.

While a significant number supported fascism, even if on an apolitical basis, there were also anti-fascists and disagreements between the factions. The anti-fascists were not as prominent, but still managed to arrange demonstrations and associations that actively promoted their cause. Nor was their influence negligible, for in 1936, their representatives (including one from the OSIA), were able to dissuade the Mayor of Philadelphia from allowing a pro-fascist parade to celebrate the Italian victory in Ethiopia. Judge Eugene Alessandroni and DiSilvestro argued that the city would allow demonstrations by radical elements, but not by “loyal and conservative citizens” like themselves. However, Jenkins explains that the stop of the parade was less about ideology than fear of a confrontation with black residents, who supported and identified with the Ethiopian cause.

55 Luconi, 86. 
56 Jenkins, 93. 
57 Jenkins, 90. 
58 Luconi, 85. 
59 Jenkins, 107.
As discussed earlier, the period of fascism produced suspicion and stigmatizing of Italian-Americans, but ironically it also gave them acceptance by positioning themselves against other groups, whether communists or blacks. For example, in 1933 the house of Giovanni DiSilvestro in South Philadelphia was bombed by what were thought to be anti-fascists targeting Giovanni and his brother Giuseppe, two of the most prominent Fascist leaders in the city. As a consequence DiSilvestro’s wife, Elizabeth, was killed. The bombing was in turn condemned by the Italian-American and Philadelphia community. Jenkins describes that as a result “It was in fact now anti-fascism that was defined as alien, violent and subversive. In turn, the martyrdom of Elizabeth DiSilvestro enhanced the position of Fascists as the embattled defenders of the Italian community against “red barbarism”.  

Apart from this extreme situation, Fascism also found other moments of acceptance. For example, in 1939 the mayor of Philadelphia, Harry A. Mackey, spoke of Mussolini as “the Duce of new and inspired Italy” whose “illuminated statesmanship has added many glorious pages to the history of the Eternal City.”

The articles published in the Philadelphia *Ordine Nuovo*, organ of the OSIA in Pennsylvania, leading up to American entry in WWII reflect the Order’s simultaneous support of Fascism and American values, as well as the general concerns and reactions of the organization, and by extension, the community. For example, the first publication of the *English Section* on June 6, 1936 contains the OSIA’s Constitution preamble and purposes, which includes “promote the fundamental conceptions of Americanism” while promoting Italian culture and uniting people of Italian origin – without “prejudice as to

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60 Jenkins, 95.
61 Jenkins, 91.
This vague and all encompassing approach based on abstract values and goals is part of the reason that an organization like the Order could claim to support Italy and the U.S. without conflict.

On the same date and in the same section appears an address delivered by a Rev. Dr. Joseph G. Gilbride at a celebration of Italian victory in Ethiopia. Entitled “The Eagles of Rome are Soaring Again”, it chronicles the success of Italy and its role in the continuation of the Roman spread of civilization in Ethiopia. It also condemns English “robber baron” propaganda against Italy and concludes that England should watch where those Roman eagles will pounce. Even with American neutrality in mind, these statements stand out for their strength, but the appearance of such opinions was not out of place in Italian-American newspapers, especially when coupled with such a distinct Fascist historical narrative. Similarly, an article from October 30, 1937 refutes claims in the American and foreign press that Mussolini is a tyrant by appealing to the civilization inherent in Italian history and Mussolini’s role in Italy’s current success. The author also writes “All who love Italy, love Mussolini. All who hate Italy, hate Mussolini. They cannot be separated.”

In this period, there was no room for dissent or negotiating of what an Italian national identity meant. Mussolini was Italy; to identify or find attachment to either was taken as support of the regime and expression of an Italian nationality.

62 “English Section,” Ordine Nuovo, 6 June 1936

63 “Mussolini – The Tyrant?,” Ordine Nuovo, 30 October 1937
SECTION II: CLAIMING AMERICAN IDENTITY IN WWII
(1940-1945)

The final turning point in U.S. and Italian relations was Italy’s declaration of war against France and Great Britain in June of 1940. In response, President Roosevelt called the move a “stab in the back” in a public address. This angered Italian-Americans and in Philadelphia ultimately decreased their vote for Roosevelt and the Democrats in the November 1940 elections. It also had the consequence of restirring anti-Italian sentiment and distrust of the community: “Roosevelt dredged up dark stereotypes that Italians had struggled to overcome. It forced them to refight battles they thought they had won, and to give ground in the progress they had made against discriminatory attitudes and practices, once again placing them in the position of having to prove their loyalty to America.”

By the time of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, the Italian-American press had already begun to moderate its message. After this event and Italy’s subsequent declaration of War against the U.S. on December 11, they had moved to full disavowal of any Fascist sympathies and, with it, Italian national loyalty.

Renouncing Fascism

The conflict between the U.S. and Italy was now inescapable for the Italian-Americans, forcing a renegotiation of their national identity. In response Italian-Americans renounced fascism while a hyper-articulated version of American patriotism

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64 Luconi, 96.
66 Luconi, 100.
emerged that served to mobilize the community and communicate that it was not a threat to America. The increased suspicions and hostilities towards Italian-Americans as enemy aliens or members of a fifth-column threat necessitated overt demonstrations of a single American national identity. However, these claims of patriotism and of American values by the community were not new; in WWI Italian-Americans had served in the army and their newspapers supported American loyalty. The WWII projections of this loyalty were thus a continuation, but unique in how American patriotism could no longer be paired with claims of fidelity to Italy. Whereas before it was possible, even in a nationalistic sense, to assert simultaneous support of the U.S. and Italy, after Pearl Harbor this was no longer possible. A population that had previously contained various political factions and dissent was now united, at least in its public face, under the banner of American solidarity.

There are two general explanations for the Italian-American emphasis of their American identity and repudiation of fascism. One is given the direct conflict between Italy and the U.S., Italian-Americans were forced to choose who they were actually supportive of and decided they were American and not Italian. Despite this appearing in the community rhetoric, authors such as Luconi suggest that there were more strategic motivations to the pretense of choice than a simple matter of loyalty. He writes “Although patriotic pledges and unending lists of war bond subscribers concealed the inmost feelings of Philadelphia’s Italian Americans, the persistence of a strong sense of identification with their ancestral country caused many members of the community to

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67 Diggins,116.
President Roosevelt for the state of war between the United States and Italy." While publicly denouncing their Italian political and national connections, they maintained identification strong enough that their evaluation of American politics was through an Italian perspective.

The reaction of Italian-American communities during WWII is similar to the response of other ethnic groups faced with wartime suspicion and pressure to Americanize. June Granatir Alexander sees this reaction as a regular occurrence in mixed generation immigrant groups that serve their twin desires to adopt American customs while protecting themselves from the suspicion of their ethnic origins:

"Despite distinctions based on ethnicity, a cultural characteristic that new immigrant generations shared with other “Americans” was a penchant for flag-waving and public displays of patriotism. This affinity for patriotic manifestations, which, one can credibly argue, has become part and parcel of American culture, stems to a degree from the interrelated experience between the native and the foreign born. Since at least World War I, immigrants have used collective public avowals to salve the concerns of Americans who were ever suspect of foreigners in their midst. During that war, coercion, political aims, and heartfelt feeling motivated exhibitions of loyalty...This was an ethnic impulse that became more than a cultural tradition, it became “American”.”

Alexander’s explanation of the motivations of exhibitions of loyalty in WWI fits equally well with the behavior of Italian-Americans during WWII. It is this fear and pressure mixed with a sizeable measure of pre-existing American loyalty that best elucidates their need for such a public and uncontested display of American patriotism. The primary reason for Italian-Americans to renounce ties to Italy was to protect themselves from the discrimination and suspicion that had increased ever since Italy entered the war. These

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fears were not unfounded, and at least in Philadelphia, fit in with patterns of ‘ethnic
defensiveness’ that Luconi argues can be seen in the voting behavior of Italian-
Americans during the 1930’s and 1940’s. In addition to discriminatory public opinion,
Italian-Americans also faced scrutiny from the government to such a degree that it
eventually led to the internment and exclusion of Italians on the West Coast.

Prior to Pearl Harbor, the FBI maintained a list of suspicious individuals
including Italian-Americans thought to be affiliated with fascism and had plans and
procedures in place for the detention of enemy aliens should the U.S. enter the war. As
early as the night of December 7, 1941 these preparations were utilized to detain several
hundred Japanese, German and Italian Americans across the country by the Attorney
General Francis Biddle. Within two months unnatrualized Italians in the United States
had been designated as enemy aliens. Around 260 Italian nationals and naturalized
Italians were interned and several thousand more affected by restrictions, curfews and
forced to move from many coastal and military areas. While the number of Italians
interned was small compared to Japanese and German Americans and mainly limited to
those residing on the West coast, these actions demonstrate that the government
perceived Italian-Americans as a real threat to the nation and that any fascist sympathies
had not been without consequence.

Author Jerry Mangione was tasked with publicizing the Department of Justice’s
identification program started in February of 1942 for German, Japanese, and Italian
nationals. A second generation Italian-American from Rochester, New York he had

70 Luconi, Stefano. "Anti-Italian Prejudice and Discrimination and the Persistance of Ethnic Voting Among
72 Ibid
worked with Biddle in Philadelphia before his appointment, but nonetheless still faced FBI investigation. According to his account, Mangione was only able to clear his name because of his connections within the Department of Justice. In his memoir, *Ethnic at Large*, he details the impact of the government restrictions on Italian-Americans and his own reaction to his job:

“I did it as efficiently as I knew how, but it went against my grain; and it must have lowered the morale of the million or so aliens subjected to it for, despite official assurances to the contrary, the program implied a deep distrust of them. The nervousness and indignation it engendered was reflected in some of the messages I received from my Rochester relatives. My uncle Stefano wanted to know if being an “alien enemy” would mean deportation to Italy. They could not understand why the American government would consider them dangerous since by now they had been her so long they could not imagine having any other homeland. One angry relative wrote: “Don’t those imbeciles in Washington understand that to have American-born children is to become an American for the rest of your life?”

Using Mangione’s description of his and his relatives’ experience, it is clear that the wartime climate of the U.S. was hostile to Italian-Americans. Their confusion at being labeled enemy aliens indicates that Mangione’s family had already conceived of themselves as more American than the government designations implied. However, this pressure was lessened when on October 12, 1942, Biddle announced that Italian nationals were no longer enemy aliens or subject to curfew and travel regulations. Significantly, October 12 was Columbus Day, one of the most important Italian-American holidays. This reversal for Italians came about because of the political and economic importance of Italians as compared to the other enemy aliens, expectation of Italy’s early surrender and the need for Italian-American support of the occupation of Italy as the largest enlisted

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73 Mangione, 293.
74 Mangione, 286.
ethnic group. Furthermore, it can be viewed as a result of the active campaigning of Italian-Americans on their American patriotism and lack of Italian connection, an "acknowledgement that Italian Americans had acted responsibly" and "did not endanger the war effort." Alternatively, Stephen Puleo suggest that the revoking of enemy alien status was done only for Roosevelt’s political gains because he need votes for the 1942 midterm elections. Additionally, in this account, Roosevelt dismisses Italian threat not because of their loyalty, but through a stereotypical joke:

"In Roosevelt’s opinion, the country had nothing to fear from Italians — "they are a lot of opera singers," he told Biddle. The official announcement, once again, came on October 12, Columbus Day, to “let the decision have a broader echo in Italian-American communities nationwide and a deeper impact on the vote,” according to a Roosevelt campaign strategist. Biddle himself called the repeal of the enemy alien designation “an important weapon of political warfare” and a deed of “good politics”.

The end of the enemy alien restrictions led some Italians to become naturalized Americans, reopened up factory jobs to Italian-Americans, and in Mangione’s estimation, bolstered the Italian underground by 200,000 volunteers to the benefit of the American army in Italy. Although still stigmatized and monitored, this event shows the strong influence of American policy on the actions of Italian-Americans. Fear of retaliation for their ethnic origin was thus a critical determinant in the self-representation of Italian-Americans as a community and as individuals. Furthermore, it shows the confusion that resulted as Italian-Americans were shown that the dual loyalty they had so long embraced and managed was perceived problematically by the U.S. government and society.

75 Diggins, 400.
77 Puleo, 212.
78 Mangione, 287.
As with other Italian-American communities, by 1940 in Philadelphia the tone towards Mussolini was still favorable but was no longer blind and took into consideration criticism of the Fascists. A reprint of an editorial from Colliers on July 26, 1940, “Lay Off the Italians”, was republished by Ordine Nuovo on August 3. Although Ordine Nuovo does not author it, the choice to run it on the front page shows endorsement of the opinion. The article demonstrates the changing national and, given its treatment by *Ordine Nuovo*, Italian-American sentiment towards Fascism. For instance, the opinion expressed towards Italy’s declaration of war against France is mixed: “with all due respect to the President and all due abhorrence for Mussolini’s jackal act as France began to stagger, Mussolini did not betray anybody.” There is dislike for Mussolini’s actions yet understanding and justification for what he did. This represents a departure from the unquestioning support of previous years and a willingness to publicly criticize Fascism without entirely condemning Mussolini. Another feature of the editorial is it speaks about the apathy of Italian Americans toward Mussolini or conversely, their violent opposition to him, along with Stalin and Hitler. The conclusion of the editorial is emphatically “Italian-Americans by and large ARE AS GOOD CITIZENS AS ANY OTHER RACIAL GROUP BY AND LARGE, better than some.”79 At this point, it would appear the message is that Italian-Americans no longer are aligned with Fascism; they exist independently as ‘good’ Americans. Moreover, they have adopted a racial discourse that allows them to favorably compare themselves to other groups and show that the “Italian race” is worthy of citizenship and American identity.

79 “Lay Off the Italians,” *Ordine Nuovo*, 3 August 1940
The first issue of *Ordine Nuovo* after the Pearl Harbor attack and the Axis declaration of War against the U.S. came on December 13, 1941. The headlines announced the War and promised American victory against all enemies of America. Featured is a message from Pennsylvania Grand Venerable Eugene Alessandroni promising the full mobilization of the OSIA to the American cause and confidence in American preparedness and victory.  

Furthermore, Judge Alessandroni, who was a known pro-Fascist, frames the war as for the protection of “our sacred ideals of justice and freedom”. The transition of Alessandroni mirrors that of the rest of the Italian-American elite in Philadelphia, where “The Italian American political consensus shifted seamlessly toward the patriotic American cause so successfully that 1941 marked not the slightest hiccup in the social and political positions of the community’s leaders.”

The Italian-American press had always contained pieces that heralded American political values and portrayed Italian-Americans as exemplifiers and supporters of these values. However, this had coexisted with the Fascist support and the fundamental conflicts of American democracy and Fascism were conveniently eschewed because the two states were at peace with each other.

With WWII, this dual promotion and identification became impossible and concern for their safety and rights forced Italian Americans to proclaim support for the U.S. If the appeal of fascism to Italian Americans is explainable as a response to internal and external pressures, so was its abandonment. With the strong associations between Italy the state and Fascism, this also meant discarding of Italian national identity. The events of WWII and the response of Italian American institutions would dictate what

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80 *Ordine Nuovo*, 13 December 1941
81 Luconi, 86.
82 Jenkins, 111.
elements of Italian national identity remained as a new Italian-American identity emerged in the following years.

**The Rhetoric of American Patriotism**

The headlines for the first of issue of *Ordine Nuovo* after the Pearl Harbor attacks promised that the U.S. would win the war and that the Order Sons of Italy in America will fight all of the enemies of America. Eugene Alessandroni, Grand Venerable of Pennsylvania, in his front page message, further stated that “For this great cause, for the triumph of the American flag, for our sacred ideals of justice and freedom, the Order Sons of Italy in America is ready and willing, as in 1917, to perform its full duty, and to this end dedicates all its resources and its organization of effective services.” While nothing other than support of American victory could have been expected, the strength by which this support is demonstrated is indicative of the way that Italian Americans saw the War and their place in it as clearly American; to protect “our sacred ideals”. Additionally in the issue’s other articles there is little mention of Italy. It occasionally appears in the list of enemies, but more often the Axis powers are referred to and most commonly, Hitler is the central figure that the U.S. is at war with. By U.S. entrance, Mussolini was regarded as less of a threat than Hitler and so the focus was on Hitler and the Axis as a whole. Still, Mussolini and fascism should have remained relevant to the Italian-American community, yet interestingly there is no direct reference to a fight against fascism.

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83 *Ordine Nuovo*, 13 December 1941
Overall, in both *La Libera Parola* and *Ordine Nuovo*, the war is framed as protection of American democracy and liberty against threat. This necessarily implied defeat of the Axis powers and their ideologies, but their rhetorical focus on the virtues of America rather than why the axis should be defeated better served their needs of demonstrating American loyalty and creating community solidarity. Through these newspapers, Italian-Americans appear united and certain about their American patriotism. Their absence of true criticism of Italy reflects a community still reevaluating its relationship and identity with Italy. Furthermore, if Italian-American attachment to fascism was reducible to emotional and nationalistic feelings, then the fervor of Italian nationalism was similar to their claims of American patriotism during the war. Italian-Americans supported fascism because it brought success to Italy and promised a return of Italian supremacy. Fascism was praised in the Italian-American press, pro-fascist marches held and Italian victories publicly celebrated. Similarly, in the Italian-American press loyalty to America was based on the greatness of the country, and this occurred because of its ideals of democracy and liberty, which in turn were very publicly lauded and celebrated.

In the period before the war, support of fascism, while not universal to Italian-Americans, could exist concomitantly to the community’s American patriotism. The war required rejection of fascist support and with it Italian-Americans’ nationalistic attachment to Italy. American patriotism remained: in its new emphasis it became the only acceptable, and thus sole, nationality of Italian-Americans where before dual American and Italian nationalistic feelings had existed. Although it only served to underscore their loyalty rather than represent the actual possibilities of the situation, the
Italian-American press did present this change as a choice. Shortly after Pearl Harbor, in January 1942, *Ordine Nuovo* ran an essay “Our Loyalty to America” by Francesco Palleria, the Grand Venerable of New Jersey. In it he refers to the war as “the hour of the supreme test”, and warns that “The hour has struck, oh members, when every one of us must, after honestly and profoundly examining our conscience, take a position – a position precise, unequivocal, absolute and unyielding.” In Palleria’s context, the war is a test – but his members still must do what is right, creating choice. His choice is American support, and in the rest of the article he declares his loyalty along with all of the New Jersey members of the Order Sons of Italy in America. His writing does not allow for any other position - American loyalty is the right and only choice for his members. Another article, titled “U.S. Italians Choose Democracy” more explicitly posits the change as choice: “Before December 7 Americans of Italian origin didn’t have to take sides. They could be both for Italy and for America. After that they had to choose one of the two and they lined up for America.” Yet like Palleria, the article parallels Italian and American values so that the choice to support America is reflective of their natural orientation towards American democracy, especially now that the romance of fascism has faded.

**Italian-American War Efforts**

In these articles, the support of Italian-Americans is due to loyalty to the abstract qualities of the U.S., and the government and people that embody them. This declared support is further bolstered by detailed accounts of how Italian-Americans are continuously contributing to the war effort in quantifiable ways. One of the most visible

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84 “Our Loyalty to America,” *Ordine Nuovo*, 24 January 1942
85 “U.S. Italians Choose Democracy,” *Ordine Nuovo*, 4 July 1942
campaigns was the purchasing of war bonds and stamps. During the war, *Ordine Nuovo* ran an update of their defense bond campaign on the front page of almost every issue and advertisements of war bonds and stamps appeared throughout the other pages. In the March 21, 1942 issue, the campaign had reached $345,410. Grand Venerable Alessandroni's progress report is quoted as saying “Our Order will give this new proof of understanding and love to America” when their goal of $2 million is soon reached. The update also reports that in every sector of the state the lodges are the “vanguard of activities and other patriotic activities” and that they are receiving praise and encouragement from authorities and public officials.\(^{86}\)

The Pennsylvania war bond campaign demonstrated Italian-American support in a very quantifiable way. It also shows the role the Order took in organizing the community and a consciousness of outside opinion. Just as Alessandroni had once proclaimed the support of the OSIA to Mussolini, its leaders were now giving over the unconditional support of its members to American victory. While speaking on behalf of their members, as one of the foremost Italian-American fraternal organizations doing so also meant speaking for Italian-Americans as a singular, cohesive group. Additionally, the OSIA were not the only leaders to make such claims. Di Silvestro also wrote about the loyalty of Italian-Americans in his role as editor of *La Libera Parola*. Additionally his political position as a state senator meant his word as a community leader was also highly visible, and presumably as influential as the community directives of an organization such as the OSIA.

Along with the praise of democracy and declarations of Americanism, demonstrating participation in the war effort was important to Italian-American claims of

\(^{86}\) “War Bond Campaign,” *Ordine Nuovo*, 21 March 1942
patriotism. One of the central ways of showing the effort were numerous articles in Italian-American newspapers about the number of Italian-American soldiers fighting in the U.S. army that detailed their excellence and courage for their country. In a 1942 article in La Libera Parola, an article cites that over 400,000 of American soldiers are “young men of Italian extraction”, 70,000 are sons of “alien” parents and even some noncitizens among their ranks. Perhaps even more telling than their numbers, the article continues to list their volunteer rates. Before the Selective Service Law, they led all racial groups in volunteering and even in the few months after its enactment they still composed 30-40% of voluntary enlistments.87

The article also places this service as following the Italian-Americans’ commitment during WWI, when 400,000 Italian-Americans served and among them could count the first American casualty and first to raise the flag in German territory. It is through this history of service that the author places Italian-American service in a continuum of Americanism that has never been broken, “they are merely continuing their heroic acts of patriotism which began with the founding of America”. As with the OSIA’s account of its war bond effort, this article also includes mention of the praise the soldiers receive from “every official corner”, adding validation to the patriotism of Italian-Americans as expressed through military enlistment. In addition, lest there be doubt about any generational divide, the article describes the families of the soldiers to be just as proud as their sons are to wear the American uniform. When placed with the statistic that 70,000 soldiers have unnaturalized Italian parents, this information serves to

87 "Over 400,000 American Soldiers in Armed Forces Are Young Men of Italian Extraction," La Libera Parola, 25 July 1942
assuage doubts about first generation immigrants and echoes the thoughts of Mangione’s relative, that to have children in America is to become American.

The history of Italian-American patriotism also gives all generations a place and investment in America that can oppose the perception that their loyalty remains with Italy. *Ordine Nuovo* regularly featured a section “Nelle Forze Armate di Uncle Sam” in which a local soldier is profiled. In one example, the soldier is a first generation immigrant to whom America is more than only an adopted land, but a glorious country to which he has given all his heart. A history of American defense along with evidence of their heartfelt belief in American democracy allowed Italian-Americans to support their labeling of America as “our country”. Stefano Luconi adds that the Italian-American coverage of its soldiers had two main purposes. One was to demonstrate that allegiance was so strong that they would fight against their former countrymen, and the second that they had severed ties to their native country.

The coverage of *Ordine Nuovo* and *La Libera Parola* reflects both these aims so that the community portrayed is solely concerned with the success of the U.S. Aside from addressing Italian-American loyalty, Luconi also argues that the coverage of Italian-American soldiers could later serve Italian interests. This occurred because their service gave them more leverage in the eyes of the U.S. government and American public opinion. This was because the “apparent break of Italian-Americans’ connections to their ancestral land made their lobbying for lenient peace terms less likely to appear influence by hyphenism, double allegiance or sentimental reasons.” Their assertion of American identity and detachment from Italy would ironically serve their continued interest in

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88 “Nelle Forze Armate di Uncle Sam," *Ordine Nuovo*, 23 May 1942
89 Luconi, 16-17.
Italian affairs, albeit of a less political nature. Nonetheless, the success of dropping their hyphenated national identity may have reflected ongoing assimilation trends, but if Luconi is correct, also shows that the Italian-American community knew what expectations the government and American society at large held for them and accordingly performed their role during their war to mutual benefit.

The function of the Italian-American press was to determine community action and behavior, but also to ensure that the community was aware of these roles. This was accomplished by the heightened and patriotic tone of its articles, but also included directly publishing government orders and desires. One example from April 1942 in *Ordine Nuovo* is an Italian translation of a letter from President Roosevelt to the Armed Forces.\(^{90}\) If the English articles of the newspapers were printed for younger generations and for non-Italian readers evaluating the community, the translation of direct government communications indicates that they wanted the messages of cooperation and patriotism transmitted to the entire Italian-American community and not just the English readers. In this particular instance, the language of Roosevelt accurately reflects that of the newspaper: the war is in defense of American freedom against tyranny. He also references the brave soldiers that have defended this cause through the country’s history. Furthermore, the soldiers he is addressing will continue to do so victoriously with the support of the entire nation.

However, while most of the articles focus on the unwavering support of Italian Americans and the self-evident virtues of the country, there is some mention of discrimination and issues of citizenship. One such article in *Ordine Nuovo* comments that the discriminatory practices in American hiring are able to neutralize the war efforts.

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\(^{90}\) "Lettera Del Presidente Alle Forze Armate," *Ordine Nuovo*, 18 April 1942
Based on a report by Mark F. Ethridge, the Chairman of the Presidential Fair Employment Practice Committee, it calls for the end of prejudice made on the basis of race, religion, color or national origin. The Committee was formed in June 1941 under this goal, mainly as a response by Roosevelt to the prospect of more protests by African-American laborers, led by the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. While Italians are never explicitly mentioned and the committee was thought to be ineffective, its mention demonstrates that there was war time discrimination existent in American society and the editors felt it relevant to the Italian-American community. Particularly of note is discrimination based on national origin, which would have been one of the foremost concerns of Italian-Americans. The discriminatory behavior is also compared to the racism and prejudice of Hitler and Japan, to ‘indulge’ in this behavior approaches treason in a war against non-democratic ideals.

In addition to publishing this critique of American discrimination as detrimental to the war effort, another Ordine Nuovo article from 1942 is titled “American Unity and Our Foreign Born Citizens” and turns the criticism towards America’s treatment of immigrants. While the employment practices article borrowed heavily from Ethridge it was written in Italian, this article appears in the English section and is entirely the work of Harold B. Hoskins. It was first published in ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, in January 1942. According to the ANNALS, at the time of writing Hoskins was on special duty with Department of State, informing on the

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91 “La Discriminazione Negli Impieghi Può Neutralizzare Gli Sforzi Della Guerra,” Ordine Nuovo, 21 March 1942
93 “American Unity and our Foreign Born Citizens,” Ordine Nuovo, 11 July 1942

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"activities of "free movements" of foreign political leaders. (not sure what to do with this information) In the same volume, the ANNALS published another article "Italian Immigrants and Their Children" which speaks equally well of the current and potential contributions of immigrants to American society. It also says that while there is a small minority of fascists, they are "impotent" and that most Italian-Americans have been neither fascist or anti-fascist, but simply non-fascist. Like Hoskins, this article is written by a government worker, Edward Corsi, who was Chairman of the Enemy Alien Hearing Board for the Southern District of New York and former commissioner of immigration and naturalization at Ellis Island.

Both Ethridge and Hoskin's articles present American society through a non-Italian perspective. The publication of these articles shows agreement with their points, but without the validation of a non-Italian, but American observation it is questionable whether the same sentiments would have been published out of fear of public dissent that could undermine the patriotic image the organization was cultivating. Tapping into this Italian-American mistrust and fear of nonconformity, Ethridge writes:

"Americans have a human but dangerous tendency to fall into two errors in dealing with foreign born citizens in wartime. We tend, on the positive side, to forget their vast potential contribution not only to our economy but to our morale; and we tend even more unfortunately to succumb to such hysterical distrust of the disloyal minority among them that we not only leave needless scars on the loyalty of millions of good fellow Americans but suffer vain and utter regret ourselves after the war."

As authors such as Luconi and Mangione have argued, Italian-Americans experienced this "hysterical distrust" when they were subjected to largely unjustified suspicion as part of a fifth column threat. Newspapers such as Ordine Nuovo, La Libera Parola and the

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94 Ibid
institutions and politicians they represented tried to address the first error of forgetfulness by documenting Italian-American contributions in the form of war bonds, enlistments and other efforts. The second error of distrust they combated through insistence of their patriotism and singular American national loyalty to the extent that Italian-Americans, at least rhetorically, dropped their dual national loyalties for declaration of a single American identity and patriotism during WWII.
SECTION III: THE CULTURAL PLURALISM OF WWII
AND ITALIAN-AMERICAN IDENTITY

In addition to action and community based evidence of their American loyalty, Italian-Americans began to use the dualistic nature of their identity as proof of their support. They created a story that their hyphenated identity was not based on dual national identities and loyalties, but that as immigrants they were a fundamental part of American history and character and thus of unquestionable national loyalty. Their hyphenated or dual identity became an indicator of their patriotism. While motivated by the war circumstances, this argument did present a contrast to what would have been permissible for immigrant identity prior to WWII, when assimilationist views predominated.95 These views were prevalent during WWI, when for example, during a 1915 speech, former President Theodore Roosevelt famously declared that “there is no room in this country for hyphenated Americans.”96 He further explained:

When I refer to hyphenated Americans, I do not refer to naturalized Americans. Some of the very best Americans I have ever known were naturalized Americans, Americans born abroad. But a hyphenated American is not an American at all... The one absolutely certain way of bringing this nation to ruin, of preventing all possibility of its continuing to be a nation at all, would be to permit it to become a tangle of squabbling nationalities, an intricate knot of German-Americans, Irish-Americans, English-Americans, French-Americans, Scandinavian-Americans or Italian-Americans, each preserving its separate nationality, each at heart feeling more sympathy with Europeans of that nationality, than with the other citizens of the American Republic... There is no

such thing as a hyphenated American who is a good American. The only man who is a good American is the man who is an American and nothing else.\

A fundamental aspect of the Italian-American rhetoric during WWII was to prove that they did not feel more sympathy for Italians than for Americans. However, their publications and events oppose Roosevelt's claim that the only good American is one who does not have a hyphenated identity by arguing that their value as American citizens was not lessened by the dual identity arising from their heritage. Furthermore, while Roosevelt only discussed hyphenization for the unnaturalized, the Italian American community projected a hyphenate identity onto all of its members, including those born in the U.S. What allowed Italian-Americans to present a dual identity during WWII was a change from the assimilationist view espoused during WWI to a new definition of American identity and citizenship. Without these new ideas on how immigrants should fit into American society an Italian American identity predicated on American national identity and Italian cultural heritage would have been difficult to maintain and promote.

The Limits of Cultural Pluralism

As the conflict in Europe escalated and America finally joined the war, the propaganda produced portrayed the war as one of ideals and values. If the U.S. wanted to distinguish itself from the racially prejudiced and undemocratic regimes it was fighting, it had to promote ideas of equality and racial harmony that not only demonstrated American diversity but American unity. Furthermore, these American values became coterminous with democracy, which allowed for the diversity that was seen as "the

97 Ibid
essence of the American system.” Within this setting, the idea of cultural pluralism for the U.S. ascended over assimilation in public and intellectual discourse. Originally coined in 1924 by philosopher Horace Kallen, cultural pluralism was developed as a contrast to assimilation and Americanization and envisioned the U.S. as a federation of ethnic nationalities rather than having its own nationality. However, as Philip Gleason explains, this idealistic notion took on a more amorphous meaning by the time it gained popularity in WWII. In this version of cultural pluralism, diversity was good and to be prized – unless it was divisive.

In addition to these limits, Gleason felt that “the real mystification created by this kind of usage was that it effectively concealed the fact that so-called cultural pluralism was predicated upon, and made possible by, a high degree of consensus. Ostensibly it repudiated assimilation; in fact it embodied assimilation because it assumed that everyone agreed about basic matters that were actually distinctive to the United States”. According to Gleason the importance of these values was their distinction to the U.S. and not their universality. Thus what ethnic acceptance was allowed under the banner of cultural pluralism was still relegated by certain norms and was not true diversity.

To further complicate the matter, Gleason also identifies that during the war period another aspect that countered any true cultural plurality was the expression “American identity” was used synonymously with “American character”. This character found development in the immigrant experience and is why Gleason thinks that for the period’s social scientists, “the ‘ethnic’ – that is, the immigrant or person of immigrant
derivation – is a prototypically American figure, not because of any distinctiveness of cultural heritage, but for exactly the opposite reason, namely because he exhibits in extreme degree the “character structure” produced by the American experience of change, mobility, and loss of contact with the past.”

Italian-Americans certainly went to lengths to prove the viability of their American character, but what is interesting is that they did not always identify their character as coming from an immigrant experience, but as directly coming from Italian values. This character helped advance civilization and America through figures like Columbus, and was apparent in modern Italian-Americans but always as a vestige of their Italianess, not a product of their experience. Of course they may have been allowed to create this distinction as long as the overall message of having American character was heard.

Nancy C. Carnevale offers a similar view of cultural pluralism and WWII, but as applied to Italian language and Italian-American identity. She argues that the war hastened the demise of the use of Italian and brought about increased assimilation of Italian-American identity with this loss of expression. Carnevale treats the wartime language of cultural pluralism as superficial and with propagandistic aims, while in truth the society was accepting Italian Americans to new degrees but like Gleason argued, doing so “within clearly circumscribed limits.”

She further writes that the “case of Italian Americans during World War I provides an example of how the dominant culture can delimit the construction and expression of ethnic identity. The Italian language was the locus of conflicting interpretations and provides a site where the erosion of outward

102 Gleason, 508.
identification with an ethnic identity, due in part to wartime pressures, is visible.\textsuperscript{104} "The Italian-Americans of Philadelphia do demonstrate a consciousness of the dominant American culture and a concerted effort to meet the expectations this culture has created for them. They also show a deep understanding of the American character that Gleason describes and a facility to implement themselves in that specific American narrative, however contrived that identification may be. However while this all demonstrates a clear response to the veiled assimilationist call of WWII, they also incorporated what strands of cultural pluralism did exist to provide validation and space for the Italian dimensions of their identity.

This reconciliation of American and Italian identity is exemplified by the community's insistence that their hyphenated identity made them better American citizens. Richard Alba describes the impact of WWII as being bigger than socioeconomic changes; it had effects on American perceptions of nationality and national origin. One result of special significance was the conflation of ethnic identity with national loyalty.\textsuperscript{105}

An article from \textit{Ordine Nuovo} in 1942 written by Frank Carbone, the Grand Venerable of Washington State on the need for American loyalty and service to the OSIA demonstrates this relationship between ethnic identity and Americaness:

And we need courage; courage to be what we are: Italians in America, to be identified as such, so that we can perform twice as much with the double ideal of the pride of our race and the love of our Country. Today, more than ever, our Order needs to be strong; today, more than ever, it must give proof of the value of Italians to America; today, more than ever, it must preserve, and consolidate, and marshall the virtues of that part of the Italian race which has been transplanted on this new continent, that one of the greatest Italians: Christopher Columbus, first opened up to the white race."\textsuperscript{106}

\textsuperscript{104} Carnevale, 19.
\textsuperscript{106} "Loyalty and Courage," \textit{Ordine Nuovo}, 21 February 1942
This article unmistakably shows that the Italian-Americans addressed are American in national loyalty; it is “our Country”. The Italian dimension of identity is reduced to an abstract, racial component that is looked upon with the same pride it held for fascist supporters. However, the virtues of the Italian race have been “transplanted” and not created from their experience as immigrants; these Italian qualities distinguish them from other immigrants. The article does also indicate some possible hostility towards Italian-Americans and expectation of hesitancy in embracing their identity. For example, Carbone states that his members need courage to be Italians in America, implying that there is some difficulty in that task. Another interesting aspect is the racializing of Italians, external groups had done this to a discriminatory effect but here they are embracing their race as a value to America and not a stigma. Nonetheless, despite being a discrete race they are still part of the white race and so further commendable for their identity and inherent values. If it were not for the continued presence of discrimination and pressure to be part of the American main stream, being of an Italian race would have been sufficient without reminder or aspiration to belonging in the white race. The appearance of this discussion of Italian racial values in an article on loyalty and courage in the war effort shows a desire to offer Italian-American identity as compatible and moreover integral to being a good American.

The article by Harold B. Hoskins published the same year as Carbone’s article expresses the wartime ideal of cultural pluralism, but is still critical of hyphenate identities. He says that the American ideal should not be expressed in terms of a melting pot because of “its somewhat mournful implication of uniformity, but rather in terms of an orchestra, in which each racial group, like an orchestral choir, contributes its special,
Hoskins supported the multicultural imperative of cultural pluralism because of the diversity it allowed, fitting Gleason and Carnevale's description of the period thought. In this American "orchestra", Italian-Americans would play their part to the benefit of all of the country and in return be allowed to maintain their ethnic affiliations that marked their difference from other groups. However, Hoskins does not seem to accept the labeling of immigrants as hyphenated Americans. He says that the contributions of foreign-born citizens "should be made not as hyphenated Americans of some special racial group but simply and fully as Americans, given on an equal basis with all other elements in the community. We must not welcome their contribution with condescension or emphasize in any way their points of difference from ourselves." Furthermore, the sympathies of immigrants to their country of origin must be recognized, but they should not be classified as "hyphenated Americans" or that this interest has any bearing on their loyalty to the U.S.

Hoskins first statement that immigrant contribution should be seen only as American does support the idea of unity based on American ideals that Gleason and Carnevale discussed. However, the Italian-American press routinely contradicts this and themselves when they try to show their contribution as Italian-Americans and as Americans. In their rhetoric, the two are the same when it comes to matters of patriotism. Perhaps that is the point that Hoskins wanted to make, that to focus on the ethnic dimension takes away from the fact that they are American. Yet even if they are American in national identity, the fact that they are a specific type of American remains and emphasizing the ethnic aspects along with the American was important to these groups. His second point probably evolved from the earlier derogatory use of hyphenated Americans.

\footnote{107 "American Unity and our Foreign Born Citizens," \textit{Ordine Nuovo}, 11 July 1942}
Americans and so Hoskins wished to separate what he saw in immigrant groups from this unloyal, divisive definition. It also may be a matter of perspective, Hoskins as part of the American mainstream sees these groups as American, it is not his place to emphasize or comment on their ethnic aspects. Conversely, Italian-Americans were left to do this for themselves and control the depiction and utility of their Italian identity in comparison to their American patriotism. This may be another reason why *Ordine Nuovo* chose to publish this article: a non-Italian was only discussing their loyalty but still giving them the ability to pursue a hybrid identity through his support of an orchestra model of America. Despite all of this there still is some inconsistency with Hoskins' stands, if he wants a U.S. built on incorporation of difference, why will he not allow recognition of that difference? He is putting forth the limited cultural pluralism of WWII: the language of diversity and acceptance but the assumption that there is no actual difference and cannot be when it comes to matters of patriotism and loyalty.

*Assimilation and Fears of Cultural Loss*

The presence of cultural pluralism, however limited, was useful to Italian-Americans who had concerns about the loss of Italian cultural tradition to assimilation. For instance a 1941 article in *La Libera Parola* on the Italian theatre in America expressed concern over the decline of the theatre as more Italian-Americans felt shame after facing the contempt in which native Americans held everything Italian. The article concluded with a description of the Common Ground publication of the Common Council For American Unity, and its encouragement of immigrant groups to maintain

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108 "The Italian Theatre in America," *La Libera Parola*, 1 March 1941
their arts so that they may enrich American life. According to Gleason, the Council was created in 1940 to foster unity and understanding among Americans from their shared ideology amid a call for tolerance and cultural pluralism.\textsuperscript{109} The article concludes with a quote from a writer; “There can be no happiness, no real joy for the man who is traditori to the past. He does not become the American, and he is no more the Italian, something in the middle, no good for himself and no good for the country.”\textsuperscript{110} The hybrid Italian-American identity may seem to occupy this middle ground, but in the way it was constructed it became a solution to the conflicting desires of Americanization and cultural maintenance. It did this by allowing for remembrance and connection to the past while becoming American because it visibly pursued these two strands of identity. The man described pursues neither and so suffers for it because he does not get the benefits of being American and the corresponding Italian values and cultural accomplishments that strengthen the overall identity and its ability to create good citizens. This quote taken along with other evidence of the community’s strong American identity demonstrates that Italian-Americans did want to Americanize to a degree. However, this desire was apparent before WWII when it coexisted with Italian identity that was acceptable because of the success of Mussolini. It is likely that it did not increase or decrease, but that the circumstances of WWII made Americanization a need in order for self-protection when the Italian identity became problematic. This quote would also seem to indicate that for an Italian-American, complete assimilation is impossible.

This conflict over how assimilated or unassimilated Italian-Americans should be is also represented in James R. Barret and David Roediger’s work on the Italian concepts

\textsuperscript{109} Gleason, 503.
\textsuperscript{110} “The Italian Theatre in America,” \textit{La Libera Parola}, 1 March 1941
of cafone and medagan. According to their definitions, a cafone is a boor who is resistant to assimilation and clings to the old country, making life difficult. They are “too Italian”, while a medagon (a corruption of ‘American’) has assimilated too much and forgotten ethnic traditions and sensibilities. They use these terms to illustrate the community dilemma of embracing both American and Italian identity so that they balance each other and one identity is not lost for the other. The poles of Italian identity visible in the assimilation of the medagon to the resistance of the cafone show that a compromising, inclusive identity needed to be placed between the two extremes. For instance, when national loyalty and ideological support for Italy were dropped for their American counterparts the medagon concerns can be seen in the desire that the dominant version of Italian-American identity did not lose all Italian features. Conversely, this move towards assimilation had to occur to augment community claims of patriotism. Both were contradicting pulls in the community that had to be addressed, but this meant that the resulting Italian-American identity was a product of negotiation between the two and the different leanings that its members and institutions promoted.

The Cultural Role of Italian-American Organizations

Inside this identity negotiation, cultural organizations stood in addition to the press as important for defining and creating acceptable expressions of Italian culture and American patriotism for the community. In their records there is recognition of the need for wartime conformity and of the presence of multiculturalism and both are used as

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reference points for the goals and function of the organizations. For example, a 1943 pamphlet outlining the need for Italo-American women’s clubs wrote:

“This work is particularly important at this moment when we want to keep up national moral, when women are needed for the home defense and also to prepare for the post-war in which we want America to be a more perfect democracy integrating into its rich culture the culture of all those who compose it. The Italians with their vitality, spontaneity, and faithfulness have much to give to America.”

This pamphlet views Italian-American women’s clubs as part of keeping up national moral so they are both servicing and included in mainstream American society. The pamphlet also describes the clubs as a way of integrating immigrant women in American culture and fostering democratic ideals. The clubs are organized by nationality so that the women are more likely to come, but the eventual goal is to get them into mixed groups. It also notes that these groups in no way impede them from becoming Americans but are to help them become an integral part of American life. However, the desire to “prepare for the postwar” shows limits to any assimilationist drive. It seems that the women need to be Americanized, but only so much that they become loyal, productive citizens. The idea that their innate Italian qualities can remain to augment their new American ideals appears here, but unlike other works that parallel Italian and American qualities, this pamphlet sees Italian values as distinctive and in need of being contributed to American society. Thus, this pamphlet suggests that a multicultural realization of American culture is not about allowing other cultures to survive, but about strengthening an overarching American culture by “integrating into its rich culture the culture of all those who compose it”. The message of inclusion is there, it is necessary for “a more perfect democracy” yet because it appears with the pamphlets support of Americanization it is not true cultural pluralism, but a call for a change in American culture through immigrant

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112 Elba F. Gurzau Papers, Box 17, Folder 1; The Historical Society of Pennsylvania
groups, but only those and in certain values who bring it towards some greater American ideal and so is not truly accommodating.

However, immigrant groups were able to keep aspect of cultural that went beyond abstract values and even if celebrating those values, still served to mark difference from the American culture at large. The Italian-Americans made strong arguments that being Italian and being American were compatible and were well suited dual identities as long as Italian political and nationalist loyalties remained subservient to the American. However, if as the women's club pamphlet suggested, Italian-American and American culture were merging and Italian cultural celebration was also celebration of American patriotism, by what justification did distinct Italian celebrations occur? Of course, for Italian-Americans, holding onto aspects of culture would make sense practically and sentimentally and fears of loss of culture would be expressed, but during WWII how did maintenance of this culture receive treatment by the community's institutions, and moreover, how was it placed into the larger developing narrative of Italian-American identity? One possible avenue to explore this is by looking at the activities and messages of the author of the women's clubs pamphlet, Eliza F. Gurzau.

Born in New York City in 1920 to Italian immigrants, Gurzau studied in Italy before coming back to New York to study under influential educational reformist Leonard Covello and involving herself in Italian-American women's organizations. In 1942 she moved to Philadelphia to accept a position as activities director at the Philadelphia International Institute.\(^{113}\) Thus at the time of the publication of the pamphlet she would have been in Philadelphia, but presumably writing based on her observations in New York, although her message would have been applicable in both cities. As late as

\(^{113}\) Register to the Gurzau Papers, HSP
1948, when Gurzau was still affiliated with the Institute, it was described as having strong relations with Philadelphia’s Italo-Americans as a non-political organization devoted to “loyal Americanism” and spreading this among “new and old stock Americans”. The language of spreading Americanism to immigrants is echoed in her pamphlet and would show why she was placed at the Institute, although there is no indication of her opinions on the Institute itself.¹¹⁴ Like in New York, in Philadelphia Gurzau became well known among the local Italian-American leadership and chaired the Philadelphia Committee for Italian Relief for its first three years. Gurzau demonstrates a voice within the community that supported Italian-American institutions, but mainly for how they integrated and strengthened the community as Americans. However, she still supported Italian culture as long as it came with an understanding of American citizenship. Gurzau’s vision of Italian-Americans is a product of the pressures of the war and the Italian components cultural pluralism allowed and thus is an example of the thoughts of a community leader that would then be transmitted to the community.

The tensions in her own position are demonstrated in a 1943 letter sent to her by Julia Monelli, a former member of a club with Gurzau who was prompted to write after seeing her mentioned in an article in New York’s Il Progresso Italian-American newspaper. In the letter Monelli writes “It is needless to say that in spite of the unrest going on today, I am still proud that I am of Italian heritage, when there are people like you who try to enlighten and broaden our Italians from too cloistered a life and for which I believe makes for a better understanding and happier life.”¹¹⁵ This one line references being Italian as a problem, but still as a source of pride – when it is displayed correctly.

¹¹⁵ Gurzaua Papers, 14:7
Gurzau and Monelli want Italians to leave their cultural seclusion, their "cloistered" life in Little Italy and integrate into the American mainstream because it will benefit them. They are proud of an Americanized heritage, not a full Italian identity that others possess. This negative view of Italians reflects the discrimination of the period, but also indicates that to community elites there was a 'correct' way of being Italian. Promoting this identity was the job of Gurzau and other institutions and was the basis for the Italian-American identity that WWII created.

The DaVinci Art Alliance of Philadelphia was one organization that tried to promote an acceptable version of Italian culture. It showcased the place of Italian talent in American culture and so represents a continuation of the theme espoused by the community of the importance of Italian culture to American progress. The Alliance held exhibitions of work, largely by Italian-Americans, including one in December 1944. On this particular exhibit, an artist was quoted by the Germantown Courier article as saying: "We're proud of being Americans and we're proud of our Italian heritage. We want to show you what happens when painters whose forebears once produced great masterpieces, paint in America." Like Monelli, this artist is proud of his Italian heritage but identifies as an American. The hybrid identity exists because the Italian heritage is an aspect and distinguisher of his American identity; Italian-American is a subset of American identity. There is still pride in that heritage, but it is based on cultural accomplishment and the artist wants to extend that accomplishment to America. An unidentified newspaper clipping about the same exhibition sheds further light into the role of the Alliance:

116 Article Clipping from the Germantown Courier 21 December 1944, Da Vinci Art Alliance Papers, Box 1, Folder 1; HSP
"And one of these reasons we like best is that the exhibit is a reminder – it helps us recall the diverse and heterogeneous origins of American culture. The war has emphasized U.S. unity (culturally as well as politically) to such an extent that it has obscured the irremovable fact that our culture, so far as we have a distinctive American culture, is a blend of traditions brought to us from foreign lands and gathered together in our "melting pot". Nor has the melting pot influence succeeded in erasing completely the distinctive characteristics of the original components of this culture. And it is doubtful if we ever want such a thing to happen. Exhibitions like that at Woodmere remind us that it has not yet happened, and give us a glimpse at the various ingredients that make up American culture."\textsuperscript{117}

Since the author and source are unidentifiable, this opinion cannot be attributed to any group, but it nonetheless provides interesting commentary on American culture during the time of the exhibition. For instance, the author contests positive views of American unity and the "melting pot" model. To them, actively reminding people of cultural difference is important because the conformity experienced during the war has undone markers of diversity. Furthermore, to deny this difference is to obscure the true American culture and character that has been built by immigration. The rhetoric demonstrated by the Italian-American community would support this point that ethnic values and contributions are essential to the U.S. culture and thus being an ethnic American was a safe and publicly supported identity. Conversely, the article’s author does not herald the war as a time of patriotic ethnic expression and multiculturalism, but rather as a moment of erasure. Both of these stances want to see cultural pluralism because it is good for American culture, yet they disagree on whether this has been limited or developed by the wartime environment. Despite these different approaches to the place and permissibility of ethnic culture in American culture, the outcome was support for the maintenance of

\textsuperscript{117} Ibid
ethnic culture. For Italian-Americans in Philadelphia, the Da Vinci Art Alliance was one avenue for this to occur.
CONCLUSION

The emergence of cultural pluralism and multicultural acceptance during WWII was an important part of the development of Italian-American identity. Without the place for ethnic culture within American culture this permitted, the Italian-American community would not have been able to maintain such a public and articulated ethnic identification. However, as Gleason and Carnevale have shown, there were severe limits to American cultural pluralism. Italian-Americans felt these restrictions to their acceptance and so despite the presence of multicultural dialogue, the reality was they still had expected roles to perform to indicate their loyalty. What changed was being Italian-American became a central part of the performance. A dual identity had evolved out of the attempts of the community’s organizations to best adapt themselves to an evolving society by presenting a meditated and somewhat idealized version of Italian-American identity that found purchase among members and in WWII America. What is notable about the case of Italian-Americans in Philadelphia is that without the heightened demands and trials of WWII that required an active promotion of American identity, the development of the dual Italian-American identity may have had a different outcome. This patriotic mobilization, coupled with the wartime changes in American society that allowed the community to create space for ethnic culture under the same banner of American identity, are what combined to produce a hybrid Italian-American identity in Philadelphia that illustrates the development of immigrant identities into that of an ethnic American.
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