My uncle came to the railroad station with me, though I begged him not to. His eyes were moist as he embraced me and, I suppose, he sensed my discomfort, my disillusionment with him.

"I'm just a foolish old man," he said, "fumbling my way through life. I wanted to show you, to tell you. . . . Well, no matter. You're the last of my people I shall see, and so forgive me my tears . . . my inadequacy. I've always wanted to help others, you know, and I'm afraid I've never been much help."

Then, as I was about to board the train, he grasped my arm. "Try not to hate him too much, Daniele," he said. "At one time many of us loved him. Surely he's not abandoned God completely. I know God has not abandoned him."

He seemed a pathetic, lonely, bewildered figure as I last saw him raising his hand in a final good-by gesture, and I was filled with a sudden remorse for the estrangement I'd imposed upon us during the latter part of my visit. It was I, after all, who had forced him to tell me of my father, and because I was unwilling to accept the implications of my discovery, antagonistic to his attitude toward the man who became my father, was it fair to release my antagonism upon him?

The trip back up north was long and depressing, and by the time I arrived in Trieste, I knew my period of atonement was over and I went to visit Madalena.

Richard Gambino

From *Blood of My Blood: The Dilemma of the Italian-Americans*

Although I tried to explain the basis of familial devotion, she seemed psychologically incapable of understanding such feelings. Thus the irony, an Americano of Sicilian ancestry explaining the ways of the not so distant past Mezzogiorno to an uncomprehending native Italian, even if a Northern Italian. Little wonder, then, that to most Americans the Chinese character is probably more scrutable than that of millions of their own countrymen who are Italian-Americans.

This background of the *ordine della famiglia* helps illuminate the confused situation of Italian-Americans today. As all of us are confronted with the conflicts of our loyalty to a sovereign state vs. our cosmopolitan aspirations, so the Italian-American has found himself in the dilemma of reconciling the psychological sovereignty of his people with the aspirations and demands of being American.

To the immigrant generation of Italians, the task was clear. Hold to the sovereignty of the old ways and thereby seal out the threats of the new "strangers," the American society that surrounded them. The complicated customs and institutions of la famiglia had been marvelously effective in neutralizing the influence of a succession of aliens in the Mezzogiorno. In the old land, the people survived and developed their own identity over centuries not so much by their periodic violent rebellions, a futile approach because of the small size, exposed location, and limited resources of Southern Italy. Instead they endured and built their culture by sealing out the influence of strangers.

The sealing medium was not military or even physical. It was at once an antisocial mentality and a supremely social psychology, for it formed the very stuff of contadino society. It constituted the foundation and hidden steel beams of a society that historically had been denied the luxury of more accessible (and vulnerable) foundations or superstructure. This is a reason for the contadino's famous pride. L'ordine della famiglia was a system of social attitudes, values, and customs that had proven to be impenetrable to the *sfruttamento* (exploitation) of any stranieri, no matter how powerful their weapons or clever their devices. But like all defenses, this life style had exacted costs in the old land. These were the vexing social and economic problems that Italians still lump together under the terms *problema del Mezzogiorno* or *questione meridionale,* meaning "the Southern problem." The problem became catastrophic after the founding of the Italian nation in 1860–1870. And [. . .] millions of contadini were forced by the specter of starvation to immigrate to other lands.

Because it had worked for so long in the old land in providing them with stability, order, and security, the ordine della famiglia was held to tenaciously by the immigrants in the new country. Thus the immigrants were able to achieve their twofold goals. One, they found bread and work. No matter how dismal and exploitive, it was better than the starvation they fled. And, two, they resisted the encroachments of la via nuova into their own lives. In their terms, their audacious adventure has to be judged a success. But the price in the United States was very high. It included isolation from the larger society.

The immigrants' children, the second generation, faced a challenge more difficult to overcome. They could not maintain the same degree of isolation. Indeed, they had to cope with American institutions, first schools, then a variety of economic, military, and cultural environments.

In so doing, what was a successful social strategy for their parents became a crisis of conflict for them. Circumstances split their personalities into conflicting halves. Despite parental attempts to shelter them from American culture, they attended the schools, learned the language, and confronted the culture.

It was a rending confrontation. The parents of the typical second-generation child ridiculed American institutions and sought to nurture in him la via vecchia. The father nurtured in his children (sons especially) a sense of mistrust and cynicism regarding the outside world. And the mother bound her children (not only daughters) to the home by making any aspirations to go beyond it seem somehow disloyal and shameful. Thus outward mobility was impeded.

The great intrinsic difference between American and Southern Italian ways was experienced as an agonized dichotomy by the second generation in their youth. They lived twisted between two worlds, and the strain was extreme. The school, the media, and the employer taught them, implicitly and sometimes perhaps inadvertently, that Italian ways were inferior, while the immigrant community of their parents constantly sought to reinforce them.

Immigrants used "American" as a word of reproach to their children. For example, take another incident from my childhood. Every Wednesday afternoon, I left P.S. 142 early and went to the local parish church for religious instruction under New York State's Released Time Program. Once I asked one of my religious teachers, an Italian-born nun, a politely phrased but skeptical question about the existence of hell. She flew into a rage, slapped my face, and called me a *piccolo Americano,* a "little American." Thus the process of acculturation for second-generation children was an agonizing affair in which they had not only to "adjust" to two worlds, but to compromise between their irreconcilable demands. This was achieved by a sane path of least resistance.

Most of the second generation accepted the old heritage of devotion to family and sought minimal involvement with the institutions of America. This meant going to school but remaining alienated from it. One then left school at a minimum age and got a job that was "secure" but made no troubling demands on one's personality, or the family life in which it was imbedded.

Another part of the second generation's compromise was the rejection of Italian ways which were not felt vital to the family code. They resisted learning higher Italian culture and becoming literate in the language, and were ill-equipped to teach them to the third generation.

Small numbers of the second generation carried the dual rebellion to one extreme or the other. Some became highly "Americanized," giving their time, energy, and loyalty to schools and companies and becoming estranged from the clan. The price they paid for siding with the American culture in the culture-family conflict was an amorphous but strong sense of guilt and a chronic identity crisis not quite compensated for by the places won in middle-class society. At the other extreme, some rejected American culture totally in favor of lifelong immersion in the old ways, many which through time and circumstance virtually fossilized in their lifetimes, leaving them underdeveloped and forlorn.

The tortured compromise of the second-generation Italian-American left him permanently in lower-middle-class America. He remains in the minds of Americans a stereotype born of their half understanding of him and constantly reinforced by the media. Oliver Wendell Holmes said a page of history is worth a volume of logic. There are few serious studies of Italian-Americans, particularly current ones. It is easy to see why this has left accounts of their past, their present, and their future expressed almost exclusively in the dubious logic of stereotypes.

In the popular image, the second-generation Italian-American is seen as a "good employee," i.e., steady, reliable, but having little "initiative" or "dynamism." He is a good "family man," loyal to his wife, and a loving father vaguely yearning for his children to do better in their lifetimes, but not equipped to guide or push them up the social ladder. Thus, Americans glimpse the compromise solution of this generation's conflict. But the image remains superficial, devoid of depth or nuances.

We come, thus, to the compound dilemma of third- and fourth-generation Italian-Americans, who are now mostly young adults and children with parents who are well into their middle age or older. The difference between the problems of the second generation and those of the third is great—more a quantum jump than a continuity.

Perhaps a glimpse at my own life will serve as an illustration. I was raised simultaneously by my immigrant grandparents and by my parents, who were second generation, notwithstanding my father's boyhood in Italy. So I am at one time both second and third generation. I learned Italian and English from birth, but have lost the ability to speak Italian fluently. In this, my third-generation character has won out, although I remain of two generations, and thus perhaps have an advantage of double perspective.

My grandfather had a little garden in the back yard of the building in which we all lived in Brooklyn. In two senses, it was a distinctly Sicilian garden. First, it was the symbolic fulfillment of every contadino's dream to own his own land. Second, what was grown in the garden was a far cry from the typical American garden. In our garden were plum tomatoes, squash, white grapes on an overhead vine, a prolific peach

tree, and a fig tree! As a child, I helped my grandfather tend the fig tree. Because of the inhospitable climate of New York, every autumn the tree had to be carefully wrapped in layers of newspaper. These in turn were covered with waterproof linoleum and tarpaulin. The tree was topped with an inverted, galvanized bucket for final protection. But the figs it produced were well worth the trouble. Picked and washed by my own hand, they were as delicious as anything I have eaten since. And perhaps the difference between second- and third-generation Italian-Americans is that members of the younger group have not tasted those figs. What they inherit from their Italian background has become so distant as to be not only devalued but quite unintelligible to them. It has been abstracted, removing the possibility of their accepting it or rebelling against it in any satisfying way.

I was struck by this recently when one of my students came to my office to talk with me. Her problems are typical of those I have heard from Italian-American college students. Her parents are second-generation Americans. Her father is a fireman and her mother a housewife. Both want her to "get an education" and "do better." Yet both constantly express fears that education will "harm her morals." She is told by her father to be proud of her Italian background, but her consciousness of being Italian is limited to the fact that her last name ends in a vowel. Although she loves her parents and believes they love her, she has no insight into their thoughts, feelings, or values. She is confused by the conflicting signals given to her by them: "Get an education, but don't change"; "go out into the larger world but don't become part of it"; "grow, but remain within the image of the 'house-plant' Sicilian girl." In short, maintain that difficult balance of conflicts which is the second-generation's life style.

When the third-generation person achieves maturity, he finds himself in a peculiar situation. A member of one of the largest minority groups in the country, he feels isolated, with no affiliation with or affinity for other Italian-Americans. This young person often wants and needs to go beyond the minimum security his parents sought in the world. In a word, he is more ambitious. But he has not been given family or cultural guidance upon which this ambition can be defined and pursued. Ironically, this descendant of immigrants despised by the old WASP establishment embodies one of the latter's cherished myths. He rationalizes his identity crisis by attempting to see himself as purely American, a blank slate upon which his individual experiences in American culture will inscribe what are his personality and his destiny.

But it is a myth that is untenable psychologically and sociologically. Although he usually is diligent and highly responsible, the other elements needed for a powerful personality are paralyzed by his pervasive identity crisis. His ability for sustained action with autonomy, initiative, self-confidence and assertiveness is undermined by his yearning for ego integrity. In addition, the third generation's view of itself as a group of atomistic individuals leaves it unorganized, isolated, diffident, and thus powerless in a society of power blocs.

To Italian immigrants and their descendants today, work involves more than questions of economics. Work is regarded as moral training for the young. And among adults, it is regarded as a matter of pride. To work is to show evidence that one has become a man or a woman, a full member of the family. So strong is this ethic that it governs behavior quite apart from considerations of monetary gain. There is a dialect saying I heard among the people of Red Hook that is indicative: *Poveri si, ma perchè lagnusi?* (Poor yes, but why lazy?). I have often since heard Italian-Americans repeat the gist of the saying, even those who no longer remember the old language or who never learned it. It is a moral wrong not to be productively occupied. Even the unemployed should find something to do, something to care for. Like all Italians, the contadino enjoyed relaxation—the feeling of *dolce far niente* internationalized by modern Italy's jet set. But relaxation only in the context of first having pulled one's weight, and preferably more.

The sense of pride for something done by oneself and for one's family, whether building a brick wall, a small business, or making a fine meal, is essential to the Italian-American psychology. It cannot be overlooked if we are to understand the kinds of work done by Italian-Americans, the kinds of work they have avoided, and the types of work in which they have not succeeded. They have avoided work where the product or result is abstracted, removed from the worker. And as a group, they have been conspicuously unsuccessful as corporation executives, as "team men." They have sought a proximate relation between the individual and the end result of his labor, whether it be digging a ditch, running a restaurant, nursing a patient, playing a musical instrument, filling a pharmaceutical prescription, or teaching a child. In short, the pride that comes from seeing and feeling one's efforts and skills mingled with some result. The Italian-American seeks to do something the result of which he can demonstrate to his family. Herein lies another important component of his pride. "With these hands I built *that* wall." "*This* is my restaurant." Etc.

The rewards of modern corporate life are abstract, ambiguous, anonymous, transcending any one individual. Indeed it is because

corporate life offers so few basic human satisfactions, and in fact demands service to the company to the exclusion of other personal satisfactions such as family life, that it compensates by offering great monetary rewards. The modern executive, as the sayings go, is "wedded to his company," and his "career is his hobby."

Following their traditional values, Italian-Americans have sought work where the rewards are more palpably human. This involves their sense of dignity, and it has nothing to do with keeping one's fingernails clean or even necessarily in "pride of craftsmanship." In an America where leisure and corporate status are prime values, and where the pride of the craftsman is nostalgically remembered, the Italian-American values instead his sheer labor first and his individual share of it as much as his skills. There is satisfaction felt in swinging a longshoreman's hook, or laying bricks, and feeling the relationship between the ache in one's arms and back after a day's work and the benefits from it to one's family. In work as in all dimensions of life, pride among Italian-Americans is much more visceral and passionate than sublimated and abstract.

The Italians replaced the Irish as the target of anti-Catholic hatred, Americans neither knowing nor caring about the differences in the Catholicism of the two ethnic groups, or that the American Catholic Church was in many regards unfriendly to the Italians. The ways of the Southern Italians were totally incomprehensible to Americans. In the twisted logic of bigotry, they were thus flagrantly "un-American." And Italians replaced all the earlier immigrant groups as targets of resentment about the competition of cheap labor.

The strain between Italians and the huge Know-Nothing sentiment in America came to a climax in a sensationally publicized series of incidents that took place in New Orleans in 1891. Italians were being recruited to labor on the farms of the American South. In particular, they worked in Mississippi and Louisiana during the sugar cane cutting season which Italians called *la zuccarata* after the Italian word for sugar, zucchero. Many of the immigrants settled in New Orleans, some temporarily, others permanently. Because the system of regionalism or companilismo was transplanted to the New World, Italians tended to settle among other Italians from the same regions of Italy. In New Orleans, 93 per cent of the Italians were from Sicily.

In a crime that remains unsolved to this day, New Orleans Police Superintendent David Hennessey was assassinated. Fueled by wild rumors that the clannish Sicilians belonged to a then mysterious secret criminal society called the Mafia, or, as it was then more commonly

called, the Black Hand, the city's Sicilians were made scapegoats. Hundreds of them were arrested without cause. They were treated to beatings in and out of jail [. . .].

The die was cast. From the early days of immigration from the Mezzogiorno until today, the nativistic American mentality, born of ignorance and nurtured in malice, has offered Italian-Americans a bigoted choice of two identities somewhat paralleling two imposed on blacks. Indeed, among the oldest epithets hurled against Italian-Americans was "black guinea," or "black dago," etc. Italians were considered an inferior *race,* as were blacks. Racists insist that blacks must be either childlike, laughing, Uncle Tom figures or sullen, incorrigible, violent, knife-wielding criminals. Similarly, the nativists and their descendants, the anti-Italian bigots of today, insist that Italian-Americans be either/or creatures. They must be either spaghetti-twirling, opera-bellowing buffoons in undershirts (as in the TV commercial with its famous line, "That'sa some spicy meatball") or swarthy, sinister hoods in garish suits, shirts, and ties. The criminal image imposed on Italian-Americans is in itself a major issue [. . .]. Even if the image did not exist, however, the "inferior race" slander would alone constitute a major problem for Italian-Americans.

The disposition toward insularity among Italian-Americans was ingrained over centuries of Mezzogiorno history. It has since been reinforced by American bigotry. However condescendingly euphemistic and polite the language of some bigots today, they still regard Italian-Americans as racially inferior "dagos," "wops," "guineas," and "greasers." Those who assume that such insults have disappeared, or only come from the uneducated, should read Glazer and Moynihan. They cite a comment made by a "world famous Yale professor of government." In 1969, upon hearing that an Italian-American had announced his candidacy for the office of mayor of New York City, the professor commented, "If Italians aren't actually an inferior race, they do the best imitation of one I've seen."

Also, we might recall well-known tests used to identify this prejudice. In one classic study, American college students were shown photographs of members of the opposite sex with what purported to be the name of each person on the photograph. The students were asked to evaluate the attractiveness of the person in the photograph. Then, sometime afterward, names were changed and the procedure repeated with the same students. The result was that those people who were regarded as "handsome" or "pretty" when they had names like "Smith" were found not attractive when their names were changed to Italian ones. (The same result was found using names commonly thought of as Jewish.)

The fear of foreign radicalism grew to hysteria. The fear culminated in two of the worst crises of the Italian-American saga—their mass deportation (along with immigrants of other nationalities) in the infamous Palmer raids, and the vicious antiradical, anti-Italian case of Sacco and Vanzetti, an affair that rocked the world and for years overshadowed all other factors in determining the path of Italian-Americans.

Alexander Mitchell Palmer was a political hack who gained power by currying favor with Woodrow Wilson, helping him to become President. In 1919, he was appointed Attorney General of the United States. During his three-year tenure of office, he raised a red scare to mammoth proportions by prosecuting and persecuting aliens, including Italians, as suspicious and dangerous radicals. His most infamous tactic was the Palmer raid. Agents of the Department of Justice would descend upon an immigrant family, or sometimes a whole neighborhood, in the middle of the night, arresting people indiscriminately. In violation of every decent legal ethic and the due process of law itself, those who were not citizens were kept incommunicado by Palmer's witch hunters, and many were summarily deported. Years later, inquiries failed to find any links between those deported and subversion. It was cold consolation to those sent back to the Old World misery they had labored so hard to escape. This insane persecution, equating foreign birth with subversiveness, created panic among all immigrant groups. Among Italians, it strengthened their insularity from the larger society, an old inclination traceable to the maxim of the Mezzogiorno that "the law works against the people."

The shameful red scare and hatred of immigrants had roots in the xenophobia of Know-Nothingism. But it was brought to flower in the twentieth century when very prominent American leaders openly embraced its bigoted positions. In fact, it may be questioned whether it could have reached such damaging proportions if the way had not been laid by some very famous and powerful Americans. Because Italians constituted by far the largest ethnic group immigrating to the United States at the time, they bore the brunt of the outrage. For example, in October 1915, former President Theodore Roosevelt went out of his way to insult all immigrants and their children, and particularly Italian-Americans. In a speech to the Knights of Columbus assembled in New York City's Carnegie Hall and including Italian-Americans, he said, "There is no room in this country for hyphenated Americans. . . . There is no such thing as a hyphenated American who is a good American." Before he became President, he had called the 1891 mob lynching of eleven Sicilians in New Orleans "a rather good thing," and boasted that he had said so at a party where there were what he called "various dago diplomats." In 1915, Woodrow Wilson said that "hyphenated Americans have poured the poison of disloyalty into the very arteries of our national life . . . such creatures of passion, disloyalty and anarchy must be crushed out."

The violent nativists got the message. In 1891, several Italians were lynched in West Virginia. In 1893, several others were murdered in Denver, Colorado. In March 1895, six Italian labor "agitators" were lynched in Colorado. In 1895, six Italians were torn from a jail by a mob in Hahnville, Louisiana. All were beaten, and three hanged. In 1899, a mob dragged three Sicilian shopkeepers from a jail in Tallulah, Louisiana, and caught two others. All five were lynched. Their offense? They had permitted Negroes equal status with whites in their shops. In July 1901, Italians were attacked by a mob in Mississippi. In 1906, a mob in West Virginia killed several Italians and maimed several others. Italians were attacked in Tampa, Florida, in 1910. In that same year an Italian was pulled from a jail in Willisville, Illinois, and shot to death. Another Italian met the same fate in Illinois in 1911.

Perhaps the most rabid of Italian haters was Senator Henry Cabot Lodge of Massachusetts. It is not true that the "Lodges speak only to the Cabots, and the Cabots only to God." Or at least it was not true of Henry. In his five years as a member of the U. S. House of Representatives and during his thirty-one years in the U. S. Senate (1893–1924), he spoke often to the American people about his hatred for Italian-Americans. In 1891, he made a distinction between Northern Italians (whom he termed "Teutonic Italians") and Southern Italians. He labeled the latter inferior, and said the "great Republic should no longer be left unguarded from them." In March 1900, he made a speech in which he alluded to Italian-Americans:

> We have seen a murderous assault by an alien immigrant upon the Chief of Police of a great city [the 1891 incident in New Orleans], not to avenge any personal wrong, but because he represented law and order. Every day we read in the newspapers of savage murders by members of secret societies composed of alien immigrants. Can we doubt, in the presence of such horrible facts as these, the need of stringent laws and rigid enforcement, to exclude the criminals and anarchists of foreign countries from the United States?

Bigoted Americans responded to the incitement of people like Lodge. In August 1920, mobs invaded the Italian neighborhood of West Frankfort, Illinois, dragging people of all ages and both sexes from homes, beating them with weapons and burning whole rows of their homes. The attacks were repeated, and the Italians fought back, turning the small neighborhood into a battleground. It took five hundred state troopers three days to end the fighting. At its end, hundreds of Italian-Americans were left homeless and, with millions of their paesani in the United States, convinced that they were in a hostile country with only themselves to rely upon.

Anti-Italian fever was virulent when on April 15, 1920, five men held up a shoe company in Braintree, Massachusetts, killing an employee and fleeing in a car with fifteen thousand dollars. Witnesses claimed the holdup men "looked like Italians." When two Italians, Nicola Sacco, a factory worker from Puglia in South Italy, and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, a mustached fish peddler from the Northern Italian province of Piedmont, came to claim a car that police had linked with the crime, they were arrested. Circumstances linking them to the crime were questionable. But when it was discovered that they were under surveillance by Palmer's Department of Justice as political anarchists and that they carried firearms, a cry for their heads was raised all over the land. They were tried under conditions that were a mockery of the judicial process and found guilty. The prosecuting attorney appealed to the worst biases of the jury, treating Italian-American witnesses in an outrageously insulting manner. The testimony of eighteen Italian-born witnesses was dismissed out of hand by the court as unreliable. After the trial, the judge who had presided is alleged to have commented to a Dartmouth professor, "Did you see what I did to those anarchistic bastards the other day? I guess that will hold them for a while." The same judge, Webster Thayer, an old immigrant-hating pillar of Back Bay Society, one year before had presided over another trial in which Vanzetti had been accused of a holdup in Plymouth. At the time, the judge had instructed the jury that, "This man, although he may not actually have committed the crime attributed to him, is nevertheless morally culpable, because he is the enemy of our existing institutions. . . . The defendant's ideals are cognate with crime." Despite the testimony of thirty witnesses that Vanzetti was elsewhere at the time of the crime, Vanzetti was convicted of the Plymouth holdup.

During their trial, nine witnesses, including the clerk of the Italian Consulate, swore that Sacco was in Boston at the time of the Braintree robbery. Six witnesses placed Vanzetti in Plymouth making his door-to-door rounds as a peddler during the time of the crime. The two Italians were found guilty, and after seven years of protests and appeals they were executed. On the morning they were to die, Massachusetts' Governor Fuller, when asked if he would intercede to halt the execution, smiled at reporters and said only, "It's a beautiful morning, boys, isn't it?"

A commission headed by Harvard University's president had found nothing wrong in Sacco and Vanzetti's trial, prompting the distinguished reporter Heywood Broun to write sarcastically in the New York *World*:

> What more can the immigrants from Italy expect? It is not every person who has a president of Harvard University throw the switch for him. If this is a lynching, at least the fish-peddler and his friend, the factory hand, may take unction to their souls that they will die at the hands of men in denim jackets or academic gowns. . . .

The last hearing held for the two Italians was presided over, as were all of their hearings, by Judge Thayer. Sacco said to him:

> I never knew, never heard, even read in history anything so cruel as this Court. After seven years prosecuting they still consider us guilty.

Both men protested their innocence until they were killed.

The guilt of the two men remains in controversy. But, guilty or innocent, they received a good deal less than a fair trial. Italian-Americans, divided on the question of their guilt, were all but unanimous about the unfairness of their trial. They felt as one with Vanzetti in the latter part of a statement he made in newly learned English when he last faced Judge Thayer. "I am suffering," he said, "because I am a radical and indeed I am a radical; I have suffered because I was an Italian, and indeed I am an Italian."

Many years later (I was born in 1939, twelve years after their execution), I remember my grandfather and his friends speak with bitterness about *il caso di Sacco-Vanzetti*. Totally indifferent to political ideologies, my grandfather was typical of Italian-Americans who were convinced the two were railroaded into the electric chair in good part because they were Italians. Countless numbers of Italian-Americans contributed to the defense fund of the two men. The outcome of the affair was simply another confirmation of the ancient belief of the Italian immigrants that justice, a very important part of their value system, had little to do with the laws and institutions of the state. The poison of the Sacco-Vanzetti affair was not to be purged from relations between

Italian-Americans and the United States until years later when Italian-Americans faced a new crisis of nationality in World War II, and resolved it with resounding loyalty to the United States—a story for another chapter.

The unequivocal loyalty of Italian-Americans to their country is astonishing when one considers much of their ill treatment at the hands of America.

[Before 1840] there was plenty of room and work for all. [. . . T]hese early immigrants were from the British Isles and Northwestern Europe. They were of the same ethnic group as most of the founders of the country—White "Anglo-Saxon" Protestants. In fact, as late as 1864, despite the already active Know-Nothing movement, then aimed at the Irish, the official policy of the American government as written in a law passed that year was to encourage immigration. In the next decades, however, pressure to exclude immigration rose rapidly as the ethnic composition of the immigrants changed. They were no longer predominantly WASP. By 1899, when the total United States population was fifty million, Protestants were among the minority (18.5 per cent) of immigrants. The majority (52 per cent) were Roman Catholics, and 10.5 per cent were Jews. In the next eleven years 2,300,000 were to arrive from Italy alone, only 400,000 of these from Northern Italy. And by 1925, there were upwards of five million Italian-Americans, a figure the nativists found alarming.

Exclusionary pressure gathered unturnable momentum as such diverse American groups as the American Federation of Labor, the American Legion, and the American Grange lobbied for restriction on immigration. Moreover, the pressure was for selective exclusion of undesirable "races," especially Southern and Eastern Europeans. This sentiment was expressed in a very popular book by Madison Grant published during World War I, called *The Passing of the Great Race.* The great race was the WASP ethnic group, or, as Grant called it, "the Nordics." The thesis of the book was as simple as it was vicious. The immigrants of Eastern and Southern Europe were "storming the Nordic ramparts of the United States and mongrelizing the good old American stock," and threatening to destroy American institutions. Grant singled out Italians as inferiors. In his crackpot explanation, Italians are the inferior descendants of the slaves who survived when ancient Rome died. This at a time when some 10 to 12 per cent of the American Army fighting in World War I were Italian-Americans. Thousands of them died and one hundred were awarded Distinguished Service Crosses fighting for a country Grant and his fellow nativists called "Nordic."

Fred Gardaphé

From *The Italian-American Writer: An Essay and an Annotated Checklist*

What you carry in your head
you don't have to carry on your back.

—ADVICE FROM AN OLD WORKER

If there is one thing I've learned about advocating ethnic-American literature, it's that you can't avoid getting personal about the literature that comes from your ancestral culture. And so, this essay is a personal account of my encounter with the literature produced by American writers of Italian descent. Through this development I have come to see my life's reading and writing as entries onto an historical rap sheet of the cultural crimes of breaking into and entering mainstream America.

I grew up in a little-Italy in which not even the contagiously sick were left alone. To be alone is to be sick. The self-isolation that reading requires was rarely possible and considered a dangerous invitation to blindness and insanity. This was evidenced by my being the first American born of the family to need glasses before the age of ten. I would not understand their attitude towards reading for many years. In fact, it wasn't until I came across Jerre Mangione's *An Ethnic at Large* that I realized I wasn't the only one whose reading was treated this way. In Mangione's autobiographical writing he tells of how being Sicilian and American created a double life inside of which he fashioned a third "fantasy life . . . well nourished by the piles of books I brought home from the public library, most of which I read clandestinely in the bathroom or under the bed since my mother believed that too much reading could drive a person insane" (13–14).

There was no space in the home set aside for isolated study. We had one of the larger homes of those in our extended family, and so our house was the place where the women would gather in the basement