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Beyond the Immigrant Paradigm: New Italian American Identities and Communities

In 1971 Michael Novak's *The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics* woke Americans up to the reality that "white" ethnicities were not lost in a fog of assimilation. Novak pointed to the ambivalent attitude of progressive intellectuals toward the early 20th century immigrant as one example of how the idea of a melting pot was, and would no doubt always remain, a myth. Their ambivalence, said Novak, resulted from their privileging of individual accomplishments over those of the family and community. This difference between the American privileging of native self-reliance and ethnic tribal loyalty has created a tension that is key to helping us understand how U.S.A. identities are shaped and reshaped over time. For Italian Americans, the fifth largest ethnic group in the United States, the years since the publication of Novak's book have been challenging in terms of developing and maintaining a sense of identity in a country that once touted erasure of one's past in order to become American. This essay will survey the evolution of Italian American identity to show how this ethnic group has continually revised its notions of what we refer to when we speak of things Italian American, to point to some ideas that might help us imagine what these identities might look like in the future, and to examine how those identities will form and be formed by new communities.

Italian immigrants to the United States were in the position of constantly negotiating their relationship between the local cultures of their origin and those of their land of immigration. Until recently, Italian American identity seemed to be constructed with basic elements considered characteristic of two nations. But just how Italian were the immigrants, especially those who arrived in the U.S. before there was a unified Italian nation? And

just what types of Italian were those who arrived after the establishment of an Italian geo-political nation? These are questions that must be raised whenever we try to categorize Italian immigrant identities. The realities of regionalism as it affected everything from language use to behavior, along with the timing of immigrants' arrival to the U.S. in relation to the establishment of geo-political Italy, all work to challenge any attempt to create a single, stable notion of Italian immigrant identity.

Preceding these new immigrants and in front of American audiences came a mediated parade of public images projecting fictional identities that became fixed in the minds of those Americans who had yet to come in contact with Americans of Italian descent. The predominant image of Italian Americans in today's media has not evolved much from these earlier portrayals and comes primarily through representation of the working class. The predominant voice of protest against these images comes from Italian Americans who consider themselves members of the middle class. What we have here is classic class struggle. Those educated out of the working class no longer wish to identify with those who have remained working class, especially in relation to the way the U.S. working class is portrayed in popular culture. Often, the result of this class mobility through education is the creation of Americans with Italian names who do not see anything wrong with writing, producing, directing and acting in films that, while protected by the First Amendment, offend other Italian Americans. For help in understanding this struggle, we need to review a similar experience that occurred in African-American culture.

When white people watched African slaves entertaining themselves on plantations, white actors soon began imitating those performers in travelling minstrel shows, which quickly became popular throughout the country. When freed slaves wanted to make their way into mainstream U.S. entertainment, they were expected to play the characters from those same minstrel shows. They became black actors imitating white actors who were imitating blacks, for they had to give the white audiences what they had come to expect. These exaggerated portrayals became the images that would define black behavior to those who had no contact with blacks. As soon as a black middle class evolved, blacks took offense at these portrayals and protested in much the same way the Italian-American community has

for nearly 100 years. But African Americans didn't limit their strategies to protest. Led by such intellectuals as Harvard educated W.E.B. DuBois, they focused on developing what he referred to as the "Talented Tenth." Through the establishment of black colleges, black studies, black businesses, black cultural products and black consumers, African Americans educated themselves and by the 1920s created arts to be studied and emulated; by the 1960s, they created a social and political awareness that challenged racist histories and legacies, and by the 1970s were able to produce independent filmmakers such as Spike Lee and television producers like Bill Cosby who made sure the rest of the world saw their lives in different ways.

While Italian Americans have been busy becoming good Americans, America has spent a great deal of time portraying only what we might call their "Untalented Tenth." Why has the bottom of Italian American culture gained the spotlight and infamy? Because Italian Americans have never organized their culture the way others have, and now they are paying for it by fighting sophisticated image-makers with out-of-date weapons. Once you become aware of the impact Italians have had on U.S. American culture from its earliest explorations to its latest scientific advances, you realize that one could stop at just about any point in American history and find an Italian influence, such as Christopher Columbus, Antonio Meucci, and Guglielmo Marconi just to mention a few, and through it all Italian Americans have unknowingly been re-inventing their ethnicity whenever they have learned something new about themselves; for example once Columbus was found to be offensive to Native Americans and other indigenous peoples, the Italian Americans would move away from the image of Columbus as they recreated their ethnic identity; in due time the immigrant paradigm would stop working as a way of conceptualizing Italian American identity.

The study of ethnic identity in the U.S. for years has been to attach people to traditions that were formed outside of the U.S. and then see what changes and what remains in terms of those ties to homeland traditions. More often than not, authenticity is allied with the ability of a group to hang on to the old – a way of not changing, of staying with what is known, a way of not being American totally. Piero Bassetti, in his development of the concept of "Italicity," reminds us that:

we live in a world in which each one of us has a plurality of identities; each one of us belongs to more than one aggregating dimension, not just in terms of ethnicity, nationality or religion, but even in terms of taste, culture, passions, interests...Italicity might be an advantage in the new world system that is taking form.... The glocalized world will be a mixture of communities that will no longer aggregate on the basis of old territorial criteria of borders that are decided by the State-Nation, but rather on connections that go beyond geographical limits. And in this, the Italic way of being is an advantage (44).

One of the ways this mixture occurs is through language development and use.

Basetti's notions of Italic communities are illuminated through Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, a study of the evolution and dissolution of nations. In building nations, Anderson tells us that there is a need for a "sacred language" and a place that is preserved as home (70). For Italian Americans, that sacred language often is broken English, Italglish, which consists of combinations of English and Italian, because traditional languages and dialects don't work when your community expands beyond the territory of what was once your nation. The place for Italian Americans is not geographic; it is the family – the place where Italian American identity is most likely to be learned and preserved. New languages develop through exchanges, and today, a key location for such exchanges is the Internet.¹ As identity becomes strongly connected to instruments of communication, sites such as i-italy can invigorate Italian American identity. In this way, Italian American identity will become more based on imagination rather than any historical notion of nation.

Basetti, along with journalist Niccolò d'Aquino, have led the way to understanding just what effect these new tools of communication will have on traditional means of fashioning identities. What journalist d'Aquino called "'The Italic aggregation'. This group includes the inhabitants of Italy, both passport-holding citizens and emigrants and their children – the so-called Generation 2 or G2 – who have become Italian to all intents and purposes and who (assuming the battle will be won by the more farsighted political views which seem to be coming to the fore, albeit with difficulty) will eventually be granted citizenship" (4). D'Aquino continues: "Even the most conservative estimates calculate a network of at least 250

million people.” Bassetti urges us to “think of Italicity as a new form of shared and pluralistic experiences that is to be held up as an example to other European populations who are on the threshold of becoming truly European” (14). Bassetti claims that these new identities will be created in what he calls “sub-national areas” (21).

To better understand these new constructs we need to return to Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* in which the author tells us that a nation is “an imagined political community – and imaged as both inherently limited and sovereign” (6). Separate nations evolved through a sense of dynastic realms and religious communities. For most Italian Americans, the founding of Italian America follows the formula proposed by Anderson for nations. If there ever was a dynastic family, it probably was the Generoso Pope family. The major religious community of Italian Catholics was organized early on by the Italian missionaries, sent by Bishop Giovanni Battista Scalabrini, who tended to the religious needs of Italian immigrants to the Americas. Many early European nations communicated through the Latin language, and the fall of Latin exemplified the process by which “the sacred communities formed by old sacred languages were gradually fragmented, pluralized, and territorialized” (19). As Anderson observes, “all nationalisms in Europe arose in the context of a traditional pluralism of interacting dynastic states...Latin’s European universalism never had a political correlate” (97). The language used by Italian Americans is, according to Bassetti, an “Italic’ language that is not the Italian language” (51); today it has become English peppered with Italian words and phrases.

Visual representations of the community help to reinforce a common notion of nation through which inhabitants learn to identify with each other. These often include representations of work, public celebrations, and focus on family as a mini-replication of the national structure of leadership – forefathers, founding fathers, etc. A common language was part of the truth of national identity; your mother tongue, so to speak, revealed your connection to one nation or another. Anderson explains, “Societies organized around and under high centres through ‘monarchy’ which perpetuated a concept of temporality in which cosmology and history were indistinguishable” (36). Today’s Internet makes it possible for “growing

numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways” (36) that move beyond the confines of traditional national identities.

Anderson talks about the origins of national consciousness, and when we apply that to Italian America it draws out the question, what are the origins of Italian American consciousness? The rise of multicultural thinking in the United States led to the development of an imagined Italian American community. Organizations arose out of the efforts of immigrant *prominenti*, insisting they spoke for the larger community. This becomes clear when we look at those early fraternal associations that developed from mutual aid societies into national organizations. Today, the Order Sons of Italy in America, the Sons and Daughters of Italy, UNICO, and the National Italian American Foundation all believe that they represent THE Italian American; in earlier times, more localized groups, such as the Unione Siciliana and the White Hand Society in Chicago, arose out of the need of Italian Americans to fight Italian crime perpetrated by what used to be referred to as The Black Hand. These organizations took on the responsibility of representing and interpreting Italian American culture whenever the need arose in national discourse.

These organizations soon created networks of communications that, as Anderson tells us about nation building, form “a common and easily transmitted sense of the past and did so through unified fields of exchange and communications which in the long run helped to build that image of antiquity so central to the subjective idea of the nation” (Anderson 44). And they did so through English, which “enabled the successful transmission of ideas” that were those “language-of-power” dialects “closer to each print-language and dominated their final forms” (45). These developments, Anderson tells us, “were responses by power-groups – primarily, but not exclusively dynastic and aristocratic – threatened with exclusion from, or marginalization in, popular imagined communities” (110). Building post-immigrant identities will depend more on English than the Italian that was once an essential part of Italian American identity. English, especially in print and eventually electronic media, has become the major register through which intellectuals shape the thinking of the general *populus*. Again, Anderson provides us with insight into the process: “It is generally

recognized that the intelligentsia were central to the rise of nationalism in the colonial territories, not least because colonialism ensured that native agrarian magnates, big merchants, industrial entrepreneurs, and even a large professional class were relative rarities” (116).

Anderson tells us that the eventual emergence of creole communities “permitted a style of thinking to flourish which foreshadows modern racism” (59), by perpetuating insular thinking in which members of an identity group needed to conform to a single sense of group belonging. This idea helps us understand the period in which Italian Americans turned from being victims of early 20th century racism to perpetrators of racism against others. It also helps us understand how the development of large, national organizations contributed to the hegemony of a single Italian American identity. Whiteness and the return of Italian citizenship led to racism based on “patriotism” – something that has been developing in Italy in response to the large immigration to the country over the past 40 years. Anderson explains: “The dreams of racism actually have their origin in ideologies of class, rather than in those of nations: above all in claims to divinity among rulers and to ‘blue’ or ‘white’ blood and ‘breeding’ among aristocracies” (149). And we can see this occurring in Italian America at a time when Italian Americans are surpassing the national average income (1960 census).

Racism, as Anderson points out, is a direct product of nation building:

official nationalism was typically a response on the part of threatened dynastic and aristocratic groups – upper classes – to popular vernacular nationalism. Colonial racism was a major element in that conception of ‘Empire’ that attempted to weld dynastic legitimacy and national community. It did so by generalizing a principle of innate, inherited superiority on which its own domestic position was (however shakily) based to the vastness of the overseas possessions (150).

This development has not gone unnoticed by Italian American writers such as Emilio DeGrazia.

In his novel, *A Canticle for Bread*, DeGrazia sings a swan’s song for a disintegrating Little Italy that looms large in the mind as it shrinks on the

streets of St. Paul, Minnesota. Drawn to Minnesota to build a cathedral, Raphael Amato, the stone artist great-grandfather of protagonist Salvatore Amato, runs into trouble caused by an American philanthropist who can change minds and neighborhoods with a wave of his cash filled hand. Salvatore searches for meaningful work in 1970s America, as he tries to find out why his great-grandfather was fired from the job of building the great cathedral. This quest turns into a mystery that Salvatore must solve before he can go on with his life. The mystery takes the protagonist to a number of storytellers who ultimately teach him that the America he has inherited is not the same place that drew his immigrant ancestors away from the poverty of the old country.

DeGrazia presents a “Little Italy” that was once a dream world for immigrants and has become a nightmare for subsequent generations. Salvatore’s college degree never helped him find that white-collar job his parents believed would be his by rite of passage. Anchored to working-class culture, Salvatore, unlike his father, understands the economic system, wants more than a job, and is left to philosophize on the demise of Little Italy:

Once upon a time my kind of neighborhood, full of people strolling by, shopkeepers standing in doorways when business was slow, mothers walking hand-in-hand with children distracted by some new things in a store window, old men on street corners arguing about the weather, baseball and politics and boys weaving in and out of the sidewalk traffic so girls would see how wonderful they were. All that noise and activity gone now, nothing left but empty sidewalks and stores, here and there a yellow light shining dimly through drawn shades in an upstairs’ window and the slogans of sex and disgust tainted on walls. At the end of the block a black woman sat head-in-hands on the curb. “Loro,” Guido called them. Them. Beware of Them, the blacks moving in with their ragged mattresses and box springs and stares, this sullen people from a time so lost in space our Old World seemed new (43).

The post-immigrant paradigm presented in DeGrazia’s novel is one in which the Italian American must confront not only the silence of the past, but also the silent lessons of racism that have been instilled as Italian

immigrants learned to become white in the United States, and especially how this racism affected their creation of identities as Italian Americans.²

Products of nationalism that help to define and maintain the nation include: the census, official maps, and museums. “Interlinked with one another, then, the census, the map and the museum illuminate the late colonial state’s style of thinking about its domain. The ‘warp’ of this thinking was a totalizing classificatory grid, which could be applied with endless flexibility to anything under the state’s real or contemplated control: peoples, regions, religions, languages, products, monuments, and so forth. The effect of the grid was always to be able to say of anything that it was this, not that; it belongs here, not there. It was bounded, determinate, and therefore – in principle – countable” (Anderson 184). It is interesting to note that in the 1990 U.S. census, Italian Americans achieved above average education. The 2000 census reported an interesting increase in the numbers of U.S. people identifying as Italian Americans, something which was achieved without a corresponding rise in immigration from Italy. This means that more Americans began to identify themselves as Italian Americans over this period. In the current census being taken, there is no place for such identification on the form. The City University of New York system – the only public system that protects Italian Americans through Affirmative Action – does not count its Italian American students, so in the future numbers will have to come from other sources. What does this say about the future of ethnic identity in the United States?

The idea of “‘uncivilized’ vernaculars began to function politically the same way as the Atlantic had earlier done: i.e. to ‘separate’ subjected national communities off from ancient dynastic realms” (Anderson 196). Italian Americanism thrives up to World War II, when Italy declared war on the U.S. through Mussolini. After the war, concepts such as the mafia, shaped by the news media and fictionally fed back to audiences through film and television threw dark clouds over many possible Italian American identities. There was a lull for years, until the 1970s, when, on the tails of an African American civil rights movement, ethnic groups began asserting their identities. This assertion surfaces in the 1980s through a literary and educational renaissance that enabled intellectual thought to lay the groundwork for the use of technology resulting in the development of

Internet groups formed through discussion groups such as H-ITAM and those found on www.i-italy.org.

As Italian immigrants shifted their focus of practical identity from Italians to Americans, they created a change in consciousness that resulted in a loss of cultural memory that would be vital for the continuation of Italian American identity. This is addressed by Anderson: “All profound changes in consciousness, by their very nature, bring with them characteristic amnesias. Out of such oblivions, in specific historical circumstances, spring narratives” (204). These narratives, which have become the basis for studying ethnic identity in classrooms from Kindergarten through graduate school, often become the foundations upon which new identities are forged: “Awareness of being embedded in secular, serial time, with all its implications of continuity, yet of ‘forgetting’ the experience of this continuity – product of the ruptures of the late eighteenth century – engenders the need for a narrative of ‘identity’” (205). The very narratives of Italian America deal with the issues of memory and forgetting both Italy and Little Italys, especially when it concerns Italian American left-wing activism.³ What memory is kept formulates master narratives of Italian American identity that foster public celebrations of Columbus Day – a national holiday that has become synonymous with Italian American identity, a holiday that originally was celebrated enthusiastically by most Americans.

A post-immigrant paradigm requires thinking beyond such mainstream narratives. Piero Bassetti foresaw the need for this: “updated with the new reality of globalization. The arrival of Italians on Ellis Island must be reread in a modern key. Just like Columbus’ voyage must be reread” (22). In order to fashion a universal sense of Italian American identity, the Italian American community needed to find a way of dealing with the figure of one of its strongest symbols. Bassetti tells us that “in order to save Columbus from a historical rereading that sees him as unpopular because he was an ‘occupier’ or the vanguard of occupiers, we must recuperate the contribution of universalism that Columbus gave to Americans” (48).

In order to understand the precarious position that comes when attaching a group identity to history, we can consult Hansen Alexander’s editorial in the October 7, 2002 issue of the *St. Augustine Record*. While the

publisher of the paper later apologized for the publication of this editorial and it has been pulled from its online archives, it represents more than the ignorance of one man and represents an anti-Italian American sentiment that is rarely addressed. The editorial reads: "Tomorrow's Columbus Day Celebration will go forth undeterred by the fact that the Genoese mariner helped Spain, not Italy stake a claim to the Americas." Then begins his lament, "The holiday has come to celebrate that which is Italian, or more specifically, that which is southern Italian." Having made this distinction is interesting, but why it was made in the first place is another story. Alexander characterizes southern Italy as an area more impoverished than the rest of Italy, and the birthplace of "tomato based foods like thin pizza, the notorious Mafia, and poor fishermen like Joe DiMaggio's father" (1). He complains that we do not celebrate northern Italian traditions like "the industrial might of Milan, the intellectual heritage of its great universities at Bologna and Padua," or the genius of da Vinci, Michelangelo, Galileo, Dante and Boccaccio. "No," he continues, "tomorrow will be about cheap wine and stereotypical visions of Italians as a congregation of vigilantes."

One of Italian America's most outspoken intellectuals, Robert Viscusi, dramatizes the Columbus dilemma in this segment from his epic poem, "Ellis Island."

4

the fact is columbus day will go the way of the dinosaur
 along with everything else
 meanwhile what about garibaldi
 who was fighting for the poor in italy
 but after the revolution
 lives to see the rich steal italy
 and starve the poor
 selling them to labor gangs in suez
 shipping them to new york to dig subways
 in return to cheap american grain
 they brought back in the empty ships
 the italians went to america in steerage
 that means they slept down below
 all in one room seasick for weeks

another room would carry wheat the other way
 the italians didn't know where they were going
 when they got there the people spit at them
 and garibaldi lived to see all this begin to happen
 which was his reward for helping the rich steal italy
 he should have come to new york to fight in the civil war
 and march in the columbus day parade (1-2)

William Connell, holder of the LaMotta Chair in Italian History at Seton Hall University, sought to justify the continued celebration of Christopher Columbus in American culture by providing a different perspective:

The holiday marks the event, not the person. What Columbus gets criticized for nowadays are attitudes that were typical of the European sailing captains and merchants who plied the Mediterranean and the Atlantic in the 15th century. Within that group he was unquestionably a man of daring and unusual ambition. But what really mattered was his landing on San Salvador, which was a momentous, world-changing occasion such as has rarely happened in human history. Sounds to me like a pretty good excuse for taking a day off from work.

Today, Italian Americans no longer depend on an identity that comes from only marching in parades. But they must also steer away from the usual fare of media-made images. Italian Americans have been formally complaining about the way they have been portrayed in the media since as far back as 1931 with little or no effect.⁴ That year, Fiorello LaGuardia, then Mayor of New York city, wrote a letter to William H. Hays, the first president of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, to protest the portrayal of Italians in the film *Little Caesar*. Obviously nothing has changed, yet over the same 80-year period, other racial and ethnic American groups such as Jewish Americans and African Americans have succeeded in changing the way their images have been presented. So what's the difference?

I have spent much time attending so-called summits organized by a national organization (of which I am a member) and a group of local people in lower Manhattan designed to come up with a plan of action for dealing

with the alleged defamation that MTV practiced against Italian Americans through its hit program *Jersey Shore* from 2009-2012. I listened to the best of what all the speakers of national organizations had to say and can only say that nothing new was offered. Protests were suggested, and while that might work for the powerful, showing up with dozens of picketers instead of thousands would set Italian Americans up for laughter and dismissal. Lawsuits were mentioned that would cost thousands of dollars, and while that might work for the Wealthy, many believe it is wasting money better invested in cultural endeavors. These tactics worked for other groups because the other groups did something Italian Americans have yet to do. If Italian Americans want to move out of the mediated shadows of organized crime or organized buffoonery they must find new ways of organizing their culture that must come through understanding their own history.

In Italian immigrants' efforts to become American, they eschewed education in favor of work; and only later, on the shoulders of money, began to consider the benefits of formal education. Italian Americans were above the average in income long before they were above the average in education. When they sent their children to school, they thought they were doing the right thing, and so focused on getting scholarships, money that however well intended, would take their children further away from their Italian-American neighborhoods and families where ethnic identities were formed and maintained. Those children rebelled against earlier generations, who didn't trust education, who had a natural sense of the changes that would occur in school, and feared what they didn't know. The basis of this fear is ignorance – exactly what we are facing today when we understand that fears can be assuaged through knowledge, knowledge of a people and their culture.

Just like Columbus, the romance and tragedy of early 20th century immigration can no longer serve as models for Italian American identity. The key to creating a meaningful sense of Italian American culture that speaks to today's youth is to first ensure that they have access to histories of their families and of their communities. They need to be exposed to historical and contemporary models of Italian Americans in the areas of arts, business, and education that they can study, emulate and transcend. The Little Italys that once served as the source and haven of Italian

American identity have become little more than cultural theme parks in gentrified land. With the move to the suburbs, Italian Americans have created scholarships for higher education, but have done little to help those applicants understand what it means to be Italian American once they enter those institutions. This knowledge comes best when it is found in the very materials those students study, in the very stories they hear and read from childhood up through graduate school. Writers such as Pietro di Donato, John Fante, Helen Barolini, Louise DeSalvo, Maria Gillan and countless others have been writing and publishing those stories, but how many of their wonderful works can be found in the homes and in school libraries where they can serve as models for present and future writings? Italian American identity is fluid and constantly shifting shapes, changing often, more often than most scholars acknowledge. How else can we account for a significant increase reported by the 2000 census of the number of those who identify themselves as Italian when there has not been a similar increase in immigration from Italy since the 1990 census?

The answer, I believe, lies in the growing awareness and acceptance of Italian American identities since the 1970s. This has been accomplished without institutionalization of the Italian American history and culture that needs to be included at all levels of public education: from elementary schools to graduate programs, and not just in the USA. Until recently, American Studies programs, once the fortresses for elite academics, created and protected a monolithic presence of U.S. culture both within the country and throughout the world. These programs have long held the reins in determining subjects covered and directions taken in creating and teaching American Studies in Europe. As long as American Studies was American-centrist, fostering mainstream and politically sanctioned interpretations of American history, literature, and eventually film, elite programs formed the basis for research, courses of study, conferences, and career advancement because these approaches coincided with the support received by and given to governmental sources and private foundations in line with prevailing diplomatic strategies. One need only look at the relationship between the United States Information Agency and the creation of American Studies programs in Europe. It was no accident that the body of Aldo Moro was found, wrapped in plastic, outside of Rome's Centro Studi Americani. This

symbolism drew attention to the darker side of the connection between the U.S. Government and American culture abroad.

From their early post-World War I developments through their peak in the 1970s and even in their current demise, U.S. and European programs have supported the imperialist agenda of the only America that mattered – The United States of America – and many of these programs abroad were orchestrated and operated in conjunction with the Central Intelligence Agency through the United States Information Agency.⁵ Political action during the 1950s through the 1970s challenged these programs and forced institutions to relegate a share of available resources to the studies of those peoples who had been the victims of nation building, and yet there are American stories that have yet to be studied.

It took a while for these programs to change, and while things are quite different today than say, twenty years ago, there is still a stigma attached to minority studies that has enabled programs to be one of the targets in the recent right wing attempts to destroy the power of the people to oppose, obstruct, and obliterate their agenda. As a precursor to what is happening today with the widespread attacks on working class citizens who try to create new unions, state governments, like Arizona, began going after multicultural studies Programs, yet another attack on difference, and one that joins racism and renewed xenophobia to drive attitudes and actions that are all too common in the wake of 9/11 and the recent terrorist attacks around the world.

If you take the time to read through the controversial 2010 Arizona House of Representatives Bill 2281,⁶ you'll find the same thinking that fed the insatiable fear of immigrants back in 1920s U.S.A. The bill actually makes it illegal to teach ethnic studies as it has been done for the past 30 years. It particularly cites courses that speak to a single ethnic group and those that advocate "ethnic solidarity instead of treatment of students as individuals." It also, in a paranoid way, bans teaching that might "advocate overthrow of the government." This is education?

During the 1980s I spent much time studying the many cultures that make up the USA. I had studied African American, Jewish American, Irish American, Asian American, and Hispanic American cultures, and was wondering, as does Spike Lee's character Mookie in the film *Do the*

Right Thing, where were the pictures of *my* people on the walls of the local institutions. That's when I decided to focus my time and energy on Italian American Studies. In my articles, books, curriculum and program development, I did not follow the traditional American Studies path, and in doing so defied status quo expectations of what a good American Studies student would produce. Throughout all my studies I learned much, but nothing more important than what I learned about two different nations and what happened when one migrated from one to the other. These were some of the most important lessons I ever learned in or out of school, and it prepared me to devote my life to developing Italian and American studies in the context of American studies.

I did this outside of school with the hopes that if I worked hard enough future generations would be able to do this within their education. What I object to most about the Arizona bill is not what it says, but what it implies. One of the first implications is that ethnic solidarity is a bad thing and runs counter to individualism. That's something I don't understand. We are constantly working the tension between individualism and community identities, and this bill assumes that it's either one or the other. The principle of ethnic (and class) solidarity is worth fighting for. Good education requires both intra and intercultural education and the thinking behind this bill is the fuel that ignited the current reaction to the Syrian (among others) refugee crisis.

Students need to learn about all the cultures that are part of their country; whether it is through textbooks or other resources, we need to be reminded that the USA was founded on the principle of resistance to economic, social and political tyranny, and this bill suggests a tyranny of culture. Thomas Jefferson reminds us that we need to keep the spirits alive that helped to found this government. "The spirit of resistance to government is so valuable on certain occasions, that I wish it to be always kept alive. It will often be exercised when wrong, but better so than not to be exercised at all. I like a little rebellion now and then. It is like a storm in the atmosphere" (Thomas Jefferson to Abigail Adams, 1787). The storm in Arizona is something that we all need to understand as the seeds of a worse storm brewing on the global horizon. Developing transnational studies is

a good, and I might argue the only, way to grasp an understanding of the complex cultural weather of today's world.

We need to rethink the meanings of multiculturalism in American studies so that the result is the creation of an inter-ethnic/racial and class solidarity rather than fragmentation, that we recognize the continued centrality of racism in American culture in our efforts to realize a truly transnational American Studies that, for Italian Americans, will take us beyond the immigrant paradigm through which the culture has been read for too long, and into the future, where new ways of becoming and being Italian American are invented every day. The key to forming a post-immigration paradigm requires new approaches to Italian American studies that seriously take into account the role that race, gender, lifestyle, and class play in the development of Italian American identities as they evolve in the twenty-first century.

Notes

¹ For Italian Americans, a prime site for identity building and stretching is www.i-italy.org. While Italian is used on the site, the language most often used is English, which, in many respects has become the new global language.

² Robert Orsi discusses this phenomenon in his article, "The Religious Boundaries of an Inbetween People: Street Feste and the Problem of the Dark-Skinned Other in Italian Harlem, 1920-1990."

³ For more on this see Cannistraro's and Meyer's *The Lost World of Italian American Radicalism*.

⁴ For an overview of what these images were, see Salvatore LaGumina's *Wop*.

⁵ For background information on American Studies Programs' connections to political, academic and private cultural foundations see: Giles Scott-Smith, "US Public Diplomacy and the New American Studies: No Logo," and Giles Scott-Smith, "Laying the Foundations: US Public Diplomacy and the Promotion of American Studies in Western Europe during the 1950s and 1960s." For a thorough account of the development of American Studies in Turkey, see Esra Pakin, "American Studies in Turkey during the 'Cultural' Cold War."

⁶ See: State of Arizona House of Representatives Forty-ninth Legislature Second Regular Session 2010 HOUSE BILL 2281, <<http://www.azleg.gov/legtext/9leg/2r/bills/hb2281s.pdf>>.

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