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Introduction

The Second World War was a momentous event of the twentieth century. While public memory recalls noteworthy generals and battles, this recollection often lacks an analysis of the influence of racial and ethnic prejudice during the war.[1] Especially in the United States, these factors greatly impacted the lives of many ethnic minorities. While the historical narrative focused on race and World War II includes a discussion of Japanese internment camps, curiously the experience of Italian Americans is often overlooked. With this in mind, this paper will examine the ways in which issues of ethnic prejudice and questions of identity factored into the Italian American experience during World War II.

Historiographical Background

The subject of race and the Second World War has elicited a significant amount of historical research. Although characterized by a variety of approaches, this

[1]Ronald Takaki, *Double Victory: A Multicultural History of America in World War II* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 2000), 4.

focus primarily falls under the field of ethnic history. This ethnic approach characterizes the work of the late Ronald Takaki—an esteemed historian who specialized in the interplay of race and the Second World War. In his work *Double Victory: A Multicultural History of America in World War II*, Takaki utilizes a multidisciplinary and multi-ethnic approach to the issue of race and the Second World War—exploring the social and cultural impact of race for particular ethnic groups in each chapter. While Takaki discusses a variety of minority groups, he focuses heavily on the experiences of Japanese Americans. For these Americans, there was no escaping connections to Japanese ancestry—for even naturalized Japanese who attempted to fully integrate into American society found themselves in the grim reality of internment.[2] Moreover, racial tension provided one of, if not the most, influential factors behind the decision to drop the atomic bomb. Indeed, in *Hiroshima: Why America Dropped the Atomic Bomb*, Takaki argues that President Truman's decision to bomb Hiroshima was ultimately motivated by racial prejudice towards the Japanese, and a desire to avenge Pearl Harbor.[3]

Takaki similarly analyzes the experience of Italian Americans during the war. However, this analysis differs from that of Japanese Americans in both length and content. While Takaki poses that Italian American communities experienced similar xenophobia and racial tensions in the years leading up to war, it unquestionably affected them differently. For example,

[2] Ibid, 153-154.

[3] Ronald Takaki, *Hiroshima* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1995), 99-100.

like Japanese Americans, Italian Americans faced racial slurs, violent stereotypes, and employment discrimination.[4] In addition, many civil restrictions were placed on groups of Italian Americans following Italy's official declaration of war against the U.S. in 1941. In response, the federal government enacted curfews, displaced some families, and even labeled many Italian immigrants as enemies of the state.[5] In his brief analysis, however, Takaki makes it clear that the Italian American situation differed from that of Japanese Americans in both scale and motive. He shows that federal and state governments detained far fewer Italian nationals, and completely abandoned a proposed full-scale deportation of all Italians believed to be "enemy aliens".[6]

For Takaki, American understandings of race during the period constituted the principle factor in this difference of treatment. Takaki argues that the fact Italian Americans were considered white, protected them from the large scale harassment—as their skin-color blended them into the American population.[7] Thus, while racist attitudes about ethnic minorities undoubtedly forced some into a marginalized position, Takaki poses that the experience of Italian Americans varied greatly from that of other minority groups.

Other scholars agree with this understanding. For historian Rose D. Scherini, a combination of race and political ideology created a hostile domestic

[4] Ibid, 132-133.
[5] Ibid, 133.
[6] Ibid, 134.
[7] Takaki, *Double Victory*, 134-135.

environment for Italian Americans during the war. According to her analysis, the suspected fascist leanings within the Italian American community created an initial wave of suspicion from the United States government.[8] For Scherini, however, ethnic prejudice primarily fueled the anxiety towards Italian Americans. She contends that even those with no connections to fascism were still targeted as potential enemies of the state—a belief propagated by extreme racial stereotypes which characterized all Italian Americans as deviant, corrupt, and untrustworthy.[9]

Other historians speak of an extremely complex tension between Italian and American identities. Stefano Luconi's *From Paesani to White Ethnics: The Italian Experience in Philadelphia*, emphasizes this tension. Luconi shows that the pre-war representations of Italian Americans as potential threats to domestic security actually fostered a stronger Italian identity in Italian Americans—an identification that generally supported fascist political ideology.[10] Yet, this ethno-cultural identification quickly shifted back to an American-oriented identity following Italy's declaration of war against the U.S. in 1943—a fact made evident by the huge Italian American support found in war-bond drives, armed-services recruitment campaigns, and other forms of

[8] Rose D. Scherini, "When Italian Americans Were 'Enemy Aliens," in *Enemies Within: Italian and Other Internees in Canada and Abroad*, eds. Franca Iacovetta, Roberto Perin, and Angelo Principe (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 282.

[9] Ibid, 280, 282, 287.

[10] Stefano Luconi, *From Paesani to White Ethics: The Italian Experience in Philadelphia* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 96-97.

civil service.[11] Thus, Italian American ethnic identities were in constant flux given shifting American attitudes towards Italians.

In *The Unknown Internment: An Oral History of the Relocation of Italian Americans During World War II*, historian Stephen Fox reiterates the conclusions of this complex ethnic identity. For Fox, the inner conflict between Italian and American identities stemmed from a variety of factors—the most important being, once again, a constant pull and push between Italian and American allegiances.[12] Unique to Fox's work, however, is the analysis of how race factored into questions of internment and civil restrictions. Fox asserts that many government officials believed that the white skin of the Italian American actually made them *more* dangerous than their Japanese counterparts. Indeed Fox shows that a significant portion of American governmental officials concluded that because white Americans and Italians shared similar physical characteristics like skin color, it actually made the Italian American easier to blend in, and thus easier to commit treasonous activities without suspicion.[13] While the government eventually rejected this notion, Fox's analysis nonetheless shows the complex role that racial issues played in the domestic life of Italian Americans during the Second World War.

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[11] Ibid, 102.

[12] Stephen Fox, *The Unknown Internment: An Oral History of the Relocation of Italian Americans during World War II* (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1990), 7-9.

[13] Ibid, 116-117.

Thematic Context: Problematizing "Race" and "Racial Identity" as Units of Analysis

Before continuing, it is important to present a semantic clarification—especially with regards to the use of the terms "race" and "racial identity" as means of describing a person's ethnic/cultural background and affiliation. Traditionally, the term "race" has been used to identify certain groups of people—groups that are distinguished by assumed differences in their biology and physiology.[14] For Western European and white intellectuals who pioneered this terminology in the mid nineteenth century, these differences were assumed to deviate from an exclusively Anglo norm. With this in mind, many contemporary historians, including David Hollinger, argue that the terminology of race is better used when describing the feelings or treatment between two groups of people rather than describing any sense of ethnic origin—especially when considering that the biological and social facets of the term were clearly defined by a third-party for the ulterior motive of unequal treatment.[15]

To solve these issues Hollinger offers a new method of approach—a method he terms the "post-ethnic perspective". Departing from the rigid universalistic approach that places individuals in distinct categories based on ethnic differences, Hollinger's post-ethnic perspective highlights the fusion that many feel between differing groups—therefore focusing on a flexible collection of identities used by individuals in

[14] David A. Hollinger, *Postethnic America: Beyond Multiculturalism* (New York: BasicBooks, 1995), 35.

[15] Ibid, 39.

forming their social and cultural position.[16] In this analysis, Hollinger eliminates "race" as viable unit of analysis, and instead focuses on what he terms ethno-racial identities. For him, this term more accurately describes the vague continuum that he posits between "racial" and "ethnic" categories, in which individuals are traditionally placed, and also renounces the prejudicial treatment of groups based on the non-existent characteristics of "race."[17] Furthermore, the term more accurately emphasizes the amount of liberty that individuals have in choosing which identity and/or identities to emphasize above others.[18]

It is clear then that Hollinger's ethno-racial identity thesis offers a more appropriate analytical framework when looking at the Italian American experience in the Second World War. Combined with Hollinger's post-ethnic perspective, the ethno-racial identity best describes the Italian American experience as highlighted by Scherini, Luconi, and other historians focusing on these issues. With this in mind, Italian American identities as discussed in this paper will be examined through this perspective.

Central Arguments of Thesis

While the historical research focusing on the impact of race in the domestic life of Italian Americans during World War II is both broad and insightful, an understanding of how this factor impacted their experience in the military is not as detailed. Therefore,

[16] Ibid, 108-109, 106.
[17] Ibid, 39.
[18] Ibid.

this paper will analyze the relationship between racial and ethnic factors and Italian American military service, and focus specifically on those soldiers who served in the Italian Campaign. Similar to the research carried out by Takaki and others, this paper will analyze whether or not factors of race, culture, and identity played any role in the motivation for military service. This question becomes especially fascinating when considering that, beginning in 1943, many Italian Americans served in the Italian Campaign—a fact that almost certainly furthered the shifting identities already experienced by Italian Americans. In the years before the war, ethnic prejudice dictated the representation of Italian Americans—prejudice that evolved into suspicions of dual-allegiance with Italy's expanding role in World War II. In examining personal accounts of Italian American soldiers, it is clear that this ethnic bias impacted the formation of their identities as Americans—a construction that impacted their involvement in the war. While strongly committed to an American identity and cause, those Italian American soldiers serving in Italy found that their Italian background significantly influenced their feelings about Italy's role in the war, their military responsibilities, and their interactions with the Italian people.

Historical Context: Changing Attitudes towards Italian Americans, 1850-World War II

In the years before World War II, American perceptions of Italian American immigrants and communities evolved considerably. In the early years of immigration that occurred in the latter half of the

nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, media depictions of Italian immigrants varied. An 1857 article from *Putnam's Monthly Magazine of American Literature, Science and Art*, describes the precarious nature of the Italian population in America through his interactions with Italians in his small town. Although he characterized a small portion of this group as experts in the "art of being happy,"[19] his portrayal of the larger Italian population in America was less flattering. Describing them as "refugees without resources or education," the author went on to note that:

> There is no class of emigrants, who, from their want of adaptation, strong home attachments, and inability to cope with a new climate and foreign habits, claim such ready sympathy…this natural inaptitude, sensitiveness, and ignorance of the world, produce some ludicrous contrasts of character and circumstances, they often prove the most difficult people to help, the most amiable marplots…[20]

While the article in no way implied that these immigrants were a danger to American society, its description was clearly intended to treat the Italian immigrants in an extremely paternalistic manner.

Other early representations of Italians living in America focused on a different image—one that characterized the perception of a hard-working and

[19] "Italians In America," *Putnam's Monthly Magazine of American Literature Science, and Art* 9, no. 49 (January 1857), 1.

[20] Ibid, 2.

industrious laborer journeying to America in order to find prosperity. For example, a 1906 volume of *Outlook*—a monthly periodical from New York City—John Foster Carr clearly underscored this image. In "The Coming of the Italian", Carr emphasized the impoverished nature of the Italian immigrant—stating that their motivations for migration were rooted in a "definite economic cause," and that Italians arrived "from a land of starvation to a land of plenty".[21] Additionally, Carr pointed to the laborious, yet inexperienced, proclivity of the Italian newcomers: "He [The Italian] comes because the country [The United States] has the most urgent need of unskilled labor. This need largely shaped the character of our Italian immigration, and offers immediate work to most newcomers."[22] While Carr's analysis characterized these immigrants as "ignorant" individuals, whose only talents were found in manual labor, he nevertheless emphasized that the Italian population in America was "quickly absorbed without disturbing either the public peace or the labor market."[23] While Carr's image contains residues of paternalism, it nonetheless speaks volumes about the perceived value of Italian American communities to the United States.

As the twentieth century progressed, however, depictions of Italian immigrants, and immigrants in general, shifted. Although caused by a variety of factors, this shift primarily resulted from economic tensions. As early as 1902, the founding-president of

[21] John Foster Carr, "The Coming of the Italian," *Outlook* 82, no.8 (February 1906), 420, 428.

[22] Ibid, 420-421.

[23] Ibid, 421.

the American Federation of Labor (AFL), Samuel Gompers, protested the influx of immigration into America, and argued that "the intelligence and the prosperity of our [American] working people are endangered…Cheap labor, ignorant labor, takes [American] jobs and cuts [American] wages".[24] Similar arguments found their way into many American periodicals, newspapers, and journals. For example, *Overland Monthly* and *Out West Magazine* recommended that the United States be "very cautious" in opening "the gates to another swarm," and further rejected the notion that the United States should be considered a destination for the world's troubled refugees.[25]

Many directed these nativist concerns specifically at Italian immigration and the Italian American population in the United States. Even Department of Labor Secretary James J. Davis commented on the need for potential restrictions on immigration, especially from Italy. Davis' extreme nativist stance became clear in the multitude of opinion pieces he wrote during the 1920s, including one for the *Los Angeles Times* in which he argued for "selective immigration," which meant the rejection of "every individual who is physically, mentally, or morally unsound or whose political or economic views

[24] Samuel Gompers, "Demand of American Labor for Restriction of Immigration and an Illiteracy Test for Immigrants: Letter of the President of the American Federation of Labor," *Publications of the Immigration Restriction League*, no. 35 (May 1902), 1.

[25] John Chetwood, "Immigration—Asset or Liability?," *Overland Monthly and Out West* Magazine 81, no. 4 (August 1923), 1.

constitute a menace to free institutions."[26] In other articles written during the same period, Davis aligned Italians with these "unsound" groups. In 1924, he wrote that Italian Americans boasted an extremely high crime rate among immigrant groups—the third highest, according to him, behind only the Turks and the Balkans.[27]

In addition to these socio-economic fears, political tensions formed in the early years of the Second World War. As Mussolini's imperial conquests expanded to North Africa, a fear of fascism's expansion into American borders grew within the American government and public. These anxieties gained strength especially after Italy's assistance in the German war effort—an action that prompted American media outlets like *The New York Times* and *The Washington Herald* to spread stories about the possibility of Italians in America acting as agents of Mussolini in order to bring the fascist political machine to the states.[28] These fears of a fifth column were reiterated by Martin Dies Jr., a Texas Congressional Representative, and Chairman of the House Committee Investigating Un-American Activities. In his 1940 book, *The Trojan Horse in*

[26] James J. Davis, "Nation Faces Menace of Immigrant Inundation," *Los Angeles Times*, March 9, 1924, 7.

[27] James J. Davis, in *Evening Bulletin*, June 3, 1924; referenced in Luconi, *From Paesani to White Ethnics*, 45.

[28] *The New York Times*, June 13, 1940, *The New York Post*, March 20, 1941, and *The Washington Herald Tribune*, March 22, 1941; referenced in Matteo Pretelli, "The Useless Fifth Column of Mussolini in America," in *The Impact of World War II on Italian Americans: Selected Essays from the 35th Annual Conference of the American Italian Historical Association*, ed. Gary R. Morimo (New York: American Italian Historical Institute, 2007), 69.

America, Dies dedicated a chapter to "Mussolini's Trojan Horse" that had penetrated American soil. According to Dies, the committee's investigations revealed that Italian Americans displayed strong support for Mussolini's activities abroad, and even made financial donations to Mussolini's government.

> Hundreds of thousands of dollars have been sent to Italy by Italians residing in the United States; and during the Ethiopian Campaign, there was an organized effort in the United States to raise funds for the conquest of Ethiopia. The support of this group alone has been an important factor in the Italian economy. The facts show that many Italian-Americans have assisted the Fascist regime.[29]

Suspicions towards Italian Americans, therefore, were broadcasted through American print-media and government.

As the war progressed, these concerns heavily influenced the federal government's action towards many Italian Americans. Following the Italian-German military alliance and Italy's declaration of war against the United States, the Federal Bureau of Investigation compiled lists of organizations and individuals considered pro-fascist in nature—even going so far as interning many undocumented aliens, and relocating naturalized citizens from sensitive military zones.[30] While the majority of Italian Americans were fortunate

[29] Martin Dies Jr. *The Trojan Horse in America* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1940), 332-333.

[30] Scherini, 282, 290.

to evade this direct government intrusion of liberty, others faced hostility from local municipal governments afterwards—especially in terms of police profiling. By June of 1942, an estimated fifteen hundred Italian Americans had been arrested and detained for small petty crimes in states with significant populations of Italian Americans such as New York, California, and Louisiana.[31] Thus, it is clear that Italy's involvement in the Second World War served as another catalyst for suspicion towards the Italian community in America.

The prevailing characterization of Italian Americans, therefore, considerably evolved in the years leading up to the Second World War. In the early years of immigration, the Italian American was characterized in a paternalistic tone—helpless immigrants attempting to economically better themselves through American benevolence. Yet, as the years progressed, and the United States faced the domestic struggles of the Great Depression and Second World War, images of Italian Americans progressed towards fears of economic and political deviance—depictions furthered by Italy's involvement in the early years of World War II.

Forming an Identity: The Influence of Ethnic Prejudice n the Experiences of Italian American Soldiers in the Years Leading Up to World War II

Clearly, the perceptions of Italian Americans fluctuated greatly in the years leading up to the Second World War. As periods of immigration passed

[31] Ibid, 287.

and Italy's involvement in the war grew under Mussolini, these representations of Italian Americans changed from simple-minded laborers to economic and political threats. For Italian Americans who later served in the United States military, these representations impacted their experience before, during, and after the war.

First and foremost, many of these Italian American men encountered first-hand the stereotypes of the "ignorant" immigrant and community. For the most part, these experiences dealt specifically with the treatment of Italian Americans in the American education system. For many, being the children of Italian immigrants negatively impacted their scholastic ventures. This was especially the case for future servicemen like Rocco Siciliano and Philip Aquila. In his memoir, Siciliano, who served with the 10th Mountain Division during WWII, described significant educational impediments that existed solely because of his Italian immigrant background. During middle school, for example, Siciliano fell victim to the common practice of holding-back immigrant children in a grade solely because school authorities assumed that the families' "poor English" inhibited academic progress.[32] In addition, Siciliano faced the same paternalistic attitudes that accompanied early Italian immigrants. After scoring an extremely low 81 on his scholastic intelligence test (the class average was in the 100s), his teacher announced his score to the entire class.

[32] Rocco Siciliano, *Walking On Sand: The Story of an Immigrant Son and the Forgotten Art of Public Service* (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press 2004), 11.

This experience was made even more humiliating as the teacher referred to him as "poor Rocco".[33]

Philip Aquila, who served with the Air Force Air Cadets during the war, faced similar educational discrimination in high school, even though he excelled throughout those four years. This success included stellar attendance, nearly perfect grades since elementary school, and even his election as class president in his senior year.[34] Despite these outstanding achievements, Aquila's background proved detrimental to his assigned curriculum during his senior year. During this period, Aquila's hometown of Buffalo, New York instituted a stringent tracking system for high school seniors—meaning that those designated for vocational or technical jobs were taught separately from those thought to be suited for professional careers. While seemingly a well established plan to track students based on their abilities, this system was often manipulated to separate the social "undesirables" from the "professional" population of students.[35] Given Aquila's success, then, the professional track should have been the obvious placement. Unfortunately for him, however, the fact that Aquila belonged to a poor Italian immigrant family sealed his fate in the vocational track.[36] Thus, for both Siciliano and Aquila, the

[33] Ibid, 12.

[34] Richard Aquila, *Home Front Soldier: The Story of a GI and His Italian American Family During World War II* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 27.

[35] William Graebner, *Coming of Age in Buffalo: Youth and Authority in the Postwar Era* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 103; referenced in Aquila, 27.

[36] Aquila, 27, 30.

stereotype of the ignorant immigrant family greatly factored into their early life.

Concerns surrounding Italian American allegiance to the United States also factored into the experience of Italian American servicemen. For some, these concerns manifested themselves in official evaluations and interviews during combat training. This situation impacted the experience of those like Phil Aquila, who faced direct questions concerning his allegiance to the United States and his abilities (or lack thereof) to fight against the Italian enemy abroad.[37] In addition to these racially motivated concerns, Aquila further suspected that his Italian parentage contributed to his domestic assignment during the war. After completing pilot school, he applied for the next phase of pilot training, one that would have readied him for active-duty on the European front. Despite his above average grades in pilot school, the selection committee rejected Aquila's transfer, a decision that solidified his role on the domestic front. While it could never be proven, Aquila strongly suspected that this decision stemmed from his Italian background.[38]

For others, concerns about allegiance created underlying suspicions that the federal government might take eventual action against Italian Americans. For Al Gagliardi, the son of an Italian living in Gilroy, these fears resulted from the restrictions placed on a significant portion of the Italians in his community, especially for those who were still un-naturalized. While he and his family escaped much of this hostility, he acknowledged that the older generations, many of

[37] Ibid, 42.
[38] Ibid, 41-42.

whom had been in the country for years but never naturalized, faced strict curfews punishable by jail-time.[39] More importantly, however, suspicions of allegiance to Italy caused Gagliardi to draw similarities to the experience of Japanese Americans. Living in Gilroy, Gagliardi formed close relationships with many Japanese Americans at school, relationships that were cut short due to their internment following the attack on Pearl Harbor. While Gagliardi felt a deep sense of regret for this treatment, he also recognized that Italian Americans might face a similar fate:

> When they started to take all these Japanese friends of mine, who were born here and went to school with me, to what they called the 'relocation' or 'concentration' camps, I was a little scared because I said: 'Gee Italy is against us [America]…I'm next!…Italians and Germans, we're probably all going to go'. So it was a little scary there for a while.[40]

Thus, it is clear that, for Gagliardi, fears of allegiance affected the Italian community of Gilroy in many ways. While the level of suspicion was minimal compared to other ethnic groups, those like Gagliardi and Aquila clearly believed themselves to be in a precarious situation.

For others, however, prejudice against Italian Americans factored little into their lives before the war. Bruno Ghiringhelli, who would later serve in F-

[39] Al Gagliardi, interview by author, Gilroy, CA, November 11, 2012.

[40] Ibid.

Company of the 87th Infantry, recalled that stereotypes, prejudice, and suspicion played little to no role in his early life. This minimal impact of ethnic prejudice resulted from living in large and strong Italian American communities. For Ghiringhelli, the context of a large Italian American community that thrived in Northern California shielded him from any sort of prejudicial harassment or social pressure.[41] Thus, while prejudice created real concerns for many Italian American servicemen growing up, for others, these factors presented little impact.

Personal responses to these experiences also differed. For some, the name-calling they faced at an early age created the impetus to stand up for themselves as equal members of society. Men like Al Gagliardi voiced their grievances from an early age—especially in response to the racial epithet of 'dago' that he frequently heard at school. After an initial altercation, Al learned that vocally speaking up for himself helped greatly: "I put the message out fast: say it behind my back but you better be able to run faster than me and nobody could run faster than me…Nobody ever called me 'dago' after that and it didn't bother me anymore because they knew."[42] For others, the realities of difference necessitated a complex balance of assimilating to American norms while maintaining their Italian selfhood. Rocco Siciliano best characterized this struggle as a "choice," a choice between a life stuck in the traditions of the

[41] Bruno Ghiringhelli, interview by author, Rutherford, CA, January 4, 2013.

[42] Ibid.

old world or a new identity compatible with both environments.[43] In his own words:

> In Salt Lake City we were a tiny minority mixed in with an overwhelming majority. Our family remained very close, and we adhered to some simple Italian traditions, especially in the habits of food and drink. Yet I often felt I was being watched…I did not suffer from any chronic identity crisis, but I was unwilling to exist on the sidelines, as neither fish nor flesh…I wanted to be accepted. That was a choice. I became determined to make to make it appear that I was part of their [the majority's] group. I wanted to show them that I thought like them, and that I, in every respect, wanted to be like them.[44]

Although Siciliano remained invested in the Italian side of his identity, he clearly understood the potential benefits of assimilation. While these responses are different, they clearly show the agency that these men held in the creation of their social identities. For Gagliardi, racist taunting caused him to stand up against intolerance and assert his equal place in society. While Siciliano's case presents a sensitive balancing act, it nonetheless deepens the notion of individual agency and control between American and Italian identities.

Unsurprisingly, America's entry into World War II strengthened this assertion of a firm American identity. Like in the rest of America, powerful patriotic

[43] Siciliano, 10.
[44] Ibid, 10, 12.

attitudes flourished within the Italian American community in the aftermath of Pearl Harbor, an attack that solidified America's involvement in the war. This devotion to the American cause is better understood when one observes Italian American enlistments into the armed services. While no precise figure exists, it is generally believed anywhere from 300,000 to 400,000 Italian Americans served in the armed forces during the war.[45] Recent personal accounts strengthen these notions of Italian American motivation. For Rocco Siciliano, the attack on Pearl Harbor created an "intensely unifying force" that "crystallized public opinion" on America's war policy, and motivated every American to help their country.[46] For Al Gagliardi, the desire to serve was so strong he even tried to enlist at the young age of seventeen, only to discover an extremely hesitant mother who would not sign the necessary authorization papers.[47] Even those of older generations willingly volunteered to serve. For Cornelius "Kio" Granai, a forty-six year old father of two, who also served in the First World War, World War II presented the opportunity to protect the freedoms of the younger generation.[48] While some fear of Italian American allegiance still continued in much of the country, these Italian American efforts in the war could not be ignored, a fact made clear in an address to Congress by New York Representative Vito Marcantonio. Responding to those who continued to

[45] Peter Belmonte, *Italian Americans in World War II* (Chicago: Arcadia Publishing, 2001), 6.

[46] Siciliano, 62.

[47] Gagliardi, interview.

[48] Cornelius Granai, *Letters from "Somewhere...,"* (Burlington, Vermont: Barnes Bay Press, 2000), 3, 7.

harbor prejudice, the Congressman passionately detailed Italian American allegiance:

> There should be no need for me to speak to you tonight about the role of Italian-Americans in this war…Italian-Americans share with the rest of their countrymen, the conviction that enemy agents, saboteurs, and spies, whether American born or foreign born, whether citizen or non-citizen, must be ceaselessly guarded against and ruthlessly dealt with…History will record that those who denied opportunities to our Italian-Americans, or to any other group because of their race, color, creed, or national origin, were themselves during the work of enemy agents and saboteurs…So, we too, true sons of Garibaldi…renew our pledge and rededicate our energies and our lives for the victory of our arms, for the victory of our cause.[49]

Through the large numbers of Italian Americans in the armed forces, and their clear passion and desire to serve the country, their commitment and allegiance to the United States cannot be denied.

It is clear, then, that the Second World War strengthened the American identity of these Italian American men. While their experience with the ethnic prejudices and stereotypes before the war varied, the

[49] Vito Marcantonio, "Loyalty of Italian Americans," in *A Documentary History of Italian Americans*, ed. Wayne Moquin (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1975), 399-400.

war created a unifying force that reinforced their American patriotism.

A Hyphenated Campaign: The Blending of an Italian Identity in Italy

While Italian American servicemen exhibited unquestionable patriotism following the United States' entry into war, Italy's status as an Axis power until 1943 created an interesting element in their experience. The impact of Italy's role in the war is especially considerable for those Italian American men who served in the Italian Campaign. For many Italian Americans, serving in Italy produced sentimental feelings of family and ancestry. Additionally, most found that their Italian American identities led to not only unique responsibilities while abroad, but also to unique interactions with the Italian country and its people.

For some Italian American servicemen, the possibility of fighting in Italy evoked emotions involving familial connections, as many had direct family members still living in Italy. Bruno Ghiringhelli, who served with the Tenth Mountain Division, was nervous about the possibility of coming face to face with Italian cousins. While this thought in no way affected his sense of duty to the American cause abroad, the reality of family in Italy planted some seeds of fear.[50] Even those without family in Italy expressed similar sentimentality. Daniel J. Petruzzi, who served with the 82nd Airborne Division Military

[50] Ghiringhelli, interview.

Government team, best described the sentimentality that accompanied the journey to Italy during the war:

> Going to war in Italy was bizarre…the prospect of fighting in the land of my grandfather was also, at the very least, unpleasant…My feelings had nothing to do with divided loyalty. We had no relatives in Italy. The family was not sentimental about the 'old country.'…I loved Italy for itself. Its history, its culture, its way of life.[51]

While these men remained completely loyal to the American war effort, their comments show the impact that Italian ancestry played in their service in Italy.

Given these ancestral factors, it is not surprising that Italian American servicemen took their assignment in Italy as an opportunity to visit family members still in the country. For some like Cornelius Granai, serving in Italy even revealed forgotten family. While stationed near his father's home town, Granai met townspeople who knew his father, uncle, and cousins, a discovery so exciting that he wrote home requesting family photos to distribute to the local townspeople. In later letters, he expressed a strong desire to travel to his father's hometown himself: "I will get there as soon as I can…I must get there at all costs…to see the home where Dad was born even though it was bombed and is uninhabitable."[52] Staff Sergeant Joseph Cuoco, A member of the 10th

[51] Daniel J. Petruzzi, *My War Against The Land of My Ancestors* (Irving, Texas: Fusion Press, 2000), 18-19.

[52] Granai, 49-50, 56.

Mountain Division, expressed similar desires. In a letter home, he relayed these aspirations to his sister—telling her that he would make every attempt to visit their Italian family during his furlough days.[53] Rocco Siciliano also felt, and carried out, these desires to visit family in Italy. While assisting with the American occupation after the war, Siciliano took time to visit his family in Southern Italy. It was during this visit that he first met his grandmother, and aunts and uncles, who had moved back to Italy when he was still too young to remember. Additionally, he was able to wander through his mother's childhood house, an experience that provided invaluable insights into his background.[54] Thus, the war provided many of these Italian American servicemen the opportunity to seek out relatives, and absorb invaluable insights about their Italian lineage.

Serving in Italy not only gave these men the opportunity to connect with their own family, it also allowed them to seek out relatives of Italian friends back home. This middle-man role characterized the experience of Cornelius Granai. Still stationed in Italy after the war, Granai wrote his wife and asked her to notify the local newspaper of his location so as to send messages to any family members still in the country.[55]Although difficult to imagine, the process worked. One month later he wrote his wife, filling her in on the progress he made tracking down the family

[53] J.F. Cuoco, *Echoes from the Mountain: The Wartime Correspondences of Staff Sergeant Joseph Cuoco* (Baltimore: Publish America, 2008), 310-311.

[54] Siciliano, 93-94.

[55] Granai, 57.

members of friends from back home.[56] From these accounts, then, it remains clear that serving in Italy provided these soldiers the opportunity to connect with not only their own families, but the families of their friends back in the United States.

In addition to these family dynamics, many Italian Americans found themselves taking on special responsibilities while in Italy, roles that directly related to their Italian background. For those that spoke Italian, these roles generally dealt with their ability to communicate and coordinate with the Italian resistance. For Phil Carter, the son of Italian Immigrants serving with the 88th Division's Blue Devils, bilingualism led to an assignment of leading a group of Italian soldiers through the mountains of central Italy.[57] Daniel Petruzzi recalled similar experiences. Serving with part of the Military Government established during the American occupation of Italy, Petruzzi oversaw the Italian *Partigiani*, or resistance fighters, an assignment made easy by his ability to speak Italian.[58] Similarly, Cornelius Granai's ability to speak Italian positively impacted his duties as the Provincial Legal Officer in charge of both the Italian and Allied Military Governments. In letters, he detailed his interactions with the civilians coming before the court, a situation where the ability to speak Italian greatly helped.[59]

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[56] Ibid, 59.

[57] Phil Carter, "A Highly Decorated Truck Driver," in *Stories of Service: Valley Veterans Remember World War II, Korea, Vietnam, and the Cold War*, ed. Janice Stevens, vol. 2 (Fresno, California: Craven Street Books, 2011), 61.

[58] Petruzzi, 7, 11.

[59] Granai, 37-38, 44-45.

While not all Italian American servicemen spoke the Italian language, those that did undoubtedly found new and added responsibilities, given their ability to interact and communicate with the native population.

The Italian identity not only impacted roles within the military, it also influenced many of these servicemen's interactions with Italian civilians. For Michael Ingrisano, who served with the 37th Troop Carrier Squadron, the ability to speak the Italian language created memorable experiences with those he met. Whether it was with local chefs, barbers, or just the average townsperson, the sight of an American speaking the native language always drew the attention of a curious Italian, a result that made truly memorable experiences with the Italian civilians.[60] For Ingrisano, these memorable interactions created feelings of sympathy and pity for the Italian people. In a letter penned in 1945, Ingrisano commented on the American plans for rehabilitation of Italy. In his writing, Ingrisano hoped for a benevolent plan of action and expressed sympathy for the Italian people.[61] Cornelius Granai detailed similar sentiments in letters sent home. In one letter written towards the end of the war, Granai detailed the Italian people's amazement in his ability to communicate and understand them.[62] Like Ingrisano, Granai also shared similar feelings of sympathy and compassion towards those he encountered. In multiple letters, Granai advised his wife to send clothes, shoes, and other supplies to aid

[60] Michael N. Ingrisano, Jr. *And Nothing is Said: Wartime Letters, August 5,1943-April 21, 1945* (Manhattan, KS: Sunflower University Press, 2002), 40, 83, 454.

[61] Ibid, 457.

[62] Granai, 57.

the poverty-stricken populace.[63] Granai's sympathies extended so far that he even faced repercussions from superiors. In other letters, Granai spoke of his commanding officers' outrage in his sympathetic treatment of Italians, something that contradicted their desire to treat the Italians as a conquered people.[64]

Rocco Siciliano also noted that his bilingualism created an interesting dynamic in his interactions with Italians. For Rocco, his bilingualism earned the respect and admiration of the local people. Although a seemingly minor detail in the context of their service, Rocco's fellow servicemen benefited greatly from these interactions, especially when locating food during extended travel. In the words of Siciliano, the Italians prepared meals "to give to the *Americanos*, whom they loved"—a fact that the rest of his company greatly appreciated.[65] For these soldiers, then, their Italian background produced unique and memorable experiences with the Italian population. It was such interactions that created feelings of compassion and concern.

From these accounts, the impact of the Italian Campaign on these Italian American servicemen is clear. Although these men undoubtedly prided themselves in serving America, these accounts show that their Italian identities factored tremendously in their experience abroad. Their Italian background created mixed emotions about fighting in the land of their ancestors and provided the opportunity to seek

[63] Ibid, 49-50, 53, 58.
[64] Granai, 44-45, 52.
[65] Siciliano, 80.

out unknown family in Italy, an opportunity that many even extended to friends back home. Furthermore, their familiarity with the Italian language provided these servicemen with a foundation with which to interact with the Italian populace. Particularly in the realm of communication, the ability to speak Italian permitted these men to interact on a unique level with the Italian people, creating truly meaningful interactions and admiration. From this examination, it is clear that Italian American soldiers were greatly impacted by their Italian identities during their service in the Italian Campaign of the Second World War.

Conclusions

World War II unquestionably impacted the lives of every American citizen. For Italian Americans, however, this impact was unique and multifaceted. First and foremost, the war allowed Italian Americans to display an undeniable sense of American patriotism, an attitude that directly contradicted images of Italian espionage or treason. For Italian American men, this patriotic identity rooted itself in military service as thousands Italian American men joined the ranks to defend their country. While the war created an environment to harness an American identity, those stationed in Italy found their Italian background playing a meaningful role during their service. For many, Italian ancestry fostered sentimental feelings that compelled them to seek out relatives still in Italy. Additionally, the ability to speak the Italian language allowed for direct and meaningful interactions with the Italian people. Most importantly, this connection

cultivated mutual respect and admiration between the soldiers and natives.

Thus, this analysis provides insights into many of the Italian American accounts involving ethnic prejudice and identity before and during the war, specifically with those Italian American men serving in Italy. Although this analysis provides only a small glimpse into the experiences of Italian Americans during World War II, it nevertheless provides a necessary contribution to the study of race, ethnicity, and identity during this historical period.

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