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RESEARCH ARTICLE



# Sons of our race! Help your motherland! Buy Italian! Italian propaganda through food ads among Italian American ethnic communities at the turn of the century

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## ABSTRACT

This essay will focus on the political meanings about food consumption among Italian Americans at the turn of the Century underlining how and where these meanings were spread and affected the idea of 'italianness'. Food advertisements published on ethnic newspapers reported political messages and the images of great Italian personalities, such as Giuseppe Garibaldi, Cristoforo Colombo or Dante Alighieri, fostering the sense of nostalgia among migrants. Similarly, some brands were named after personalities such as D'Annunzio and Mussolini, to emphasize political affinity to the motherland. The groceries and other small food shops that sold these goods represented not only a place to buy things, but also a hangout for the ethnic community and depicted the landscape of the ethnic neighbor. Often the owner came from the same village of his customers and became a symbol because his origin ensured the authenticity of the products. Go to a particular shop and buy a particular food could represent a political choice. Italian Governments, and above all Fascist Regime, forced migrants to demonstrate to be loyal patriots and kin with the family left in Italy buying Italian products first.

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## Introduction: policies, 'Greater Italy' and national identity of Italian migrants

Between the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, there was an increase in the number of Italians who crossed the ocean to move permanently or temporarily to North or South America. To give a sense of the magnitude of the phenomenon, during the decade 1891–1900 about half a million of Italians left for the United States and Canada, while in the following decade, there were more than two million departures. Therefore, the Italian ruling class had to change its approach to a phenomenon, migration, which until then had been only dealt with in a purely repressive attitude.<sup>1</sup> With the defeat of the Italian army near the Ethiopian city of Adwa in 1896,<sup>2</sup> the imperialist ambitions of Italian Prime Minister Francesco Crispi disappeared and for a decade Italian Government colonial aspirations were interpreted differently;

namely, emigration to the Americas was now seen as a possible means for cultural and economic expansion. This vision, originally suggested by the northern Italian liberal élite, was enshrined in the emigration law of 1901, which established the *Commissariato Generale per l'Emigrazione* (General Commission for Emigration) and which transferred the mandate on migratory affairs from the Ministry of the Interior to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The emigrant was to become a sort of missionary and ambassador of Italy and of Italianness, the bridgehead who, through purchases and production – especially of foodstuffs – was to open new markets for the homeland.<sup>3</sup> It was soon realized, however, that these migrants had little sense of national belonging and their identity was more tied to the region or small village of origin. This lack of sense of national belonging can be seen in religion too. If, in general, Italians were Catholics, their rituals were not seen in a positive way by the Irish catholic Church. The Irish blamed Italians for paganism because of their various, and regional, devotion of Saints. Every member of a common Italian area (province or city, above all) followed specific ways and feasts for patron saints. Some Italian Americans remember they were used to prepare large loaves of bread and invite friends and neighbors on St. Joseph's Day. Then, what was left over from the feast day was donated to the poor. After some years emerged 'national' cults such as Our Lady of Mount Carmel, whose devotion became a moment of cohesion and gathering for the Italians of East Harlem. The rituals often adapted to the American context, as evidenced by the custom of sticking banknotes on statues of Our Lady or saints, but at the same time attempted to reproduce Italian forms of sociability. In the memories of Italian Americans, festivals are often associated with images and tastes of typical regional products that were thus associated with that particular time of year. The festivals, however, were also frequented by non-Italians who came to the ethnic neighborhood often to buy products that they would probably never have been able to find at a different time of year.

Therefore, for Italian emigrants we can also speak of translocal migrants, a definition that better specifies links with the *paese* rather than with Italy.<sup>4</sup> This is why the Italian ruling class, formed by middle-class people with ties to foreign trade, tried to give a national identity to Italian migrants. At the same time the theories of social scientists and anthropologists such as Cesare Lombroso, Giuseppe Sergi and Alfredo Niceforo, who argued for the coexistence of two racially different 'Italies', began to gain resonance in American circles.<sup>5</sup> In three ethnographic studies, Alfredo Niceforo tried to scientifically demonstrate the existence of two Italian races, the first one, the Aarii, located in the North, and the second one, the Italics, of Eurafrikan origins, in the South. Thanks to the supposedly scientific approach of these studies, the racial inferiority of the Italian South compared to the North was regarded as demonstrated.<sup>6</sup> These authors provided US racists with a justification to introduce a distinction between a good migration and an undesirable one. In particular, Sergi provided the elements to make northern migrants more acceptable; he in fact claimed that they were endowed with greater social sentiment, more inclined to order, discipline and care for the common good. On the contrary, southern Mediterranean people, described as lacking in social structures and forms of collective government, and with a penchant for relying on individual ingenuity, became *de facto* deemed unassimilable in a rational and ordered society such as the American one.<sup>7</sup> Even if in Ellis Island at the beginning of the twentieth century the distinction between Northern and Southern Italians still existed, the image of Italian

southerners became soon the stereotype of the behavior of all Italians. The distinction between North and South, anyway, made northerners believe that they were a step above their southern compatriots in the hierarchical scale of the American racist order. Looking at the findings of the 1911 Immigration Commission, Italians were divided into two different ethnic and linguistic groups along the lines of Sergi and Nicosia's studies. Northern Italians were placed in the Keltic group while southerners in the Iberic group. There were two other entries, namely Sicilians and Calabrians, which, although they did not represent two distinct ethnic groups, were nevertheless identified as having their own characteristics and specificities.<sup>8</sup>

In this article, I will analyze the relationship between the images associated with food-stuffs in nineteenth and twentieth century advertisements published in Italian ethnic newspapers and the politically motivated mobilizations to buy Italian products fostered by the government to pursue economic, cultural, political and military aims. The consumption of Italian food products provided the migrants with the possibility of imaginatively returning to Italy. It offered the opportunity to 'experience' Italy and participate in the life and culture of the nation even for those who had never crossed the Atlantic, namely the second generations.<sup>9</sup> Historiography, while acknowledging its limitations, has widely adopted the theoretical approach of transnationalism, a paradigm that provides the tools to understand how migrants are people who forge ties both in the host country and the country of origin. The integration of migrants does not constitute a total break with the world they have left behind, even when there is not intention of reversing migration. The Italian experience, therefore, can be understood by analyzing the networks that were formed, both the mainly family-based spontaneous ones and the state-sponsored ones built both by sending and receiving countries for political, economic, and commercial purposes. Even in the case of migrants have no intention of coming back, countries of origin recognize they can be a lobbying tool or they can be useful for commercial and political expansion. In the specific case of Italy, moreover, migrations took place at a time when a process of nation-building was underway. This consequently was tied in with the fates of transatlantic migrants. Importers and manufacturers used images and symbols that appealed to a transnational consumer audience whose changing tastes challenged the categories of tradition and authenticity.<sup>10</sup> In the Italian case, therefore, emigration gave rise to a conception of a deterritorialized nation as well as of a deterritorialized kind nationalism in a context of 'guided transnationalism'. In other words, the national sentiment was present wherever its member lived, whether inside or outside Italy's formal borders.<sup>11</sup>

Recently, historiography has highlighted that consumption is a key factor in the development of capitalism and in the formation of national identities, especially from a perspective guided by the categories of gender, class and race.<sup>12</sup> However, there are two areas that remain unexplored; on the one hand, the structural ways in which consumption influenced migrant practices and identities, on the other how political goals of governments have often gone hand in hand with the commercial purposes of private companies. Authors such as Simone Cinotto, Elizabeth Zaroni, Hasia Diner, Piero Bevilacqua, Donna Gabaccia, Vito Teti and Stefano Luconi have emphasized the cultural, political and gendered aspects that have altered the diets of the first migrants and of subsequent generations, and notion of Italianness linked to food consumption; in addition to that, they have also explored the consequences of this in the host countries and in the

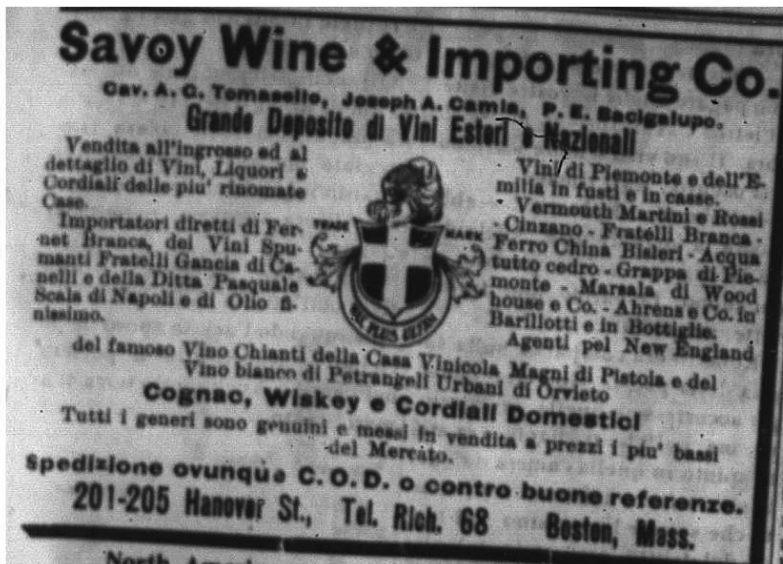
country of departure. The consumption of meat and in general the impact of the variety and quantity of products available on the American market caused an anthropological change. Many observers noted that the qualitative and quantitative improvements in food had transformed the second generation who no longer looked as poor and emaciated as their parents. In addition, remittances gave the family left in Italy access to products previously almost exclusively available to the wealthier classes. This also caused resentment on the part of those who saw their class privilege eroded through the consumption of fresh and expensive food.<sup>13</sup>

The role of advertisements in ethnic newspapers is yet to be investigated from a perspective that considers spatial-temporal and political-commercial relations with a real and imagined national territory during a period spanning two generations. The main archival source for this research is the collection of ethnic newspapers kept in Minneapolis at the Immigration History Research Center. Newspapers were in fact the medium through which advertising messages (which often oscillated between commercial promotion and political propaganda) could contribute to creating among Italian Americans a shared imaginary on the meanings and stereotypes connected to food consumption. Newspapers, therefore, helped to structure an imagined community based on a sense of national belonging that early Italian migrants lacked. For this reason, Italy and the ethnicity of Italian Americans were also shaped by the circulation of newspapers, whose readers would become aware of being part of a community thanks to shared rituals and a shared imaginary.<sup>14</sup>

## Politics, history, and an invented past

The need to offer images of Italy which could be used to claim a non-subservient role in America and which could be suitable for structuring a feeling of shared national belonging, led to choosing to represent the Nation by using politicians and great personalities of the past on the one hand, and by exploiting current events which had received wide coverage in the United States on the other. The products were often linked to images of the Italian royal family, as is the case of the Savoy Wine & Importing Co., an importing firm in Boston which traded the brands Branca, Martini and Rossi, Bisleri, Gancia and Cinzano, and established an explicit link between the products and the House of Savoy (Figure 1).

Similarly, pasta production companies presented the Savoy coat of arms together with the American one, linking in the same advertisement the American character of their means of production ('Modern Pasta Factory') to the Italian 'personality' of the processed product ('Managed and administered by Italian technical personnel with Italian workers'). The explicit references to the Nation also served the purpose to represent a people that was no longer to be considered racially inferior and economically underdeveloped, but was in fact at the same level of the modern Anglo-American society. The unsuccessful colonial wars had ended up showing up the political and military limitations of the Kingdom of Italy and the weakness of a population considered in-between, not black but not totally white. It was therefore necessary to leverage the association between important politicians and the economic and commercial development that migrants could bring back to Italy. The Di Pietro company, for example, a brewery based in Boston, decided to create a brand to honor King Umberto I of Savoy.<sup>15</sup> In



*La Gazzetta del Massachusetts, Boston, 14 August 1909*

**Figure 1.** *La Gazzetta del Massachusetts, Boston, 14 August 1909.*

the advertising for this brand of beer, along with the image of the king, the flags of Italy and of the United States appeared together. This was meant to promote the consumption of a product and of a company which could offer a way to maintain links with the country of origin. The figure of the sovereign also represented the Italian community which, despite being outside the borders of its homeland, had a guide, a father who would still watch over them. King Umberto on the one hand entrusted the migrants with a mission (to spread Italianness in various arenas) and on the other offered them a useful image to use in the States. Xenophobic tendencies were in fact rampant in America, and Italians were considered at the bottom of the ladder of the racist North American social order.

The consumption of products associated with the greatness and expansion of Italy was also linked to specific brands, such as is the case of the liquor Fernet-Branca which was presented as the 'Glory of the Italian Nation because it carries the name of Italy admired and respected in all parts of the world.'<sup>16</sup> The image of Christopher Columbus served this purpose too; it was also used also to communicate and promote a new era of Italian economic and cultural imperialism, achieved thanks to emigration. Until then, however, the image of the sailor from Genoa had been celebrated in the United States because of his contribution to the expansion of Christianity and to the civilization to America; there was no emphasis on his Italian origin. Columbus Day became a *de facto* day for Italians to reclaim their place in the construction of Italianness.<sup>17</sup> Specific products were also associated with important personalities of the Italian Risorgimento such as Giuseppe Garibaldi; pictures and representations of him were often offered as gifts, and his name was adopted by companies as a brand name.<sup>18</sup> The construction of the myth of Garibaldi began while the leader was still alive. After his death, Garibaldi and the territories on which he fought became a *lieu de mémoire* through which the identity, the liberation and unification of a



people and its nation were constructed. The image of Garibaldi had the ability to ignite the political passions of the Italian community in the States. This happened in two specific circumstances. The first was on the occasion of the 4th of July 1907, a date that marked the Independence Day of the United States as well as the 100th anniversary of Garibaldi's birth; this coincidence was exploited to plastically represent Italian American roots and ethnic identity. During the celebrations, a place devoted to Garibaldi's memory was inaugurated, namely Meucci's house on Staten Island where Garibaldi was hosted during his American stay. The Italian ethnic newspaper *Il Progresso Italo Americano* took the initiative of organizing a march of about ten thousand people; this turned Meucci's house into a sort of pantheon of Garibaldi. The second circumstance was the occasion of the 50th anniversary of his death, in June 1932. The ceremonies in this case triggered bitter verbal and physical clashes between fascist and anti-fascist groups who were vying to take over Garibaldi's heritage. Some products were advertised as having played a role in the process of Italian unification, such as the Marsala Florio liquor: one advertisement specified that 'Garibaldi, before marching on Naples, landed with his Thousand at Marsala and after a brief stop he felt so invigorated that he no longer doubted his strength and we know that a few days later he triumphantly entered Naples.'<sup>19</sup> Therefore, Marsala Florio claimed that its product was linked to Garibaldi and the accomplishment of the unification of the Nation; the consumption of this product therefore, it was implied, could shape Italian consumers who had emigrated to the United States into a cohesive and respected community. There were also references to celebrities of the time, such as the opera singer Enrico Caruso, the poet and adventurer Gabriele D'Annunzio<sup>20</sup> and even Benito Mussolini. Mussolini was used for commercial purposes by the Indiana Macaroni Company. This initiative came under fire in *Il Corriere del Popolo*, an antifascist newspaper based in San Francisco, which made its views clear:

Let us add neither cheese, nor tomato sauce, nor comment to "Mussolini Maccheroni Brand", to avoid an encounter with the noble wrath and the novel tastes of the dictator, whose order to seize the republican *Corriere* might be extended across the seas and over the mountains, or who might have us given a generous measure of "Mussolini Brand" oil, making it very hard for us to digest the tasty "Mussolini Brand" maccheroni.<sup>21</sup>

The images associated with Italian products offered suggestions which tended to erase time and space, portraying Italy as a nation even before the nation had actually come into existence. Therefore, using decontextualized historical figures became a tool to represent the importance of a national community that had rediscovered an ancient (and invented) unity and power. Often these images were related to the economic achievements of the leading Italian merchants, called Prominents, who were thus attested as representatives of Italy's past, present, and future glories. In conjunction with Italy's entry into the First World War, a number of brands began to highlight the link between Italians and Ancient Rome. In the following decade, more specific references to Romanity gradually appeared. The Neapolitan company Ajello-Bozza, for instance, called their olive oil Romolo; moreover, the Claudia Roman Imperial Mineral Water of New York emphasized that its mineral water Claudia was already used by Roman emperors.<sup>22</sup> The most interesting example perhaps, however, is an ad for Ferro China Roma by Thomas Pipitone's New York company. The Ferro China Roma bottle is juxtaposed with the figure of a Roman legionnaire and the caption accompanying the

image is 'You can obtain strength and health and also make your children grow up healthy and strong like the ancient Romans by always drinking Ferro China Roma.'<sup>23</sup>

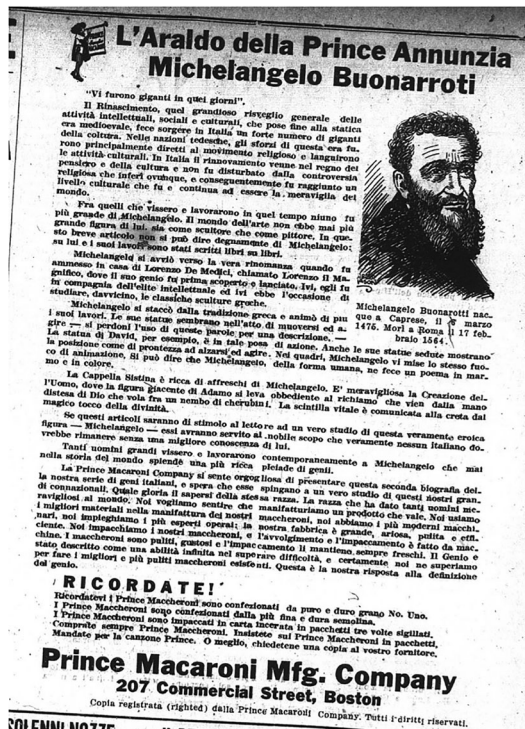
These specific references to Romanity were echoes of previous links established by Italian nationalist circles starting from the beginning of the twentieth century; this is when the annexation of Libya first and the territory beyond Italy's north-eastern border later became pressing issues on the nationalists' agenda. Latinity and Romanity, in fact, were elements that were to be opposed on the one hand to the Slavic and Bolshevik barbarians from the East, and on the other represented the 'historical' justification for the conquest of Libya – a land which was considered to be the 'fourth shore' of Italy – as a return to an Italian ambition to an empire, which had existed in Roman times.<sup>24</sup> This return, during the Fascist regime, was not intended to be a revisitation of the past, but the starting point to build a new civilization. According to the historian Emilio Gentile, 'the *new Italians* that Fascism wanted to forge were supposed to be the Romans of modernity'.<sup>25</sup> It was therefore clear that the Italian emigrant needed to be represented as an heir of the legionaries who created the Roman Empire, and as an heir of Romanity, a concept that went beyond the boundaries of the nation state and projected Fascism into a universal dimension. These images therefore went on to create a sense of continuity linking Italian blood to a lineage, or a race, that had innate qualities, handed down over the centuries. Exemplary in this sense was the Italian Genius campaign launched by Prince Macaroni of Boston in August 1933, during which short biographies of great Renaissance men, including Michelangelo Buonarroti, Leonardo da Vinci and Raphael Sanzio, were published. In these ads, the qualities of each artist were said to be shared by the products and the company, with an emphasis on the pride of belonging to 'the same race. The race that has given so many wonderful men to the world'.<sup>26</sup> In Raphael's biography, for example, Prince Macaroni claimed for itself the ability to improve artistic knowledge (Figure 2):

Like Raphael, we have adapted everything good about the manufacture of macaroni and added to it. We have developed a product that is a masterpiece. Try our macaroni, and you will confirm that we have created a product unique in its field. We pack the macaroni to keep it fresh and clean, and to protect you from any substitution.<sup>27</sup>

## Political propaganda among ethnic communities

From the First World War onwards, the names and imagery of consumer products became more and more closely linked to the events of the country of origin. During the First World War, Italy's alliance with the United Kingdom, France and later the United States, made it easier to link the consumption of products with support for the war effort. Newspapers such as *Il Progresso Italo-Americano* were at the forefront in the organization of fundraising events, dinners, and concerts. Italian American cookbooks conceived to support the two homelands at war circulated too. An example of this is the *Practical Italian Recipes for American Kitchens* which was printed and sold to help the families of Italian soldiers in 1917 in Wisconsin.<sup>28</sup> The cookbook could first be requested from Julia Lovejoy Cuniberti of Janesville and then was reprinted in 1918 in Washington. The proceeds of the sale of the book benefited the displaced Italian families and children who fled from the territories which were invaded by





## La Gazzetta del Massachusetts, 12th august 1933

Figure 2. La Gazzetta del Massachusetts, 12th august 1933.

Austrian troops after the Italian army lost the Caporetto battle.<sup>29</sup> In two years, after more than four thousand copies were sold, almost two thousand dollars were collected and sent to the Young Workers' Colonies in Rome, founded at the end of 1917. The signatures on some of the recipes are significant; they are not only of individual personalities (all of whom were women, which probably indicates that this was a dialogue by and for a female audience) but also of restaurants and businesses in the United States (e.g. the Roma Pavilion Restaurant in Chicago) and in Italy (e.g. the Pensione Santa Caterina in Siena). The presence of these businesses evidently reveals a dense network of dialogue between ethnic communities in the States and Italy, united in a shared propaganda and warfare effort.

During the war, moreover, some Italians, recruited into the American army and sent to fight in France, were called for the first time Americans, fueling the process of ethnicization that would develop in the years between the wars.<sup>30</sup> The entry of Italians into the consumer society was therefore influenced simultaneously by American economic and commercial dynamics and by the growth of a sense of belonging to a new Italian and American ethnic group. Adherence to a shared war effort, moreover, could bind both the American-ness and the Italian-ness of relatives left at home, particularly women, whose sons and husbands fought either with the Italian or the American army. This link is explained well by an advertisement for Caruso Brand Macaroni, which shows a

truck carrying packs of pasta to a military camp, greeted by a standing ovation from the soldiers. To reinforce the message of the image, the advertisement also features a testimonial from the doughboys at Camp Kendrick in New Jersey.<sup>31</sup> The consumption of Caruso Brand macaroni therefore not only meant using the same product of the soldiers of the AEF (American Expeditionary Forces) but it also was a symbol that simultaneously supported the two homelands at war (Figure 3).

At the end of the conflict, a lot of advertisements linked the consumption of specific products to the victory against Austria and Germany. An example of this is Calissano wines from Alba, which called for a toast to victory.<sup>32</sup> Pueblo Macaroni, moreover,

**Ci scrivono dal Campo:**  
 "I Maccheroni Caruso Brand sono così buoni che non se ne ha mai a sufficienza".  
 Firmato: Doughboy — Y. M. C. A.  
 Camp Kendrick, Lakewood, N. J.

**Ne' questa e' la sola testimonianza**  
 che ci è pervenuta, ma ce ne sono arrivate e ce ne arrivano giornalmente  
 da persone di tutti i ceti  
 dall'operaio che noi  
**MACCHERONI CARUSO BRAND**  
 trova l'alimento ECONOMICO per l'aumento che essi fanno nella cottura e SOSTANZIOSO, per il  
 nutrimento che essi contengono, all'epurare dal poltoso l'astidipensano, che mai gusto prima in  
 vita sua  
**CIBO S' DELIZIOSO**  
 Andremo di mano in mano pubblicando qualche delle testimonianze che riceveremo, ma se volete  
 convincervi che quello che vi diciamo  
**E' LA PURA VERITA'**  
**PROVATE VOI STESSO**  
 Si vendono a minuto presso:  
**New York Macaroni Stores**  
 103 THOMPSON ST., NEW YORK CITY

181 Thompson St., New York City	2219 First Avenue
197 Bleecker St.	corn. 114th St.
234 East 29th St.	593 Morris Ave., Bronx, N. Y. City
121 Mulberry St.	660 East 187th St., Bronx
407 West 39th St.	

Si vendono a caso (intere porzioni) presso i seguenti:

Bacilio, Calandra Co., 121 Spring St., New York	A. Nardello, 310 E. 125th St., New York
I. Bergoni & Co., 434 Bleecker St., New York	M. Aiello Co., 74 Rodgwick St., Brooklyn
G. Cella & Bro., 454 West Broadway, New York	B. Bendis, 1029 Wallabout Market, Brooklyn
Cello Bros., 529 West Broadway, New York	F. Borsa, 253 Flushing Ave., Brooklyn
C. Maspero, 818 Greenwich St., New York	S. Montagner, 180 Jackson St., Brooklyn
P. Pantano, 40 Mulberry St., New York	New York Macaroni Stores, 7016 Wallabout
Parodi, Drennis & Co., 183 Perry St., New York	Market, Brooklyn
Parodi & Co., 283 Washington St., New York	G. Sarno & Sons, 1003 Wallabout Mt., Brooklyn
Picotti, Cella & Helmsch, 163 Bleecker St., N. Y.	P. Scalfano, 1009 Wallabout Mt., Brooklyn
Scaramelli & Co., 82 N. Moore St., New York	Marotta & Cella, 4 Wallabout Market, Brooklyn
Scard-Bro., 120 McDougal St., New York	Pastory & Cresci, 681 Palisade Ave., Jersey City
A. Sarge & Co., 2037 First Ave., New York	

*La Follia di New York, 19 November 1918*

**Figure 3.** *La Follia di New York, 19 November 1918.*

created the brand Victory in the first half of the 1920s, which depicted a triumphant soldier on the body of a defeated challenger.<sup>33</sup> New York's Caffè Ferrara even created the line of Great Victory Sweets which bore the name of the most important personalities of the conflict. There were Wilson-style papalini, Diaz-style mostaccioli,<sup>34</sup> Pershing-style almond paste, Vittorio Emanuele III-style royal pasta and Poincaré-style biscuits.<sup>35</sup> The practice of naming foods or dishes after protagonists of specific historical periods or battles can be traced back to as early as the late eighteenth century. An example of this trend is the *Louisentortchen* dedicated to Louise of Prussia, an icon of the anti-Napoleonic battles, or the *filet à la Wellington*, in honor of the victorious British general at Waterloo.<sup>36</sup> In the same period, dishes dedicated to influential politicians were well known in Italy too, as is evidenced by chicken *alla Luzzatti* or beef *alla Ponti*.<sup>37</sup>

The bond between the loyalties to the two homelands that was built during the war lasted into the years of economic reconstruction. Evocative names continued to be chosen as brand names – such the Piave<sup>38</sup> and Fiume<sup>39</sup> olive oil brands – and several commercial initiatives were organized to support Italy's economic and social recovery. Between 1919 and 1920, a food parcel service from the United States to Italy was in fact activated under the name Italianissima Inc., which was headed by the Italian Consulate in New Haven; this initiative was modeled on a precedent to this program in 1917 built on the idea of the *Progresso Italo-Americano*.<sup>40</sup> The initiative circulated in numerous newspapers which emphasized that helping Italian families was a patriotic act toward Italy. The parcels could be of various types and prices, and contained mainly pasta, sugar, coffee, lentils and condensed milk.<sup>41</sup>

### Italian goods first! From war debts to the empire

The close link between consumption and helping one's fellow countrymen – that is to say keeping involved in Italy's economic, social and political events – continued throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Its aim was mitigating the crisis caused by the world war and intensifying the duties of Italians toward their families and the new Fascist nation. In 1925, for example, the Italian American company Alps Drug, based in New York, offered to send torinese Caffarel chocolates to friends and family in Italy for Christmas and New Year, while the three Medals Macaroni Stores of San Francisco encouraged people to eat products from Italy.<sup>42</sup> The possibility of contributing to the improvement of life in Italy was expressed in two campaigns held in 1925–1926 and 1935–1936. These campaigns aimed to drive Italians to buy products to help their country of origin achieve its economic and political goals. Mussolini frequently resorted to the mobilization of migrant groups as consumers of imported products, as these were seen as instruments of Italy's political and economic expansion. In this context, Mussolini and the Fascist leadership, faced with the substantial failure of the Italian Fasci in the United States,<sup>43</sup> outlined a different strategy to increase the regime's influence overseas. No longer by direct political propaganda but by use of a sort of cultural or 'parallel' diplomacy that through cultural and economic promotion would be able to mobilize the Italian American masses around specific themes useful to Italy's political and economic expansion.<sup>44</sup> This was also possible thanks to the dynamism of some entrepreneurs who supported the regime. The first campaign concerned the payment of war debts, considered an obstacle to Italy's economic expansion. Several importers – in particular Joseph Personeni and Luigi

Gandolfi, both based in New York – launched an intense advertising campaign in the newspapers. With the clear intention to link mobilization and the purchase of products for Christmas, Personeni layed out the tasks and mission of the Italians in the United States.

To help Italy pay its war debts. To import and distribute in America the most varied, selected and voluminous assortment of Italian products. YOUR DUTY To give preference on all occasions to the good products of Italy and to promote them actively among your fellow countrymen and Americans. OUR DUTY To promote and facilitate, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, the consumption of the most accredited Italian Specialties, selling them at uniform prices and at the highest convenience.<sup>45</sup>

The following year, again during the Christmas festivities, the Gandolfi import house published two long appeals, very similar to political manifestos.

For three months now, Italy has been fighting a decisive and close battle for its economic independence. The problem to be solved hinges on the need to import less and export more. The fruits of this battle, when victory is won, will be stronger foreign exchange, higher wages, and a reduction in the price of living. We Italians in America, the natural customers of Italian export trade, cannot and must not shirk our duty to do our part to ensure that the gigantic effort of our homeland is crowned with certain success. Italian products, in terms of price and quality, challenge and win any comparison: the watchword, today and always, remains fixed in the practice of preferring, buying, increasing the consumption of products imported from Italy. Life, today, costs more in Italy than anywhere else in the world; Italian workers - the architects of our future power - have lower wages than workers in France, England, America and Germany. Nevertheless, their spirit of sacrifice and their passion for work have something that stands out and wins. Let us give our contribution to these brothers of ours, who fight with a fierce will: let us buy the products that are the fruit of their labours: let us share together the pride of the unfailing common victory.<sup>46</sup>

Personeni perhaps printed the most explicit image; Italy is seated against a background made up with the coats of arms of the most important Italian cities, including those of the cities of Trento and Trieste at the bottom, cities that were only conquered after the First World War.<sup>47</sup> In the national imagination, the two cities soon formed a so-called 'patriotic hendiads'. It stood for the defense of Italian products, linked to the defense against the Austro-Germans in Trento, and for economic expansion which was linked to the conquest of Trieste, a first step toward the acquisition of the Istrian and Balkan territories. The advertisement then carries a message that sounds almost like an intimidating and belligerent order: 'Italy needs to ... Produce, Export, Expand. We must prefer the good products of Italy everywhere' (Figure 4).

The campaign officially ended as a result of the diplomatic agreement between Giuseppe Volpi (Minister of Finance from 1925 to 1928) and Andrew William Mellon, head of the US Treasury, thanks to which Italy obtained a sixty-two-year deferment in war payments with very advantageous interest rates.<sup>48</sup> Despite the official end of the campaign, however, mobilization was to remain almost constant despite the 1929 crisis and the hardships that hit Italian producers during the prohibitionist era.

The second campaign coincided with Fascist Italy's attack on Ethiopia and the consequent sanctions decreed by the League of Nations. Fascist propaganda in the United States provoked harsh fights between the Italian and the Black Community.<sup>49</sup> Once





*La Follia di New York, New York, 31 October 1926*

**Figure 4.** *La Follia di New York, New York, 31 October 1926.*

again, one of the companies which was most active in promoting the campaign to buy products to help Italy cope with the sanctions was Joseph Personeni; he published a call that combined nationalism and rising racism.<sup>50</sup> Alongside the advertisement for Ferro China Bisleri, in fact, the following announcement can be read: “This masculine and energetic figure ardently embracing the Italian flag says to you all: “Sons of our race, wherever you are, defend and spread the products of Italy” (Figure 5).<sup>51</sup>

The general exaltation fueled by hopes of the birth of an empire in the event of victory over Ethiopia, led many Italian American associations to organize donations of gold to the country, fundraising and offerings for the Red Cross, which often were ways to hide fundraising for the war, as reported in some anti-fascist newspapers.<sup>52</sup> The messages from many companies, amplified by the Italian Chambers of Commerce in the United States, emphasized that it was necessary to incur into a slightly higher expense to buy imported products in order to help Italy economically. For example, Pietro Carbonelli, a member of the Italian Chamber of Commerce in New York, argued that ‘consuming Italian products means [...] supporting Italy against those who, blinded by selfishness and subservient to the imperialism of others, believe that they can crush us, laying siege to our old people, our women and our children’.<sup>53</sup>



*La Gazzetta del Massachusetts, Boston, 9 may 1936*

**Figure 5.** *La Gazzetta del Massachusetts, Boston, 9 May 1936.*

In general, all advertising, not just that of food products, was affected by the climate of war. This widespread feeling of exaltation led grocery stores, greengrocers, and other businesses to mobilize and support the campaign in aid of Italy. In cities such as Philadelphia, Boston or Chicago, some greengrocers even positioned fruit to create a large red cross, while the owners of the Gloria Chain Stores, although of Greek origin, identified themselves so closely with the Italian community that they collected funds that were then delivered directly to Mussolini in Rome. The campaign continued even after the conquest of Ethiopia because the United States, which was not a member of the League of Nations, remained one of the few markets open to Italian exports while sanctions were still in place. Evoking Romanity, the advertisement of the tomato importing company Luigi Locatelli claimed that 'the tomato gave vigour and energy to the East African Legionaries and made them win. It will also give you the strength you need for your daily work'.<sup>54</sup> The economic and cultural policy of Fascism led many Chambers of Commerce, largely made up of food entrepreneurs, to become a propaganda tool for the regime, much like other organizations on American soil. A series of cover pages of the *San Francisco Chamber of Commerce Commercial Review* published in the occasion of the victory the Ethiopian War, for example, testifies to this. As is shown in the image, between March and July 1936, photos of Benito Mussolini, Vittorio Emanuele III and Rodolfo Graziani were printed on the cover page (Figure 6).





«La Rassegna. Pubblicazione Mensile della Camera di Commercio Italiana in California», Marzo 1936, Maggio 1936, Luglio 1936

**Figure 6.** “La Rassegna. Pubblicazione Mensile della Camera di Commercio Italiana in California”, Marzo 1936, Maggio 1936, Luglio 1936.

Precisely on the occasion of the conflict with Ethiopia, the Chambers engaged with the press and radio stations in the campaign to buy Italian products. The campaign was in fact launched with an official speech by Ercole Locatelli on the radio. Locatelli was a prominent member of the New York Chamber and a dairy entrepreneur. The Chambers also tried to convince American circles that the conquest of Ethiopia would bring undoubted advantages for the American market and international trade. The San Francisco Chamber, along with a fundraiser for the Italian Red Cross – an initiative shared by many organizations and newspapers – also launched a counter-boycott of British products.<sup>55</sup> Carlo Bertolaia, of the New York Chamber, instead engaged in a series of conferences that were repeatedly reported by the ethnic press in various cities, especially in those where there were active Italian Chambers. In a speech in May 1936, Bertolaia likened Mussolini’s statement ‘you serve your country by guarding a can of petrol’ to the role of Italian American consumers.

Every gallon of olive oil, every can of tomato, every piece of cheese represents the combined work and effort of an Italian farmer, an Italian worker, an Italian merchant. Every purchase you make here, however modest it may be, constitutes a reason for living, a help, an encouragement to the mass of our Italian brothers and sisters who live in their homeland [...] Italians of America! You have never had a finer, easier or more convenient opportunity to safeguard your interests and to render immense service to our Motherland. Help her in this difficult hour by buying, using and having Italian products used - real Italian products, grown in Italy, processed in Italy, packaged in Italy by industrious, tireless, heroic Italian hands.<sup>56</sup>

At the end of the campaign, the Chambers continued their effort to support the fascist autarkic project by publishing the call of Felice Guarnieri, Minister for Trade and Currency, for an increase in exports from Italy. In it, Guarnieri stressed how it was necessary to keep

in mind that to serve one's foreign customers well means ensuring continuity of work for one's workers and increasing the prestige of the country, [...] every position wrested from foreign competition constitutes a victory not only on the economic field, but also on the field of spiritual values.<sup>57</sup>

Again Bertolaia, in one of his memoirs of 1937, argued that if a consumer wanted to eat 'real' Italian food he would have to buy imported products because what was produced in the United States was not a hybrid, but a completely American foodstuff that had nothing to do with the Italian gastronomic tradition. While the campaign to purchase products imported from Italy had limited effects, the consumption of Italian Style products increased. In fact, the war in Ethiopia generated a widespread feeling of exaltation that also involved non-Italian companies. This spirit, moreover, produced commercial initiatives of various nature aimed at helping the Italian autarkic project, such as the coffee shipments organized by the Bostonian company Charles Torrielli,<sup>58</sup> and by Joseph Personeni who had created his own brand Imperial.<sup>59</sup> This climate of exaltation, aid and loyalty to the country of origin, however, proved to be extremely superficial and quickly waned. It disappeared the day after Italy's entry into the war against the United States, when Italian Americans, as opposed to what happened in the previous world war, found themselves in the position of having to choose between two nations fighting on opposite sides.

## Conclusion

As we have seen, in conclusion, food consumption and political mobilization were profoundly intertwined. The entry into consumer society contributed to the definition of the ethnic identity of the community of Italian Americans. In addition to this, the sentiment of national belonging was often invented and fueled by advertising images and campaigns led by Italian governments with the collaboration of ethnic entrepreneurs. Many of them were convinced that if immigrants imagined returning to Italy by buying imported products their money would materially cross oceans. Instead, Italo-American producers realized that the demand for Italian food did not necessarily mean a demand for authentic food; they realized that precise and effective promotional strategies and packaging techniques might suffice to foster the feeling in Italian consumers that they were experiencing 'Italy outside of Italy' by using imagination and political passion.

Two competing fields of forces emerged. On the one hand, an attempt was made to organize migrants in function of a commercial, political, and cultural expansion of Italy; the homeland was to become the center of a sort of Commonwealth linking the colonies of direct domination with the 'informal' ones constituted in the places of emigration. On the other hand, there was an intensification of the agency of governments and of the ruling class to assimilate Italian immigrants into the culture and ideology of modern Anglo-American capitalism. Italian American ethnicity was thus constructed on the one hand as a response to the discriminations suffered in the American context, and on the other hand with an awareness of the (invented) 'national' belonging to two worlds. The term 'Italian' was the result of an effort to rebuild one's identity in a diasporic context, which combined both the Italian identity as it was configured and spread abroad by liberal governments and the fascist regime, and as it was conceived by the American

society. The images of Garibaldi, the Savoy dynasty, or an ahistorical past of biological national unity conveyed by advertisements in ethnic newspapers helped to provide Italians with shared symbols with which to identify their social practices and to develop a sense of racial belonging to a well-defined group, which would tend to be considered white and no longer in-between, at least in comparison of other ethnic groups, such as the Chinese, blacks, and Puerto Ricans. The transnational cultural, commercial and financial networks of the ethnic entrepreneurs constituted the pivot around which the economic interests of the Italian and American bourgeoisie as well as the ideological structures of their respective countries met and clashed. The merchants thus became one of the privileged interlocutors for the national ethnic community and they were critical to convey ideological structures linked to socio-cultural practices.

## Notes

1. Manzotti, *La polemica sull'emigrazione*; Sori *Il dibattito politico*, 19–44; Annino, “La politica migratoria,” 1229–1268; Marucco, “Le statistiche dell'emigrazione,” 61–75; and Ostuni, “Leggi e politiche,” 309–319.
2. Labanca, *Oltremare*, 57–94.
3. Einaudi, *Un principe mercante*; Del Vecchio, “L'emigrazione italiana,” 139–206; Ciuffoletti and Degl'Innocenti, *L'emigrazione nella storia*, 154.
4. Zucchi, “Paesani or Italiani?,” 147–160; Baily, “The village-outward,” 43–67.
5. Teti, *La razza maledetta*; Petraccone, *Le due civiltà*.
6. Niceforo, *La Delinquenza in Sardegna*; Id. *L'Italia Barbara contemporanea*; Id. *Italiani del Nord e Italiani del Sud*.
7. Sergi, *Arii e italici*.
8. Perlmann, *America Classifies the Immigrants*; Benton-Cohen, *Inventing the Immigration Problem*, 168–199; Folkmar and Cuddeback Folkmar, *Dictionary of Races and People*, 81–85 and 127–128.
9. Zanoni, “Returning Home,” 45–61.
10. Cinotto, *The Italian American Table*; Zanoni, *Migrant Marketplaces*.
11. Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*.
12. Cavazza, Scarpellini, *I consumi*; Trentmann, *Empire of Things*.
13. Cinotto, *Soft soil black grapes*; Diner, *Hungering for America*; Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat*; Teti, “Emigrazione, alimentazione, culture popolari,” 575–600; Bevilacqua, “Emigrazione transoceanica e mutamenti dell'alimentazione,” 520–555; Zanoni, “Per Voi, Signore,” 33–71; and Luconi, “Buy Italian,” 455–474.
14. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*; Deschamps, *Histoire de la presse italo-américaine*.
15. Immigration History Research Center Archive (from now Ihrca), University of Minnesota (from now UoM), *La Gazzetta del Massachusetts*, end of 19th century.
16. Ihrca, UoM, *L'Araldo Italiano*, 9 giugno 1912.
17. Connell, “Who's Afraid of Columbus,” 136–147; Bushman, *America Discovers Columbus*; Michaud, *Columbus Day*, 47–72.
18. Doyle, *Americas Garibaldi*; Isnenghi, *Garibaldi fu ferito*; Riall, *Garibaldi*; Degl'Innocenti, *Garibaldi e l'Ottocento*; and Fanesi, *Garibaldi nelle Americhe*, 34–60.
19. Ihrca, UoM, *Corriere d'America*, 25 novembre 1925.
20. He was the hero of the so called “Impresa di Fiume” (nowadays Fiume is the city of Rijeka) and the Commander of the Italian Regency of Carnaro, near the Istrian area.
21. Ihrca, UoM, *Il Corriere del Popolo*, 6 luglio 1923.
22. Ihrca, UoM, *Corriere d'America*, 6 marzo 1923; Ihrca, UoM, *Corriere d'America*, 11 marzo 1923.
23. Ihrca, UoM, *Corriere del Wisconsin*, 14 aprile 1927.

24. Roccucci, *Roma capitale*.
25. Gentile, *La Grande Italia*, 149.
26. Ihrca, UoM, *La Gazzetta del Massachusetts*, 12, 19, 26 August 1933.
27. Ihrca, UoM, *La Gazzetta del Massachusetts*, 26th August 1933.
28. *Practical Italian Recipes*.
29. Labanca, *Caporetto: storia e memoria di una disfatta*.
30. Sterba, *Good Americans*.
31. Ihrca, UoM, *La Follia di New York*, 19 novembre 1918.
32. Ihrca, UoM, *Il Cittadino*, 12 dicembre 1918.
33. Ihrca, UoM, *Marsica Nuova*, first half of 20s.
34. Mostaccioli are a popular sweet of the gastronomic tradition of the Campania region.
35. Ihrca, UoM, *La Follia di New York*, 8 dicembre 1918.
36. Porciani, "Mappe mentali," 96–112.
37. Capatti, "Ricette o politica," 156–161.
38. Ihrca, UoM, *Il Progress Italo-Americano*, 4 gennaio 1920.
39. *Annuario*, 106.
40. *Le cassette di Natale per i nostri trionfatori sulle Alpi*, in Ihrca, UoM, *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, 15 novembre 1917.
41. Ihrca, UoM, *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, 1 agosto 1920.
42. Ihrca, UoM, *Il Corriere del Popolo*, 17 maggio 1928 and *Corriere d'America*, 25 novembre 1925.
43. Pretelli, *Il fascismo e gli italiani*.
44. Pretelli, "Italia e Stati Uniti," 523–534. Luconi, *La "Diplomazia parallela."* Garzarelli, "Fascismo e propaganda," 477–520. Garzarelli, "Parleremo al mondo intero." Cavarocchi, *Avanguardie dello spirito*. Carletti, Giometti, *Raffaello on the road*.
45. Ihrca, UoM, *Corriere d'America*, 3 dicembre 1925.
46. *Ibid.*, 12 and 25 dicembre 1926.
47. Ihrca, UoM, *La Follia di New York*, 31st October 1926.
48. Volpi, "Giuseppe Volpi," 71–85.
49. Venturini, *Neri e italiani ad Harlem*; Weisbord, "Black Americans," 236–241; Asante, "The Afro-American," 167–184; Scott, "Black Nationalism," 118–134; and Drago, "American Blacks," 883–884.
50. In relation with the 1938 racist laws see Luconi, "The Fascist racial turn," 32–47.
51. Ihrca, UoM, *La Gazzetta del Massachusetts*, 9 maggio 1936.
52. *Il fascismo italiano in America si nasconde dietro la Croce Rossa*, in Ihrca, "L'Adunata dei Refrattari," 23 novembre 1935.
53. Ihrca, UoM, *Il Grido della Stirpe*, 25 gennaio 1936.
54. Ihrca, UoM, *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, 17 maggio 1936.
55. "Per la difesa d'Italia," 7–8.
56. *La parola d'ordine per gl'Italiani nel mondo*, in Ihrca, UoM, *La Gazzetta del Massachusetts*, 30 maggio 1936.
57. Guarnieri, "Imperativo Categorico," 7.
58. Ihrca, UoM, *La Gazzetta del Massachusetts*, 18 novembre 1939.
59. Ihrca, UoM, *La Follia di New York*, 7 aprile 1940.

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