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## **A comparison of Italian immigration to Rochester, NY, before and after WWII**

Culture is an ever-changing chameleon. Those who seek to freeze it in amber risk not only distorting it but also misrepresenting it. It changes for many reasons. Its main purpose is to aid a society to adapt as circumstances change. Granted, in a crude utilitarian concept, not every part of culture has a strict material function. However, life is not simply materialistic and crude. It is safe to say, at least metaphorically, that cultures have souls and souls must also be nourished. Therefore, the beautiful and ceremonial side of life may often outlast the more utilitarian. Certain rituals, performances, and beliefs may outlive their strict usefulness. However, it is important to note that these less materialistic aspects of culture do have many reasons for being and many tasks to perform. Nevertheless, over time they may also change with circumstances.

One such area is that of religion. Religion among Italians-Americans is first different from religion among Italians in the country of Italy. It varies from region to region, and island to island. When immigrants came to the United States in large numbers from Italy, they adapted their religious beliefs to the American religious scene. There were huge differences between their Catholicism, even in its adapted form, from Irish and German fellow Catholics.

Moreover, not all Italian immigrants were Catholic, but they held on to many Italian secular practices.

Over time, Italian Catholics became more accepted into the American Catholic Church but were still considered different from Irish and German Catholics, for example. However, World War II and its aftermath led to a major change in American life, including the life of Italian-Americans. The war changed many things. Veterans had experiences with members of other ethnic groups that changed their lives. The GI bill opened more accessibility into mainstream American life and culture. Many who grew up in the period after WWII did not want to be different from their classmates and fellow Americans, even their fellow Catholics. They knew they were different, and, in many cases, their teachers and employers treated them differently.

I focus in this article on changes in religion among Italian-Americans before and after World War II. Like many differences, the changes were not always noted as they occurred but in reflection they seemed startling. Ideas regarding dogma, morals, rituals among other aspects of religion appear as almost opposites from one extreme to another. Yet, in changing they seem, as all change does, inevitable. Despite the change in religious beliefs and practices, however, the majority clung to their Italian identity. The later generations may even do so more than those of us of an older generation born on the cusp of World War II.

### **The Early Period**

Italians have been in Rochester for many years. However, they came in large numbers beginning in the 1880s and their migration continued into the 1920s. The migration of Italians slowed down in the 1930s and then increased for a time after World War II. Italians became Rochester's largest ethnic group, adding their flavor to the ethnic mix, along with the English, Scots, Irish, Germans, Poles, and other ethnic groups who settled in Rochester. Initially, they faced rejection and scorn. However, by the end of World War II they had become well-integrated into the Rochester community. With others, they moved to more integrated city neighborhoods and to Rochester's suburbs. They began to fill professional jobs, political and civil, including that of mayor.

While the Mafia had a foothold in Rochester, so did more reputable and civic minded institutions. Italians took their rightful place in Church organizations, Catholic and Protestant as well. The language may have faded from common public use but other customs remained, and their food became as American as the hot dog. But more subtle aspects of Italian culture remain-attitude, aesthetics, and family. There are other characteristics that mark the

community but the work ethic still appears to be strong in descendants of Italian immigrants and their children.

Indeed, the northern European clergy of Rochester generally found the Catholicism of these new immigrants lacking; it was, in their view, a form of paganism to be discouraged. The following passage from a sympathetic clerical historian captures the feel of the time:

Before the 1930s these [religious] festivals were observed on a big scale. There was a solemn High Mass in the church, and an Italian priest was brought in to deliver the panegirico in honor of the holy person whose feast was being commemorated. Some of the members or their families brought big candles to the church in fulfillment of vows to their patrons. If the orator of the day was a good one, excited listeners might cry out, "Ewiva"-"Long live Saint So-and-so!" Then, at the moment of the consecration, somebody inside the church would signal a group outside, and the outsiders would set off a round of giant fireworks, while a band struck up the Italian national anthem<sup>[1]</sup>.

In Rochester, as elsewhere, each religious society from different parts of Italy had its own statue, and members would carry it around their shoulders through their neighborhood while musicians played along. People pinned money to the sashes placed around the statues. After the parades, there would be parties and, maybe, fireworks. The rituals displayed aspects of the interpretability of the sacred and the secular, noted by Moore and Myerhoff<sup>[2]</sup>. They certainly highlighted symbolic proclamations of ethnic identity and a clear drawing of boundaries. They also displayed a religiosity that was in the larger community tolerated as a steppingstone toward "true" religiosity. The younger generation brought up in "mainstream" Catholicism looked down on our parents and grandparents as living relics. Old-fashioned was the catchall putdown of Old World remnants. And yet they often fascinated us-their children. When we were honest, we realized the depth of connectedness not always found in the modern world we embraced so readily and often without much thought. The history of the accommodation of these viewpoints is, truly, the history of the mutual socialization of Italians to the Catholic Church in Rochester and of that Church to the Italians. Simply put, the contact of Italians and other ethnic groups within the context of the Catholic Church changed not only the groups but also the Church itself. It became obvious to the Roman Catholic hierarchy of Rochester that some accommodation with Italian immigrants had to be made or they would be lost to the Church. Certainly, by 1900 it was apparent to any serious observer that a significant number of Italian immigrants was going to remain in Rochester, if not forever at least for a meaningful period. The Church could not afford to neglect their spiritual needs, no matter how foreign they and their vision of Catholicism might appear to northern European

Catholics. However, through becoming Americans and gaining the type of knowledge that fit us into the world sociologists call one of "Anglo conformity," those of my generation also lost knowledge that had provided our ancestors with clear skills that enabled them to adapt to their ecological settings. Loss of precisely the kind of knowledge stored in old rituals and "folk" creeds has hampered the easy movement of people into the "modern world" everywhere, as anthropologists have noted repeatedly<sup>[3]</sup>. The "third generation" phenomenon in which members of that generation seek meaning in a study of what the second generation rejected in the assimilation process is not just a seeking of sentimental nostalgia or a rejection of American identity. Rather, in large part, it is a groping for a sense of meaning that has been lost, a meaning that "ritual in use" provides, as Edith Turner has so wisely noted.

Most of Rochester's Italians are Catholic. They had to adjust to the American version of Catholicism, which in Rochester was a mixture of German and Irish traditions. By 1940, they had done so and added some of their own traditions to Catholicism as well. There were many milestones along the way. In 1898 there was a mass held for Italian immigrants in the Lady Chapel of Rochester's St. Patrick's Cathedral. Many Italian parishes opened soon after: St. Anthony of Padua Church 1906, Our Lady of Mt. Carmel 1909, St. Lucy's Church 1912, and St. Francis of Assisi Church 1929 among them. Additionally, many Italian Americans had moved away from their parents' parishes and into "American" parishes like Most Holy Redeemer and St. James. By the time of World War II the various national groups were beginning to mix.

Certainly, many still felt ties to the "old country". There were various drives for those whom the war affected in Europe. In Italian parishes like Mt. Carmel the pull was very strong as this passage makes clear. But the greatest special drive was for war-torn Italy. The pastor of Rochester's Mt. Carmel Church, Father Charles J. Azzi, headed the diocesan clothes-for-Italy drives of 1944 and 1945. He reported 160,000 pounds the first year, and 70,000 pounds the second years. The Diocese did another great favor to Italy at the time of the first national Italian elections, April 18, 1948 (Diocese of Rochester Archives). The diocese urged people to write letters to people in Italy warning them of the Communist threat. The Valguernera Society sent 1200 copies of a letter written by an East High School student, Gina Trovato, to people in Italy. Gina had recently come to Rochester from Italy.

It appears that Rochester's Italians were repaying the cost to the Diocese of Rochester. The Diocese said that the approximate cost of their Italian work from 1920 to 1936 was when broken into the following categories: Salaries \$75,700, Rents & Upkeep & Summer School Expense \$7,300, Interest & Principal Payments \$7,319 for a Total = \$90,319. If we multiply

the figure by a factor of twenty dollars in 2006, really \$20.18, we get a figure of \$18, 226, 370. It would appear that the value of "saving" Italy alone would be worth that figure to the Church. But there were other contributions made by immigrants and their children, of course. A brief trip through the archives of some Italian parishes and parishes with significant numbers of Italians among their parishioners is instructive.

St. Francis Xavier parish was originally a German national parish. The diocese established it in 1888. It became an Italian parish by the 1920s. As early as 1904 the diocese had sent three priest to Rome to learn Italian. One of these, Fr. Kunz became pastor of St. Francis in 1922. On November 23, 1929 he established what was then termed a mission chapel named St. Philip Neri. The Italians in both religious structures continued their local festivals and took an active role in parish life. Most were in the building trades and factory work. Even during the Great Depression of the 1930s they continued to support their parish.

One of St. Francis' pastors helped establish both the Annunciation and St. Philip parishes, which were essentially Italian parishes. Father George Weinmann basically taught himself Italian and was never afraid to work on the church. As one of his altar boys, I spent much time helping him clean the church, removing paper from the pews, fixing the pamphlets, cleaning out the candle glasses, and sweeping floors. Father Weinmann had an unexpected sense of humor. His rectory was a few blocks away from the church. He would often dress in shirt sleeves and work pants.

When various representatives of different religions came to the door looking for converts. He would listen for a bit and tell them he was not interested in religion. When asked if he didn't worry about losing his soul, he would respond with a no, shaking his head. The Jehovah's Witnesses of Megiddo Mission representative would move on, praying for his soul.

Father Weinmann had set up a St. Peter Claver society in 1935 to unite black people under Catholic auspices. Basically, he was known as a friend and companion of the poor and a man not afraid of hard work. He learned how to adapt to Italian customs. When the early immigrants resented putting money in the collection, a custom foreign to Italy, he encouraged them to help build and repair the church buildings. Raffles, festivals, and any other parish fund raising activities were prominent along the way. Even after the collections picked up under immigrant children who had become "Americanized", the parties continued along with spaghetti dinners.

There were many changes in St. Francis itself. There was a merger with Our Lady of Sorrows on Niagara St with its large population of Italians. As noted, St. Philip Neri and the Annunciation had been part of St. Francis' mission. The Annunciation now went to Mr.

Carmel. Father Patrick Moffat became pastor in 1937 and remained for the next eighteen years. Moffat had been a catechist to Italian and Sicilian kids. Moffat had served in various Italian parishes, including Mt. Carmel and knew both Italian and Sicilian, sometimes preaching in the languages. Moffat was an advocate for released time religious instruction, a common feature through high school in Rochester. He also supported various clubs for teens, including the Big Brothers Club. He kept his school in good shape and had 720 students there in 1955.

Catholic schools were a key means for moving into the wider society and learning about Catholicism as the Catholic Church wanted one to learn, replacing many of the folk beliefs of the immigrants. I will have more to say later on the topic. But most churches in Rochester had schools attached to them in which almost every teacher was a nun.

St. Francis of Assisi parish, however, was an exception to the rule. On August 15, 1929, the Bishop of Rochester, John F. O'Hern, dedicated and blessed St. Francis of Assisi Church. It was the third incarnation of the building. It had first been a theater and then a garage. However, although, St. Francis did not have a school, it did have released time students for religious. Its program began in 1941, and it had 275 high school students. The program was tied to Charles Settlement House. The manner in which Italians began migrating to the edge of Rochester and into its suburbs is shown by the manner in which the number of baptisms and marriages changed during the 1940s into the early 50s. 1948 saw 154 baptisms, the most St. Francis parish ever had in a single year. The number dropped quickly after that. During the first year of the war, the number of marriages was 73 in 1941. It rose to a high of 84 in 1947 and 1948 and dropped to 29 in 1952.

In common with other parishes St. Francis saw its Italians joining others in moving to the suburbs. Home ownership was promoted in Rochester and it was easier to buy a home, often a new one, in the suburbs. Others simply moved to better parts of the city and bought homes there. There was a drop in the number of people who attended mass, and, therefore, there was a drop in the collection basket.

The Church of the Annunciation had its beginnings in 1917. There were a cluster of homes in the Goodman-Norton Street area, an area termed Goat Hill at the time. Before the church was built, there were home masses at the home and barbershop of Daniel Greci of Taft Ave. The first home mass in the area was said in 1914. Bishop Thomas Hickey would not authorize the build of a church. However, he gave approval for a chapel at Norton and Clark Streets; that became the site of the church. I went into great detail in volume one about the building of the "underground church" and its development. It is important to note that about

370 of its parishioners served during World War II, all but seven men. Seven of these people died, all Italian men. The Annunciation stayed a strong parish into the 1960s because it was on the edge of the city bordering Irondequoit. In 1958, in fact, it opened its school, rather late in the day for Catholic school openings. Many people moved into this area after World War II, one bordering my own neighborhood a short walk away.

The original Italian parish in Rochester was St. Anthony's parish on the west side. Between 1908 and 1913, the Italian community attended services in a church on Murray Street before building St. Anthony's on the corner of Booth, originally Division Street, and Gladstone, known then as Pine Street.

"Saint Anthony of Padua is very popular with Italians and highly respected," said Father Marcel Brodeur, who has been with the church for 12 years. He speaks of the church's namesake, known as "the saint of miracles"<sup>[4]</sup>.

The church went through many changes. There was a fire, damaging the church and its contents. There were so many parishioners that the church had to be enlarged. This turned into a major renovation, including a stone edifice and basement excavation. The parish dedicated this new stone and stain glassed church in 1925. Guido Nincheri, an artist, was mainly responsible for the church. A second fire occurred about four years later, necessitating further changes.

Reconstruction began immediately, and every wooden part of the structure was removed. The entire interior was replaced with reinforced steel and cement. The ceiling and walls were finished in stucco and the floor in terrazzo. Two galleries were constructed: one for the choir and the organ and one for the congregation. Both were made fireproof. Considering that the church already had a \$45,000 debt, this level of reconstruction inevitably added to that burden<sup>[5]</sup>. The new church remained for about 60 years until a new one was built a short distance away.

It is important to note that the church plays a major role in its parishioner's lives, especially during that period. The major events of a person's life took place in the parish: baptism, first communion, confirmation, marriage, and burial. Along the way, there were other important events: weekly mass, meeting of friends and neighbors, festivals, school, parties, and much socialization. One's life was inextricably tied to the seasons of the church, Christmas, Lent, Easter; these were family as well as religious occasions.

Thus, the period after World War II brought distressing changes to the parish. There were many immigrants into Rochester in that period, and St. Anthony's was no exception. The parish priest, Father Jerome Ferraro, had the duty of helping these immigrants, many of who



were Italians get jobs and homes. At the same time, many Italians in the parish found their homes expropriated.

Properties in the Rochester/Gladstone areas were expropriated to make room for Commerce High School and the Rochester Housing Projects of the Ottawa Carleton Regional Housing Authority, a move that many believe was influenced by the politics of power.

"I remember the church had to work hard to help people in the community," said Ierullo, whose home was also expropriated. "There were a lot of losses and the church had to work hard to comfort people and help them"<sup>[6]</sup>. Consequently, there was a strong Italian migration away from the parish to other parts of the city and to the suburbs. Some returned for weekly mass, but that habit began to fade as children grew up.

### **Churches and Schools**

The movement toward Italian parishes and schools must be seen within the overall context of developments within Rochester itself. The various immigrations of Europeans to Rochester - Irish, German, French, Polish, Italian, Lithuanian and Ruthenian Catholics- put a strain on the diocese's resources. Bishop McQuaid, first Bishop of Rochester, was eager to provide the various nationalities with churches of their own and whenever possible with priests from their communities. He believed that people should hear sermons in their own languages. Bishop Bernard John McQuaid was born in New York City on December 15, 1823 and died on January 18, 1909. He was committed to marshalling resources to keep immigrant Catholics in the church.

Therefore, he was not only committed to national churches but to Catholic schools as well. McQuaid believed that Catholic parents should have some relief from paying school taxes for public schools. However, when his campaign in that regard failed, he began to build Catholic schools. In 1868, he became the first bishop of Rochester. There were then 2056 children in the parochial schools of the five German churches. The schools of St. Patrick and St. Mary had 441 children. Each of these schools had a dual system, a pay school and a poor school. McQuaid was not happy with this distinction.

There were some suburban schools in parishes outside Rochester but not many children were served there. McQuaid then undertook to build up a parochial system of education. McQuaid used the Sisters of St. Joseph for his system and provided them with a teacher's training or normal school. By 1910 the Josephites had 40 schools in Rochester, including one high school, Nazareth Academy. The Sisters of St. Joseph assumed responsibility for educating, among others, most of the Italian youth who came to Rochester.



There were other orders in Rochester, of course, but the Sisters of St. Joseph assumed most of the responsibility for socializing Italian youth.

### **The Sisters of St. Joseph**

The Sisters of St. Joseph came to Rochester primarily as educators and they felt a special calling to educate Italian youth. Over the years many Italians joined the sisters. The sisters have proved very generous in sharing their history and experiences with others. Much of what follows comes from extensive interviews and their archives. One of the Italian parishes in Rochester was St. Lucy's at 247 Troup St. Italians built it in 1911, a common occurrence in the Italian parishes. Often all the Italians had to offer were their labor and some food to the priests and nuns. These things they shared openly and graciously, according to Sister Margaret Louise Kensick. While the church was being built, masses were being celebrated in a store front on West Main Street. Finally, the church was finished in 1913. Sister Margaret notes that the parish was one big family. This big family welcomed her.

Sister Margaret served at St. Lucy's from 1937 to 1939, the immediate pre-war years. She notes that since there was no convent for the sisters she had to live across the street from St. Mary's Hospital at St. Mary's Boys Home. The sisters ran both of these institutions. St. Mary's Boys Home had three very large dorm rooms for the boys. She states that she worked for her room and board by tucking the boys in at night.

It was a short walk each morning to the school. Each nun taught 2 grades in each classroom. She had the third and fourth grade. Two of the nuns, Sister Francis Edward and Sister Mary Adele spoke fluent Italian, and that endeared them to the people even more. She and sister Dominica, the mother superior, did not speak Italian. There is a note of regret in her account at this point, for the people did not care how grammatically a person spoke Italian; the effort was enough for them.

When Sister Margaret returned in 1945 there was a convent near the church on Clifton Street. There were still four sisters to teach eight grades. Shortly after her arrival, they had to abandon the convent because of leaky pipes. Soon there was a new convent on Reynolds Street with a "tan brick hardwood floor". It is interesting the things that Sister Margaret remembers.

For example, she remembers that every Sunday one of the ladies would send in a spaghetti and meatball dinner for the sisters. Sometimes, she recalls nostalgically, there would be homemade pasta. It was common in the forties for families to spend a Saturday rolling out dough into various pasta shapes and drying them on clean sheets on a bed. That sort of pasta

and the smell of baked bread trigger her memories of the parish where she stayed until the early 1950s. Food played a big role in the parish and she notes nearby bakeries, Bogga's, Delassando's, and Caccavaio's. She was especially fond of Caccavaio's because Josephine Caccavaio gave the sisters free fresh bread each Saturday.

Despite the lure of Italian food, Sister Margaret points out that St. Lucy's Church was the center of parish. That center was Italian Catholicism to its core. What transpired at St. Lucy's can easily stand more or less for what happened at other Italian parishes in Rochester. There was a certain flamboyance to events and some exoticism as well that fascinated and even repelled non-Italians. In fact, some of us younger Italian Americans would sometimes be embarrassed or even shamed when others made sport of us.

For instance, at St. Lucy's there was a "Statue of Christ on the cross with light bulbs all around the cross. On a certain feast it was customary to put flowers along with the lights. Generose and her friend would take empty sanctuary lights and fill them with small pink and purple asters. Then they would be tied to the framework of lights so you would have a cross of light and flowers." Generose was a handy man in charge of church maintenance. Sister recalls that there was an argument between him and his helper. To settle it, they went to a corner beer joint. Whatever may have happened there, the argument was settled and the cross was set up as usual. The ability of Italians to flare up into frightening rage and then to settle problems with those whom they disagree never cease to amaze those from other, calmer, backgrounds.

Even an admirer like Sister Margaret proved no exception. She describes other Italian liturgical variations with a sense of humor mingled with awe. There were, for instance, the numerous processions. For whatever reason, Italians love parading around a church. However, because of the possibility for mocking, these processions were generally kept within the church or at least limited to church grounds. Women sang Italian hymns as they processed, carrying various church banners.

On Christmas Eve and Christmas day masses, they sang "Tu scendi dala Stelle", You have come down from the stars. Sister recalls Christmas week fondly. She says that during that week, "Elderly ladies... brought coffee, eggs, sugar, etc." They sat in the convent parlor singing Italian hymns for the sisters.

Although Christmas may be the most popular Catholic holiday, Easter is the most important. Italians had their unique way of celebrating the feast and events leading to it as well, making Holy Week unforgettable. On Holy Thursday parishioners unrolled a large

canvas painting of Mary holding the Jesus's dead body on her lap. This painting went from ceiling to floor and had a place of honor in front of the altar.

At the altar there was a long table set with twelve places and glass goblets. Of course, it represented the Last Supper. Placed on the table were sets of three were twelve large loaves of round, braided bread. These loaves were placed on the arm of each altar boy as he left the sanctuary. At the Holy Thursday ceremony, the priest, by the forties an Italian American, washed the feet of the twelve altar boys. Sister notes that he had given them strict instructions to wash their feet before showing up. He then kisses their feet in imitation of Christ's actions at the Last Supper.

Holy Thursday is followed by Good Friday. On that day, there was yet another procession in which Italian men sang hymns as they carried a stature of the dead Christ. Moreover, they added dramatic effects to the reading of the Passion, adding thunder at the part where Jesus dies. Although sister notes the performance was theatrical, she felt it was very real as well. She also remembers the fireworks at these events. Italians always made sure that the American flag waved along with the Italian, conscious of what Jerre Mangione called the dual identity of Italian Americans.

### **Protestant Italians**

There are two major sources for Rochester, New York's Protestants. Whether long-time Protestants or converts, however, they looked on their fellow Italians who were Catholic. They deemed them to be priest and superstition ridden, not ones to get along in the Promised Land. They knew that changes had to be made to fit into the Rochester setting. Even to be an accepted Catholic meant adapting to the ways of those Catholics who were close to the ruling WASPS. Why not go a bit farther along the way of assimilation and become Protestants or if a Waldensian why not join a mainline Protestant church? Failure to do so meant that one would not get ahead and face obstacles that could not so easily be overcome. Some of the migrants moved into the Protestant church to attain their goals, feeling that Catholicism had neglected their material and status needs. Others had been Waldensians in Italy, followers of Peter Valdez, a twelfth century preacher, whose followers were condemned as heretics in the thirteenth century. Valdez translated the Bible into the vernacular and inspired wandering preachers, greatly influencing St. Francis of Assisi. The Waldensians also condemned the corruption and wealth of the Catholic Church, influencing Luther and other reformers. These two sources merged in Rochester's Protestant churches.

The first source is amply illustrated in this excerpt from an interview with Paul Kay, recalling his boyhood.

Mother happened to be in a group of people and they started a church. This is the Protestant Church... so we've been Protestant all our lives. And of course that, in a way, has set us apart from or kept us away from relatives to a certain extent, which have all been Catholics. So it wasn't a strong tradition in the family, going back to the Reformation or anything, but it seemed to have come from anti-clericalism, you know... they wanted to try the Protestant faith, so they started this church. And there was a Verna family who had, well maybe four brothers... they had the appearance of Greeks, you know. The classical Greek type of a face. But in their way they were quite smart and so they set up this church. There were three brothers who were involved here and one brother involved in the same type of church in Pennsylvania. And so they left their imprint on this city and all these families who were part of this church. The Christian Apostolic Church, on Goodman Street, North Goodman Street is where they're located. On the West Side, there's a small church there. It didn't start there, it finally moved there and that's where they're still worshipping, there's still a group there. But we became affiliated and the word you know, and the church took on meaning. And we would go to revival meetings and have revival meetings that was the type of a church, the Billy Graham or the Evangelical Church, they called it.

All Italians. This was an Italian-American Protestant Church. And I believe at the time, I remember one other... similar church, and there were other churches. Maybe another one on the west side of the city, Italian-American also, and they just decided to make a go of it and they were doing quite well to fit their own needs. But there was a lot of socializing between families... just having an interest in each other's families that type of thing. So later, my wife and I decided or I decided to go mainstream, so we joined the Baptist Church and at present we're Presbyterians. And the Baptist Church, through our adolescent years or pre-adolescent, left quite a mark in that we were being taught things beside just the religion, you know. How to adjust to our society, how to get along with people and different phases of life like learning about marriage and sociological things in that respect.

It was like a mission for these churches, and people who were devoting themselves to helping Americanize these kids who were coming up. And so the ministers were excellent and they were quite highly trained people and they saw the needs and tried to meet the needs of all these young people who were coming up, as far as helping them to get into the type of society we were in<sup>[7]</sup>.

Kay's subsequent career illustrates the value of Protestantism in his life. Certainly, this excerpt highlights the manner in which he and his family used the evangelical church to become more familiar with American ways. . Even their trip to pick fruit provided an opportunity to become more familiar with American practices... People who joined Italian-

American Protestant churches in Rochester, New York, were both proud of their ethnic identities and upwardly mobile.

Kay continues:

When I got out of college, I had problems getting a job because of the acceptance of the Italians wasn't very great then, so I knocked around. I wanted to stay in this area because I'd been out of town for so long, just to be near the family, so I tried very hard, all angles. I wanted to get a job; I studied chemistry at school. I wanted to get a job in my field, of study, and I didn't have very good success. I think I might have tried for one, maybe two years. And finally, I decided to go this route and the doors were opened pretty quickly. So, I started my career and it went pretty good after that. So, I shortened the name. Capogravi. Well, I, my work career was at Bausch and Lomb Optical, and then from there in my twenties, might have been when I was twenty-seven or so; I switched over to Kodak and finished my career there. I worked all my life at Eastman Kodak. Retired when I was not quite sixty-five and since then I've been taking courses at Nazareth, continuing studying Italian and Italian culture and following up on my music which I enjoy so<sup>[8]</sup>.

It is notable that once he changed his name job offers came in. Places that had not hired him before his name change found him employable with no need for further qualifications. Kay also noted that having an Anglo surname aided in upward mobility within Kodak. At the time, Kodak was the key employer in Rochester and was known for its great pay scale and benefits. It is evocative, however, that once retired Kay found it necessary to reestablish his ethnic identity openly. He had never denied being Italian once he had found a job for which he was qualified. He had never openly acknowledged it either, as he moved from Italian- American Protestant churches to more "mainline" ones. He avoided both Catholicism and American evangelisms. Inwardly, however, he maintained his feeling of being Italian and returned to an open acceptance of it quickly when no prejudice or discrimination could any longer harm.

The evangelical missions sought converts among people such as the Capogravi family who were disillusioned with Catholicism, and were religious, and upwardly mobile. They targeted strong women such as his mother who, in Kay's words, was the "bossman" in the family. Kay goes further and terms his family a matriarchy. As Seller<sup>[9]</sup>, notes, Protestant missionaries had a rather complex agenda. They sought to combat the growing influence of Catholicism in America, which the incursion of Italians represented. The slums in which most Italian lived personified social evils, which the missionaries abhorred. There were symbolic connections in most missionaries' minds, moreover, between physical and moral cleansing. Seller, for example, cites the Presbyterian missionary, Mary Remington, who "would like to put... these miserable wretches into a bathtub and clean them up for once"<sup>[10]</sup>. In common with

most Americans, and Italians for that matter, the missionaries sought to combat atheism and socialism. They erroneously believed that all Italian men were atheists and socialists and filled with uncontrollable violence. Finally, the evangelicals wanted to "Americanize" the immigrants.

### **The Evangelical Missions**

The first center of Italian settlement in the 1880s was called "Sleepy Hollow", the same area in which the Genoese immigrant Domenico Sturla settled. It was in a run-down district between St. Paul Street and the Genesee River. The next major settlement area, still near the river, was on Front and Mill Streets. Problems that marked later settlement were present in these early ones. For example, there was a language problem. Padrone served as labor recruiters and go-betweens, with all the evils inherent in this system. When Italian immigrants sought to learn English in night school they were frequently turned away because they did not know the language. The irony of the situation led to a group of prominent Rochester women founding "a mission to teach English, arithmetic, and "Americanism" to Italian men"<sup>[11]</sup>.

As early as 1889, when the Italian population of Rochester was less than 600, several prominent Rochester women established the Italian mission. *The Union Advertiser* notes:

First and Second Readers Wanted - The Italian Mission has secured rooms at No. 61 State St. for the purpose of establishing a school for the education of the Italians. Those in charge of the affair solicit contributions of school books First and Second Readers are needed. Children who wish to contribute them will please leave them at the room on State Street (March 21.1889:3-4).

Evangelical missions sought converts among those Italians who were unhappy with the Catholic Church for whatever reason and those who were members of various groups, such as the Waldensians. They viewed Italian Catholics as more or less pagans. White, for example, lists a number of reasons why the Baptist Church had such difficulty in converting Italians in Rochester, New York<sup>[12]</sup>. The religious life of Italians before they came to the United States was one of being only nominally Catholic. He adds that Italians were anti-clerical by nature, but hints that they were more: anti-clerical toward Protestant clerics than Catholic ones. Moreover, the younger an Italian male the more anticlerical he was likely to be. Older Italian males were a bit more tolerant of clerics. He writes, "The religious

conditions in the United States reflect those existing in Italy. No matter how greatly Italians are anticlerical, they are not entirely anti-Catholic"<sup>[13]</sup>.

Additionally, he claimed, Italians were at a primitive stage of religious development. There are, he notes, "magicians living on the superstitious nature of their countrymen"<sup>[14]</sup>. White offers an example by giving a vivid description of a ritual to cure mal'occhio (the evil eye). He addresses the power of the Catholic Church perceptively as well as its attitude toward Italians. During the early years of Italian immigration not much attention was given to meet their religious needs and other wants. A very large number of Catholic priests were Irish. Many times they would upbraid the Italian, especially at funerals...."<sup>[15]</sup>.

Protestants, especially Baptists in Rochester, used former priests as clergy to minister to Italians. Not surprisingly, Italians who were already anti-clerical "by nature" were especially suspicious of Italian Protestant clergy who had been Catholic priests. The Baptists made the further culturally insensitive move by using women missionaries to work with Italian. Men were jealous of women in White's terms. They were wary of the modern influences that American women were spreading among their women.

Given the hard work and sincerity of the evangelicals, it is interesting to note that in their own words, their missions were failures.

White<sup>[16]</sup> reports that "St. Mark's Italian Baptist Mission, Rochester, had the following numbers of members as of his writing, baptisms: 10, total memberships 85, benevolences \$20.00; Sunday School-Teachers and officers 7, pupils 5; one Young People's Society with a total membership of 60. The Reverend C. R. Simboli "Addresses and Letter Regarding Work - the Outlook of the Italian Baptist Work in America" in Feb. 9, 1924 states "If we are honest and frank, we must state are not going so well with our Italian Baptist work in America. To be sure, there appears here and there a mission that is slowly gaining in the broad reaches of a desert waste"<sup>[17]</sup>. He continues "The majority of our missions and churches are stagnant and lifeless... often stimulates the Catholic Church to great exertion and activity..." The causes for the failure, he argues, are the lack of proper equipment, old churches controlled by dying American congregations, and, furthermore, Italians have no liberty in these churches; their customs, he notes, are interfered with. Nevertheless, he adds, "The Italians are children of warmth, color, and remarkable sensitiveness"<sup>[18]</sup>.

A file of St. Mark's Baptist Church offers additional insight into how the Baptists sought to win Italian converts<sup>[19]</sup>. The Annual Report 1923 of the Home Mission Board records<sup>[20]</sup> notes "the Hebard St. Christian Center, among the Italians, The House has been under the direction of Mr. and Mrs. James W. Herring. The house has been open 7 days a



week with gym, sewing, and other Sunday school on Sunday afternoons. Since February, we have had the aid of Miss Genevieve H. Pflaum. The building has a gym, shower, baths, a library, clubroom, etc. (sic.) 100s of boys and girls are found in the most congested area of the city"<sup>[21]</sup>.

Unfortunately, for the cause of evangelism, settlement houses provided for the hundreds of kids in Rochester's crowded Italian areas without seeking to change their religions.' It is clear that evangelicals and Pentecostals identified all the traditional American ideals - democracy, individualism, honesty, industriousness, thrift, sobriety, and patriotism - with Protestantism. Therefore, in converting the foreigner they were serving the nation as well as God. This motive was stressed almost to the exclusion of all others during and immediately after World War I, when the movement to evangelize the world was viewed as an extension of Wilson's campaign to make the world safe for democracy. "If America wants good citizens, let her convert the Italians and all other classes to Christ," suggested Reverend Antonio Mangano. . . Americanization of the household was critical, and to achieve this the Americanization of the mother and homemaker was essential. As one American evangelist stated, "the greatest problem is not the foreign child but the foreign mother"<sup>[22]</sup>.

## Conclusions

Rochester's Italian Catholics had to combat negative stereotypes both Protestants and their fellow Catholics of other ethnic origins. Protestants, including Italian Protestants, saw them as superstitious people under the domination of the Pope and his agents. Moreover, these people wondered at a people who persisted in their Church when it was obvious that the Catholic Church in Rochester did not really want that adherence. Italian boys who wanted to be priests were sent to the seminary in Buffalo, New York, rather than sharing housing with other Rochester boys. German Catholics made it clear they wanted no part of Italian Catholics in their parishes. On the other hand, Protestants offered a path to inclusion within American society, jobs, skills, and other means to fit into American society and Americanize quickly. In their minds they offered a way out of superstition and toward enlightenment.

Within the ethnic competition of Rochester's Catholic Church Italians had to forge an ethnic identity in order to compete with German and Irish Catholics. In that context, they learned what it was to be Italians, an identity that held no meaning for them within Italy itself. They had to learn to cooperate with fellow Italians from different areas and forge some sort of panethnic identity. Differences existed among people from various *paesi* (villages) within the

group. They were intolerable and counterproductive in the face of generally negative "American" attitudes toward the community.

It is important to note that not all Italian American Protestants in Rochester were disillusioned immigrants. The Lanni family, a very prominent Italian American family, had a long history of working against the papacy, stretching back to the twelfth century. The Lanni claim to have been Protestants from the Reformation<sup>[23]</sup>. In other words, they were most likely Waldensians. Being Protestants and imbued with the Protestant Ethic, however, did not save them from being the target of ethnic slurs.

Poor Italians found it difficult to adapt to a wealthy city that did not welcome them. In order to do so, they turned to mutual aid societies, political organizations, and the Catholic and Evangelical churches. However imperfectly, they forged a master identity, Italian, to serve in public confrontations with those of other ethnic groups in the city. In doing so they learned to get their share of the spoils in various competitions. Italians learned to present themselves in various win take advantage of a given situation. It was a survival technique that served them well in an environment so hostile to their basic sensibilities.

## **Churches**

Immigrants fueled the growth of the Catholic Church in Rochester. The Italians become the largest of these immigrant groups. The policy of Rochester's first Bishop, Bishop McQuaid was to find priests for each of the ethnic groups who spoke the language of the people, and, if possible came from that group. McQuaid fostered the growth of national parishes, founding new parishes as the situation demanded. It was his goal not to let parishes become too large to defeat their familial nature.

In addition, McQuaid desired the establishment of Catholic schools to combat the sectarianism of the public schools. His initial goal was to obtain tax money for the support of these schools. However, failing that he moved for parochial schools, supported by the diocese and parish, staffed with teaching sisters. McQuaid believed that children learn their religion in schools. Along with the three "r"s, there was a fourth, religion. So he ordered, "Build schoolhouses then for the religious education of your children as the best protest against a system of education from which religion has been excluded by law."

McQuaid began with a "system" that in 1858 had 2497 children in parochial schools. 2058 were in German parishes, demonstrating the nature of Rochester's parishioners at the time, while 441 were in schools at St. Patrick and St. Mary parishes. The Bishop changed the practice of free (poor) schools divided from select (pay) schools at the latter parish. These set

up a class system he opposed. In the towns, there were only a few schools with minimal students.

McQuaid used this small foundation to build a strong parochial school system, replacing the brothers who taught in the system with nuns, mainly the Sisters of St. Joseph whom he favored. He also integrated boys and girls into the same system and classes. McQuaid set up a normal (teachers') training school for the sisters. By 1904, an annual conference for teachers from different orders met to plan ways to develop and improve Catholic education in Rochester.

It should be noted that McQuaid established seminaries, major and minor, for Rochester. The minor seminary was for the first six years of training, and the major for the last six years. He believed that young men should receive training near their families. For the first six years, they should return home each evening. He also set up Catholic Charities, which became quite a force for aiding Rochester's Catholics in need, as well as establishing hospital care for those in the diocese.

### **The Sisters of St. Joseph**

The Sisters of St. Joseph were employed in the Rochester Diocese to work with Rochester's youngsters, especially Italians. The objective was to keep them away from Protestant influence and attempts to convert them. The zeal of Protestants was great indeed. I have reproduced some excerpts to illustrate the seriousness of Protestant purpose in that regard.

(There were ) young Italian girls, who came to our school only to study English -special students. They sat in my classroom most of the day, either hearing English or reciting it. When they became acquainted, so that I felt that I could venture, I invited them to Sunday-school, and they accepted the invitation. Then I invited them to stay to church, and they did so; and before very long the second daughter, a beautiful girl, seventeen or eighteen years old, told me that she wanted to join the Methodist Church. "Why?" I asked. "Because I am converted, and don't believe the way Catholics believe. I believe the way you believe, and I want to join the Methodist Church." I said, "What does your mother think about it?" "She is against it." "What does your father think?" "He does not care." I said, "My dear, you wait. You join the church now, and your mother and father will never have any patience with your religion. Do you want them converted?" They replied, "It is the desire of our hearts" -- for by that time the eldest daughter was anxious to join. I prevailed upon them to wait, saying that their mother would be drawn to Christ through their example, much more than through their opposition. I told them to live their religion, to wait and to pray for their mother, who made no objections to their coming to our services. Soon after that they went to

France, but just before I left Brazil I got a letter from this second daughter telling me that nearly the whole family were active working members of the Protestant Church in the French town where they lived, and that they had come to Christ through the influence we had exerted over them, acquired through purely secular teachings in our schools.

We don't always see such direct results, but have to judge by inference. There was a very lovely girl of fifteen, who had been sometimes a boarder, sometimes a day pupil in our schools. She had been taken out of our school for a year that she might make her first communion in the Catholic Church, but afterwards came back to us, because with us she could get the education they wanted her to have, and in the convent schools the pupils do not study the subjects which we teach. They came up from Rio one night and the next morning we heard that this daughter was dead. I could not believe it, and I went with one of my teachers to see if the girl was sick; but she was indeed dead; and there around her coffin were the candles to light her through the dark valley. The mother was sobbing in the next room, but she sent for me; so I asked her how her daughter had died. She said, "She was only conscious for one moment. I don't know whether she knew me. All she said was, 'Jesus, my Jesus,' and then she became unconscious, and died without another word." I thought of that girl dying with the name of Jesus Christ upon her lips instead of the Virgin's, and it was proof to me that Jesus was in her heart. I have no doubt that, although she had been withheld from identifying herself with us, she had taken Jesus Christ as her Lord and Master<sup>[24]</sup>.

The zeal of evangelizing Protestant missionaries is evident in this quotation. It was the job of the Catholic schools to combat their efforts and protect Catholic youth from falling prey to the enemy, in this case Protestantism. The Sisters of St. Joseph were in the forefront of those efforts.

On September 26-27, 2006, I interviewed five Italian American Sisters of St. Joseph at their Motherhouse in Rochester, NY. I sought to discover what it was like to grow up in Rochester as an Italian American in the period during the Depression and World War II and to become a Sister of St. Joseph. Copies of the tapes are in the Sisters' Archives in Rochester, NY.

## **Interviews**

There are many common threads in the stories the sisters related. Not all had been taught by the Sisters of St. Joseph but all had contact with them as youngsters. Each lived in Italian neighborhoods, deeply influence by the Catholic Church and its rituals and culture. The family was strong and included regular church attendance and reception of the sacraments. Even in strict families, they always felt love. Even when their entrance to the convent was opposed, they were asked whether they needed clothes or money to enter. The Depression hit each of them hard, followed by the World War and its prosperous aftermath.

Each had a strong family, even if raised by relatives other than their parents. Each felt some difference in how they were treated because they were Italian Americans. Most were reluctant to say so but it is clear that they knew they were different from others. Their dark hair and eyes was a giveaway that they were different from German or Irish nuns, even in old-fashioned habits.

The sisters were often overworked, especially during the height of Catholic education when schools were overcrowded. They followed a clear routine but they managed to be creative. One is impressed with the strength of these women and their stamina under conditions modern nuns might find ascetic. Somehow, they taught large classes, sometimes two classes in one, as in first and second grade. Country schools, especially, might have large classes of 35 or 40 and/or joined classes. Indeed, one sister noted she had 56 children in one class. Somehow students learned, and the sisters did a generally fine job.

There were many transfers going on as well. The sisters might move with little warning from one parish to another and their statements regarding favoritism in general of Irish parishes, reflecting internal strains in the Catholic Church. However, the sisters now mention these strains with humor, always careful to note that they did not suffer any bias because of their background.

There was a consensus that times were very different when the sisters were growing up. Families were stronger. Families were also more than simply the nuclear family. The extended family merged into the neighborhood whose members included many who knew each other in Italy. There was greater obedience, at least outwardly, to the family. People knew people at more primary levels than may be true today.

Interestingly, after retirement, many sisters became involved in other works. Some worked with abused women. Some reached out to the poor and homeless. Some taught art in after school programs. Each kept active as long as they could. They had the habit of a routine and of giving to others. The joy they had in teaching carried over into later life.

They also were quite honest about problems in the Church they noted when teaching, the changes of the sixties when many others left the priesthood and convent; the lack of involvement of many Catholics in the Church and the decline of nuclear families and communal life. There was a depth of wisdom displayed that gave the lie to old cartoons depicting sisters as simple and naïve creatures.

## **My Days in Catholic School**

I wandered back and forth between Catholic and public schools during my own education. The Sisters of St. Joseph did not teach me. The School Sisters of Notre Dame had that dubious honor. I entered kindergarten during the latter days of World War II, tagging along after my older sister and her friends. It was a comfortable way to enter school. And I had a comfortable nun teaching me.

Alas, I found out that I was not going to enter first grade with my classmates because the entry age had changed on me during the year. Well, I decided that I already knew all that kindergarten could teach me and finally refused to go back any longer. I might have stayed had I the good fortune to have the same teacher, but she was promoted and I was not. However, the next year I went to first grade and was pleased with my teacher. She seemed ok with me as well. The next year, after the war was over, we moved about a mile away and I went to Number 25 School, getting a taste of secular education. Most of the students there were Catholics and Italian. In my previous school, all the students were Catholic, but most were not Italian. Interesting that it was more diverse in some ways than the public school!

I had been promised that I could return to the Catholic school, Holy Redeemer, when I was older. So, in fifth grade I did so. Our closest parish, St. Philip Neri, did not have a school. But I went to religious education there once a week on Rochester's released time program. The pastor taught us, Father George Weinmann, about whom I have previously written. I got close to Father Weinmann, a good man who loved Italians and who spoke the language.

I stayed at Holy Redeemer, having fine teachers but was often in trouble. The exception came with the seventh-grade teacher who loved boys and knew how to handle us. She rejected corporal punishment and kept us busy while setting clear guidelines. Sister Hilary was from Baltimore but spent most of her life in Rochester, NY. We boys were happy when our eighth-grade teacher was ill for a time and Sister Hilary took us into her class, teaching two grades for a time. I graduated from eighth grade. Back to public school it was for ninth and tenth grades. But for eleventh and twelfth grades, I went back to Catholic schools, spending one year in a seminary and twelfth grade at Aquinas Institute.

The experiences did me good. I saw various aspects of the educational system. At that time many of us were certain that the parochial system was better. It had more rigor, more discipline and went into depth on many subjects. We knew this from talking to our friends. I knew it from being in both systems. Perhaps, there were a few more frills in the public school system. I had no music lessons in the Catholic schools and little art. But in the academic subjects I did indeed get fine instruction. We did not shirk science. No one condemned

Darwin. The good sisters had no prejudice against evolution, for example. We learned science and took elementary school Regents' exams in science when the public school had opted out.

I have always learned experientially and being in both systems led me to feel the strengths and weaknesses of both systems. The fact that I could provoke some of the good sisters, and even a priest at Aquinas, attests to my willingness to question the system, even while being part of it. I did not check in my reason when I became a Catholic, or more accurately a Sicilian Catholic. My grandfather always loved Jesus. He just wasn't too sure about his front men.

### **Post-WWII and Changes in Religion**

One of the many differences between post-WWII Italian immigrants and earlier immigrants from Italy is their attitude toward religion. The earlier immigrants, especially men, may not have been regular churchgoers-only baptisms, weddings, and funerals. However, despite a strong anti-clericalism there was a loyalty to the religion, which they readily distinguished from the clergy. Newer immigrants found it easier to join other churches, or no church at all. Their ties to Catholicism are looser, more in keeping with the Italian anti-clericalism as well as the new immigrant's awareness of the diversity of American religions.

Excerpts from an interview make this point clearly:

*Frank Salamone:* So let us just start talking about religions, you know your attitude towards religion as to what you want to share your background.

*Rita:* That was the thing, and so when I came to the states I was exposed to all different type of religions, either people from work-mostly from work-most of the Italians actually had shifted to visiting other churches more like, Born Again Christian, because Catholics are not Christians [laughter]. I had my crisis actually like Paul [laughter] when I was about 33 years old-obviously not starting to read the bible itself. As a kid, all I was exposed was a catechism, you know, what the Catholic religion basically wanted us to know, basically it was not like go ahead read your bible on your own, everything was in scriptures, and they were all dictated by the priest. So yes, I started visiting different churches, and I joined the United Church of Christ, and I was baptized. But you know, what I wasn't really happy anyway, visited Reformed Christian Church, and obviously there were Jehovah witnesses that I got to know, but that's not what I was, but they were nice people and Catholics had different perspectives of what other religious are-at least in the Christian realm. But then again, I decided, well, Paul absolutely he didn't want to come with me to this new church because the kids were questioning, why are you going to that church? Why can't we all go together, so and he said, I don't want you to split my family and so and there is no perfect



religion. So, I went back to Catholic again [laughter]. So that was my experience. There was this one family member with whom you can't really bring up a subject of religion because first of all she overpowers [laughter] the conversation, like, you really can't say nothing about other than whatever she has to say and try to convince everybody else that, that's the true word of God.

*Salamone*: Religion and politics are two things my father said do not discuss [laughter]

*Carmelo*: It's a cover for the personality, it's a way to expose yourself, but at the same time protect yourself by saying what you believe in, and you are, like, looking for an abutment to who you really are by using religion or politics. When we get to this subject in the house with my wife and I and other relatives, I let them talk and talk; they are all like the politicians like parasites in religion. Everybody has a need to search, whatever religion you were born into, but I happened to be born Roman Catholic, and that's just what I followed, it was simple. I wasn't really a good boy, thank God for confession [laughter], but then even with all of the problems of the Catholic religion, so on and so forth, where am I going?

Everybody is always searching, and my search is done through what I have read, and I found out that ultimately everybody has got different clothes on, but we are all kind of the same. So one good preacher would convince you something or the other and you will move onto that, and as we had said earlier, sometimes you go, and afterward you say, Well, I really didn't get that much out of this.

Robin, my wife, is Methodist, I'm Catholic. It didn't matter to me when we married-in fact, I thought I had a great thing that Robin was going to stab me when we got home. She had to sign a paper that we had to bring the children up Catholic when we got married. I said I don't have a problem with that because as I said, "Robin where is he going to be when we have kids? Outside the door?" [laughter].

But, anyway, we got married in the Catholic Church, and she's Catholic by osmosis [laughter], but anyhow I mean I'm Roman Catholic. I went to St Francis and with all of the, as I said earlier, with all of the problems, that all religions are having in particular. We went to school at St. Francis, I go beyond that because there is not a lot I can do. I'm not going to be disheartened by what the messengers-be it the priest and the nuns-failed to fulfil, what they were teaching in a hypocritical sense.

So I look beyond them, to look at myself, and say, Well, I know what they did, and what they taught didn't always match, so I have to make a decision: do I become a hypocrite like some of them were, but some of them were great, some were tremendous teachers, and from a religious standpoint, help you get along with people generally regardless of religion, and like I said, to me it's like a change of clothes and I'll change my clothes but I will not change my religion.

*Salamone*: Well the old men never went to church like my grandfather and his generation. I mean, they would go for weddings and funerals, maybe baptisms, and that was it, but they always believed.

*Carmelo*: That was my mum's attitude as well, you really didn't trust [laughter], yes, she never trusted even in those days, especially in Italy. When she got married, she had a bitter experience with the priest, she said something in the privacy of confession, confidentially. Yes, confidentially,

and the priest then sort of let it out. Spilled it all out [[laughter], she was totally turned off, and she said that she will never go to church-she never did, other than weddings or funerals, but never trusted, never went.

*Dennis:* What you said about the men not going, my father would go to church at 11 o'clock with my mother, and we didn't make the nine o'clock we were supposed to be at that kids go. My father just went because my mother probably insisted on it, or would just let my mother go alone because it would be disrespectful or something, but my father, I remember my father being in church and sitting there and saying nothing but just standing there [laughter] and my father's attitude was like most Sicilians: "At least, what can you do for my family? You want collections every Sunday like every church in every religion really asked for, but what can you do for my family?" So, my father just went just to watch and keep my mother from being angry.

*Salamone:* I know my dad went later, he didn't go for a long time and then he and his brothers became, I don't know, more Americanized, and what have you, and then every Sunday they would all parade down, and so on, but it took a long time after he came home from the army till I was in, I don't know, fifth grade, it's when he may have started going, but my grandfather and all those men, who probably were born in the 1880's, weddings and funerals-they were very religious in their way, but that was that.

*Rita:* That is typical, like I mean there was a sign, I mean where like a good Catholic you go to church once a year [laughter].

*Salamone:* My grandfather's saying was that he loved Jesus, but not his front men.

*Dennis:* A lot of people say that; my experience with the Catholic Church was different. I came from a very strict Catholic family okay, everybody went to church, and that was it. My grandma's father, my grandfathers and that was it. My experience in the Catholic school, okay, I hated it with a passion, we got one nun and she was crazy or something, because I was in this sister's class. She maybe stood in front of the class, and everybody said, Midget, Dennis is a midget, and I went home crying, and my mother was dying with cancer, and my mother is mentally ill, the cancer went to her brain, and my mother used to beat us until we couldn't walk any more, okay, but I had to go back to that school, that's why when I got to a point where when I got to ninth grade I couldn't wait to get out. At the graduation I lit a cigarette up and a sister comes out and she says, Dennis when you die you going straight to hell. Sister Walter Marie, I said, Sister, I guarantee I'll see you there [laughter].

And by the time I turned 16 I'm a born again Christian but then I had been since 1963 or '64, '65 way down there, I got the urge to go back to church then. I started going to mass every day. I haven't stopped, and I will be 64 next week. Okay, I joined the monastery as what they call Third Order, and you know Geneseo College, okay behind Genesio there is a small monastery there. I was there for some years after. I really wanted to be a missionary, and when I met my wife I was a senior in high school and she was tenth grade, and I said, Look, I want no relationship, and I don't want to get close to you because come June I want to go to South America and work in the missions. One thing you have to know, she gave me a kiss goodbye one night and there goes the priesthood.

I'm still Catholic. If you count Sundays I go six days a week, okay, but I had a terrible upbringing in the Catholic church, okay, and I can honestly and truthfully say I really hated the school! I really despised them: to me it was a dictatorship, it wasn't school. If you did something at home it got back at school which should have been there, okay, so when you call at school they said, You just at school, you get involved in it, I didn't like it, okay. And we had a priest who molested us in that place, so I didn't like it, okay, and he never did anything like touching my private parts like that.

*Carmelo:* Those were the accusations I myself knew, as I said to you. Now, while playing baseball on the school playgrounds Saturday mornings I honestly forgot to go to altar boy practice. So, I never became the altar boy I wanted to be. I had the Latin. I still know the Latin, "Introibo ad altari Dei", so I couldn't quite be an altar boy. The nuns said, you weren't here; I said, Okay, what are you going to do? But there were accusations, and I'm sure there was a lot of truth to what was said, but Dennis is right about the corporal punishment with nuns, but the thing is, I agree with that, but I didn't let it affect my belief in God. I guess would be the bottom line of it despite the fact that they were really physically abusive.

Yes, missing the altar boy practice in fifth grade, every year we had exams and in fifth grade somehow, I scored the highest in the religion test. So, you remember the stage behind the school, the nuns were shocked they really probably didn't want. I think I got the award some place downstairs. Anyhow, I get the highest score, I don't know but it was an accident I tell you. But I had to go on stage, and for a split second, they give you a little award or trophy and as we go on stage Carmelo Oliveri, they call me up and for a split second I almost went, I was going to, but I saw at the corner sister Blandina over there. She was so mean [crosstalk].

*Carmelo:* There were some Sicilian workers here. They told me they joined the Jehovah's Witnesses. So, they joined, they got convinced to join Jehovah Witness, so they became Jehovah Witnesses, and talking to them while we were building the house I'm always inquisitive to find out people's take on life, and so on, especially religion and he went on to tell how wonderful it's been for them, and so on and so forth, up-to the point that one of the preachers there impregnated one of the parishioner's daughters.

One of the elders, one of the pastors, impregnated a young girl, and then he took off, he disappeared, or something. It goes on with every religion, it's not just, I mean in any format, as I said before, the religious moniker is a cover for who you really are, because you look beyond that.

*Dennis:* Well, I look at the Catholic Church. Others have run off to what they say has been the true church, but there is no process of the Blessed Sacrament. But I think the majority of Christians who are Catholics are the biggest hypocrites, like the Catholic Church has pro-life-okay, now if you believe the idea you got to be really naive. Because my daughter Mary was 16 at the high school, okay, now using her brains, before was a know-it-all, but she won't listen to me okay [laughter]. She got pregnant at 16 and being Catholic we couldn't get an abortion okay, no one group of people were more rude and inconsiderate to us than the Roman Catholics. That was she graduated, and we raised the baby. As a matter of fact, she's still there, she went into, she was a cheerleader, so in college she coached the CYO in Christ the King. The priest asked her to leave

because she was a bad example. Now, when she was thrown, I said you still call priest and Christ, molested boys for 50 years, and you want us to forgive them, but a 16-year-old girl who made a mistake, she can't be forgiven? How could that be? Your grown men molested boys. Well, like I said she still got the baby, but I do not believe in nuns, I don't believe in priests, I don't believe anything that goes down at that place, okay. I just believe in the true presence of the Blessed Sacrament, and that's my culture, okay? And when I was at the monastery, I really loved those monks, they were really nice guys [laughter]. Okay, my wife thought they were gay and everything, but they weren't [laughter]: if they were gay I would have noted, I would not hang around them [laughter]. But yes, you know the rules of the church were made by men, most of them, and men interpretation of that will and God's word and just saying, I'm sorry. I think the Bible and the Gospel, I think it's smart: Mark 7, that Jesus says, I did not come to abolish the old law, I came as fulfillment scripture; the true way Jesus taught us is forgiveness.

*Carmelo*: It's amazing all the different levels of participation in at least eclecticism and other religions too, and I've been since the beginning and dealing with other people older than me, smarter and wiser, and so on, it's a fluctuation, we all have different levels, we almost became a monk. I thought about becoming a priest for about 20 seconds [laughter] in the fifth grade. But ultimately it's like I've gone to church, we spent probably 15 years at the Methodist church every Sunday to keep our boys following some sense of morality, it gives you a moral code, and going to church, synagogue, mosque, whatever it might be if you really have people who are teaching you the truth (and often times you're not), you kind of get a moral bearing, something to guide yourself, with and for me going to the Methodist church was no big deal, it was the basic concept of helping my children develop a good balance, and their personal life, and who they are, and they developed tremendously. Since then, we gave up most of that because of disenchantment. Robin was part of the hierarchy of the church; I was on the board of trustees. But things happened in that church too, they were disheartening. I go to church still, most of the time. For the last several years with my mother at St. Anne's, where she lives, and many times I go to Holy Apostles where a friend of mine is a priest.

## Conclusion

Ethnic identity is a type of political identity. It is a means of mobilizing support to attain perceived goals, support which calls upon the principle of ethnicity, or presumed common descent<sup>[25]</sup>. That it changes over time to suit various situations has been established in numerous places. Although ethnic, and therefore, political identities are mutually negotiated, there are limits to the process. These limits come from the cultural ecological setting in which an ethnic group is located.

In Rochester, NY, that setting originally consisted of a dominant English, German, and Irish culture. Although many of the Germans and almost all of the Irish inhabitants of

Rochester were Catholic, it was a Catholicism alien to the largely southern Italian settlers. Alfred Francis White writes<sup>[26]</sup>:

During the early years of Italian Immigration not much attention was given to meet their religious needs and other wants. A very large number of Catholic priests were Irish. Many times they would upbraid the Italians especially at funerals.

The German American clergy were often not much better. The religious style of Rochester's Italians was also the style of much of their life; namely it was an improvisational arrangement of what was at hand and what worked toward survival. Thus, Italians had to adapt to the cultural and social ecological conditions which they found. The underlying constant in that adaptation whether it took place in Rochester, New Orleans, San Antonio or Los Angeles was the ability to improvise in order to adapt. It was as true for post-war Italian migrants as pre-war newcomers. What changed was the cultural ecological setting to which they adapted. In the post-war years, the "older" members and descendants of the earlier Italian immigration were part of the overall setting to which newer migrants adapted. There were, of course, other differences.

America after World War II experienced the greatest prosperity the world has ever seen. For a time, it was the only super-power left standing after the great destruction of the worst war the world has known. As the Worcester Historical Museum website describes it in a paragraph that it could have written about Rochester, or almost any other American city, America emerged from World War II as the pre-eminent economic force in the world. Worcester and the nation experienced a brief tremor as industries reconverted to non-military production, dismissed the thousands of women who held war-time factory jobs, and absorbed returning GIs. The country then launched into a quarter-century of unprecedented economic boom. The air was charged with confidence. This was the era when developers built extensive neighborhoods of ranch-style houses on the city's west side, which were quickly occupied by workers and their wives and children, the "baby-boomers"<sup>[27]</sup>.

This prosperity attracted immigrants from many different groups to Rochester after World War II. These groups included Ukrainians, Poles, Romanians, Jews, and many others, including Italians. Many of these people entered the United States under the Displaced Persons Act.

The Displaced Persons Act (1948) was an act passed by the 80th United States Congress which gave permanent residence to 400,000 World War II refugees. President Harry Truman signed the Displaced Persons Act but strong critic of it. He stated in a speech after the signing:

It is with very great reluctance that I have signed S. 2242, the Displaced Persons Act of 1948. If the Congress were still in session, I would return this bill without my approval and urge that a

fairer, more humane bill be passed. In its present form this bill is flagrantly discriminatory. It mocks the American tradition of fair play. Unfortunately, it was not passed until the last day of the session. If I refused to sign this bill now, there would be no legislation on behalf of displaced persons until the next session of the Congress. It is a close question whether this bill is better or worse than no bill at all. After careful consideration I have decided, however, that it would not be right to penalize the beneficiaries of this bill on account of the injustices perpetrated against others who should have been included within its provisions.<sup>[28]</sup>

One of the leaders in the study of Italian migration to America is Donna Gabbaccia<sup>[29]</sup> and her work has detailed the relatively recent embrace of Italian ethnic identity. Gabbaccia argues that until recently the majority of migrants to the United States had come to the US to escape conditions and felt little loyalty to Italy. There was a longstanding distrust of authority in Italy and an abiding trust in their communities and families. There was also an allegiance to the Catholic faith. Some of that is changing with the influx of the new Italian migrants grew up under a united Italian state and who, by and large, come from a middle or even upper-class background, from Northern rather than Southern Italy.

Frank Cavaoli provides an in-depth discussion of waves of Italian migration to the United States and the differences among the waves<sup>[30]</sup>. He is one of the few scholars to publish on the impact of the recent postwar wave of Italians migrating to the United States and the impact they have had. His article presents the relevant material on these different but related periods of migration and how each was unique from but related to the others. He notes the problems that the huge influx of people so different from those who already inhabited the United States caused, providing important references to key works. Additionally, he addresses the issue of nativism and its intellectual ties to Social Darwinism and the now discredited viewpoint of Cultural Evolution. Indirectly, he also disputes Gabbaccia's view that Italians were not a persecuted group. He cites the legislation aimed against them and barriers to their immigration which Woodrow Wilson raised, grouping them together with Jews, Asians, and African Americans as part of the "lesser races".

Indeed, it was only in 1965 that the restrictive acts of the late teens and 1920s were replaced with Lyndon Johnson's new immigration policy, encapsulated in the Hart-Celler Immigration and Nationality Reform Law. Johnson noted that Italian Americans had played a key role in getting the bill passed. There were 300,000 Italians waiting to migrate to the United States at that time. Cavaoli discusses the impact of the new immigrants on Italian life in America, a key feature of my current work. Additionally, David Gilmour's *The Pursuit of Italy*<sup>[31]</sup> argues that to this day regionalism, loyalty to one's own area or town, dominates Italy

and differences in language, style, history, custom and traditions prevail I argue that the influx of new Italian migrants exaggerated those differences with Italians who had arrived from different regions before World War II. These differences manifested themselves in many ways, not the least of which is their self-identity.

Northern Italians were part of the post-war immigration to Rochester. Certainly, there were people from regions other than the Mezzogiorno before 1946 in Rochester's large Italian population. However, economic conditions after World War II were such that a greater number of Northern Italians came to the United States, helping to change the cultural ecological situation. These great changes in economic, social and cultural factors made for interesting times in Rochester.

Recent literature on migration has questioned the assumption that the migration process necessarily involves cultural and ethnic identity transformation. Similarly, the assumption, which Richard Alba<sup>[32]</sup> and Richard Alba and Victor Nee<sup>[33]</sup> have made, for example, that migration will inevitably lead to a loss of ethnic identity and the assimilation of the Italian American ethnic group into a broader Euro American one is open to empirical verification. Some label this approach, which accounts for social economic, demographic and cultural changes "transition theory". It also encompasses contact with the homeland over time and return migration. Social, cultural, demographic and economic changes in the land to which migrants go are given due consideration<sup>[34]</sup>.

The key issues in my research have been the search for authenticity, grappling with dual identity, and ecological adaptation. Certainly, the settlement of Italian migrants and their adaptation in Rochester, NY, from the late nineteenth century to the present day has provided ample opportunity to explore the relationship between ecological adaptations, identity formation, the problems of dual identity, and the search of an ethnic group for authenticity. Moreover, it has presented a gateway to understanding negotiation within groups toward achieving consensus on issues of identity as well as breakdowns in these negotiations.

It must be clear that ethnic groups are not static entities. Ethnic groups are positional groups and chameleon like sets of meaningful relationships. For many years now, anthropologists have moved away from a primordial static view of ethnicity or ethnic groups. Few if any anthropologists do not view ethnicity as a process and not a thing. It is important to note that these relationships are internalized relationships fraught with meaning in which socialization plays a vital role. Furthermore, along with socialization, interactions are vital in the formation and maintenance of ethnic groups. The number, type, structure and meaning of relationships help define groups and shape their identities.



Northern Italians were part of the post-war immigration to Rochester. Certainly, there were people from regions other than the Mezzogiorno before 1946 in Rochester's large Italian population. However, economic conditions after World War II were such that a greater number of Northern Italians came to the United States, helping to change the cultural ecological situation. These great changes in economic, social and cultural factors made for interesting times in Rochester. Not the least of these changes were those in the Italian American community. The creation of new Italian American clubs is but one manifestation of the change. There is also an increase in "boosterism", a kind of chauvinism that exaggerates the contributions and splendor of one's own group and which partially grew up in clear response to that of other ethnic groups.

As one migrant puts it

There was quite a difference. The level of education especially, from our prospective, our family, because, like I say, my sister, Maria, was a school teacher and Rita was at the university in Milan, and, of course, I was going to school. The level of education was different. We looked at things a little differently. We had knowledge of Italian, knowledge of Italian history, because of the school, and extremely proud of our heritage, which you probably didn't have as much perhaps with the people that came earlier. Some couldn't read or write. So, the knowledge of Italy was very limited from an old town. We, again, I grew up in the north, which was, there was very little difference between coming from < my area> to the United States. The only thing difference was the language, to be honest with you. Everything else was pretty much the same.. And the people that came after World War II, and perhaps maybe because of the exposure that they had, notonly the school but television, radio, you know, were a little different from the earlier Italians that came here, strictly from the towns.<sup>[35]</sup>

This sentiment was repeated in one fashion or another in many interviews, from people from both Northern and Southern Italy. This area requires further investigation and interpretation in understanding the forging and maintenance of identity.

## Summary

The Second World War was a major factor in changing the lives of Americans. It changed the lives of those young and old as well as those yet to come. The 1950 census marked a growth of the city of Rochester's population to its highest level, about 333,000; it has never reached that number since. By the 1960s Rochester began to lose population, falling to 318,611, declining from 23rd to 38th in U.S. city size. Many people, including Italian Americans, moved to the suburbs. Others just moved out to New York, St. Louis, California,

Florida, and Arizona, among other more exciting places. Interestingly, some of the suburban areas to which Italians moved were areas Italian contractors developed and which were close to other Italian settlements, such as Irondequoit.

During the immediate post-war period it was still possible to reach a consensus on what it meant to be an American, a Rochesterian, and an Italian American. The euphoria of the victory of the Allies in World War, which most Rochesterians translated as the American victory, overwhelmed everything else. The return of prosperity and the resurrection of the American dream eclipsed all else - for a time. The culture wars of the sixties, which changed many things, would have been beyond comprehension. Ecology played its part in shaping of the consensus and its identity. To be an Italian American in Rochester was both similar and different to being one elsewhere. There were different social structures to take into account. Rochester's culture was different from other cities in the United States while, of course, sharing many aspects with those cities.

Similarly, those Italians who came to Rochester, NY, had to adapt to a social system and a culture already established. As they adapted, they also helped make changes in that culture. Of course, they had to adapt not only to many different ethnic groups but also to differences in what came to be their own ethnic group, Italian-American, a catch-all phrase that covered over many differences among its separate segments from different regions of Italy as well as differences among those from the same region. By 1940 most of these differences were covered up in what was an uneasy alliance. Among the youngest generation of first and second generation Italian Americans born in the United States, these differences were blurring and those differences between ethnic groups, while not blurred, were no longer seen as barriers to friendships or even alliances.

Indeed, there were many things that were desirable, consciously or not, in other ethnic groups. Many of us had begun to dream we could be upwardly mobile and enter the elite world radio, movies, and later TV showed us. We bought the American Dream and often saw ourselves as different from our parents, and, yes, "smarter" because, thanks to their hard work and dedication, we were being educated, spoke better English than they did, and read all the right books. Unfortunately, reality was to set in over the years.

There were many major parts of life that shaped people: the war, education, entertainment, politics, crime, dating and marriage, and religion, among others. In each case the mutual shaping of Rochester and its ethnic groups is prominent. The destiny of the Italian American ethnic group has been inextricably intertwined with the city and its other ethnic groups ever since the first Italian migrations, even before there was an Italian State.

Italians have been in Rochester for many years. However, they came in large numbers beginning in the 1880s and their migration continued into the 1920s. The migration of Italians slowed down in the 1930s and then increased for a time after World War II. Italians became Rochester's largest ethnic group, adding their flavor to the ethnic mix, along with the English, Scots, Irish, Germans, Poles, and other ethnic groups who settled in Rochester. Initially, they faced rejection and scorn. However, by the end of World War II they had become well-integrated into the Rochester community. With others, they moved to more integrated city neighborhoods and to Rochester's suburbs. They began to fill professional jobs, political and civil, including that of mayor.

While the Mafia had a foothold in Rochester, so did more reputable and civic minded institutions. Italians took their rightful place in Church organizations, Catholic and Protestant as well. The language may have faded from common public use, but other customs remained, and their food became as American as the hot dog. But more subtle aspects of Italian culture remain - attitude, aesthetics, and family. There are other characteristics that mark the community, but the work ethic still appears to be strong in descendants of Italian immigrants and their children.

It is important to note that it was during World War II that Italian Americans became super patriots. Blake McKelvey provides the rationale for that transformation<sup>[36]</sup>.

Unfortunately, the Italians faced an additional handicap in Rochester at the outbreak of World War II when Mussolini's collaboration with Hitler placed those who had failed to secure full citizenship on the enemy alien lists. Of course, the Italian societies had long since banned the use of the fascist salute, and some of their leaders had been outspokenly critical of many of Il Duce's edicts and programs. Few Rochesterians doubted the loyalty of local Italians, and the demand for workers soon assured jobs to all, enabling many to improve their status. Local Italians rallied with other residents when the attack on Pearl Harbor drew American into the war, and many rejoiced with a special sense of relief when the American forces liberated Sicily and southern Italy in 1943. They celebrated Columbus Day with unusual fervor that year happy over the announcement that all restrictions had been lifted from Italian aliens, but another tense year and a half elapsed before they could rejoice over the surrender of the German forces in Italy.

Rochesterians of Italian descent bore their full share of the war's losses, but as Americans, not Italians. Many returned from the war with such a strong sense of national unity that the attempts of the older ethnic societies to emphasize their cultural origins aroused but limited response. McKelvey notes that there was even a noticeable drop in the occurrence

of spoken English in public and even the Italian language newspaper *La Stampa Unita* not only changed its name to *The Rochester Press* but dropped the use of Italian, publishing in English.

It took the arrival of post-war Italians to begin the revival of Italian culture in Rochester. They were joined, it is true, by some Italians who had come to Rochester before the war. These earlier arrivals tended to be better educated than the average earlier immigrant or people born in the United States who had attended college. The example of the founding of Rochester's Casa Italiana at Nazareth College is a case in point. Two of the people mainly responsible for its successful completion were Sib Petix, born in Rochester, NY, and his uncle Joe Lo Curto, who came to Rochester before World War II to escape from Benito Mussolini's rule. Lo Curto was a successful businessman, who fought for the teaching of Italian in the public schools and who worked diligently to get the Casa Italiana established. Most of the others involved were post-war immigrants.

This pattern is found in various Italian American societies. Even those initiated early in the Twentieth Century generally either died out or were revived by those Italians who migrated after World War II. Again, some first or second-generation Italians who were educated and who stayed in the Rochester area helped keep these institutions alive. However, I saw one society after another kept alive through those people who migrated after World War II. Though no one was more culturally Italian than my mother, for example, she would always become irritated with my questions about the old way and usually say that we were Americans not Italians. An uncle once became upset with my love of books by Rochester's Italian American authors. He would say that those days they wrote about were terrible and he did not want to remember them. He ended with the usual statement that he was American. It is a statement one does not hear from people who came to the United States post World War II. Rather that segment of immigrant Italians and their children opposed any than a cultural tie with Italy. The men opposed a political tie, which would subject them to an Italian military draft. Indeed, they exaggerated their patriotism and had no use for a "dual identity". Most Italian Americans who migrated to the United States before the war openly or secretly mocked those who refused to become citizens or who gave the fascist salute. They had little sympathy for those who found themselves interred; privately, saying that those who had been interred by the government should have become citizens as they had done. They found no romance in being "dual citizens" as many of the post-war migrants do. America meant security and they had battled for a respected place there, not for a return to disgraced homeland.

## **Ethnicity and Identity**

Ethnicity is a process and not an event. People use it to achieve desired goals. It is my purpose here to consider the cognitive dimensions of behavior. To do so, I treat ethnic groups as social persona, categories composed of statuses, social identities, and distributions of these in a social field. To maintain boundaries, viewed as the distribution of statuses (rights and duties vis-à-vis members of other groups), there is a need for the use of symbolic behavior. This symbolic behavior can be viewed as an ethnic boundary marker. Of course, it is members of ethnic groups who interact with one another. Finally, ethnicity is a type of identity. To understand this concept, it is necessary to examine the consequences of ecology on identity and presentation of self; to assess the interrelationship of Weber's concepts of class, status, and party in a situation of change; and to suggest that these are various modes of the same phenomenon. Finally, I wish to suggest that there are political uses of ethnicity in a multi-ethnic situation. To do that I wish to use Ward Goodenough's reformulation of the concept of status and role theory to ethnic groups. There are a number of benefits to be derived from using such an approach. Ethnic groups in this framework become social persona whose boundaries can be defined by their distribution of rights and duties vis-à-vis other similarly defined social persona. This approach has the further advantage of making the concepts operational without forfeiting their taxonomic clarity. It also succeeds in focusing on dynamic and relational aspects of stratification rather than on those that are static and descriptive. It is appropriate to introduce a brief summary of Barth's approach to ethnic groups. Barth gives "primary emphasis to the fact that ethnic groups are categories of ascription and identification by the actors themselves, and thus have the characteristics of organizing interaction between people"<sup>[37]</sup>. Barth believes that ethnic groups categorize people in terms of their most basic identity, namely origin and background<sup>[38]</sup>. The proof of a person's social identification as a member of any ethnic group is his willingness to be judged by its value system<sup>[39]</sup>.

Ethnic groups, therefore, provide categories for identification (member/nonmember) as well as serving as a means of channeling behavior<sup>[40]</sup>, especially behavior that distinguishes one group from another of the same type. Barth considers the primary function served by ethnic groups to be the articulation of interaction between groups that perform complementary activities. These activities can vary in type from cultural symbiosis, as in the Pathan-Baluch case<sup>[41]</sup>, to ethnic stratification<sup>[42]</sup>. Significantly, the degree of cultural similarity between groups is no guarantee that the ethnic distinction between them will be either greater or less than between groups that are culturally diverse<sup>[43]</sup>.

In fact, so long as a group perceives a need to maintain a separate identity it will maintain an ethnic boundary. It can do so in a number of ways, but all of these can be reduced to the following formula: Minor differences between groups will be magnified, and major differences within groups will be ignored<sup>[44]</sup>. The need to magnify minor differences seems to become greater as contact between groups increases and they become more similar. The fewer activities performed in what Goffman terms the backstage of non-articulated areas between groups in contact, the greater the need to accentuate distinctions between groups -provided there is a need to maintain differences - for the greater the common areas shared by groups the more likely it is that their cultural content will increase in similarity<sup>[45]</sup>. By concentrating on the boundaries where ethnic groups come into contact, Barth is able to formulate principles regarding the processes involved in ethnic group formation, persistence, and change.

He emphasizes that isolation is rarely a factor in ethnic persistence. More important for the advance of anthropological theory is an understanding of the processes involved in maintaining ethnic boundaries when groups come into contact<sup>[46]</sup>. Barth takes a view of social change that appears to emphasize internationalism. Like Firth, who speaks about the ways in which individuals make choices within limits set by their social structures<sup>[47]</sup>, Barth points out the need to discover the options and alternatives open to members of ethnic groups<sup>[48]</sup>. At times, one of those options is ethnic change. Discovering when one may or may not change one's ethnic identity is one of the tasks of the empirical researcher. There are times when use of a given ecological niche is restricted to members of a particular ethnic group. Since membership in any ethnic group implies a willingness to be judged by the values of that group<sup>[49]</sup>, the occupation and exploitation of a given niche may require that one's behavior be judged by the other occupants in a way that differs from past judgments<sup>[50]</sup>. In such a case, one would be expected to change one's ethnic identity in order to live more comfortably by reducing the cognitive dissonance inherent in the situation<sup>[51]</sup>. In order to maintain unity and distinction, ethnic groups require that their members see themselves as being different from members of other similar groups. Adherence to different rules and the willingness to be judged by those rules signify that one accepts or chooses the values of one ethnic system rather than another. Once a choice is made, values play an important role in providing a sense of identification. Barth has stated that whatever values, or clusters of values, an ethnic group emphasizes will determine their evaluation of new modes of behavior<sup>[52]</sup>. Barkow adds that old modes of behavior are treated in the same way by people who have changed their ethnic identities<sup>[53]</sup>. The converts are extraordinarily careful to conform to the behavior which the recipient ethnic group expects of them. Contact between ethnic groups, especially those in

which members may be exchanged, normally facilitates the learning of role behaviors, values, and stereotypes. To stress the importance of values in maintaining the persistence of ethnic groups and their distinction from other ethnic groups is not to contend that values or behaviors are unchanging. The crucial matter is that ethnic groups distinguish themselves from one another. Barth has summarized the above argument as follows:

1. When defined as an ascriptive and exclusive group, the nature of continuity of ethnic units is clear: it depends on the maintenance of a boundary. The cultural features that signal the boundary may change, and the cultural characteristics of the members may likewise be transformed, indeed, even the organizational form of the group may change-yet the fact of continuing dichotomization between members and outsiders allows us to specify the nature of continuity, and investigate the changing cultural form and content.
2. Socially relevant factors alone become diagnosis for membership, not the overt, 'objective' differences which are generated by other factors. It makes no difference how dissimilar members may be in their overt behavior-if they say they are A, in contrast to another cognate category B, they are willing to be treated and let their own behavior be interpreted and judged as A's and not as B's in other words, A's. The effects of this, as compared to other factors influencing actual behavior, can then be made the object of investigation<sup>[54]</sup>.

It is of vital importance that ethnic groups remain conceptually separate from one another even while, or perhaps especially while, they are exchanging members across a permeable boundary. Furthermore, the major reason that they remain separate from one another is organizational. They are better able to reach a goal by maintaining their separation than they would be by merging their identities. The goal, or series of goals, may be the exploitation of a particular ecological niche. It may be the articulation of a number of groups exploiting a variety of niches in a plural society. Even when there are great differences in behavior among members within an ethnic group, they share many common values. By emphasizing the similarities in values and using them to distinguish "we" from "they," ethnic groups reinforce boundaries. In short, values may serve to promote either ethnic persistence or change (Barkow, n.d.b.).

Goodenough terms each of these patterns the group's status, i.e., its rights and duties in given interaction situations<sup>[55]</sup>. The collection of rights and duties is its role. What Weber terms *Stande*, Goodenough calls social position, using social identity in place of status. He labels the collection of an individual's social identities his social persona. The application of Goodenough's terminology to ethnic groups allows one to explain changes in relative status



by focusing on the interaction situations in which ethnic members participate, qua ethnic members, grammatically in a number of ways to display different aspects of relationships. I am suggesting that ethnicity is: (1) a combination of social identities; (2) a series of statuses; and, finally, (3) a social persona. This is that "culturally ordered system of social relationship" that aids in predicting social action. Relationships between ethnic groups follow the same rules as those in which other selves and alters are involved.

Ethnic groups are at one and the same time collections of status identities and social persona, and categories that channel interactions with similar entities in a social field. In these interactions each ethnic group functions as a social persona, combining social identities within a field of possible statuses. Each ethnic group presents itself to others in a slightly different way because the relationships are differentially structured. Some groups are allies, some hold each other in mutual contempt, some exploit complementary ecological niches, some have asymmetrical relationships, etc. In Goodenough's terms, the statuses will vary with the social relationships. Each group, acting as a social persona, will choose particular identities. These identities, according to Goodenough, have a series or field of possible statuses (rights and duties) vis-a-vis other groups that bind them. Thus, it is possible to conceive of ethnic boundaries as combinations of these status boundaries. An ethnic group could conceivably be defined in terms of its possible combination of statuses in all its possible grammatical social situations. Class, status, and party, in Weber's usage, simply become aspects of the point-of-view analysis.

Ethnicity, then, is a process and not an event. People use ethnicity to achieve desired goals. Each of us has many masks, changing from one to another as we judge its appropriateness for a given situation. It is important to note that not all identities are open to us. It is equally important to note that it is only in light of the social identities of others that we even begin to define our own self-identity. In sum, there is no "us" without a "them". There is no group identity without the existence of an opposing group. The sense of identity is in large measure a product of opposition and complementarity; "we" are what "they" are not.

To what degree this difference is tolerated, respected, or even ignored is dependent on many factors: racial differences, religious beliefs and practices, occupational opposition or complementarity, relations of equality or subordination, and so on. If there is neither opposition nor complementarity, if the existence of the other group neither hinders nor helps the existence of my group, then the groups may simply ignore one another. It is not so much that they will not have separate identities but, rather those identities will not have much relevance in transactions between them.

Ethnic groups are simply action groups based on the principle of ethnicity. They are not natural groups. Ethnicity is a socially useful cultural symbol. Therefore, something in the nature of the situation must trigger the mobilization of the principle of ethnicity before a coherent group can be formed around it. Simply put, that something is the need for political, social, or economic goals to distinguish one group from another, and to structure relationships between members of different groups.

The meaning, therefore, of being a member of an ethnic group depends on both a specific situation and the total situation. The total boundary between groups must take in the total situation; that is, all the possible contacts in which a member of one ethnic group may come into contact with members of other such groups. Ethnic groups, in sum, exist to promote and organize interactions between and within groups organized on the mythic principle of common descent.

Finally, we study ethnic groups to gain a valuable perspective on socio-cultural change. Ethnic identity change is often intimately associated with other types of change. As circumstances change, the meaning of belonging to a particular ethnic group changes. Symbols and personnel may also change. Additionally, any new ethnic group's entrance into an area presents new problems for those groups already in the area.

Differences between those Italians who migrated to the United States before World War II and those who came after World War II can best be understood through this framework. Not only were Italian Americans changing in the post-World War II era, but those who came to Rochester after World War II, including Italians, faced a world vastly different from that of the prewar era. Their very presence changed circumstances in Rochester, New York.

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Abstract

Frank A. Salamone

**A Comparison of Italian Immigration to Rochester, NY,  
Before and After WWII**

The main purpose of the article is to attempt to describe, analyse and interpret the experience of Italian immigrants in New York, in Rochester. Author of the dissertation compares the pre-war and post-war fate of immigrants. Furthermore, he is trying to find an anthropological sense and a cultural principle organizing the life of that specific ethnic group (symbols, rituals, strangers). The meaning of being a member of an ethnic group depends on both a specific situation and the total situation. The total boundary between groups must take in the total situation; that is, all the possible contacts in which a member of one ethnic group may come into contact with members of other such groups. Ethnic groups, in sum, exist to promote and organize interactions between and within groups organized on the mythic principle of common descent. Differences between those Italians who migrated to the United States before World War II and those who came after World War II can be understood through the framework of specific historical and cultural experience (mythic principle).

Keywords: experience of Italian immigrants in New York, in Rochester; ethnic group; World War II

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