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**Land of Opportunity: Aspects and
Socio-cultural Legacy of Irish and
Italian Immigration to the United
States of America**

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ABSTRACT

The United States is the nation of nations par excellence. However, the true significance of immigration is frequently underappreciated by the regular American, and, similarly, some of the most essential chapters of American immigration history (namely European) are left buried in the past in favor of newer ones. Furthermore, the vast majority of the studies that constitute this subject's corpus focus on each of these chapters independently, as if they were entirely unrelated or notably different to one another.

This study examines the features, stories and consequences of two of the most relevant immigration processes in US history, Irish and Italian, by compiling/consulting numerous sources and constructing one single complete article. It aims at evaluating the data and providing the knowledge to fully understand the magnitude of their legacy, inevitably delivering useful learnings; as well as proving that conjunct analysis is not only plausible, but maybe advisable in some cases.

Keywords: Immigration, United States, Irish, Italian, American history, Socio-cultural legacy

Estados Unidos es la nación de naciones por excelencia. Sin embargo, la auténtica trascendencia que la inmigración ha supuesto es a menudo infravalorada por el propio estadounidense, y, del mismo modo, algunos de los capítulos más esenciales de la historia de la inmigración americana (la europea) quedan enterrados en el pasado en pro de aquellos más recientes. Además, la gran mayoría de los estudios que conforman el corpus de esta materia se centran en cada uno de estos capítulos de forma independiente, como si no tuvieran relación alguna o fueran considerablemente diferentes entre sí.

Este estudio examina las características, historias y consecuencias de dos de los procesos de inmigración más relevantes de la historia de Estados Unidos, la irlandesa y la italiana, mediante la recopilación/consulta de numerosas fuentes y la construcción de un único artículo integral. El objetivo es la evaluación de datos y presentación de los conocimientos necesarios para comprender plenamente la magnitud de su legado, aportando, inevitablemente, útiles enseñanzas; así como pretende demostrar que un análisis conjunto no sólo es plausible, sino tal vez aconsejable en algunos casos.

Palabras clave: inmigración, Estados Unidos, irlandesa, italiana, historia de América, legado socio-cultural

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Introduction

The United States of America have, for quite a long time already, been the most culturally diverse country on the planet, something most Americans take pride in, but do not really understand how it came to be, nor how much of America it is, i.e. underestimating the relevancy of immigration and its influence.

Dozens of books and articles have been written within the subject of American immigration. Nonetheless, almost all of these address the various “chapters” that compose it individually, as if they meant completely different things or were somehow unrelated, leaving very few academic papers that do examine the whole or a broader scope of it, but sacrificing either depth or brevity.

This singular focus limits the reader to isolated pieces of the whole picture, which does not represent the interconnection that, I am convinced of, exists amongst them, to some degree. This forces the tedious task of navigating and recollecting numerous works, from various authors, to observe these relations/similarities, as well as understand the impact of each of the parts; but often ineffectively, due to logical dis cohesion.

Lastly, out of all the sources of American immigration, the historically major one, and which fundamentally represents the foundation from which the United States are formed, i.e. European immigration, has been ignored or diminished for the past decades, focusing on others which have gained prominence over this most recent period of American history, such as Latin-American or Asian; or once again decomposing it into numerous separate branches, without correlation: English, Irish, German, Italian, etc.

It is for these reasons, and under these convictions, that I have resolved to comprise two of the major (European) chapters of America’s immigration history into one single and brief study, aimed at proving the earlier pretexts, on their importance for American history and culture, and also the resemblance and connection they share, which hopefully will help to re-think or question the very decentralized perception of the matter that I have observed.

Therefore, in this paper I shall analyze the social, economic, and cultural repercussions that the Irish and Italian immigration phenomena had into the USA, for which a generous introduction to the reasons and exposition of the characteristics (aspects) of each process is necessary to understand them along the way, i.e. presenting what happened (and how), recognizing the common features, and exemplifying and ultimately assessing their individual and collective impact.

In order to achieve this, an evaluation and careful read of a long list of collected authoritative sources shall be taken, to extract relevant data to cement our work with and to support our claims.

CHAPTER I: The Irish Diaspora

1.1. Early Immigration and the Great Famine Years

When thinking of Irish immigration to America, most people immediately relate it with the Great Hunger of the 1840s. As a matter of fact, there were hundreds of thousands of Irish-Americans already there by said time.

As historian Catherine Shannon (n.d.) acknowledges, colonial records in birth, death and marriage prove the presence of Irish-born immigrants as soon as the 1620s/30s. This early migration, nonetheless, was sporadic and uncoordinated, and their numbers were not significant; a rough estimate of 50,000 to 100,000 left Ireland for the Thirteen Colonies during the 17th c. (Kenny 2000). By 1715, the Irish accounted for less than 1% in New England (Donovan 1932).

In contrast with the following centuries' immigrants, these included elevated numbers of artisans (skilled servants), as very few from the "lowest ranks of the rural poor" would leave the country in this period, and populated mainly the "backcountry." It would not be until right past 1720 that the first major influx of Irish emigrants assumed "the character of a mass movement" (Kenny 2000, 7-9).

It consisted, fundamentally, of Northern-Irish Presbyterians, i.e. *Ulster Scots* (who would become 'Scotch-Irish' in the New World), making for three-quarters of the 250-400,000 Protestants who crossed the Atlantic, out of the 500,000 Irish in total, according to Kenny (2000). Dr. Shannon (n.d.) claims the majority immigrated to New England (chiefly Boston) between 1714 and 1750, then populated the mid-Atlantic area through Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Charleston from the 1750s. She argues that they were "escaping the discrimination that the *English Penal Laws* imposed on dissenters" (non-Anglicans and Roman Catholics alike), in addition to poor harvests, droughts, rising rents, and "the burdensome tithes demanded by the Anglican Church" (1). Many found themselves impoverished and in need of alternative livelihoods.

Moreover, in 1718, Massachusetts' Governor Shute offered free land to Ulster settlers to strengthen the frontier against "the Indians" and consolidate the colony's claim to the disputed territory (Hart 1928).

Perhaps, in comparison with the homeland, where they confronted both threatening Catholics and condescending Anglicans, the Ulster Scots must have seen in

America a more favorable environment for their religious principles, and hence, their entire way of life (Dickson 1950), as well as good availability of land.

As previously advanced, many of these Presbyterians travelled to New England (especially during the first half of the century), but no warm welcome was given by “their fellow religious dissenters,” the Puritans, for these denounced any proposal to bring Irish colonists as “formidable attempts of Satan to unsettle us” (Kenny 2000, 23). The Scotch-Irish became nearly as unpopular among New Englanders as their Catholic counterparts would be in the subsequent century (Ford 1915).

Given the hostility they faced, perceived as “enemies” and considered “unclean, unwholesome and disgusting”, many fled to Western/Northern New England, where they founded several towns/settlements, like Limerick, Londonderry, Belfast and Hillsboro (Shannon n.d.); as well as venturing down to the mid-Atlantic states and the Southern colonies’ backcountry (Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Georgia), like most of their predecessors did the century before, in hopes of accomplishing much easier integration (which many did) and usually doing significantly better in economic terms. In any case, as Dickson (1966) observes, for Irish immigrants, “temporary bondage in heaven was preferable to a false freedom in hell” (92).

These “frontiersmen” maintained their settlement patterns and kept practicing their “traditional grain-and-livestock agriculture”, as well as the distilling of whiskey, successfully transporting a piece of Northern Ireland into American soil, and actually setting the norm in the backcountry for the others, unlike in the North (Kenny 2000).

Regarding religion, they played an important role in the introduction of Presbyterianism into America. At a time where Protestants would not make a third of the Irish population, pre-Famine Irish America was clearly Protestant, and “that must be the starting point for any history of the American Irish” (Doyle 1981, 52). In addition, their religious influence in the colonies granted them some political power, and even though they did suffer the prejudice and persecution of the naturals (mostly in the North however), it must be recognized their assimilation into American life was not so much “agonized” as it would be for their fellow Catholic countrymen (both before and after the Potato failure).

Some historians sustain that it was not so much that they “fitted the bill” better, but that they helped to create an existing American ideal throughout the 18th century, which would help them to fully assimilate by the late 19th (Dunaway 1944).

The numbers made evident their prominent share in the country they would help to create. By 1790, three-quarters of the approximately 500,000 Irish-Americans were of Ulster origin, making for “50 per cent of white settlers on the trans-Appalachian frontier” (Kenny 2000, 25-42). In the young United States, as a whole, the Scotch-Irish came second in number, only behind the English.

It is no doubt that the Scotch-Irish history (and all Irish) of the eighteenth-century proved significant in several aspects for American culture and history, such as religion, education, politics, and the very American Revolution, in which they made a crucial contribution, fueled in large part by their hatred to Britain.

Thus, the Protestant-Irish impact in American history does deserve a space in the recognition of Irish-American legacy, even if they “deliberately sought to exclude themselves from the fold of Irishness in the nineteenth century” (Kenny 2000, 44).

Moving forward, in the antebellum era, the tides would turn for the Catholic side, even before the 1840s, in a much more massive outflow (but still nothing more than a rehearsal of what was about to be). From the end of the Napoleonic Wars to the beginning of the Great Famine, 800,000 to 1,000,000 Irish emigrants—about twice as much as the preceding two hundred years—sailed to North America (Miller 1985).

Protestants continued to emigrate in prominent numbers, but, as Miller (1985) explains, “at some point in the early 1830s annual departures by Catholics began to exceed those of Dissenters and Anglicans combined” (198), composing 50-60% of all emigrants during the entire period, showing an increase from 2,000 per year in 1820 to 25 times that figure in 1844 (Shannon n.d.). Howbeit, this period’s most important feature resides in the turning point it would mark on the Irish-American portrait with the exponentially increasing numbers of ‘relatively poor’ Catholic emigrants from the three southern provinces.

A meaningful gesture that exemplifies this change of direction, and evident despise between one side and the other, is that anticipated before, that the Scotch-Irish rushed to differentiate themselves from the newcomers, “assimilating rapidly into the mainstream of Protestant America” (Kenny 2000, 45).

The main causes that forced the hand of immigration this time were but the precedents to what would facilitate such devastation in the following decades: “population growth, lack of diversification in the economy and consequent pressure on land,” responsibility in large part of the British government management of the post-war extended crisis (Kenny 2000, 46). It is worth noting, on the other hand, that there were

still economic migrants, wishing to improve their quality of life, but not fleeing lethal consequences in their home-country, a privilege the next few generations would not have.

Meanwhile, in the direct spectrum of emigration, due to some British legislation approved in 1816 that raised the fares to the United States, many immigrants, unable to afford this, travelled to the still British-owned Canada instead, reducing the inflow of immigrant to the US for some time.

Interestingly, though, this would, in the end, serve for nothing but show how good of a destination the States were, and how determined the Irish were to get there, as many chose not to remain in the British provinces, and head south, because the US remained the emigrants' preferred destination after all, even if that meant going through some more trouble.

Reports speaking of overcrowded ships hassled by disease, shipwrecks, and difficulty to find jobs decreased Canada's appeal, it was the United States that remained the *land of promise* for most Irishmen; an emigrant in Philadelphia could enthusiastically declare: "thousands are coming yearly to this country where there is room for all—employment for all and success for many" (Miller 1985, 197). This was certainly embellished, but undoubtedly reflects that there was no better option at the time. By the late 1830s, the USA returned to the number one spot for direct Irish migration.

Added to the fact that Irishmen estimated the US as "a sort of half-way stage to Heaven," and "never ceased to look towards America with affection; loving the people who won the freedom (American Revolution) from which they vainly sighed" (Grattan 1859, 3), really helped to encourage emigration to the New World, for which the devoted Irish felt true passionate admiration.

And they did have good reason to expect a warm welcome from the freedom fighters that they so vehemently supported and cheered on during the Independence War. However, as Grattan (1859) very well understands, the expectations of the newcomer were "romantic rather than reasonable," and the Fairy Tale lasted as long as they set foot on the continent.

Unsurprisingly, however, despite any social deterrent, they, "in the vast majority of cases, hold fast, and work their way"...for "the ardently love of liberty rarely deserts the Irish heart," and do not cease to love America, but develop a rather "practical and business-like regard," where their families could flourish (Grattan 1859, 8-9). In short, they, like the ones before them, were not doing very well in terms of social acceptance, but were surely committed to prosper eventually. After all, natural-born persons could

not reach to understand the battles and forged spirit of the poor Irish immigrant, and their determination to embrace such foreign land as their own.

On a different regard, this was also the period of true establishment of *chain migration*, a pyramidal pattern which consisted of begetting more emigration via the remittances (and even prepaid tickets) sent by the family members overseas to their relatives, and so on (Fitzpatrick 1980). This contributed to the formation of concentrated and strongly bonded communities within the most popular destinations, like the “Five points” neighborhood in New York, where Irish culture persisted somewhat isolated for a long time.

These newcomers would face harsher difficulties to blend with American society and culture, being “aliens in race, language (sometimes) and religion,” but despite well-rooted contempt for foreign “influence” in general, maybe related to the Founding Fathers’ desire to true independence as a sovereign nation, which could easily translate to misconceptions: “History and experience prove that foreign influence is one of the most baneful foes of a republican government” (G. Washington, “Farewell Address”); the Irish dreamers could “hardly be made a bad or disloyal citizen, or prevented from the first opportunity to serve the country,” as their visible eagerness towards joining the armed forces, for example, illustrates (Grattan 1859, 10).

Inevitably, nevertheless, the discrimination they suffered surely prompts the growth of disdain amongst the Irish in any case. “Cramped, narrowed, and prejudiced,” the Irish-American develops a “deep-rooted sense of wrong, and a hatred to those who do it, nourished in his heart” (9). This certainly hinders integration for at least a couple of generations, inherited by their children and the famine immigrants forbye.

To the positive side once again, the pre-famine decades certainly showed that the Irish already had a considerable impact in “American social life,” especially in urban areas due to their strong presence (Miller 1985).

Then, in September 1845, a dangerously pernicious plant pathogen, commonly known as “blight,” severely damaged the potato crop and caused a prolonged and unprecedentedly harsh famine: *an Gorta Mór* (The Great Famine). This “New Disease,” in fact, had previously afflicted some areas in the US back in 1843, and somehow crossed the ocean, eventually reaching Ireland (Ó’Gráda 1995).

What caused such a huge crisis in Ireland is no secret for historians. First and foremost, an unsustainable population growth in the Island had been occurring for over a

hundred years, doubling their population in half a century, from 4 million in 1788, to 8.2M in 1841 (Connell 1950); such headlong growth, highlights Ó'Gráda, “helps explain stories of a country, lemming-like, on the road of disaster” (1995, 5).

Secondly, their specialized economy and unequitable land distribution/control played a significant role. Consisting in large part of farmland, the Isle was expected to provide notable quantities of grain and livestock to the Empire, but the Irish were themselves remarkably poor, and very few owned land, mostly due to the Penal Laws of the 17th century, which prevented Catholic Irishmen from inheriting or even purchasing land for the next 150 years. Thus, most of them worked the land for Anglo-Irish landowners to simply pay rent, and depending largely on the potato (common and cheap) to nourish (Abbott, 2016). Moreover, the pre-famine crisis on domestic industry did not help, as Ireland still lacked the necessary infrastructure and industrial capacity to absorb enough rural population. In the words of recognized author Cecil Woodham-Smith: “Ireland was on the verge of starvation, her population rapidly increasing, three quarters of her labourers unemployed, housing conditions appalling and the standard of living unbelievably low” (1962, 36).

Last, but not least, was the poor political handling of the situation. Most experts, such as Ó'Gráda, Shannon and Woodham-Smith, agree that a more conscious or serious management of the crisis, namely a “less doctrinaire attitude to famine relief” and persistence in aid, would have, in all certainty, saved many lives. The latter of the previously quoted, however, does recognize a first period where the British government “behaved with considerable generosity,” especially considering the times; but acknowledges a second period “hard to defend,” after the Poor Law of 1847, “refusing assistance when the second total failure of the potato occurred” (1962, 408).

It is obvious, therefore, that the poor politics from London had severe consequences for the hapless people of Emerald Isle. In the famous words of contemporaneous author, John Mitchel: “The Almighty, indeed, sent the potato blight, but the English created the Famine” (1861, 219).

It is because of this, that an Ireland, so poor that visitors “often went home shocked by the degree of depravation and suffering they had encountered” (Kenny 2000, 53), could not stand a chance over what was upon her. Consequently, a staggering 2.1 million Irish were forced to emigrate in just a decade ('45-'55), the vast majority (1.5M) to the United States, leaving another million to die (Donnelly Jr. 2001).

One main feature to highlight from this period is that, due to the extreme situation, it involved all classes and regions of the country. Whereas the eighteenth saw an essentially Protestant arrival, and subsequent fast decline in favor of Catholics from the south-east of the country in the early eighteenth, this catastrophe would leave no exemptions, as shown (amongst other sources) by the emigration reports collected at departure ports, like the Colonial Land and Emigration Commission's report of 1847: "[Emigrants] consisted of people who, seeing starvation impending at home, used the pecuniary means they possessed to provide themselves with a passage to a country where they thought they would be able to live."

The most popular destinations were, by far, Boston and New York, where the larger communities of Irish had been for a long time. Although these were the kind of areas more likely to repudiate the Irish (particularly Catholics), very few dared to try their luck somewhere else, even if advised to do so, since not only poverty but also lack of skills usually prevented them from even thinking of it, especially when there were enough jobs there, be it good or not. However, the few that could and did take the step reportedly did better.

These immigrants were, for the most part, less prepared than their predecessors, both for "material achievement and assimilation abroad." A notable portion were Irish-speaking traditionalist peasants, making them even more distanced from American worldviews—as far as "diametrically opposed to the typical American" (Miller 1985, 326). This was but another good excuse for Americans, and even other settlers, to not welcome the Irish wave, since they had become simpler, more violent, uneducated and "daft" to the American eye, strengthening nativism's (paranoiac) fears that these newcomers would seek to "overthrow the American government and values" (History 2018).

This negative perception was boosted, as well, by the young pseudo-science of racialism, which depicted the Irish as an uncivilized race of its own, attributed in large part to the English prejudices and relations with their neighbors: "This wild, reckless, indolent, uncertain and superstitious race have no sympathy with the English character. Their ideal of human felicity is an alternation of clannish broils and coarse idolatry" (Blake, 1960). After all, they represented the historically predominant source of European influence over the States.

If this presentation was not enough to hate the Irish, the 1847's typhus epidemic (following the second devastating potato crop failure), which arrived to America through

the wretched overcrowded immigrant ships (“coffin ships”), killing thousands, was of no help for the ill-starred Irish (Bruemmer 2013). Also, being at the bottom of the pyramid, they gathered in crowded rat-infested tiny shanties, often shared with other families (Ernst, 1994), in the humble neighbourhoods where blacks would live, stimulating a “dirty” perception and facilitating disdain, to the point where the “softer” slurs like “mick” would turn to “white n*ggers”, and where occasional (but undoubtedly more common) violence against the Irish, or among Protestants and Catholics would sprout, such as the Bible Riots of 1844 in Philadelphia, or 1871’s Orange and Green Riots in NYC (Tager 2001). As one emigrant lamented in 1860: “The Great majority of the American people are, in heart and soul anti-Catholic, but more specially anti-Irish” (Miller 1985).

The Celtic spirit was resilient though, and would not surrender to bad weather when having gone through a hurricane at home. Most Irishmen were given (as in the earlier decades) the dangerous, low-paid jobs that nobody wanted (usually offered by big employers), like building canals, digging trenches for water, working on the railroads (i.e. “navvies”), or in the best cases, as humble blacksmiths and stable workers (Klein 2017). “The poor Irishman, the wheelbarrow is his country,” remarked the well-known writer Ralph Waldo Emerson. As a result, in cities like Boston, male immigrants, on average, would not survive 15 years after arrival (Handlin 1991).

For the Irish women, who gained presence in America precisely during this period, their habitual destination was to enter domestic service in cities, which was, in comparison, a preferable and more comfortable occupation; while some others experienced the undoubtedly worse alternative at textile mills (Kenny 2000). It was, in fact, as Shannon (n.d.) notes, these women, who “were the primary funders for chain migration and for the remittances sent back to their families” (4).

The process of chain migration was strongly consolidated during the Famine years, and would endure and condition post-famine emigration in good part, promoting, prolonging and influencing immigration until WW1. This was made possible thanks to the much improved economic conditions that Irish-Americans shortly achieved, since, even if they resignedly conformed with the most deplorable jobs, their prospects were unquestionably greater than the misery and death they left behind; and the results would come to prove so, as the multiple letters-home recorded show: “I am very well and John is

in very good situation and is very happy. I thank God I am in as good health as I ever was in all my life” (Curtis 1845).

Once again, Irish-Americans were improving their life and economic conditions, but at the cost of degraded social status, restraining, for now, their cultural frame to small spaces within the country, namely big cities such as Boston, New York, and Philadelphia, where their voices, thanks merely to their numbers, could at least be heard.

A meaningful milestone was the union of some Irish “Aid societies” for the creation of one big official parade on the festivity of *St Patrick’s Day*, making it similar to today’s, and eventually becoming a popular emblem of American culture (History.com editors 2009b).

By the mid-1850s, Irish-born people amounted for nearly 27% of the population, which had to be added to those born in American soil; and represented as much as 85% of the “resident foreign born” (Handlin, 1991). Remarkable influence over American society and politics, and thus culture, was already happening; and this would only anticipate a stronger impact throughout the upcoming years.

1.2. Post-War America: The Age of the Clover

The anti-Irish sentiment would go on with sufficient strength in the few decades subsequent to the Famine. So much so, that some employers sought to deliberately prevent the Irish from getting jobs, displaying the notorious ‘No Irish Need Apply’ (NINA) signs. It seems, despite being a controversial topic among historians, there were plenty of these to be found in the Northern cities. *The New York Times* alone has reported a record of at least 40 instances that this was present (in all its variations) in the advertisements of contemporaneous newspapers (Bulik 2015).

On the other side, the Irish had their own prejudices too, among which there was a powerful anti-English/Anglican sentiment. British spy Thomas Doyle noted that a minority, but non-ignorable portion of Irish-Americans fiercely hated British dominion over their homeland, and most especially the ‘landlord class’, desiring vengeance and the destruction of both (Larcom 1861). There was indeed remarkable support for *Fenianism* across the pond during this period. O’Mahony would even found an organization in America (Irish Republican Brotherhood), aimed at financially and militarily supporting a “forthcoming rebellion” in Ireland (Miller 1985). Even so, this “common enemy” assisted

the unity and camaraderie in the Irish-American communities, forming a true sense of *community* and empowering themselves.

Fortunately, things started to change after the Civil War (1861-65) concluded, since many enlisted or were conscripted into the Union Army, and thus coexisted and fought side by side with other Americans, which helped to accelerate the “humanization” process of the Irish. Most importantly, their vast population in the Northeast granted them some political power, mostly in the Democratic Party, as well as establishing a vigorous seed for Catholic beliefs in the country, erecting majestic places of worship, e.g. St Patrick’s Cathedral in Manhattan. They earned a seat at the table to start modulating the landscape.

As Miller (1985) explains, “neither the Democratic party nor the American Catholic church were a specifically *Irish* organization...However, as they attracted the overwhelming majority of Famine emigrants, they were both to a degree transformed into Irish institutions” (329).

Thanks to having worked in blue-collar jobs for decades, the Irish earned useful connections with the Unions; as well as an important attachment to the Democratic party, due to lack of antagonism and for pragmatic reasons (return the favor), which allowed them to expand their labour spectrum (Miller 1985). They, of course, kept working on hard-working manual jobs, but such progress, largely credited to the efforts of Mother Jones, a distinguished Irish-American union organizer, granted them the real opportunity to develop socially and grow in the labour market, and also politically (Library of Congress n.d.).

They opened several pubs/taverns, and enrolled massively in the city police departments, a peculiarly well-known occupation (so much that it is cultural both at national and semi-international level). By the beginning of the 20th century, 5 out of 6 officers in the NYPD were either Irish born or of Irish descent (Bessel and Emsley, 2000). Regarding women, teacher and nun arose as the new most popular professions, probably as a related step forward from domestic service.

Of course, hostility did not just disappear; their increasing positions as alcohol dealers in Irish taverns, added to the “pernicious addiction to whiskey-drinking” by quite a few, said to be “the true source of every excess committed by Irish in America”, and the continuation of rioting (although with less regularity as time advanced), reinforced the stereotype of the drunkard, primitive and violent Irishman, a tool easily used by

unfriendly institutions/parties to spew disgust among the population. The fact that several immigrants were starting to obtain citizenship, and thus official equality of rights, enraged them further (Grattan 1859, 29).

In any case, true change was being achieved indeed; the Post-famine generations were doing better than their predecessors, and just worse than their children would. It shall be noted that a good reason of this gradual prosperity was a cultural shift procured namely by religious institutions. A moral reformation, in which many Roman-Catholic ecclesiastics took a “distinguished part,” was vital for the assimilation of the Irish. The “principle of Temperance” pleaded the abandonment of the clannish/mafia-like proclivities of many foolish immigrants who sought familiarity and protection, and replace them for newly-established “affiliated emigrant societies,” founded as a supportive institution aiding newcomers to obtain employment, and offering guidance as to where/how to establish themselves in America (even founding small colonies). The “social animal” that was the Irish had to set aside their associative energy to thrive best (Grattan 1859).

This socio-cultural effort to assist immigrants and bring harmony had many deflectors, as expected, but also many powerful allies on various branches, such as General Harrison, Father Matthew, Bishop Fenwick, Legislator Boyd, and writer Samuel Goodrich, who in fact identified the two most prominent prejudices against the Irish in the personal/anecdotal experience, and the strong influence from the English source:

Let us receive them as friends, and give them welcome to our country. Let us, at least, extend the band of encouragement and sympathy to the Irish. [...]Let us especially be guarded against two sources of prejudice, to which we are particularly liable. [...]Influenced by such considerations, let us, by all fair means, bring about a good understanding between the Irish emigrants and society.

All these aforementioned factors demonstrate a major shift in attitudes and prospects, which initiated a path to full assimilation into American culture, instead of quarrelsome defiance from it by both parts of the equation. It would not become a flower field, but certain improvement.

Consequently, too, Fenianism encountered a “meteoric fall” by the early 1870s, losing social and institutional support (Miller 1985). The main ghost that remained, on the other hand, was that of street violence and social instability, but in their defence, and as Nieburg (1963) explains, “any group whose interests are too flagrantly abused or ignored is a potential source of violent unrest,” and this was the case (50). Thankfully, in a similar tone with the rest, the late 19th was a time which marked the dawn of a more

peaceful and harmonious era (with few exceptions), as exemplified by John Tager's *Chronology of Boston Riots* (2000), for instance; and which saw an increasing rapprochement between Britain and the States.

Regarding emigration itself, during this era, the previous "panic-driven exodus" was overpassed and now emigration was increasingly based on economic matters (Shannon n.d.). Nonetheless, even after the effects of the Famine had largely disappeared, the flood continued, reaching over 4.5M people who left Ireland for a new life overseas between the 1850s and WW1, most of whom ended in the USA (Hatton and Williamson, 1993).

Throughout this period, Irish immigration to the United States fell with the return of better times, but rose again when recession or (minor) famine reappeared. However, despite an evident decline, large number persisted in departing even in the worst of times, evidencing the prosperity the US represented (Miller 1985). By the 1890s, however, the newcomers had dropped below 50,000 a year. As to what caused this, various experts seem to agree that the improved economic conditions of Ireland, where wages were slowly matching those overseas, was the main reason for it; also, the result of less encouraged emigration-policies, and the fact that there were few in need left to depart (Shannon 1988).

By the early 20th century, Irish immigration would decrease exponentially and become at best secondary, only rising up in the twenties and fifties, but nothing compared to what had been. They would pass on the baton to the next group of migrants that would, sadly, but also conveniently, take on the baton of discrimination too (ironically assisting Irish integration), the Italians.

1.3. Saint Patrick's Legacy

The Irish-American history, which we have reviewed and thoroughly analyzed, has not only stated, organized and summarized the facts, but has consequently provided several relevant findings, which have been remarked on each corresponding point. It is now time, thus, to reflect on what conclusions they lead to.

In the first instance, it is necessary to insist (once more) on a simple force that yet exercises obvious strength, and that is the numbers' magnitude. An often-quoted aphorism, "Boston is the next parish to Galway," shows the close connections between Ireland and the United States (most importantly New England). From 1700 to the present

day, the *Land of the Free* has received the outstanding figure of 8 million Irish immigrants of all ages, equalizing the entire population of the Isle at its historical maximum, right before the Famine. This means that, proportionally, it lost more population than any other nation (Akenson 1993), and that is not exactly “lightweight”. Such a vast influx has had major implications over the very state of the Union (and over the country of departure).

The very “episodes” throughout this bigger picture have shed some light over what these have been for their respective times, but as a matter of fact, not only does it matter for a certain century, but matters ever since, because representing so much of what America used to be and in the making of what it is, not only gains you a few assets over the pie that is American history, and thus culture, but continues to be of relevance, as 32 million Americans (at least) who have inherited their most direct legacy can confirm (US Census Bureau 2019). A statistic that surely helps to highlight how relevant this is indeed, is that as much as half of all US presidents have Irish ancestry, from Andrew Jackson (7th) to Joe Biden (46th).

The next direct consequence of this mass immigration, especially because of the mid-19th century’s share, is the construction of a community, which plays a significant role into the development of a culture within the whole (for the good and the bad). This gives the print of Irish much prominence and distinction too, by constructing their cultural identity, as exemplified in, for instance, the social behavior studied by Tager (2001), or ethnic identity, which some experts claim has been (and is) a “defining characteristic of becoming American” (Kenny 2000, 27), and which separates, hence, the Irish-American experience not only from any other, but also in two smaller pieces within, Catholic and Protestant.

Another proven fact over the importance of Irish immigration is the major role they, like the other good peoples who committed themselves to prosper in America, play into elevating the United States to its superpower position, or in the poetic words of Grattan (1859): “The peasantry, the artizans, the manufacturers, or the agriculturists of Europe, bringing out with them the skill and industry which alone were wanting to make America what it now is, and without which it never could have reached its present eminence!” (23).

However, although being a real consequence, ultimately influencing society and culture, as well as enlarging its reach, it is not these contributions in force that I would consider of greater interest, but most importantly, and as it could be expected with so much history in-between, it is how the Irish adopt and transform the society and culture of the country they embrace as home, by integrating it in body and soul. Irish immigration

is regarded nowadays as an example of powerful patriotic spirit and determination to achieve the true American dream, a status, nonetheless, earned not without hardship, blood and tears, and thus exemplary and inspiring to anyone, as well as a valuable lesson to learn from.

Just like the positive remained, though, some of the negative did too, for it is certainly not only about the resilience and endurance of the dreamer's soul, or their many contributions to America, but also the beer and whiskey-loving fool and the grumpy Irish, as part of the cultural heritage, which, in all honesty, is not necessarily bad or harmful, but maybe simultaneously positive as a cultural magnifying tool and creative encouragement.

Irishness has undoubtedly made its place in American society, with admirable willingness to assimilate, and an eminent legacy as a result, which not only persists today, but also accounts for one of the most important elements in American identity. In fact, "Irish presence is directly related to some of the principal themes in American history, especially regarding urban life, labour, race, religion and politics," which manifests an undeniable and remarkable impact in society and culture (Kenny 2000, 45).

Out of all the destinations, America proved not only to be greatest, but was also the most transformed in return. Today, Irish-American culture is so engrained into America's "melting pot," that Irish traditions, music, religion, literature, language, and even history, are all irreversibly connected to both places. The clover is as much a symbol of Ireland as it is of the Irish, and since today's America would not be understood without them, it is too for America. That is why Saint Patrick's Day is widely celebrated all over America, as well as an entire month (March) in recognition of Irish-American culture.

Each and every one of the branches that compose Irish-American culture, like the aforementioned, brings a whole class of cultural value. To present one example, just by grasping at the most famous literature, one can only imagine how immense the scope is; from Frederick Douglass remarking on the oppression and misery of the Irish, comparing them with African-Americans (Crowell, 2007), through J.P. Kennedy imagining the Irish cultural foundations of his state, Maryland (1860), to the traumatizing struggles of the humble Irish in Crane's *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (1893) and McDermott's *Charming Billy* (1997).

However, in order to get the whole picture, it must be understood that the Irish-American heritage does not stop there at all, but it is virtually inestimable, since a good portion of the legacy persists in the form of *Institutions*, which are either created or

adopted by them, and individual legacies too. By that, we mean, the organizations, e.g. Charitable Irish Society of Boston, Irish American Cultural Institute, Friendly Sons of Saint Patrick, New York Irish Center, etc.; we mean, as well, the religious and academic institutions, such as the *Cathedral Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul* in Philadelphia, or *St. Patrick's Cathedral* in New York City, or the Villanova University and Boston College; it is also the countless personalities or cultural “pawns” (Bing Crosby, F.S. Fitzgerald, Clint Eastwood, Eileen Farrell, Judy Garland, Frank O’Hara, Eugene O’Neill, etc.); and certainly means the canals and roads constructed, the buildings erected, the towns founded, and so much more.

CHAPTER II: The Italian Exodus

2.1. Welcome to Ellis Island: The Great Arrival and the Unfortunate Irish Relay

As soon as Irish immigration began to taper-off (1870s-1890s), a new kind of emigrants, yet not so different from the previous, would start to settle *en masse* in America and write off their own history in the New World. However, it is worth briefly noting, before this ‘Great Arrival’, the characteristics and forms of pre-1880s migration.

The period between the discovery of America by Columbus, thought indeed to be Italian, and the 1820s (when official immigration statistics started to be recorded) is of little relevance as far as Italian immigration is concerned. The 16th and 17th centuries were the age of explorers and adventurers, with few names of relevance, like Cabot and da Verrazano (first men to explore the Atlantic coast of North America).

Most notably, however, is the good number of missionaries of Italian origin who travelled to America to undertake the risky mission of teaching and converting the indigenous peoples to the Christian faith, founding numerous towns and settlements in the South and especially the South-West of North America.

The few Italians who arrived to America until 19th century came by the mere attraction of an “untouched” and “uncorrupted” land, vast and wealthy (Zugarini 2022).

Despite the lack of numbers, the Italian influence was already appreciable. The beloved founding father, Thomas Jefferson, for instance, had a “particular affinity for Italian culture” (Library of Congress n.d.); his fascination for Roman and Italian history influenced his imagination of American democracy. Also, his neighbor (and friend) at Monticello, Philip Mazzei, a well-known philosopher Italian immigrant, is believed to have influenced Jefferson’s drafting of the Declaration of Independence (Marchione 1977).

In any case, before 1820, only a few Italians had settled in North America. Mainly consisting of missionaries, teachers, artists, and other professionals from the upper crust; but Italian immigration would increase steadily from 1820 to 1880, a trend anticipating a turning point (Cavaioli 2008).

In the decades between 1820 and 1880, an official record (possibly below the actual number) of 81,277 Italian immigrants arrived to the shores of the United States, two thirds of them in the last decade (US Census Bureau 1975). Similarly to early Irish immigration, this period was almost exclusively starred by Italian immigrants from the

north of the country, the majority being educated and skilled workers (artisans, shopkeepers, architects, musicians, painters,...), much different from the southern Italians that would arrive in the peak decades.

These newcomers spread throughout various regions across the country, although most notably in the northeast (Pennsylvania to Maine), California (chiefly San Francisco) and Louisiana. Similarly, once again, to the Ulster Scots of Irish pre-famine emigration, they found little difficulty to integrate into American society, easily achieving an occupation in their fields (Zugarini 2022).

As the Italian-American population grew, so did their contributions. Famous figures of the age include a number of personalities that made important cultural contributions to enlighten the States, such as Constantino Brumidi, who, among other works in the country, painted the Capitol building with his magnificent frescoes, including the Great Dome's; or Lorenzo da Ponte, who constructed America's first Opera House in 1833 (Daniels 1990).

Another important figure was inventor Antonio Meucci, who immigrated to New York in 1850, where he successfully created an electromagnetic voice-transmission device, which many credit as the first telephone, even the US congress (H.Res.269—107th Congress). He also hosted and employed his friend Garibaldi, one of the most important political leaders in Italian history. The place where they lived is now the Garibaldi-Meucci Museum, and was added to the *US National Register of Historic Places* in 1980.

Moreover, some ecclesiastical positions and religious exiles (mainly Jesuit priests) began to emigrate to the US. In 1859, St Anthony of Padua Church was founded in Manhattan, NY, as the first parish dedicated to serve the Italian-American community (Dunlap 2004).

Italian immigration to America continued to increase progressively during these decades, from less than 500 in the 1820s, to nearly 56,000 in the 1870-80 decade (US Census Bureau 1975). As Forster (1919) noted, Italian immigration to the date had not been very significant, but it set the stage for the incoming wave, creating the first communities.

Then, the 1880s arrived, and the immigrant influx rose all the way up to 307,000. This marked the beginning of a rapidly exponential increase in the number of Italians

arriving to the US, the “Great Arrival” period (1880- 1921), which would define, in large part, the experience of the bulk of Italian-Americans.

In the following decade, the immigrant population doubled to 650,000, but seemed nothing compared with the +2M Italian immigrants of the 1900s, and 1,1M from 1911-20. By the 1920s, when immigration began to decline, over 4 million Italians upheld this new land as home, i.e. 10% of the foreign-born population (Egmont 2015).

In order to fully appreciate the magnitude of this phenomenon, the number of new Italian immigrants registered on the peak year of 1913 alone (377K) was fifteen times larger than the 50 years from 1820 to 1870 combined; compared to the total arrivals in the USA, Italians ascended from 5% in 1883 to 45.5% in 1906 (Zugarini 2022). In proportion to population of country of origin, it can only be matched with the Irish famine migration.

The main reasons by which so many people were forced to leave their homes to seek a better future across the Pond were the poor status in which their country, and most importantly, their region, were submerged, contrasted with the good prospect that represented America and the newer travelling facilities that encouraged emigration.

The vast majority of the immigrants that arrived during this time were from the *mezzogiorno*, i.e. the Italian south (around 4 in 5), an already “humble” and overpopulated region, barely industrialized. As Cavaoli (2008) explains, the inhabitants were mainly poor and traditional “contadini” or peasants, who worked the land of a landlord and very rarely owned land themselves, a situation that resembles that of the Irish peasants addressed in the previous chapter.

However, agriculture in the Peninsula was certainly no longer profitable. The drought climate (on a discouraging streak too), the primitive methods of production, the subsequent epidemics of malaria, the not-always cooperative soil, and the sky-scraping taxes imposed by the government were devastating for the impoverishment of the southern regions (Cavaoli 2008). The impatient efforts of the government to industrialize Italy were “paid to a large extent by the south, forced by poverty to feed a growing migration” (Zugarini 2022, 36).

Contrastingly, the United States looked shiny and beautiful on the other side of the Pond. A good portion of the earlier immigrants were reporting their families back home of the much better conditions this country could offer: earnings up to ten times

higher and better working conditions, negligible taxes, non-compulsory military service, and more (Lambert 1913).

Ironically, the American industrial system and the greater opportunity it offered was the main allurement for the southern Italian peasant. As Dr Sowell (1981) acknowledges, the motivations were almost entirely economic.

Furthermore, the much improved and affordable transatlantic voyages boosted the encouragement to take the step, as it became more accessible, the trip would take significantly less time than only a decade before (Stella 1924), and the travelling and safety conditions were improving (although there was still a long way in this regard).

Surprisingly, these rural immigrants very rarely took up farming occupations in the States, but tended to “cluster” in the big cities of the north, namely New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago and Detroit, in the most alien environment to expect at first sight (Tomasi 1972), despite repeated efforts from the Italian government to encourage migration to the inland. As Zugarini exposes, the reason why the “vast agricultural areas of the country” failed to attract most immigrants was the unappealing climate, the ‘distant’ or isolating properties of the typical American farm, which “did not at all recall the rural environment that immigrants had known in their homeland,” and most importantly, the lack of an already existing Italian-American community to seek shelter in; the prospect of renouncing to a familiar environment and people in the big cities’ *Little Italies* was “too great a sacrifice” (2022, 44).

For new-coming unskilled laborers who, in several cases, did not even speak English, it was preferable to “play safe” in the metropolitan areas where both simple jobs and other fellow “Italiani” were easy to find. Hence, whereas other immigrants of the time spread all around the country, a third of Italian immigrants did not even get passed New York, and the majority of the rest only moved to neighboring states like New Jersey and Massachusetts.

It was precisely in New York’s Harbor where nearly all Italian immigrants started their new life in America, in the station of Ellis Island (founded in 1892), where they went through an already uneasy experience, vulnerable to all kinds of frauds and misunderstandings, given that most were unspoken in the language and/or illiterate, and many others plagued by sickness were esteemed ineligible and sent back home (History.com editors 2009a).

Having got through the interrogatories and medical examination, they sailed in relief to the city to begin their life as Italian-Americans, which would certainly not be free from prejudice, abuse, and struggle.

As aforementioned, Italian-Americans settled in large numbers in the big industrial cities of the North, with some outposts in California, Louisiana and a few other states. On each of them they congregated in a few neighborhoods, where they built an own Little Italy, mostly due to both a natural tendency to get together and the safety of the known, and because of generalized repudiation elsewhere; the biggest community assembled in New York, most importantly in Lower Manhattan (Iorizzo and Mondello, 1980). Their institutions, customs and language (or some dialects of it) were preserved; Italian restaurants and other stores were established and life would start to flourish.

In these districts, comparably to the poor Irish immigrants before them (whom they not rarely neighbored), Italians squeezed in narrow tenement houses, “low-rise apartment buildings that were usually grossly overcrowded by their landlords.” Sometimes, an entire Italian village would reside in the same block or “even same tenement building” (Library of Congress n.d.). As one could imagine, the conditions were awful, as journalist Riis would denounce in his work *How the Other Half Lives*.

The typical Italian immigrant flowing into the city was a traditional fairly young male unskilled worker (Ratti 1931). Among countrymen, his sympathy would be reserved to those belonging to his own region or even province, as they did not feel any sense of ‘common nationality’ in the recently unified Italian Kingdom, and were strongly separated in terms of customs, dialects, etc. (Zugarini 2022), i.e. *campanilismo*; but the deepest loyalty always resided within the family (“familism”).

Unlike most immigrant groups, Italians often migrated in family, and those who did not, either joined another family (“bordo”) and/or were providing for a family overseas and expecting to come back. The family was at the center of all, their members, “united like the fingers of the hand” (Verga 1955, 2), and strongly supportive. Various authors have theorized that this affinity towards family, and contrary distrust towards “broader authorities” such as politicians and the Catholic hierarchy, are explained by their experience with the latter back in Italy, the former acting as some sort of shield against these “large (hostile) institutions” (Cannato 2015).

Many experts argue that this intense “familismo” resulted noxious for the integration of Italian immigrants into American society. Tomasi maintains that, for southern Italians, family is the “key and only Italian institution,” and consequently, “the individual is absorbed by the family in-group and, therefore, alienated” (1972, 20); this generates a conflict in the process of assimilation, for at least one or two generations.

In the same line, the Ianni siblings (1972) believe that it is precisely kindred ties that bind Italian-American criminal families together, not some external network of conspiracies and crime. Additionally, Banfield (1958) deprecates familism and blames it as a major societal handicap to Italian-American acculturation.

As a matter of fact, the consequences of the traditional and protective perception of family and community bonds did sprout/help to spread the already negative judgment that was being made of them. By restraining themselves to familiar communities and socializing within these, conserving their values and customs untouched, they remained “extraneous to American life,” so much that many could not speak English fluently even after years of living in the US (Zugarini 2022, 45-49).

By, for instance, refusing to educate their children in American education, withdrawing them from schools at a young age to make them work, elongating also illiteracy in the community, they elicited the image of uncivilized people amongst Americans; by procuring women’s chastity to defend the honor and virtue of the family while rejecting contemporary demands for women’s rights and freedoms, they facilitated a backwards depiction of them, alien to a more liberal American society.

The regular American, already unhappy and worried by the prospect of an army of foreign workers offering unfair competition and threatening his job and very standard of living, was disgusted by the un-American way of life these processed (Zugarini, 2022). The fact that many were primarily interested in money, sending millions of the dollars earned back home did not help either. In fact, between 30-50% of this generation would return to Italy after having saved enough money to guarantee a much better life in their country, known as “ritornati” (Cerase 1974). Cavaioli argues that, apart from the strong ties and sentiment towards their communities and birthplaces, a major cause for return migration and “resistance to assimilation” was the “lack of acceptance by the host society” (2008, 224). In short, neither party of the two saw the other with good eyes;

endeavors aimed to exclude the new immigrants became more aggressive and would eventually result in regulatory laws.

The most important source of prejudice, nonetheless, probably was, as it had been with Irish-Americans, racialism and nativist hostility. Basing their arguments on Darwin's *Origin of Species* and the "survival of the fittest" rhetoric, many contemporary American socio-political scientists, like Sumner, Bancroft and Burgess, affirmed that Anglo-Saxon, Nordic and Germanic peoples were genetically superior to Mediterranean and Slavic peoples (Cavaioli 2008). A good number of writers (e.g. M. Grant) and political and academic figures supported this theory, occasionally ornamenting their rationale with historical events or patterns. Once again, this new class of immigrants was categorized as uncivilized, uneducated, and prone to crime, and treated accordingly; they had taken over the Irish relay.

Amplified by academia and the media, this perception of the newcomers unsurprisingly provoked more tensions and phobia towards the Italian immigrants, to the point that policemen had to be incentivized with a pay increase to patrol the "risky" areas where these lived (Preziosi 1909).

If all of this was not enough reason to hate them, their affiliation to the Catholic Church was of no help indeed. Even though Irish-Americans had cleared the path to some degree, the American Catholic church had an "almost exclusively Irish orientation," and despite having suffered the same persecution, they made little efforts to help Italian practitioners, even repudiating their religious feasts, brought to America (Zugarini 2022). Despite this, Italian-Americans founded 219 Catholic churches and 41 parochial schools by 1910 (Herbermann 1913), as well as some colleges, e.g. Santa Clara University, evidencing their faith was still a fundamental part of the culture they transmitted to America.

They faced, for several decades, labor, legal and social discrimination. The severity of the inequality and deep contempt against this people produced very dark episodes in the history of the US. In 1891's New Orleans, soon after a bunch of Italian-Americans, accused of murdering local police chief Hennessy, were acquitted inasmuch as there was no evidence of their guilt, an enraged mob broke into the cities' arsenal and stormed the prison to "serve justice" to the "dagoes" (a racial slur for Italians), killing eleven men (some not even involved in the trial) as the crowd cheered (Blakemore 2017; Gambino 2000).

Regarding the condition of legal defense for convicts, as well as the (institutionally) engrained anti-Italianism of the age, we shall simply take the famous words of Vanzetti, condemned to the electric chair under “questionable” evidence, which summarize it as follows: “I have suffered because I was an Italian, and indeed I am an Italian.”

Experiencing a severe cultural contrast, and with little tools to remedy this, they were easy prey for abusive employers and had little choice in the job market given their qualifications. They predominantly got the dangerous low-paid manual jobs the indigenous population generally dismissed, which included most of the massive building projects demanded by the fast-growing cities, such as digging canals, paving the streets, erecting buildings and bridges, or mining the massive NYC metro system. The great majority of workers in the big cities’ public works were Italian immigrants; for many (including women and children), the congested and smoke-filled factories would become their workplace (Library of Congress n.d.). Hardship and unsafe precarious conditions were commonplace, but most did not have a choice, a situation that reminds yet again of the Irish immigrant’s experience.

Given their many handicaps (lack of skills and language knowledge), several Italians fell prisoner to the “padrone” system. Meaning “boss/manager,” the *padroni* (sometimes Italian-Americans themselves) would contract labor in the community for big employers like manufacturers or construction companies, helping many in need to find jobs, but essentially being human traffickers and facilitating an exploitation system (Nelli, 1964); these essentially “labor brokers” exercised too as owners for these desperate souls.

The evident risk that these jobs carried not so rarely prompted tragedies at the workplace. For instance, in a mine near Cherry (IL), 1909, an explosion killed 259 people, most of them Italian-Americans; also, in 1911’s Manhattan, a massive fire in the Triangle Shirtwaist factory ended the life of 43 young Italian women, leaving an appalling landscape of semi-melted bodies on the street (Lifflander 2011).

Feeling powerless against an unscrupulous and highly-organized system, and unaccepted in most of the existing trade unions, Italians began to create multiple welfare institutions and organize in workers associations for and by them. Although divided in many ways, culturally and even linguistically, they shared a space and life within their communities in American soil, coexisting and growing together, and, united by a common

designation as Italian-Americans, they started to gain conscience as a “federated” community, which slowly granted them strength and visibility.

Thus, the vulnerability they suffered regarding scams, social marginalization, and the consequent difficulty to obtain a decent job and predisposition to poverty and criminality, as well as the dramatic experience of many in the workplace, gave rise to a number of charities and trade unions. Mainly founded on private initiative, these societies were formed to protect Italian newcomers on arrival (e.g. *La Società per gli immigrati italiani*), provide legal assistance (*L’Ufficio Legale di Chicago*), care for elders and children (*Italian Welfare League*), or aid the poor and help them get jobs (*L’Ufficio di avviamento al lavoro per gli immigrati italiani*), usually by enlisting them in unions. From 1899 to 1905 alone, around 12,000 operations were conducted by them (Maffei 1924).

The Church also intervened in this task, various orders like the Missionaries of St Charles Borromeo were sent to America to fulfill this purpose. Amongst them, it is worth highlighting the role of Mother Cabrini, an Italian-American nun who founded numerous schools and orphanages (and even a hospital) by raising money; but most importantly, she inspired many to follow her example, magnifying and changing American charity forever, becoming the first US citizen to be canonized as Saint in 1946 (Di Donato 1960).

Through the Unions, Italian workers started to take action, achieving collective strength and organizing strikes. In some cases, the strikes, often meant to demand responsibility from the employers exploiting them at the expense of their safety, would once again prompt a disastrous and heartbreaking result, like that of the Ludlow Massacre (1914) in Colorado, which ended the life of 25 people, most of them Greek and Italian workers (including 11 children) shot dead by the National Guard, after striking for a whole winter on a tent colony outside the “company towns” from which they had been evicted (Dehler 2022).

Their tireless work and inestimable help in the construction of the modern cities, as well as the rise and consolidation of the USA as the top economic power, would mean precisely their arguably biggest legacy. Egmont states, in fact, that “it remains to this day that the most notable contribution of Italian Americans was in the labour industry of the United States” (2015, 174). The heritage is made evident by the very cities’ infrastructure that Americans see today, on the buildings that skim the clouds and on the underground that carries the transit.

During this period, some early success is appreciated. Good examples include the establishing of the first renowned Italian restaurants, like Philadelphia's Dante and Luigi's Corona di Ferro (1899) or New York's Barbetta (1906), many of which have maintained the same family's property (Mancuso, 2011); the foundation of the Contadina food company in 1918, by Italian immigrants settled in the north of New York; or how, by the 1880s/90s, a number of Sicilian families established the wine industry of California (Hart, 1987); most importantly, nonetheless, is the creation, in 1904, of the Bank of Italy, which would in fact become the Bank of America, by a second-generation Italian-American, Amadeo Giannini. It was obvious that Italians were already forging a heritage.

Italian-American writers like Panunzio and di Donato would very accurately reflect on this generation's experience with their works *The Soul of an Immigrant* (1924) and *Christ in Concrete* (1939), respectively; from their journey and life struggle in cultural and socially-alien America, to the powerful sentiment of hope that fueled them. Paradoxically providing for the lexicon of American culture.

The First World War and application of increasingly restrictive immigration laws, among other circumstances, would mark the end of this age and beginning of another.

2.2. From New York to Chicago: Becoming American

With the beginning of WW1 (1914), immigration significantly decreased, especially during the two years of US (direct) involvement (1917-18). The conflict provided for many the chance to integrate into American society and prove their patriotic commitment by enlisting to serve the country. Nevertheless, nativism remained strong and discussions about the application of immigrant laws were already taking place.

In 1917, President Wilson signed a bill requiring all newcomers over the age of sixteen to pass a literacy test in order to be admitted into the States. As Bradley (2000) acknowledges, this bill "discriminated against poor and uneducated children," and its application was, in fact, justified by arguing that around 3% of the "old immigrants" were illiterate, whereas over half of southern Italians were (542-547). Despite having some effect, after the conflict concluded, the immigrant flow gradually returned almost to pre-war levels, until reaching nearly 350,000 in 1920 (Istat 2011).

In the following decade, further efforts were made to reduce unwanted immigration as President Harding signed the first immigration law based on a quota

system in 1921, and President Coolidge sealed it by signing the “National Origins Quota Act” of 1924. Both of these aimed at limiting select European (basically southern & eastern) immigration by establishing a quota per country of origin according to their corresponding percentage amount in US population of a past date (e.g. 1890), which had powerful repercussions to the number of arrivals for decades, especially as it was joined by the Great Depression of the 30s and subsequent WW2 (Cavaioli 2008). The number of Italian immigrants arriving to the US declined to 445,000 in the 1921-1930 decade, and merely 68,000 in the following (US Census Bureau 1975).

With the 1920s, on the other hand, Italian-Americans would find new great opportunities to grow in America. The prohibition law of 1920, commonly known as the “Dry Law,” presented itself as the perfect chance for a new profitable business providing many with “new earning opportunities,” by producing, transporting and selling illegal alcoholic beverages, which required no education or belonging to a certain class (Zugarinin 2022, 51-52).

This practice was pure fuel for the rise and growth of mafias and gangsterism, constructing complex networks across the cities, and generating spikes in crime in cities like Chicago and New York. Several figures emerged in this scenery, notorious mobsters and gangsters like “Lucky” Luciano, Frank Costello or Al Capone, widely known even nowadays. The associations between mafia, crime and Italian-Americans were consolidated and naturalized (Zugarini 2022), the stereotypical image of mafia-like Italian, although serving as an excuse to call out or ostracize, would also prove to have a double-edge as it achieved to amplify the reach of Italian culture in the decades to come.

Simultaneously, Italian-Americans, who had finally developed some sort of consciousness as a community through shared experience in the “American environment,” started to successfully organize in unions, gaining strength by the “power of collective bargaining” and starting to make their voices heard (Zugarini 2022, 75). Over time, they achieved recognition, creating new associations and finally being able to join American major trade unions, which rocketed their activism and allowed them to access a variety of careers in large numbers, establishing numerous new businesses. Much of this success is attributed to their deep sense of loyalty, which elicited fraternal ties within the community members to help one another to grow (Lambert 1983).

Over the following decades, as the immigrant flow was drastically decreased, and as the general situation of Italian-Americans improved, the Americanization process

speeded up. Second and especially third-generation Italian-Americans were educated, in increasing numbers, in American schools, and participated more actively in American life outside the community, inevitably developing an individualistic sense that was slowly overshadowing or replacing the familism of their parents and grandparents, more in line with the “open, dynamic, pluralistic and urban American society” (Tomasi 1972, 15).

The toil and sweat of the previous generations brought a generational progress that also translated into economic development and wealth as the decades went by. Whereas 4 in 5 Italian immigrants worked in blue-collar jobs, only 50% of third-generation Italian-Americans belonged to this sector (Nelly 1980); by the end of the century, a majority would be employed in white-collar positions.

With expansion throughout American society, their cultural impact would similarly intensify. Their excellent predisposition for music gifted America with excellent composers (e.g. Menotti), conductors (Toscanini), opera tenors (Caruso) and singers like Sinatra, to all known. Literary works by Italian-American authors, for instance, would be available in bookstores for the first time, motivating new writers and creations, especially for the growing movie industry, enriching American culture: Di Donato, Ciardi, Fante, Corso, Puzo, etc.

Regarding science, many Italian-Americans excelled in their respective fields, making important contributions, such as Enrico Fermi, creator of the first nuclear reactor, involved in the Manhattan Project, and awarded with the Nobel Prize in physics. Among many others including Faggin, Segré and Luria, all recognized geniuses of immeasurable value for science.

On the culinary stage, Italian cuisine, which represents a significant piece of Italian culture, blended with the American product and gave rise to a whole new spectrum of possibilities for a high-potential industry, and for every regular American to enjoy. In fact, the monumentally famous *pizza*, although invented in Naples, only gained mass popularity in the United States, before expanding to the rest of the world (even Italy), thanks to the immigrants who brought it to American shores, establishing the first pizzeria (Lombardi's) in 1905's Manhattan, inevitably seducing American hearts over the years with its “flavours and aromas”, and consequently spreading throughout the world (Turim 2012).

The two main sources of social and cultural heritage towards America were, nonetheless, related to business and religion. In regards to the former, Italian-Americans

continued to build numerous business; in the words of Egmont, “no segment of the economy was without a leading Italian figure” (2015, 174). Hence, dozens of companies more, of great importance, would emerge throughout the 20th century by the hands of bold Italian-Americans, including D'Agostino Supermarkets (1932), E&J Gallo Winery (1933), Sbarro (1956), Subway (1965), Paychex (1971), Allegis Group (1983), Qualcomm (1985) and Airbnb (2008). Most importantly, nevertheless, Italian-Americans offered their expertise as presidents/CEOs of major companies, such as “Lee” Iacocca, or as renowned economists like Modigliani.

As for the latter, the role of Italians in the American Catholic church would become predominant by mere numbers in the 1920s, exercising its influence and progressively allowing many feasts, already celebrated by the local communities, to attain National recognition. These traditional feasts originated as regional celebrations in the Little Italies of the most popular US cities for Italian immigrants; they include the well-known San Gennaro Feast, celebrated in New York City, St Anthony of Padua in Boston, and St Joseph's in New Orleans and a few other cities, among others all across the continent. Additionally, they contributed to the American Catholic heritage by erecting and protecting places of worship, like Our Lady of Pompeii and Our Lady of Loretto Churches in New York.

The community's increasing visibility and power was manifested in political “clout”, as more and more candidates began courting Italian-American associations as elections approached (Library of Congress n.d.), and some Italians themselves achieved local, state and national leadership. Perhaps the greatest example is Fiorello LaGuardia, who, after serving in Congress, became, in large part thanks to votes of the massive Italian community, the first Italian-American Mayor of NYC in 1934; fighting fiercely to reduce crime, corruption, and unemployment, he is considered nowadays one of the greatest mayors in the city's history, as well as some others of Italian ancestry in more recent years, such as Guiliani (Roberts 2001).

By WW2, the majority of Italian-Americans living in the country (most second-generation onwards) were successfully integrating into American culture, but discrimination would make one last strike, since, after entering the conflict, the paranoia against the “non-naturalized Italians,” who had come to America from the enemy's land, were declared “enemy foreigners,” getting monitored, and even a few interned in camps (Zugarini, 2022, 156-157). In some places, Italian stopped being taught at all, as

“speaking American” was being encouraged by media and other institutions. For this reason, experts like DiStasi (2016) believe the Italian language experienced a gradual decline in usage in America that has continued to the present day.

On the opposite side, nevertheless, the “readiness” of the vast majority of Italian-Americans to “almost unanimously proclaim” their complete loyalty towards the United States of America, fighting in large numbers to serve their country (nearly 1 million), side by side with their fellow Americans, meant a turning point for their history (Zugarini 2022, 156), and granted them the push to finally become indistinctly Americans. In the words of Professor Diggins, “it provided the fuel for the melting pot” (1972, 108).

Furthermore, soon after the conflict, a new surge in Italian immigration happened (although far from the levels of the Great Arrival), which lasted until the mid-1970s. The causes for this were humanitarian legislation post-WW2, and the signing of the “Nationality Reform Law” in 1965 by President Johnson, thanks to the pressure and lobbying from the Italian-American community, putting an end to the oppressive laws of the 20s. In the following decades, immigration dropped exponentially as “demand was met” and Italy’s economy thrived (Cavaioli 2008).

It was, as abovementioned, during the second half of the 20th century that Italians would achieve full Americanization. Italian-Americans became the “backbone” of America’s middle-class, populating the suburbs and graduating college; the long-established stereotypes of the ruthless Italian mobster would turn to a happily accepted instrument to amplify Italian-American distinctness and culture, thanks in good part to the *Godfather* (1972), a film directed, produced, written and starred by Italian-Americans, that served this same purpose of enlightening proud self-consciousness, in what is called “The Godfather Effect” by author Santopietro (2012).

More organizations were created during this late age to assist the immigrants and help the community to grow, such as the “American Committee on Italian Immigration”, the “Italian-American Civil Rights League,” or the “National Italian American Foundation.” In any case, as the immigration flame died out, and the Italian-Americans lost most of its independent identity, exclusive legislation, organization and ethnic affirmation lost fuel and sense, as exemplified by the one surviving Italian newspaper, *America Oggi*, in contrast with the +100 of late 1910s (Park 1922).

1.3. America's Little Big Italy

Today, nearly 18M people identify as Italian-American, close to 6% of the entire population (US Census Bureau), and is the only European group which has grown in the past decades, despite a severe decrease in immigration, which shows Italian-Americans are proud of their history and culture, and thus recall their right to identify with the heritage their ancestors have built on America.

In every big city of the North-East, Mid-Atlantic and Midwest, there is a “Little Italy,” reminding every American of the many contributions that Italian immigrants and their children gifted to this country.

From the captivating voices of Caruso and Sinatra and the living sculptures of Piccirilli, to the immortal works of Puzo and the incalculable impact of Venturi in architecture, Italian-Americans have undoubtedly elevated American culture; from the nuclear reactor of Fermi, to the elements discovered by Segré, or the micro-processor of Faggin, Italian-Americans have also propelled scientific advancement to newer extents. The sports feats of Rocky Marciano, Joe DiMaggio, and several others, inspired contemporary Americans and inspire us today; the exquisite blending of Italian and American cuisine and its mouth-watering results show us the advantages and potential of getting the best of each. The buildings that preside American cities and the very ground we walk on remind us of the hard work ethic of generations seeking a better life for their children, and the amazing results that sweat and determination can obtain, creating superpowers. Bold entrepreneurs like Giannini and the huge success of businessmen like Iacocca exemplify the American dream and the influence that Italian-Americans fought to have, and achieved, as evidenced by past political leaders like LaGuardia and Cellucci, and present counterparts like DeSantis or Pelosi, and other positions of power like the Supreme Court (e.g. Justice Alito).

Every year, the colorful Feasts attract visitors from all over the country and have become a major bit of the cultural personality of numerous cities. Every day, thousands of New-Yorkers take the subway, built to a great extent by Italian immigrants, to get to their jobs, or watch a movie about the mafia life that ruled the city of their grandparents, or enjoy a good dinner in an Italian “ristorante” owned by the very descendants of a once young dreamer.

Dozens of museums and persisting organizations make Italian legacy endure and be remembered, and so does the Italian language and many more things. The powerful

institution of family, for instance, is still alive in some form in the modern generations, having positive related consequences like long-lasting marriages and little elder abandonment, as studies show. Similarly, Italian-American culture inspires the fabric of American pop culture (shows, movies, videogames, etc.), and by extension, Western culture.

The Italian-American story is one of toil and sweat, highly mythologized by the shadow of crime, and powered by the might of family and perseverance. Its legacy is evident and is abundant, and just like it was with Irish-Americans, truly incalculable. As President Clinton very well encapsulates in his 1994's Proclamation on "Italian-American' Heritage and Culture Month:"

Italian Americans have indeed worked hard to build upon their rich heritage over the last century, and the fruits of their labors are evident in every aspect of our national life. From politics to business to academia, their diverse talents and skills have sustained our society and enriched our daily lives.

Conclusions

This detailed and yet condensed analysis has proven to be revealing as it has fulfilled and evidenced the two premises it aimed to, as well as providing other useful findings in consequence.

To begin with, the search and exposition of the events that describe and define the history of Irish and Italian immigration to America, have demonstrated a much closer connection between the two that most probably imagined. Both of their chronicles show very similar experiences, as seen, for instance, in the fact that they had two different periods within the whole, characterized by two different groups of people, i.e. the early immigration of Protestant Northern-Irish, formed mainly by skilled workers, followed by a much larger arrival of Irish Catholic peasants, in the first case; or the artisans from the North of Italy who first populated the New World, in contrast with the following massive influx of poor and traditional Southern-Italians, in the second. Moreover, both periods had similar motifs as to leave their country for the other side of the Pond, and same features, e.g. easier integration into American society for the first periods' immigrants in relation to the following ones.

Also, Irish and Italians had closely comparable experiences in the US, from their problematic arrival, settlement and clustering in the same or contiguous poor neighborhoods of industrial cities, through the xenophobic and religious discrimination and consequential marginalization and aggression suffered, to a generational progress forged through hard work and powerful resilience/will, which allowed them to integrate and transform American society and culture forever.

Additionally, it is worth noting that this evident similitude is so acute and extensive, that they even coincide in the smaller features, such as the fact that, in both cases, military conflicts were a major turning point for their histories in America, or by sharing the same kind of profile and occupations for the typical immigrant, to name a few.

Perhaps, a different insight regarding the subject of American immigration should be taken into consideration, as the evident interrelation between these two, as well as the poor availability in existing materials (one of the main limitations for this project), suggest.

These findings help to understand the innumerable and priceless contributions these two groups of immigrants have gifted America with. In the first place, much of America's emergence as an economic superpower must be credited to their numbers bulking America's workforce, and the same for the union movement which they both

strengthened and reshaped, which undoubtedly transformed American society as a result, helping likewise to enhance the visibility of American culture, and influence on American thought, for instance.

In the same note, they played a primary role in the introduction, spreading and rooting of new beliefs into the country, first for Presbyterianism and then, most importantly, for Catholicism. Their religious influence remodeled, once again, American society to an important degree, and permitted the creation of a broader cultural heritage.

However, their “input” does not remotely stop there, since, as we have seen and repeatedly insisted, its scope is most certainly immeasurable. The Irish and Italian cultural heritage, that persists today, goes from an elevated enlightenment in literature, art, music, cinematography, etc., to the traditions, customs and ways of thinking/seeing the world, imported from the homeland, or the smaller things like cuisine, new vocabulary, genetic heritage, and many more.

Most importantly, nonetheless, the study of the struggle and moving experiences that both the Irish and Italians had to undergo, provides a highly valuable lesson to bear in mind, which might just be the greatest legacy left, and is the importance of tolerance and open-mindedness for any society to not only survive this phenomenon, but ultimately take the best and strengthen from it, like the United States has and should aim to do for the current challenges; as Professor Kenny explains, “some familiarity with (their) experience would surely be indispensable in grappling with current dilemmas” (2000, 202). Additionally, the admirable endurance, determination and hard-work of these two peoples that we have learned about, emphasizes that this understanding and will to co-exist and successfully vitalize and integrate in a society, must be a two-way compromise, for not only should one of the parties carry the efforts. It is vital that we understand it is as important that a society is willing to accept and integrate a new group of people, as this latter to work hard on doing so.

The immense socio-cultural relation between the source and target cultures remind us of the miracle that is America, and how inevitably connected it is to its roots and legacy inherited from the Old World in the most diverse ways. In the words of Cavaioli (2008), “from its earliest foundation, and through continuous development, immigration has been the driving force that has characterized the history of the United States” (213).

I am only sorry that it had to be limited to two of the many histories that formulate the American Pie, for a more extensive/encompassing analysis would surely pay in terms of learning, although maybe necessary for the sake of brevity, in what is possible.

Finally, to conclude with, all of this is something that America must never forget, and while diligent care should remain over the immigration influx, the beacon of hope and opportunity that the United States, still to this day, represent for millions of dreamers, ought to stay lighting bright in the horizon.

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