

The Italian American Political History of
Brooklyn

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A senior research project, submitted
to fulfill part of the requirements
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in
History, from St. Francis College,
Brooklyn, New York

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May 4th, 1962
History 400

St. Francis College
Brooklyn, New York

Preface

There can be no denial of the fact that the author was motivated in this undertaking by a strong sense of ethnic pride. This sense of pride, however, does not minimize the justification for making this attempt, provided, of course, that this feeling has not obscured the vision of that truth, and has not altered a true historical perspective.

Before an immigrant group can assert its political significance, it is necessary for that group to engage itself in a struggle with existing groups. Once that struggle has been undertaken, and has been won, the historian can begin to study that highly interesting and informative story of American cultural assimilation. In The Italian-American Political History of Brooklyn, I have attempted to tell the story of some of the people engaged in one such ethnic struggle, and of their roles, individually and corporately, in the formation of a politically significant community of Italian-Americans in Brooklyn.

I have endeavored to eliminate all sentimentality, and to maintain strict adherence to the truth. If failings in either area should be revealed to me, I will stand ready to make the proper adjustments.

I should also like to explain the reasons for the various structural and stylistic methods employed in this paper. The reader will find that the continuity is frequently difficult to follow, particularly in the later chapters. Because of the political complexity of Brooklyn, twenty-two or twenty-three political communities, and the fact that outstanding contributions have been made at different times with different stresses, the chronological chapter divisions will make the paper seem somewhat disorganized. Be assured, however, that under the circumstances, the structure used was the best that could be devised, given the topic and its involvements.

In addition, to some there will be the burden of statistics and election figures. These, I hope, will be of interest to the historical critic. To others there will be certain liberties taken by the author that will seem to put him in the position of being almost a social critic. These, I hope, will be of interest to the casual reader.

Although I am sure the critics of the paper will never number more than three, and the interested readers will never reach that total, it is nevertheless the fanciful dream of the author to interest the small few who will be looking from both perspectives. I trust the readers will bear with me in this.

In addition, I would want it clearly understood that I am aware of certain shortcomings of this project. The author concentrated on presenting a research project, and has therefore posed no problems, given no solutions, and failed to excite the literary cliques in not transcending the clearly self-imposed limitations. The purpose of this paper, as primarily a research project, has eliminated any of the previously mentioned considerations. Secondary considerations have necessitated loose adherence to the firmly defined limits, but even this has been done through constant and consistent devotion to the initial plan and purpose of the paper.

In conclusion, I should like to express my appreciation to those who have been of assistance in this undertaking. I would like to thank Dr. Joseph A. Ellis, Mr. James Waters and Mr. Arthur Konop for the organization of the paper. In addition, for granting me interviews, I would like to

thank Hon. Anthony J. DiGiovanna, Hon. John LaCorte, Hon. James V. Mangano, Hon. Louis Priola, and Hon. Stephen C. Sanzillo.

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April 30, 1962

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Introduction

The great urban centers of the United States are, for the most part, composed of an ethnic and religious population markedly different from what is generally considered to be the typical American character. New York, with its large number of Jews; Buffalo, with its extremely high percentage of Poles; Detroit, with its many Negroes; Boston, traditionally a center for Irish Catholics; and Rhode Island, with a large population of Italians, all illustrate that the character of the urban industrial populations, particularly along the Eastern coast, is markedly different from the character of the rural populations, the white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant peoples, traditionally thought to represent the American ideal.

America, frequently thought of as a melting pot, where all peoples become one, is, in fact, nothing of the sort. The large cities throughout the United States are characterized by ethnic and religious ghettos. Many groups, if not at physical odds with one another, maintain an over zealous identity in the face of attempts by some at amalgamation,

and the attempts by others at the more realistic goal of assimilation. Although the process of assimilation is well on its way toward completion for Southern European and Eastern European immigrant groups, it is well to note that this process is terminating more than four decades after the critical impact of their immigration. In addition, there are geographic areas removed from the concentration of these newer peoples where the more established citizenry have, in their ignorance, failed to change their hostile feelings toward America's migrant groups of the pre-World War I era, to say nothing of the more contemporary immigrant groups.

Needless to say, the Puerto Ricans and the Negroes remain out of the mainstream of American social interaction today. Whether these racially dissimilar groups will be included within American society is really only a question of time. For the present, politicians will be forced to contend with this potent political force of the minority in a manner not unknown to the American political experience.

Political leaders currently attempt to segregate the many Negroes in the urban areas and to chart their development in racially segregated political districts. Negro districts have been apportioned by various state legislatures

in an effort to keep Negro political power concentrated in one area, and then consequently to thwart their progress within the total social structure.¹ This is one method of sapping political strength and was used in the past with the national groups as well.

Immigration to the United States has been for any number of reasons and has always caused an impact upon the American scene. One of the areas that has consistently been effected, however, has been the political. New groups have sought political expression almost in a body, and this en-

¹ Of the four Negro Congressmen in the House of Representatives at the present time, no one of them represents a predominately non-Negro district. Adam Clayton Powell (D-NY) represents a district that is 88.5% non-white, and his district's bounds districts that are 16.2% non-white and 3% non-white. William Dawson (D-Ill) is the representative from the First Congressional District of Illinois, which has a population of 92.1% non-white. Robert Nix (D-Pa) represents a Philadelphia district that is 73.8% non-white, while the other Congressman, Charles Diggs (D-Mich) represents a district that could be considered mixed, 133,205 whites to 133,135 Negroes.

There are only four other districts in the U.S. that are predominately non-white (2nd Ill.; 3rd Miss.; 2nd N.C.; AL Hawaii). The Hawaiian District has few Negroes, however.

Although Negroes represent 11% of the total population, they represent majorities in 1.4% of the districts in a demonstration of the power of concentration.

The figures used are taken from: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Congressional District Data Book, A Statistical Abstract Supplement (Districts of the Eighty-Seventh Congress), (Washington, D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1961).

deavor, and its success, has been seen in the representation of these groups in politically important bodies. It is thusly no accident that the 1917 delegation to Congress was overwhelmingly influenced in a manner clearly shown with a listing of these Representatives:

Joseph V. Flynn
Harry H. Dale
James P. Maher
Fredrick W. Rowe
John J. Fitzgerald
John J. Delaney
Daniel J. Griffin
William E. Cleary
Oscar W. Swift
Reuben L. Haskell 2

The 1917 Brooklyn Congressional delegation consisted of ten men, seven Democrats and three Republicans. All of the seven Democratic Congressmen were Irish-American Catholics. All of the Republican Congressmen were Anglo-Saxon Protestants. Clearly, religious and ethnic lines were drawn, the newer group dominating the Democratic Party, while the more traditional elements restricted themselves to the Republican Party.

Today, the parties are not structurally divided as strongly, but the influence of various groups is shown over

² Biographies of the Congressmen are found in: Biographical Directory of the American Congress (Washington, D.C., 1928).

the entire political framework. Brooklyn's current delegation to Congress demonstrates this:

Victor L. Anfuso
John J. Rooney
Edna F. Kelly
Abraham Multer
Hugh L. Carey
Emanuel Celler
Eugene J. Keogh
John H. Ray 3

This group of seven Democrats and one Republican bows to the three major political pressure groups in Brooklyn today. The Irish, on the political decline, boast four of the borough's representatives. The Jewish people, who are soon to assume domination in the borough, boast two, while the Italians are represented by one Congressman. Brooklyn's lone Republican is a Midwestern born Protestant of conservative leanings. Retiring this year, he is the last of his generation of thought, and will undoubtedly be replaced by a more progressive figure. In addition, his district, the Fifteenth, also includes Staten Island in addition to a safe Republican constituency in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn.

³ The biographies of the Congressmen are found in: Official Congressional Directory of the Eighty-Seventh Congress (Second Session), (Washington, D.C., 1962).

It is thus quite apparent that the various immigrant groups have made political impressions upon the borough. The expression of national origin in political circles has indeed been vocal in many instances. Immigrant groups have fostered their ethnic counterparts in the pursuit of political office, and these immigrant groups have as well made very militant pressure groups. After forty years little has been done to remove the religious and ethnic considerations that play so prominent a part in political machinations. When the 'Wagner-Gerosa-Stark' team was leaving office, its position was sought after by 'Wagner-Beame-Screvane', 'Lefkowitz-Fino-Gilhooley' and 'Levitt-Mackell-diFede', in a demonstration of the respect that the political chieftans of New York City have for other than individual qualifications.

While this is by no means a condemnation of persons involved in such a practice, it nevertheless indicates that the voice of a national group, whether a valid consideration or not, is loud in the demands for a part in the selection of political figures of prominence. Representatives in political circles are not alone representatives of political philosophy or party affiliation, but are usually representative by the sound of their names, the color of their skin,

the accents of their parents and the churches to which they belong.

Ethnic and religious considerations, then, and the insecurity that comes to those in power because of an overwhelming influx of newer groups are the factors that must be considered. The shifts in social structure that are caused by immigration is therefore met by the hostility of the politically entrenched leaders. Concessions are made, or they are forced, and issues become clouded in bigotry. Political bosses can attempt to compromise, but in doing so must be careful not to alienate the more traditional forces within the political community. If a boss is astute, compromise is had, and the problems that are caused by the newer groups never leave the back room. If a boss is antagonistic, then a struggle is almost inevitable, and it is almost a certainty that as his opposition grows, his strength is sapped, and the battle is lost.

Unfortunately, too many bosses have been unable to see the future before them, and their inability to do so has caused many struggles for political control. For the Italians in Brooklyn, there has been a combination of combat and concession in the struggle for political self-assertion.

It will be the purpose of this paper to look at the Italian movements into the political sphere and to place within a proper perspective the impact of Italian political figures, and to a limited extent their not unique political philosophies, upon the history of the borough of Brooklyn.

Chapter 1

The Early Years

Italian immigration during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries had been scant indeed. The 1850 census shows that there was a total of 3,645 Italians in the United States and its territories, with the Italian population being only 0.17% of the total foreign population in the nation.¹

Professor Marraro of Columbia University estimates that in 1850, the population of the Italian community in New York City was seven hundred (700) or about one-tenth of one percent of the total population in the city.² Marraro's census statistics, corroborated by the Historical Division of the Kings County Clerk's office show the follow-

¹ From United States:Census,Census Population of the United States in 1860 (Washington, 1864), p. xxviii as found in Howard R. Marraro, "Italians in New York During the First Half of the Nineteenth Century", New York History(1945), pp. 278-306.

² Ibid., p. 280.

ing immigration statistics for before 1850:

<u>Years</u>	<u>Italy</u>	<u>Sicily</u>	<u>Sardinia</u>	<u>Total</u>
1820-1830	389	17	32	438
1831-1840	2,211	35	7	2,253
1841-1850	1,590	79	201	1,870
Total	4,190	131	240	4,561

The 1850 City Directory for New York City listed three lawyers of Italian extraction, but perhaps the most politically prominent of Italian-Americans was a Brooklyn priest, Father Charles Constantine Pise.

The founder of St. Charles Borromeo's Roman Catholic Church in Brooklyn, Pise was the son of an Italian born father and a native American mother. He was born in 1801 and early in his life entered a Jesuit seminary, from which he later withdrew because of personal reasons. Pise studied at Georgetown University in Washington and came into contact with President John Tyler. Pise was by this time a priest and struck up a friendship with the former Speaker of the House and United States Senator from Kentucky, Henry Clay. It was through the influence of Senator Clay that Father Pise was unanimously chosen as Chaplain of the United States Senate for the Twenty-Second Congress in 1832. The select-

ion of Pise as chaplain of a House of Congress marked the only occasion for the holding of that office by a Roman Catholic.³

For the most part, however, the Italian-American population of this early era was composed of Italian political exiles. These immigrants had been discontent with events in their homeland and many were forced to flee because of the pressures exerted by the authorities at home. Many of them as well fled the incursions into Italy by the Austrian Hapsburgs. These political exiles were generally the most articulate members of the Italian society. They were, for the most part, strongly interested in political practice, and even more deeply interested in political theory.

The earliest of the Italian immigrants, those of the pre-Revolutionary War days, had been interested in music, literature and the arts. The political exiles of the Nineteenth Century shared this common love of culture, although they were adept at moving into other areas.

The whole period sees Italian immigration similar to that of the mid-October, 1836 political exile of Gaetano

³ The Tablet, One Hundredth Anniversary of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Brooklyn (Brooklyn, Tablet, 1953), p. 66.

de Castillia, Pietro Borsieri, Felice Argenti, Luigi Tinelli, Felice Foresti, Giovanni Albinola, Alepandio Luigi Bargnani and Cesare Bensoni. These eight men had been placed on an Austrian government vessel, and had been escorted into New York harbor under armed guard. They were welcomed by the people, and the press, and one of them was recorded as having remarked, "The Emperor of Austria was mistaken in believing my exile in America would be a punishment. The people changed into good that which he designed for evil." 4

The exiles were for the most part assets to the American scene. E. Felice Foresti, who was mentioned previously, became a professor of Italian Language and Literature at New York University. He also served in the American diplomatic corps as Consul at Genoa to the Government of Sardinia, after becoming an American citizen in 1841. 5

Although the Italian Americans could become involved

⁴ Marraro, op. cit., pp. 282-283.

⁵ Giovanni Ermenegildo Schiavo, Italian-American History (New York, Vigo Press, 1947), Vol. 1, p. 488.

in American political action, and Foresti could claim his allegiance to the cause of the Whig Party in 1844, the Italians seemed much more interested in the politics of Europe in general and Italy in particular. "Hence they (the Italians) had little interest in local affairs. ... The organization of the Italian Guard in 1840 showed clearly their chief interest, for the guard was clearly intended as a training medium for future soldiers on the battlefields of Italy." ⁶

Because of this intense interest in the affairs of Italy, many of these immigrants became interested in the spreading of their homeland news through the medium of the press. Naturally, since most of the immigrants were political exiles and were ardent republicans, their press became vocal for the liberation of their homeland and an overthrow of the existing forces. Not only was there opposition to the monarchs, but there was also opposition to the pope. The loud anti-papal pronouncements of the Italian press in the United States would lead to a great deal of hostility between Italian Catholics and Irish Catholics.

On the basis of this ill-feeling over the temporal

⁶ Ibid., pp. 533-536.

power of the pope, which many Irishmen held to be a virtual creed, the Italians faced difficulty within their own religious community.

The hostility of the Irishmen, coupled with their almost absolute control on the American Catholic Church, led many Italians to seek refuge within the Protestant movement. The Protestant Episcopal Church was particularly successful in the recruitment of many Italians, most of them Northern Italians, into its ranks. In Brooklyn, as well, the Episcopalians opened a mission church to attract the Italians.⁷

It was not unusual to find that many of the early Italian political figures were members of the Protestant faith. Not unlike the Catholics in the South, they lost their religion in the face of new surroundings. Among these Protestant figures were: Fiorello H. LaGuardia, former Congressman and Mayor of New York City; Anthony Caminetti, the first Italian Congressman west of the Mississippi; the famous Taliaferros, public officers in Georgia, Florida and Virginia as well as Dante Fascell, presently in Congress from Florida.

⁷ The Episcopal Church in Brooklyn was Anunziatione Church at 67th Street near Fourth Avenue.

In fashion much like other libertarian movements in exile, the Italian-Americans of this era gave adherence to societies formed to free their homeland. The 'Giovine Italia Society' was formed for the purpose of freeing the Italian homeland, after the 'Carbonari' (Charcoal Burners) was suppressed. Soon the New York area became the center for the Italian partisan political activity.

L'Europeo Americano became the first Italian language newspaper, being formed in order to, "maintain alive," as Publisher G. F. Secchi di Casali said, "among the Italian residents in the United States, their love of their mother country and to inform them in their own language of the events in Europe in general, and of those of Italy in particular." ⁸

Needless to say, the Italian authorities were little pleased with the efforts of Italian-Americans to spread republican ideas. But if the Italian-Americans were united in their opposition to monarchical tyranny, Italian pol-

⁸ From a letter by Rocco Martuscelli to the Hon. Guistino Fortunato, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Naples, as found in the State Archives at Naples and recorded in Marraro, op. cit., pp. 293-294.

itical exiles were disunited in their solutions of the problems of Italy through Republican government. Almost immediately after the appearance of L'Europeo Americano, competition arose from other newspapers. L'Eco d'Italia was published as a counterbalance to the earlier paper and adhered to the principles of enlightened Republicanism. A third paper entered the fray almost immediately, when L'Eco d'Italia broke with Mazzini supporters in its editorial policy. The new paper, L'Esule Italiano was short lived, however, as a lack of funds caused it to suspend publication.⁹

If the controversy over republicanism, or indeed any of the political ideas concerning Italian exiles, filtered into Brooklyn, there was limited market for their words among Italian-American residents. There were few Italians in the City of Brooklyn as the Brooklyn Directory for 1849-1850 indicates. The following Italian names were found listed:

Bazzerea, John	
Bello, John	
Bego, Joseph.	Painter
Benzei, Alex.	stone cutter
Berri, William.	oil cloth mfg.

⁹ Marraro, op. cit., pp. 296-297.

Blevo, Felix	
Brasso, Mrs. William	
Cozinno, Joseph.	waiter
De Lano, O.L.	dry goods
De Lano, S.S.	dry goods
Farra, Thomas	carpenter
Gatineo, Dago	musician
La Rosa, Peter W.	cabinet maker
La Rosa, Zebulon	boatmaster
La Rosa, Zebulon	carver
Mayo, Augustus	importer of watches
Perrine, A.J.	tailor
Pease, John	
Pease, Richard P.	turner
Pettitoa, _____	
Rae, Edmund	
Rae, William	
Rea, Ann	
Rea, Langford	physician
Rea, Samuel	commission merchant
Rea, Thomas	laborer
Spinola, Francis B.	harbormaster, Alderman 2nd Ward
Spinola, John C.	
Spinola, John L.	

Of these presumably Italian-Americans, the most politically prominent was the Alderman of the Second Ward, Francis B. Spinola. A harbormaster, residing at 90 York Street, Spinola represented a waterside district, far from heavy in Italian influence.

Spinola was born at Stoney Brook, Long Island, on March 19th, 1821. He studied at Quaker Hills Academy in Dutchess County, and after the study of law was admitted to the bar in 1844. Spinola was elected to the Board of Aldermen of the City of Brooklyn from the Second Ward in

1846, 1847 and 1849. He was later elected to the New York State Assembly in 1855, and the New York State Senate in 1857. Spinola served in the State Senate from 1858 until 1861.

During the Civil War, Spinola served as a Brigadier General of Volunteers and heading a group known as "Spinola's Brigade". He received his commission on October 2nd, 1862, "for meritorious conduct in recruiting and organizing a brigade of four regiments, and accompanying them to the field." Spinola was wounded twice and was discharged from the United States Army in August of 1865.¹⁰

General Spinola was a hero, however, before he even got on the battlefield. The Brooklyn Standard reported:

The friends of General Spinola, and their name is legion, desireous that he should not leave Brooklyn without some testimonial to mark their respect for him as a man, approval of his public services in the legislature and of his patriotism in offering his services in the field, and the admiration of the untiring labor and energy displayed in his efforts to raise a Brigade for the service, and which he has so successfully accomplished have presented him with a splendid charger. 11

¹⁰ Biography of American Congress, op. cit., p. 1555.

¹¹ Brooklyn Standard, Saturday, Oct. 4, 1862, p. 2, col. 1.

The founder of the Brooklyn Standard, a Brooklyn weekly, was James Del Vecchio, another prominent Italian-American of the period. Del Vecchio, who founded the Brooklyn Standard in 1859 enlisted in the Armed Forces with the outbreak of the Civil War, and was commissioned as a Brigadier Quarter Master for Spinola's Empire Brigade, the unofficial name for the four regiments commanded by the general. With the departure of Del Vecchio, the following notice met the readers of the Standard:

Special Notice

From this date and during the absence of the Editor and Proprietor with the Army of the Union, the subscriber will continue the publication of the STANDARD regularly every Saturday as heretofore.

Charles R. Del Vecchio
Brooklyn, October 11, 1862 12

Charles Del Vecchio, who was the brother of James, continued with the paper until shortly after his brother died at home of wounds inflicted during the Civil War. The paper, worked as well with by James' widow, became defunct shortly thereafter.

Another Italian-American worthy of note during this

¹² Brooklyn Standard, Saturday, Oct. 11, 1862, p. 2, col. 1.

period was Charles A. Canavello. Canavello, a Democrat, served on the Board of Supervisors from the Eighteenth Ward in 1863. After an uneventful term in office, Canavello's seat on the Board of Supervisors was won by S. J. Stewart, a confectioner, running on the Union ticket in the November 1863 election. The Stewart victory, a surprise upset, caught the Brooklyn Eagle in the error of having recorded a Canavello victory.¹³

Correction of this error came on Thursday, November 5th, 1863, when the Eagle recorded the final vote:

Canavello (Dem)	-	153	-	125	-	278
Stewart (Union)	-	145	-	205	-	350

Stewart by 62

14

This defeat ended Canavello's political career and brought to a virtual standstill the Italian political activity in Brooklyn.

Italian immigration picked up at this point, continuing at a rather increased pace, however, its real impact

¹³ Brooklyn Eagle, Wednesday, Nov. 4, 1863, p. 2, col. 6

¹⁴ Brooklyn Eagle, Thursday, Nov. 5, 1863, p. 3, col. 3.

did not begin to be felt until the 1890's. In the three decades between 1851 and 1880, Italian immigration totaled 18,963.

Italian leadership was present in New York in some form during this period, and characteristic of this was Judge Charles Antonio Rapallo of the Court of Appeals, the highest court in the State of New York. Rapallo served on the bench from 1870 until his death in 1887.

Brooklyn, however, could claim little prominence. Spinola, the most outstanding Italian-American in Brooklyn up to this time left the City to move to New York, where he was successful in his pursuit of political office. The General continued his law practice and supplemented it with insurance. He was elected to the House of Representatives as a Democrat from the Tenth Congressional District in 1886 to the Fiftieth Congress. Spinola was re-elected to the Fifty-First and Fifty-Second Congresses in 1888 and 1890. Spinola died before the Fifty-Second Congress met at Washington D.C. on April 14th, 1891, and was interred in Greenwood Cemetery. ¹⁵

¹⁵ Biography of American Congress, op. cit., p. 1555.

With the departure of the older immigrants from the political scene, a new group of Italian political figures, from a new generation, and closely involved in the problems of the new generation, would emerge. Humble beginnings, and socially unacceptable forefathers would make their struggles identified with national goals and national aspirations of a minority group. It would be a new role for the Italian-Americans, one that would be made difficult by the social pressures that would be set upon them.

Chapter 2

The New Immigration

The Italian immigrants of the latter Nineteenth Century were markedly different from the immigrants that had preceded them. The new immigrants were most generally from Southern Italy, including Sicily, and were more often than not of the uneducated and peasant classes. These immigrants were more than political exiles, they were economically and socially depressed peoples who were looking for a new life. Indeed, many of them planned to make their money in American and then to return to their homeland to enjoy the benefits of their labor.

They had been attracted by the streets paved with gold, the call of adventure, the adverse conditions at home, the messages of their 'compadres' in American nations, and the cheap transportation. They settled not only in the United States, but also in Argentina, Chile and Brazil, as well as throughout most of South America.

The migration was almost horde like and its impact in the United States was immediately felt. From this migration would come however, the ancestors of President Jorge Alessandri of Chile and former President Arturo Frondizi of Argentina.

In the United States, the largely unlettered immigrants settled near the waterfronts in the great urban areas. They gathered themselves in ethnic groups in a pattern set by the many immigrant groups that had preceded them in America.

The immigration figures of this period demonstrate in figures alone the enormity of this mass movement of Italians to the United States:

1881 - 1890 -	307,339	
1891 - 1900 -	651,893	
1901 - 1910 -	2,045,877	
1911 - 1920 -	1,109,526	
1921 - 1930 -	451,315	
1931 - 1940 -	67,828	1

These unofficial figures above are verified by the almost identical figures of the Immigration and Natural-

¹ Taken from the figures of the Brooklyn Borough Historian.

ization Service, which also demonstrate the decline in immigration after the Immigration Laws of the 1920's.

1820 - 1910 -	3,086,356
1911 - 1920 -	1,109, 524
1921 - 1930 -	455,315
1931 - 1940 -	68,028
1941 - 1950 -	57,661
1950 - 1958 -	155,318
(1820 - 1958 -	4,932,202) 2

Although a great many of the early immigrants sought temporary employment in America, families were soon called for and the United States soon became home. Economic set backs in the United States in 1893 and again in 1907 boosted emigration back to Italy, but these movements were largely obscured by the great immigrations of the period and the settlement of the United States by these new Italian people.

In 1890, the Italian population in Brooklyn reached 9,563 out of a total foreign born population in the City of 261,700.³

² John Kieran (ed), Information Please Almanac (NY, 1960), p326.

³ Brooklyn Eagle Almanac (1894), (Brooklyn, Eagle Press, 1893), p. 59.

The settlements of the Italians, as with most foreign language speaking groups, soon began to resemble isolated cities within the city, and from the initial settlement districts many "Little Italys" began to crop up in different parts of the city. The initial settlements of the immigrants had come in the Mulberry Street area in New York City. This area had only 416 Italians before the Civil War, as compared to 3,435 Irishmen, but the area soon became overrun by Italian immigrants in the period of the 1890's.

The pressures caused by the rapid influx of this new element caused the older settlers to seek new homes in other areas of the city. Not only did non-Italians flee from this onrush, but they were soon joined by some of the more settled Italians who also sought refuge from their countrymen.⁴

Soon Italians were seen in growing numbers in Brooklyn along the Hamilton Ferry area, along Union and President Streets, in the Red Hook area, Buttermilk Channel and the Old India Wharf areas. These new sections became known as the "Little Italys" of Brooklyn.⁵

⁴ Schiavo, op. cit., p. 532.

⁵ Ralph Foster Weld, Brooklyn is America (New York, Columbia University Press, 1950), p. 135.

These initial Italian centers were later complemented by settlements in the Navy Yard area, Williamsburg, Greenpoint, East New York and Ridgewood. With these people came Italian traditions and folkways. Transplanted from the old country, the Italians organized with their "compadres" into societies for social purposes, to insure proper burials for their members, to promote economic gains in the area of their crafts, to promote athletic interests in the Italian national sport, bocci, and inevitably, to insure for themselves a voice in political developments. The influences of the Italians in social, religious and cultural activity, admittedly profound, could lead to many studies in themselves, however, it is not the purpose of this paper to become involved in these areas. Suffice to say, the impact of the Italians was even felt in the formation of trade union associations, examples of which were the Longshoremen's Association of New York, the Padroni Panattieri (Boss Bakers the Fruit Packers, the United Italian-American Ice and Coal Dealers Association, the United Bootblack Protective Association and the Barbers' Association, each of them operating within Brooklyn, and each of them concerning not only the Italian economic community, but the trade and commerce of the entire borough itself. ⁶

⁶ A list of Italian Societies is published in every edition of the Brooklyn Eagle Almanac.

The later Italian immigrants were not as readily received in America as were the immigrants of the early and middle Nineteenth Century, and Italian-Americans were soon put on the defensive. In 1904, at the order of the outgoing Secretary of War, Elihu Root, Fort Columbus, so named since its erection early in the Nineteenth Century, was 're-named' Fort Jay. The reasons for the change in name are obscured by the passage of time, but the motives of the secretary have been linked to the anti-Italian feelings that were prominent throughout the areas that were confronted with the Italian immigrants.

As has been said, one of the most crucial of the struggles for the Italian-Americans came in the religious area, and oddly enough involved their fellow Roman Catholics, the Irish-Americans. The early Italian immigrants, as had been mentioned, were republicans opposed to the monarchical forms of government, particularly the Bourbons who had ruled Naples and Sicily in the face of the movements toward unification. As they opposed the notion of kings, the Italians generally also carried with them a dislike for the secular or temporal absolutism of the papacy, as exercised in the Papal States.

Papal parties and anti-papal parties were much a part

of Italian politics and while the loyalty to Catholicism could never be questioned, there was constant struggle over papal designs in Italy. To many, the struggle for unification in Italy in the 1860's was thwarted chiefly by the foreign alignments of the popes.

The pope had not been without support, however, as the help given to him by Napoleon III of France was augmented by Irish volunteers in the Papal Army. In many battles on the Italian peninsula, Irishmen met Italians in struggles over contrasting political-religious ideologies. With the end of the battles in Italy, however, conflict was brought to the sidewalks of New York.

When the Italian paper, Il Proscritto declared that, "our chief object of attack will be the papal power, which for so many ages oppressed mankind and ruined Italy,"⁷ this could hardly be appreciated by the Irish veterans of the Papal Wars, who brandished their papal "tin medals". The struggle, at first verbal, required little time to become a series of pitched battles in the slum areas of New York City. It was said, and perhaps understandably so, that, "it is a notorious fact that many policemen look with

⁷ Schiavo, op. cit., p. 533.

good-natured toleration on the New York ruffians' attempts to have fun with the 'Dago'.⁸

Needless to say, bigotry had an effect on political life. Italians became more inclined to look with animosity and distrust toward Irish political leadership. Italians had carried forth from their homeland a love of the word republican, especially since it represented the struggle to free their homeland under Mazzini, Cavour and Garibaldi, and now it became a common explanation for them to proclaim, "No like the Democrats," which became another way of saying as well, "No like the Irishman".⁹

Earlier leaders and earlier votes came strongly Republican, however, within a space of time the Democrats would have their fair representation among the Italian voters. By 1890, clubs for Italians were established in Brooklyn on the political level within both the Democratic and Republican parties. These early clubs, catering to the needs of the immigrants were short-lived however. The Italian Republican Club was founded in 1890 and lasted just

⁸ Ibid., p. 534.

⁹ Ibid., p. 531.

four years under the leadership of Thomas Cacciola. The club had its headquarters at 20 Union Street. The opposite number was Antonio Caffiero's Italian Democratic Club of which little was heard politically. Although Caffiero did not play a role in the events of his party, Thomas Cacciola emerged as the Republican candidate for a seat on the Board of Aldermen in 1897.

Earlier political figures appeared on the Republican line and in the election of 1889 in the Ninth Senatorial District, C.L. Sicardi lost by 1,993 votes in a bid for the State Senate. In the next year, another Italian, Robert Caccavajo ran last among the candidates of the major parties for a seat on the Board of Alderman in the Eighth District. Caccavajo, also a Republican, received a total of 14,292 votes.¹⁰

By 1892, however, the political clubs began to grow

¹⁰ All the election statistics used in this paper, with exceptions that will be noted, have been taken from the Brooklyn Eagle Almanac. The elections statistics may be found in the appropriate editions, depending upon the election year in question. Because of the ready availability of these statistics, the election results will not be footnoted in the future. Elections in 1893 for example would be found in the 1894 edition, for example, and this procedure is carried forth for all of the elections in question.

in number. The Ausonian Club of 667 Fulton Street was formed with a claimed membership of one hundred under the presidency of S. Marchisio. The Second Ward Italo-American Club of 62 Union Street also began to function with A. Grossa as its first president. In addition, Frank Castellano began the Citizens' Democratic Club with headquarters at nearby 65 Union Street. In 1894, Antonio Lessa succeeded Castellano as President of the Citizens' Democratic Club. This was the beginning of Italian political operations in the South Brooklyn-Red Hook areas, sections that would develop into the source of Italian political strength in Brooklyn.

In 1892, as well, one of the earliest political leaders in the Italian community began to operate in the sphere of politics. Francis L. Corrao, an attorney, and later to become an Assistant District Attorney in Kings County, formed the Kings County Italian Democratic Club with headquarters at 20 Union Street. The club claimed a membership of five hundred members, and within a year moved its headquarters to President Street near van Brunt. From these beginnings would come Corrao's prominence in politics as the President of the Italian American Political Union, an association that would solicit delegates from the Italian Democratic Clubs in Kings County, and sought to be the voice for Italian-

Americans in Kings.¹¹

Corrao, who would be the first Italian-American to receive a political prize from the Kings County District Attorney, as Assistant District Attorney, also gained prominence from his association with many of the social clubs that catered to the needs of the Italian community. These organizations would prove to be political assets, as would be demonstrated by the case of Corrao's brother, Charles S., who was President of the Columbus Social Club of the Sixth Ward. The interest of the Corrao brothers would benefit Charles, who was made a captain in the Police Department of the City of New York, one of the first Italian-Americans to gain prominence in that department of the city government.

In 1892, the Columbus Political Union was also established, with incorporation dating from August 1st of that year.¹² The club had its headquarters at 137 Jay Street and began its operations with six branches in association.

¹¹ Weld, op. cit., p. 145.

¹² Incorporation papers were filed with the County Clerk of Kings County and may be found in the county records of the County Clerk.

Although the Columbus Political Club was not highly centralized, and was not strongly led, suffering at the hands of a rapid succession of chief executives, the Columbus Political provided a means toward the consolidation of other Italian clubs. It began a program stressing cooperation among many of the clubs that were formed within the Italian communities of Brooklyn.

The Columbus Political Club was re-incorporated on January 15th, 1900 and was re-named the Columbus Democratic Union. With its political affiliation clearly defined, the union began to operate more effectively through its increasing number of branches.

The purpose of the Columbus Democratic Union according to its papers of incorporation was as follows:

The particular objects for which the corporation shall be formed are as follows:

Primarily, for the general welfare and political union of the Italians under the auspices of Democracy, and

Secondarily, for their moral, intellectual and social elevation according to the principles of American Citizenship and the Institutions of this Country. 13

¹³ From incorporation papers filed with County Clerk (Kings

The organization planned to establish, "Branches in all the Italian quarters". The seven directors of the corporation were:

Leonard Rossi, 137 Jay Street, Bklyn
Joseph Pitetti, 196 Prospect St., Bklyn
Gaetano Romano, 395 Court St., Bklyn
Antonio Vigliante, 466 Adelphi St, Bklyn
James Rollo, 121 Classon Ave., Bklyn
Francesco Provenzano, 599 Liberty Ave.,
Bklyn
Vincent Palermo, 4th Ave. and 94th St.,
Bklyn

The incorporation papers were signed by Joseph Giambalvo a Notary Public of Kings County (#41). an Attorney and Counsellor-at-Law of 26 Court Street. Giambalvo, who acted as the notary, became familiar in Brooklyn political circles in later years.

Some of the earlier office holders of the Union were: Leonard Rossi, Charles Sasso, James Tossinni, Pietro Gallo, Michele Petrella and Antonio Vigliante. None of these figures was strong enough however to provide for a careful development of the Union, as the turnover became frequent and the club suffered from it.

While the Columbus Union shows extensive operations on paper, none of its leaders show up on the list of Democratic

County Committeemen in Kings. The clubs were however many in number and no doubt exercised some influence on the local levels. Among the clubs affiliated with the Union were the Columbus Democratic Club of the Second Ward located at 35 Front Street and the Columbus Democratic Club of the Fifth Ward. The Second Ward Club was organized in 1899 and was absorbed into the Union in 1902. The Fifth Ward organization was formed through M. Borgia and held its meetings at its headquarters located at 20 Navy Street. Another club formed along the same lines and later to become an integral part of the Columbus Democratic Union was the Sixteenth Ward Columbus Democratic Club. Formed under F.L. Morvillo, the Sixteenth Ward Club operated from 47 Rochester Avenue.

A corresponding Columbus Democratic Club of the Twenty-Fourth Ward also began to function under President Chieffo. The club, with headquarters at 73 Troy Avenue was a short term operation. In the Twentieth Ward, Vigliante, a director of the corporation headed a Columbus Club along with A. Ciccaraldo that was also brought into the Union.

Columbus Democratic Clubs began spreading throughout the entire borough. In the Eighth Ward, the Columbus Dem-

ocratic Club was located at 119 39th Street, and was directed by President G. R. D'Antonio. A. Migenone founded the Columbus Democratic Ward of the Sixteenth Ward, however, this club, riddled with factional disputes, soon disappeared from the Union. Under James Rollo, another director of the Union, and presiding officer in the Columbus Democratic Club #5, another club began operations at Kent Avenue. This club later changed its name to the Andrew Jackson Club, and passed from the political scene during the mid-twenties.

Another Columbus Democratic Club was formed in the Seventh Ward in 1902, but this club was actually a paper one and did not last. In addition, a Columbus Democratic Club was also formed in the Thirty-First Ward. The Columbus Democratic Club of the Twenty-Sixth Ward was formed in 1902, and from it would evolve the Biagio Rizzo Democratic Association. Another of the early Columbus Union clubs was the Columbus Democratic Club #7 formed in the area of Bensonhurst at 92nd Street and Fourth Avenue. The club was led by another director of the Union, Vincent Palermo.

Although it would appear that from the structure of these clubs that the Italian-Americans should have a meaningful voice in Democratic Party circles, the opposite was true. The politically minded citizenry gave little

heed to these clubs and they were also ignored by the politically secure Democratic Regular Organization. As a result these clubs were practically powerless. There was no representation of the leaders of the Columbus Democratic Union on the all powerful County organizations such as the County Executive Committee of Kings, and indeed there were few Italians on the entire County General Committee. From the beginnings of Italian immigration until the 1900's, only four Italian names appear among the members of the Democratic County Committee. These Committeemen were: J. Suffa of the Twenty Seventh Ward in 1896; Charles Rassiga of the Seventeenth Ward in 1897 and 1898; Joseph Lamaire of the First Ward in 1898 and Fred Biba of the Fifteenth Assembly District who served from 1899 until 1902.

The Democratic Union did not completely represent the Italian-Americans of Kings County as other organizations began to enter the picture. On January 29th, 1901, the Italian Republican Club of Kings County filed a petition of incorporation, for the purpose of, "social intercourse, the dissemination of political literature and the education of American citizens of Italian birth in the teachings of the Republican Party." 14

¹⁴ From incorporation papers filed with County Clerk (Kings)

This organization under the Presidency of V. Angelorno appealed on March 1st, 1901 for another incorporation under the title of the Italian Republican Club of the Borough of Brooklyn with the same directors and for the same expressed purpose. This organization did not last very long, but nevertheless does demonstrate the diversity of Italian political thought in terms of party philosophy and party affiliation.

The Italian-Americans had a greater number proportionately on the Republican committees than they did on the Democratic, although the numbers were still rather insignificant.

Robert Nimmo was on the County Committee of the Republican Party from the Eighteenth Ward from 1890 to 1892; William DeNepe served in 1892 from the Thirteenth Ward; Robert Caccavajo represented the Eighth Ward in the same year; Eugene Berrie was also a member in 1892 from the Seventh Ward, and John Petrie, Jr. was a representative from the Thirteenth Ward in 1892.

When in 1893 the County Committee was reduced in size by three-fourths, the Italian representation was substantially reduced as well. John J. Petrie continued to represent the Thirteenth Ward, and Paul DeFere represented the Twenty-

Fourth Ward in 1897 and 1898. Other Italian-Americans on the Republican County Committee included Robert Nimmo in 1899 from the Twenty-Eighth Ward, James Niblo in 1899 and 1900 from the Twenty-Third Assembly District, and Charles Francisco from 1900 until 1903 in the delegation of the Twenty-First Assembly District.

On a very important post in the County Executive Committee, Eugene Amelia represented the Fourteenth Assembly District on the Republican leadership level in 1900, 1901 and 1902.

The leaders of the Democratic and Republican Party in the Italian clubs did not occupy significant positions of wither power of esteem within the organizational ranks. This is shown by the fact that in no notable instance did a leader of the early national clubs appear on the election ballot as the choice of the party, or appear in the councils of the party hierarchy in the borough.

In their stead on the ballots, other Italians appeared, more closely allied with the regular organizations. In some instances, however, Italians appeared on the election line in the most unlikely of places. This happened in the race for the New York State Senate from the Second Senator-

ial District in 1893. In that election W. A. Montignani ran on the Prohibition ticket. Needless to say, the 'Italian dry' did not fare well at all receiving 283 votes out of more than 35,000 cast.

A major set back for the Italians occurred in 1895, when an Italian Republican fourth in a race for two County Judge positions. Paul DeFere trailed his two Democratic opponents, while his Republican co-candidate, Aspinall, was at the head of the ticket. Although the race was not lost by a particularly large margin, De Fere being 95 votes behind one of the victors, the fact that the both Democrats outpolled De Fere while the other Republican was victorious could not be regarded as particularly favorable to Italian candidates seeking borough-wide positions.

In 1895, one of the most prominent of Italian-Americans in the Republican Party, Charles H. Francisco, was elected to the Board of Aldermen from the Seventh District. Francisco, running behind two other Republicans running for the three seats on the Board, was nonetheless elected. In that election, Francisco polled 11,891 votes while the front-runner, Republican Williams garnered 12,182. The closest candidate to Francisco, Democrat Helgans, polled 10,311.

Francisco, who was to become a prominent figure constantly in the Twenty-First Assembly District, was also elected to the New York City Council in 1897, to become one of the earliest of Brooklyn legislators to represent a part of the borough in the City Council of Greater New York. The vote for the three Councilmanic seats saw Francisco, running with Citizens' Union as well as Republican endorsement, win a close contest while coming in first among the candidates. Francisco, who had finished 191 votes behind his running mate Williams in 1895, gained these votes in addition to seventy-two more in his victory in the 1897 election.

While Francisco was faring well in one election, another Italian Republican was also running, but with much poorer luck. In the Ninth Councilmanic District, Thomas Cacciola, a leader in the early Italian Republican movement and the former President of the Italian Republican Club, finished a poor seventh in an unsuccessful bid for the City Council. Denied the endorsement of the Citizens' Union, Cacciola barely edged his Republican mate, Dierking, in the eight man bid for three seats in the Ninth District.

In another unsuccessful bid, Republican Trotte was handily beaten in his race for the New York State Assembly

from the fourteenth Assembly District. Trotte received 1,365 votes as opposed to Democrat Schmidt's 5,481 in the 1897 contest.

By the turn of the century, the Columbus Political Club's Central Committee organized in the downtown Brooklyn area with Vincent D'Agrosa serving as both President and Secretary. D'Agrosa left politics after this stint, however, when he took a Civil Service Examination and was made an interpreter in the Supreme Court.

By 1900, then, the Columbus Union was becoming the main vehicle for Italian political expression within the Democratic Party, while the Republican Party, although lacking in specific national clubs, was able to call upon the Italian-Americans that were assimilated into the various organizational clubs throughout the borough.

The Italian-Americans had not been welcomed with open arms, as indeed, they were, "less (than) exemplary citizens" who settled, "in Brooklyn because the Mediterranean ships put in at that port, (and)... occupied a few blocks along the waterfront."¹⁵

15

Harold Coffin Syrett, The City of Brooklyn, 1865-1898; A Political History (New York:Columbia U. Press,1944),p.236.

"Residing in tenements, located in the most thickly populated portion of the city, the Italians' living conditions approached the barbaric." ¹⁶

Nevertheless, these 'barbarians' were beginning to make not only social and economic inroads, but political ones as well. N. Grilla organized an Italian Republican Club in 1899 with headquarters at 252 High Street. Grilla held the office of president until 1904, when the club was disbanded for lack of support. Countering the Republican influence of course was the Columbus Democratic Union. The Union, which had at one time branched out thorough the entire borough, limited itself to two branches. Under the control of Nicholas Piro and Gaetano Pizzo, the clubs were located at 161 Bridge Street and at York and Front Streets. The operations of both of these central headquarters were in the forms of complementing the regular Democratic organization in their pursuit for Italian votes.

By 1914, however, under Brooklyn's long-time Democratic chieftan, John McCooley, the Columbus Union was disbanded as a union of Italian clubs, and the member clubs of the old

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 237.

union were urged to join the regular Democratic clubs in their respective Assembly districts in order to effect a smoother running Democratic organization. The move of the leader was for the purpose of insuring the dominance of the county structure in the organization, to end factional disputes, and to provide for power on the local level for the Italians rather than through a county-wide organization that would rival the regular machine. The move by McCooney was made in the face of the problems caused by the Progressive Party and the recent difficulties that the regulars were having with dissatisfied groups that were allied. ¹⁷

In 1898, Antonio De Martini, who would become one of the first Italian-Americans in the Republican hierarchy on the regular organization level, emerged as a candidate for the New York State Assembly from the Third Assembly District. De Martini ran a poor second behind Democratic candidate James J. McInerney in that South Brooklyn-Cobblehill district. DeMartini garnered 1,922 votes on the GOP line to McInerney's 4,777.

¹⁷ Information on the consolidation of the Columbus Democratic Union, particularly as it concerned the Twenty-Second Assembly District and B. Rizzo, was obtained from the Hon. Stephen C. Sanzillo, Deputy County Clerk of Kings, in an interview in his office in February of 1962.

In 1900, the first Italian-American from the new group of immigrants was chosen for a position of party leadership and prominence. Eugene Amelia of the Fourteenth Assembly District was chosen by his club to a position on the County Executive Committee of the Republican Party. Although Amelia lasted in that position for only three years, serving until 1902, his position on the party council at such an early date was an indication of the growing strength of the Italian voters, a power particularly felt within the Republican Party ranks.

Italian Republicans were also active in the Twenty-Second and Twenty-Third Districts, when in 1905, the Italo-American Republican Club was formed by Henry Martone and P. Niccollola. The organization was located at 199 Stone Street, and claimed 250 members. It was short-lived, however, functioning until 1908.

During Amelia's short turn in political prominence, he appeared in 1901 on the Republican ballot in an unsuccessful bid for City Magistrate. In a fairly close election, Amelia garnered 13,252 votes to 16,810 for the Democratic victor, Brennan. This appearance of an Italian on the ballot became more commonplace, particularly among the Republicans.

In 1902, another Italian-American was chosen for a run in the South Brooklyn-Cobblehill Third Assembly District. This was the same district in which DeMartini had been beaten by McInerney. This time, Republican R. Scotto was selected to go against the incumbent in the heavily Democratic district. The result was a better than two to one defeat for Scotto as he was able to gather only 1,804 votes to McInerney's 4,404.

In 1904, as well, Republican County Committeeman Gaetano Parisi was picked to go against Assemblyman John McKeown in the Second Assembly District. Parisi also suffered a defeat at the hands of the Democrat gathering only 2,355 votes to the incumbent's 5,641.

Results from the Twenty-First Assembly District in 1904 were much more rewarding for the Republicans, and for an Italian in particular. Charles H. Francisco, who was also engaged in construction, and who lived on Halsey Street, was successful in his election bid for the Albany seat. Francisco joined John B. Ferre of the fourteenth Assembly District who served in the lower house from 1902 until 1904, in being the first Italian-Americans to serve in the Assembly from Brooklyn since General Spinola in 1855.

Francisco garnered 8,617 votes beating the Democratic candidate Emil Rose who had 7,262.

Francisco made a re-election bid in this Cripplebush-Williamsburg district in 1905, but was unsuccessful when the consistently non-Republican district reverted to its old ways and elected Frank E. Harvey, a candidate of the Municipal Ownership League of William Randolph Hearst. The League captured five seats in the 1906 State Assembly, with Francisco's being among them. In the election itself Francisco polled 5,150 to Harvey's 7,520 and Democrat Josephson's 3,699. With this defeat, Francisco retired from elective politics, and the Italians would have to wait for almost two decades before another Assemblyman of Italian origin would take his seat in the lower house.

In another race for the Assembly in 1905, another Italian, L.A. Cavo, made a bid on the Municipal Ownership League line for the Assembly seat in the First Assembly District. Cavo came within 898 votes of victory in the old Sixth Ward area receiving 2,062 votes to Republican incumbent Thomas O'Neil's 2,960.

Cavo made another bid for the Assembly seat in 1906, but by this time the third party lost its impact, and

Cavo's candidacy was doomed to failure. He emerged from the election as a poor third with only 1,676 votes compared to Republican D.H. Ralston's election winning 4,478.

As with Cavo, Italians were not adverse to running in elections as the candidates of the many third parties. In the election of 1906, W. Perine ran for the Assembly in the Eleventh Assembly District and gathered twenty-three votes on the Prohibition ticket.

In another election, this one in 1907, F.C. Pease ran for the Assembly in the Twelfth Assembly District. The candidate of both the Non-Partisan Party and the Municipal Ownership League, Pease was only able to obtain seventy-nine votes and was even outpolled by the Socialist candidate.

By 1910, the regular organizations had been far from enthusiastic in the receptions given to Italian-Americans interested in joining the party organization. Italians on the 210 man Republican County Committee of 1910 numbered three: Antonio De Martini of the Third Assembly District, W.P. Rae of the Seventeenth Assembly District, and Charles Francisco of the Twenty-First Assembly District. The Dem-

ocrats, with 341 men on their County Committee, could point to but one, former Assemblyman John B. Ferre of the Fourteenth Assembly District.

In the Fourteenth Assembly District in the Greenpoint-Williamsburg District, Republican L. Prudente was badly beaten by Democratic incumbent James E. Fay, in the 1909 election. Prudente received 1,346 votes to the winner's 3,715.

The Democratic ballots began to open for the Italians, however, as in 1908, F.C.J. Tessaro made an attempt to capture the Senatorial seat in the Tenth Senatorial District. The run by Tessaro marked the first time that an Italian-American made a bid for elective office from the East New York area. In his unsuccessful attempt, Tessaro received 11,301 votes to Republican Charles Alt's 15,749.

If the Italian-Americans could not fare well at the ballot box, they were able to receive some assistance in the form of political patronage. When the political clouds were beginning to look dark for them, Francis L. Corrao was given one of the first political pay-offs. This would take their minds off some of the pain that they had been suffering.

Although the number of Italian-American political clubs established before 1910 seemed notable, there was actually little durability to most of them, to say nothing of their virtual political sterility.

By 1910, however, and continuing into the second decade of the Twentieth Century, the number of clubs increased, only to become gradually absorbed by the older institutions of the parties. With this absorption would come an increase in power and prestige for the Italian political leaders, and their causes.

Chapter 3

Years of Growth

By 1910, there were only four Italian American political clubs of importance in Brooklyn. In short time, however, there would be a tremendous increase in the number of these clubs that would bring the total to nine by 1911, and would increase it to eleven by 1913, according to the Brooklyn Eagle Almanac's listing of these Italian societies.

The Italian-Americans began feeling their political strength, became more fully aware of the political inequities under the existing system, and they began to exercise their feelings through the political clubs. The failure of the major political parties to accommodate to the new element in the community, particularly the regular Democratic organization, would no doubt play a role in the movement of the early Italians to the Republican Party. The late start of the Democratic Party would be made up for in later times, however, by a rapid and thorough accommodation to the Ital-

ian voters. The accomodation would be arrived at with a great deal of difficulty.

Clearly by 1910 Italian leaders within the organization would be found in the Republican Party almost exclusively, with the awakening of the Democratic Party still to come. No small part in the awakening of the Democrats to the potential strength of Republicanism in New York among the Italians was played by a young Republican upstart from the heavily Italian East Side of Manhattan. Fiorello LaGuardia, who would run on several tickets, among them the Socialist and Fusion labels, made Democratic leaders aware of certain political realities when he defeated Michael Farley in a 'safe' Democratic district and was elected to the United States House of Representatives. LaGuardia's victory, along with that of Russian born Socialist Meyer London's in 1914, in immigrant districts of Southern Europeans and Eastern Europeans clearly demonstrated the determination of the newer immigrants to elect men from their own backgrounds as well as of their own beliefs.

Italian clubs still continued to multiply, with one of the newer ones in Brooklyn being E. Martone's Democratic Club at 161 Bridge Street. Formed under the leadership of Henry (Enrico) Martone, the naming of the club demonstrates

the fascination of many early immigrant political leaders to have themselves immortalized before their earthly departure. Martone's club lasted many years, and would, twenty years later, play a part in the formation of the last of the Italian political unions in Brooklyn, the Mike Laura Association.

Another new club was the Franklin Civic Club of S.L. Testa, located at 97 Pine Street, and formed in 1911. The Testa club did not endorse a political party, but preferred to contribute their political strength in a non-partisan manner, acting as a pressure group on behalf of the interests of the Italians in the area.

Another club was organized at 175 Central Avenue under Dr. Calgoero Giovinco. Incorporated on August 20, 1909 as the Italian Central American Democratic Club, it came into full operation in 1910 in the furthering of the Democratic Party among the Italian voters.

The Italian Democratic Club of the Second Assembly District was organized in 1911 under Dr. Louis Lapetina. The club operated from headquarters at 121 Sands Street. The encroachment of the Democrats into the Second Assembly District did not go unchecked, however, as the Republican

Party offered its opposition in the pursuit of Italian votes. Under the leadership of N. Molinari, the Italian Labor Republican Society of the Second Assembly District began operations from Main and York Streets.

By 1911, Antonio DeMartini would make another attempt for political office, this one as unsuccessful as the bid for State Assembly, an office denied to him by the voters in 1898. Running in South Brooklyn's Forty-Fourth Aldermanic District, DeMartini lost to Frank Cunningham, a powerful leader in Democratic politics in this area for many years to come. The result was a crushing defeat for the Italian, as he lost by a better than two to one margin, garnering 1,972 votes to Cunningham's 4,171.

The Italian movements within the political sphere were greatly aided by the birth of the National Progressive Party. Theodore Roosevelt's Bull Moosers bolted the Republican Party in 1912 when William Howard Taft was renominated for the office of President instead of the extremely popular Roosevelt. Teddy's third party movement developed so rapidly that there were few entrenched politicians within the party's hierarchy. As a result, it was possible for aspirants to avoid fighting a powerful machine. The Progressives, therefore, became a vehicle for many freshmen denied positions

within the two major parties. In New York City, this was especially true for the political aspirants of the immigrant groups, the rising social and political forces within the community. In addition, the Progressive Party with its impact upon the political scene, forced the acceleration of many democratizing processes within the established parties themselves. There can be little doubt that the generally astute leaders of the Democratic Party in Brooklyn, particularly John McCooney, were aware of several accommodations that would have to be made in view of the complexities given politics in the borough.

Almost immediately Italian-Americans became involved in the Progressive movement. In the Tenth Senatorial District, T.J. Trapani of 188 New Jersey Avenue outdrew the opposition of the Republican party in the Senatorial seat from the Bushwick area. Trapani received 9,333 votes as contrasted to 12,346 votes for the victorious Democrat, H.H. Torberg. The Republican, C.J. Moore received 8,041.

In 1914, J. Ferrara was chosen as District Leader in the Seventh Assembly District, and by the next year, M.L. Lentino held the same position in the Second Assembly District. Trapani, the defeated Senatorial candidate was also involved in the party's affairs, as a delegate to the

New York State Executive Committee from the Twenty-Second Kings County Assembly District in 1914, 1915 and 1916.

In 1917, Trapani was elected Secretary to the state executive committee.

Another Italian, A. DePiano was also a member of the state executive committee, holding the position in 1916 from the Thirteenth Assembly District.

Bull Mooser L.J. Perasso ran a close election race in 1913 for the Assembly seat in the Thirteenth Assembly District. Perasso, running in the East New York-Bushwick-Ridgewood area lost by less than 150 votes as he ran on the Republican and Independence League lines as well. The vote for Assemblyman Kramer was 3,308, while Perasso received 3,162.

Progressivite L.M. Barbieri made a very poor showing in his bid for the Assembly seat from Brooklyn's Third Assembly District. Barbieri's poor showing in the election demonstrated the failure of the Progressives to run well without Roosevelt at the head of the ticket. Progressive candidates began to suffer from the lack of strong organization, and Barbieri demonstrated this as he was able to gather three percent of the total vote. He received 177 votes to Democratic Assemblyman Taylor's winning 3,559, and

barely outpolled the Socialist.

In the Seventh Senatorial District, the Progressives nominated in 1914 an Italian-American for a position at the New York State Constitutional Convention. J.P. Pinna, running in a field of twelve for three seats finished a lowly tenth. Although Pinna's showing relative to the entire field was poor, he did finish more than one hundred votes ahead of the closest Bull Mooser, and that with a total of only 772.

The election of 1917 marked the last Brooklyn appearance of the Progressive Party of Teddy Roosevelt on the ballot. When Teddy endorsed the candidacy of Charles Evans Hughes, the Republican candidate for President in 1926, the National Progressives were all but finished.

As the Democrats and Republicans adopted the program of the Progressives, and began to capture its supporters, the question was purely academic as to the extent of time it would take for the Bull Moosers to pass from the political scene.

In a race for the Municipal Court Judgeship in the Seventh Judicial District, the Progressives nominated S.J. Trapani. The showing of Trapani was very poor in an elect-

ion marked as well by the appearance of an Italian-American running on the Socialist ticket. The top three candidates were far ahead of Trapani. Democratic victor E.A. Richards garnered 20,001 to 11,018 to Republican H.C. Glore and 12,550 to the surprisingly strong H. Kurio. Trapani received 109.

In 1917, P.V. Trocchia was appointed to the Executive Committee of the Progressive Party, but by this time, as was previously mentioned, the party influence on the political scene had disintegrated, and with this decline, it followed that concerns of Italians involved in the movement of this third party became of minimal importance in terms of the larger political picture.

S.J. Trapani, perhaps one of the most outstanding of the Italian-American politicians of the day, and the most outstanding in the Progressive movement from Brooklyn was eventually rewarded for his political contributions by means of an appointment to the staff of the District Attorney for Kings County.

Another prominent third party movement, one that was particularly popular in urban areas, especially among the Jewish people, and popular in the rural areas among the

Germans, was the Socialist Party. The Socialist movement had branched into different splinter groups, such as the Socialist Labor Party and the Socialist Workers' Party, as well as the Socialist Party itself. Socialism lost its real strength, however, when it became identified with extremist positions not in accord with the traditional governmental framework in the United States. It lost its strength in times of prosperity when its cries for economic reformation fell upon deaf and contented ears.

The Socialist Party was particularly strong in the days before and during the first World War, and in Brooklyn had as slight appeal to the Italian-Americans interested in politics. The most outstanding of the Italian community involved in the Socialist movement was H. Lurio who demonstrated a particular personal political appeal during this period. Lurio ran for a seat as an Alderman in the Sixty-fifth District, and although running third in a field of five, he polled 22% of the total vote cast. The vote for Lurio was 2,452 as opposed to Republican Rosenbloom's winning 3,778 and Democrat J. Gralla's 2,608. The Progressive candidate, F. Thornton received 1,929.

Lucio proved his popularity again in 1917 when he outdrew a Republican and finished second in a field of four in

an unsuccessful bid for a Municipal Court Judgeship in the Seventh District. The race, which was previously mentioned in the case of Progressive S.J. Trapani, was a clear indication of the strength of the Socialist movement in certain circles at that time. In addition it represents the strength of Lurio himself. Lurio received 12,530 votes to Democrat Richard's 20,001. The Republican received only 11,018.

These parties were by no means the sole vehicles for the political expressions of Italian-Americans. In other contributions to third party movements, Italians played a very large part in the structural formation of the Independence League. A short term political movement, the party boasted Executive Committeemen, or District Leaders, of Italian extraction in four of Brooklyn's Assembly Districts. These leaders were S.J. Magia of the Sixth Assembly District, G.B. Dassia of the Seventh Assembly District, T.F. Esposito of the Eighteenth Assembly District and A. L. Palma of the Nineteenth Assembly District. The political strength of the group was minimal and its contribution to the overall political structure remained even more so.

An additional factor in the political picture was the

role of the regular Republican organization in the appeal to Italian voters, and the accomodation to the Italian element through the rapid incorporation of the Italian-Americans into its political organization. The Democratic County Committee of 1912, composed of 315 members was not represented by a single member of the Italian community, while the Republicans could boast of seven members with a County Committee strength of 409. The Republicans on the Kings County Committee were:

A. DeMartini, of the Third A.D.
Samuel Ciccone, of the Thirteenth A.D.
S. Licare of the Sixteenth A.D.
A. Madeo of the Sixteenth A.D.
W.P. Rae of the Seventeenth A.D.
C.H. Francisco of the Twenty-Second A.D.
L. Morilla of the Twenty-Third A.D.

The Republican Party bent backwards in an attempt to get Italian support. The election of Republican Governor Whitman in 1915 proved to be one of the methods for Italian advancement in government. As a result of the dispensing of Republican political patronage, Brooklyn received a lucrative reward from the state with the appointment of Charles Mansone as an Assistant Attorney-General of New York State. Mansone's appointment coincided with the appointment of another young Italian attorney, Fiorello LaGuardia, to the same office, and marked the

first real recognition of Italians by the New York State governmental patronage machine.¹

The Italian voters were naturally drawn to the Republican Party of the early part of the century because of many of the policies of the Republican Party on the national scene. The appointments by President Theodore Roosevelt of the only Italian to ever hold a cabinet post were instances to be remembered by many Italians. Charles Bonaparte was appointed as Secretary of the Navy in 1905, and Attorney-General in 1906. It was during his three years as the Attorney-General that the Federal Bureau of Investigation was begun.

In later years, as well, when President Woodrow Wilson, a Democrat, 'sold out' Italy at Versailles over the question of Trieste, the Italian voters would remember the position of both the Democrats and the Republicans over the Treaty and the League, much to the benefit of the local Republican chieftans and the chagrin of the Democratic leaders.

Throughout the period, Italian-Americans appeared, with few exceptions, on the ballots of the Republican Party.

¹ Schiavo, op. cit., p.553.

In 1916, DeMartini again lost to Assemblyman Taylor in a bid for his seat in the Third Assembly District. In that race, DeMartini received 1,246 to Democrat Taylor's total of 3,747.

The Republicans conceded to Italian strength as well in the Old Sixth Ward Area when Italian-Americans were nominated for the New York State Assembly for three successive years. The nominations, in 1917, 1918 and 1919, were to no avail, however, as the Republicans went down to defeat. In 1917, A. G. Petrella, who also received Fusion Party endorsement was unable to unseat Assemblyman Larney in the First Assembly District race. Petrella received 3,128 votes to Larney's 4,752.

The Democrats nominated John J. Griffith in 1918, and the Republicans tried to capture the Albany seat with Gaetano Parisi. It was to no avail, however, as Griffith, running strongly, received the endorsement of 7,099 voters, while Parisi could only muster 4,278.

By 1919, however, Assemblyman Griffith was not as popular with his constituents. In addition, he carried the burden of an unpopular Democratic program in the nation. He faced discontent with his constituents, particularly the

Irish, Italian and German voters who were antagonistic toward Wilson, Versailles and the League of Nations, all of which became issues that affected the Democratic Party even to the local precincts. In any event, Assemblyman Griffith was only re-elected by a scant seven hundred votes, in an election marked by a tremendous swell in the Republican totals. The results, although close, nevertheless meant defeat for Republican J.J. D'Amato who received 6,231 votes to the incumbent's winning total of 6,973.

Throughout the entire period, Republican Italians consistently appeared on the ballots as the years progressed. In 1918, Humberto F.X. Savarese, who was later to be elected a member of the New York City Board of Aldermen, lost a close race to Assemblyman Dreschler for an Assembly seat in the Sixteenth Assembly District. Savarese received 5,869 votes to 6,836 votes for Democrat Dreschler.

During the same election, as well, the East New York section witnessed another Assembly contest involving Italian-Americans. O.B. Lafreniere came within eight hundred votes of defeating the Democratic incumbent, G.J. Morris. In the heavily Socialist district,

Lafreniere received 8,213 votes to Morris' 8,935 and Socialist Searby's 3,674.

In 1918 a significant event in Brooklyn Italian politics happened when Antonio DeMartini was elected as President of the Sixth Ward Republican Club. When in earlier times Italians had received prominence within regular party ranks, they did so without being recognized members of the Italian community. Prominent Italians in the regular ranks were only seen in the days prior to mass migration, or in areas where there were few Italians. When immigration increased, the Italians were excluded from the old political institutions and the regular party machinery and were forced to plod their way within the national club movements.

DeMartini's election as chief executive of the Regular Organization Club in the **Third** Assembly District meant that an Italian did not have to make his way in segregated national clubs, but instead could achieve prominence within the framework of the party itself. As such, it marked not only DeMartini's personal abilities but indicated the beginning of Italian assimilation within the political structure. The presidency, while not the office of power, rather of prestige, marked the beginning of

Italian power.

In 1919, Italians appeared solely on the Republican line in the November elections. In the Eighth Assembly District, which encompassed the Wallabout-Fort Greene area, a section with a heavy Italian population, but heavily Democratic as well, Fred E. Casanova lost in a landslide to Democratic incumbent Reilly. Casanova received 3,454 votes to 7,582 for Reilly.

In the Ridgewood area, however, the Republicans were successful in the election to the Assembly of John Damico of 732 Bushwick Avenue to a seat from the Nineteenth Assembly District. Damico beat incumbent Benjamin C. Klingman in an election decided by a scant nineteen votes. The race was a three-cornered battle that saw the Socialist candidate draw enough from the Democrat to insure the Damico victory. Damico received 3,681 to 3,662 for Klingman and 2,669 for Socialist J.A. Weil. There is no doubt that this vote went to the Republicans because of the widespread hostility to Wilson's policies, again, on the question of Versailles and the League. Damico failed to secure the 1920 nomination and consequently served just one uneventful year in the Assembly at Albany.

The initial Damico victory in the Nineteenth Assembly District marked the beginning of an uninterrupted reign of thirteen years by Italian representatives in the Assembly for that district. During the next thirteen years, four others besides Damico would serve. They were Assemblymen Francis X. Giaccone, Charles Fasullo, Anthony Palma and Jerome Ambro.

In other 1919 elections, two other Republicans went down to defeat, these in the race for New York City Aldermen. In the Thirty-Seventh District, M. Barra went down to defeat by a better than two-to-one margin. Barra received 2,201 to Larney's 4,570. In the Thirty-Eighth District, Frank Cunningham was winning against DeMartini again, 4,030 to the Republican's 1,852.

Although the entire period seems to show exclusive activity on the part of the Italian-Americans concentrated within the Republican Party ranks, it is manifestly unfair to give that party sole credit for Italian political advancement.

As has been noted, the second decade saw changes in terms of the growth of Italian political clubs, with the Democrats playing a major role in their organization. Among some of the newer clubs were the Christopher Columbus Club

of 375 Fulton Street and the Jefferson Civic Club of 20 Olive Street. The latter, under the direction of John Pons was a club that was essentially non-partisan and interested in lobbying for Italian interests.

The Democratic Party had become particularly involved with the diffuse clubs of national character, and consolidation of Italian clubs allied with the Democratic organization was called for in order that the undertakings of the Democratic Party might include Italians. During the earlier period patronage had been sparse and there had been minimal cooperation between district clubs and national ones. The condition needed rectification if the Democratic Party was to continue to remain the majority party in the borough.

The movement by the Democrats to consolidate, not only national clubs, but non-regular associated party clubs, was undertaken in 1914 and 1915 by Kings County Democratic chieftan John McCooney. McCooney, known as the 'Foxy Grandpa' of Brooklyn politics, had a knack for playing off leaders and clubs against one another. He was particularly skillful at keeping the Italians off guard, playing upon their vanity and their intense passionate likes and dislikes for one another.

McCooley urged the Italian clubs to organize on the basis of the Assembly District clubs. He also urged them to cooperate with the district leaders in the promotion of the Democratic Party interests. As a result of this, Italians were now accepted within the organizational structure, and they were rapidly added to the County Committee in an expression of the Democratic Party's wishes to tie them closely to the Party. Italian Democratic leaders began to emerge within the organizational structure, and some of the earlier leaders of the Italian national movement, such as Savarese, Martone, Correale and Rizzo, found their way into the regular organization.

Because of the McCooley decision, the, the 1,672 man Democratic County Committee was able to boast of Italian-Americans in almost every one of the Assembly Districts in 1915. The group consisted of:

First A.D.

P. Diglio
W. La Liberte

Second A.D.

V. Solito
A. Castere
E. Martone
A. Coppola
L. Zurlo

Third A.D.

L. Laura
M. Ditore

Fourth A.D.
J. J. Cazazza

Fifth A.D.
W. J. Pape

Sixth A.D.

Seventh A.D.
R. Argoglia
Al Astarita

Eighth A.D.

Ninth A.D.
J. DeLiberte
A. Porco
G. W. Acratelli
F. Dassori

Tenth A.D.

Eleventh A.D.
R. Raimondi

Twelfth A.D.
F. J. DeMange

Thirteenth A.D.
P. Ottati
P. Petrocello

Fourteenth A.D.
J. Fontana

Fifteenth A.D.

Sixteenth A.D.
G. Celabrese
J. J. Sasso
R. Arevoli
J. Savarese

Seventeenth A.D.

Eighteenth A.D.
F. A. Dugro

Nineteenth A.D.

D. Cicio
 W.A. Marinello
 G.J. Liota
 V.J. Correale

Twentieth A.D.Twenty-First A.D.

Twenty-Second A.D.
 B. Rizzo

Twenty-Third A.D. 2

Although the number is not proportionately large, the spread of Italian committeemen throughout the entire borough was no doubt an indication of the borough wide effect that the Italians were gradually beginning to have in political circles.

The drive for consolidation as chartered by McCooey led many of the Italians into close harmony with the regular party machinery. One example of this was the Biagio Rizzo Democratic Club. Formerly the B. Rizzo Democratic Association of the Twenty-Sixth Ward, at 591 Liberty Avenue, the club was incorporated as the Biagio Rizzo Italian-American Democratic Club of the Twenty-Second Assembly District, Inc. It was formed under Rizzo, a banker and real estate man of 374 Fulton Street, and was founded for

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The names were taken from the Brooklyn Eagle Almanac (1915)

, the expressed purpose of gathering Italian votes for the Democratic organization candidates for public office. It operated with the blessings of powerful James P. Sinnott, the district leader of the Twenty-Second. Rizzo died in 1922 and the club continued its operation until 1935, when it was dissolved and its membership was incorporated into the Sinnott club.³

Although the Italian-Americans were not on the ballot frequently in those times, they did at least receive some recognition, largely in the form of political patronage from the Democratic leaders.

Rafael Raimondi, a former member of the Democratic County Committee received a job as Deputy Sheriff. Charles Mauro was, in 1919, appointed as a Deputy Commissioner of Street Cleaning, while J.L. Pittaluga was made an Assistant Engineer in the Brooklyn Bureau of Sewers. In addition, Michael Laura was made Deputy Commissioner of Street Cleaning succeeding Mauro, when the latter retired to work for the Italian Line, a steamship company.⁴

³ Information on B. Rizzo was obtained from the Hon. Stephen C. Sanzillo in an interview, February 6, 1962.

⁴ From Mr. Louis Priola, in an interview, February 6, 1962.

Among other political appointments were those of Joseph V. Lemaire as Assistant Deputy County Clerk, and of Andrew Yacenda as Warden of Jails.

By the 1920's there was no question as to the fact that the Italian-Americans were on the rise. In 1920, the first Italian in modern times made a bid from Brooklyn for a borough Congressional seat. J.J. Astarita, a Republican from the Fourth Congressional District, which largely embraced the Red Hook area, was soundly defeated in his bid for the House seat. He garnered 14,684 votes to Congressman Cullen's 21,069.

In the same year, Humberto F.X. Savarese, a Republican won a special election for the Aldermanic seat in the Fifth-First District, becoming the first Italian-American to do so from that district.

By 1920, indeed, Italians were becoming involved in Congressional elections, Aldermanic elections and Assembly elections far too numerous to be recorded in every instance. In many cases, the results were successful.

Another breakthrough occurred in 1921 when the first Italian ran for boroughwide office with the endorsement of a major party. Michael T. Laura, running as the Dem-

ocratic Candidate for Sheriff of Kings County, was defeated for that office by 24,600 votes, running a poor last among his fellow candidates on the Democratic borough-wide ticket. All of the other members of the ticket were victorious as well in the 1921 Laura defeat. A gentleman who played a role in that election, campaigning for Laura, Mr. Louis Priola, could not recall vocal anti-Italian sentiment that would perhaps explain Laura's defeat. However, it became a common belief among Brooklyn political chieftans that would last for many years, that an Italian could not be victorious in an election run on the borough-wide level. The fact that the entire Democratic slate, save Laura, could carry Brooklyn would not but hurt the cause of future Italian political aspirants.

1921 was also noteworthy in that it marked the initial appearance of a woman of the Italian community on the election stand making a bid for political office. Mrs. Mabel T.S. Falco of the Old Sixth Ward area lost in her bid for the Aldermanic seat in the Thirty-Third District. The loss was not a poor one as Mrs. Falco received 6,171 votes to her male opponent's 8,586.

These bad breaks for the Italians were by no means substantial set-backs, for in the same year, 1921, Mayor

John 'Red Mike' Hylan appointed the first Italian Magistrate from Brooklyn, Gaspar J. Liota. By 1929, Liota would be joined on the Magistrates' bench by Sylvester Sabbatino, and within two more years, that number would be doubled by the addition of Magistrates Pinto and De Andrea.

In 1929, as well, Michael Ditore would become Brooklyn's first elected Italian judge winning the post from the First Municipal Court Judicial District. Italians would have to wait until the 1930's before electing a second judge to the Municipal Court bench.

By way of appointments, Charles H. Francisco was made a Warden of Jails in 1922 under the Republican sheriff. In other areas, Joseph DeBragga would serve through the thirties as Chief Clerk of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court on the basis of a 1927 appointment; John Savarese would be the Secretary to Borough President James Byrnes in 1929. In addition, the twenties saw the appointment of Joseph Lentol as Superintendent of Sewers in 1929, and John Imperatore as Clerk of the Municipal Court, Third District, in the same year.

In addition to the appointed political patronage and the judicial positions received, Italians would also serve during the twenties in the Albany legislature. During the twenties, eight Italians saw service in the New York State Assembly from Brooklyn, the only house of the legislature in which Italian members from Brooklyn were found.

The first to be elected was Joseph 'Joe the Barber' Lentol in 1918. Lentol was elected from the Fourteenth Assembly District in Greenpoint defeating Republican G.A. Owens and Socialist H. Rugoff. Lentol received 3,035 votes to Owens' 2,263 and the Socialist's 2,803.

Lentol was re-elected in 1919 over Republican Cavallo and Socialist Rugoff. He served only two years in Albany and was not re-nominated by the party because of a struggle with Democratic leader Dan Carroll.

The Democrats nominated Andrew Yacenda in 1920, but in an upset victory Socialist Henry Jaeger defeated the regular Democrat. Jaeger was expelled from the Assembly over the question of his residence in the state and in 1921, the Democrats and Republicans formed an alliance to deprive the Socialists of victory. The maneuver was one that had been successful for many years in eliminating

third party movements in New York City. By nominating one candidate to run with both Democrat and Republican endorsement, the third party was almost always beaten. In 1921 they used the trick to endorse Democrat Andrew Yacenda, and this time with success. Yacenda's total vote on the Democratic and Republican lines amounted to 6,899 which was more than enough to beat Socialist Gertrude Klein who mustered but 3,733. Yacenda served only one term and with his passage from the political scene, Italians ceased serving as Assemblymen from the Fourteenth until the election of Joseph Lentol's son, Edward, in 1949.

Of Brooklyn's eight Italian Assemblymen in the twenties, five came from the Nineteenth Assembly District. The first to serve was Republican James Damico whose scant victory was mentioned previously. In the election of 1920, Frank Giaccone was nominated by the Republicans to retain the district in the Republican column. In the election, Giaccone faced Democrat Klingman and was carried into office on the coat tails of Republican Presidential candidate Warran Harding. Giaccone received 4,708 votes in that election to a substantial 4,348 for the Democrat. Socialist Rubin had a strong 2,909.

Republican Giaccone served one year in Albany and ran for re-election in 1921. Running without Harding at the head of the ticket proved to be too much for Giaccone as Democrat Charles Fasullo walked away with the victory. Giaccone had 3,848 votes while Fasullo had 5,207. Another Italian also appeared on the ballot running on the Socialist ticket, but F.M. Testa was only able to muster 901 votes.

Fasullo was re-elected in 1922, making his service in Albany exactly two years, however, he was not re-nominated by his party in 1923. Instead, the nod went to Democrat Anthony Palma, a graduate of St. Francis College. The Republicans countered with Alexander Pisciotta. Palma, who was also a pharmacist, defeated the Republican by a little less than a thousand votes, 4,409 to Pisciotta's 3,483 and Socialist Morris Stainen's 1,061. He served just one term in Albany being denied re-designation by his party.

Pisciotta, the Republican, made another bid for the seat in 1924, and this time he faced Jerome Ambro. Ambro, who would represent the Nineteenth Assembly District for eight years, until 1933, defeated the Republican by a thousand votes. Ambro received 5,086 to Pisciotta's

4071 and 1,395 for Socialist Stainen.

The other Italian to serve in the Assembly during this period was James F. Ricca, who represented the Twenty-Third Assembly District from 1922 until 1927. The Twenty-Third District was located in Brownsville where the heavy Jewish population brought heavy returns in for the Socialist candidates. In 1920, Ricca, a Republican, lost in his bid for the Assembly to Socialist Assemblyman Solomon. Following the idea of eliminating the third party, the Republicans and Democrats allied in the election of 1921 and both nominated Ricca against the Socialists. The result was victory for Ricca over Socialist L.P. Goldberg. Ricca received 6,278 to Goldberg's 5,307.

In elections after this, until 1927, Ricca was the successful candidate of both parties, although it was not done without inter-party and intra-party frictions in the form of primary fights.

The service of these Italians, all within the framework of organization clubs did not mean that activity within the national clubs had ceased. One of the most important consolidation attempts of the Italian clubs was yet to come in the form of the Mike Laura Club.

This movement came when the Oberdon Club, incorporated on March 8th, 1917, was re-incorporated as the Mike Laura Club, Inc. of Kings County, with headquarters at 106 Pierrpont Street. The club was headed by Michael Ditore as President and was organized throughout the entire Borough of Brooklyn, along Assembly District lines, and included membership from many of the Italian societies of Brooklyn.

The Mike Laura Club reached a highpoint in 1929, with representatives of all twenty-three of Brooklyn's Assembly Districts within the party hierarchy. The representatives, the last of the great Italian national club leaders in Brooklyn were:

First A.D.

Joseph Martone
Francis Corrao

Second A.D.

John Savarese
Louis Polleo

Third A.D.

Michael Laura
D. Ramondi

Fourth A.D.

Andrew Basile
R. Raimondi

Fifth A.D.

F. Grisoli
Felix Di Juli

Sixth A.D.
Louis Parisi

Seventh A.D.
John Agoglia

Eighth A.D.
James Gallo

Ninth A.D.
Joseph Astarita

Tenth A.D.
J. Brownie

Eleventh A.D.
Matthew Abruzzo

Twelfth A.D.
Louis Priola

Thirteenth A.D.
P. Petrucelli
J. Toscano

Fourteenth A.D.
Andrew Yacenda

Fifteenth A.D.
Joseph Pappavero

Sixteenth A.D.
Peter Brancata
S. Fasanella
A. Rospardi

Seventeenth A.D.
James DeMaro
P. Sandora

Eighteenth A.D.
Angelo Pope

Nineteenth A.D.
Vincenzo Correale
B. Caruso
C.L. Fasullo

Twentieth A.D.

G. J. Liota
F. Russo

Twenty-First A.D.

Joseph Puglisi
Dominick Ciccia

Twenty-Second A.D.

F. Rizzo
T. V. Rizzo
S. J. Trapani
John Viggani

Twenty-Third A.D.

Frank Buonora
Joseph Fucci

The organization was not a limited operation, as it became affiliated with the most noteworthy of the remaining Italian national clubs. Among the associates of the Mike Laura Club were Vincent Correale's Columbus Democratic Club of the Nineteenth Assembly District, L. Martone's Columbus Political Club and E. Martone's Martone Democratic Club. Others affiliated with the operation were Giovinco's Italian Central American Democratic Club, John Agolia's Italian Citizens' Association and Lapetina's Italian Democratic Club of the Second Assembly District. The Mike Laura Club had for its membership powerful Italian community leaders as Corrao and Correale, former

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From a list in the possession of Louis Priola, a former member of the Mike Laura Club.

state legislators, as Yacenda and Fasullo, and future judges, as Abruzzo, Brancato, Sabbatino and Ditore, among its more prominent figures.

The club received several concessions in the way of patronage from the county leaders, but because it de-emphasized the role of the Italian citizens on the community level, it had few victories in city, state and national elections.

The club also lacked the ability to effectively check bad political leaders on the local level since it frequently took the spotlight off the local situation. In many cases, it was able to provide the local leaders with assistance, taking off the pressures that would otherwise be applied to the club house and putting it upon the shoulders of the Italian community leaders. The process of centralization under Laura also meant at times that local interests would be sacrificed for larger gains, fine for the time in question, but intolerable if a really strong grass-roots organization was to be built. In short, there were many weaknesses within the Mike Laura Club, weaknesses that would be capitalized upon by the opposition, and weaknesses that would deter new Italian leaders in the organization of the Democratic Party from supporting.

The Mike Laura Club planned to widen its scope and to include other areas of the country that had heavy Italian populations and form a nation-wide organization in cooperation with the Democratic Party. In fact, the Mike Laura Club held national conventions at Atlantic City, New Jersey in 1930 and 1931 for this expressed purpose.

As with many other nationalistic organizations involved in the political processes, however, the passage of time and the maturity of attitudes brought the need for such an operation to an end. As the Italian community in America became accepted and assimilated, the hopes of its early leaders to preserve national identification with Italy were doomed to failure. A defensive attitude to organize soon became an offensive one, to infiltrate.

Within a few years the Mike Laura Club would dissolve, and with its demise, the political expressions of Italian-Americans would be realized within the structures of the major political parties, through the regular organizations. The passage of this club from the political horizon brought to a virtual end Italian extra-party activity. The Italians would now concentrate upon their local clubs and their local areas in an attempt to reach political expression

within the framework of the entire social structure.

Throughout the thirties and carrying into the future, Italians would concentrate on assertion within the party ranks. Their struggles would now be for leadership of the organization itself. The rewards for this would be more election victories, a wealth of political patronage, and service to the community. In the remaining chapter we will see the growing maturity of Italian political behavior and chart the progress made by the Italian-Americans on the political scene.

Chapter 4

The Present Generation

The Mike Laura Club was organized on a county-wide level. Laura absorbed the local Italian Democratic Clubs into his association and in this way was able to secure for them a number of positions on the county-wide level. Some of the offices secured for the Laura men were those of Assistant to the Brooklyn Borough President, by John Joseph Savarese for Borough President James Byrnes in 1929, and Chief Clerk of the Supreme Court, Appellate Division by Joseph DeBragga in 1927.

The major shortcoming of this system was, however, that this patronage for Italian-Americans did not sift down to the local district levels. The Italian leadership during the late twenties became known for its failure to seek total absorption of the Italian-Americans into the regular ranks of the Democratic Party. In addition, this centralization, under one county-wide organization, pre-

vented Italian-American power from concentrating in areas that could have been controled.

The weaknesses of the county-wide organization, as seen in the Mike Laura Club, were not seen in similar terms by the Italian political leaders. Mike Laura had felt that Italian influence should be spread out over the county, and this opinion had many adherents. Another group of considerably younger men felt that the need for party strength by Italian-Americans was best obtained by gathering power on the local levels, and forcing a way into the councils of the Democratic County Committee. This new group wanted equality with the leaders, an equality arrived at through election victories. The newer group wanted positions in the Assembly and on the County Executive Committee and wanted to represent their entire districts, including Italians, rather than excluding others. This was a decided threat to the 'status quo'.

The first Italian-American in Brooklyn to successfully wage a district campaign to gain a position as representative of the district was Joseph Lentol of Greenpoint-Bushwick. Lentol served as an Assemblyman in 1919 and 1920 from the Fourteenth Assembly District of leader Dan Carroll.

Lentol, a young man, was not, however, all that Carroll wanted him to be, a stooge. Lentol went against Carroll's wishes when he voted in favor of a bill requiring fire escapes in certain types of buildings. As a result, Carroll denied him the re-nomination for re-election to the Assembly in 1920.

From that time on, Lentol made war on his former boss. Lentol tried many times and was finally successful in 1926, when he broke the back of the Carroll machine and was elected district leader of the Fourteenth. The Brooklyn Eagle carried the story of the Lentol victory:

Brooklyn regular political organizations are stunned today from two major shocks received in yesterday's primary elections. State Senator Daniel J. Carroll for more than a score of years the absolute boss of Eastern District was retired against his will as Democratic leader and State Committeeman of the 14th Assembly District by a majority of more than 1,000. His place in the councils of Democracy is taken by Joseph Lentol, known throughout the district as "Joe the Barber". Lentol is the first Democratic boss of Italian extraction in the history of Brooklyn.

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¹ Brooklyn Eagle, Wednesday, Sept. 15, 1926, p. 1, col. 8.

The Lentol victory was to bring a great change, as he would carry forth a new type of leadership to his district. Carroll had been depicted as a type of Tammany Hall chieftan who exercised the absolute and dictatorial control over his entire district. Said the Eagle about the Senator:

In the defeat of Carroll, one of the most picturesque bosses of the old school will pass from power. For two decades the Senator literally carried the Eastern District "in his vest". He ruled his bailiwick with an iron hand and counted on his big Christmas parties and outings to pull him through when any insurgent started a fight as they did most every two years. He got his first shock when Lentol came within 34 votes of capturing the leadership (in 1924). 2

It was also largely speculated that the Senator used more than outings and parties to consolidate his hold on the Fourteenth.

The new district leader was depicted as almost angelic in nature as the Eagle reported that he was carried about on the shoulders of his constituents and

² Loc. cit.

loyal followers throughout the entire district when they heard of his victory. Lentol was clearly the boy wonder of the day, at least in the eyes of the Brooklyn newspaper:

In methods and policies, Lentol is almost the direct antithesis of Carroll, being intensely interested in welfare and labor legislation. He is always available to and a sympathetic ear to his constituents. ³

As popular as he was with the voters on September 14th, 1926, Lentol was almost as unpopular with a large segment of his district two days short of eight years later when on September 12th, 1934, Lentol lost his seat on the County Committee to Dr. Joshua Friedman in a hard fought primary decided by a scant two hundred votes. Although Lentol was ousted at that time, he was, at a later time, victorious in reclaiming his district leadership and position on the Democratic County Executive Committee.

Another of the early leaders of the Democratic party was Carmen Pisano. Pisano, an undertaker, served

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Loc. cit.

as the leader of the Sixth Assembly District from 1930 to 1946. Pisano's district was taken over by Bertram L. Baker, the first Negro district leader in Kings County.

In the year that Lentol lost his leadership bid, 1924, another Italian in the adjoining Thirteenth Assembly District was winning the leadership of that Bushwick area. Peter (Pat) Petrucello, won a heated contest marked by ethnic quarrels. He was victorious over old-line leader William Breitenbach, however, the job proved to be too demanding for the largely inadequate Petrucello, and he lost his leadership almost as rapidly as he had gained it.

The idea of representation for Italian-Americans on the local level was also appealing to a youthful political aspirant from the area of South Brooklyn. James V. Mangano held to the thesis that representatives for Italian-American voters had to be elected on the local levels.

The Eighth Assembly District had by the thirties a substantial number of Italian-American residents. Mangano felt that they were being mis-represented and so in 1930 waged a primary fight against the organization for the designation as the Democratic candidate for the State Assembly. Mangano was easily defeated by the well oiled

and entrenched machine of the regulars, and indeed, he would be subject to constant defeat before he would achieve ultimate victory.

Mangano operated from an Italian club, the Mazzini Club, of which he was President. The conflicts that he faced, both internal as well as external, were similar to those faced by many of the same youthful aspirants to political office. His bid was for the union of the Italian elements of the district behind his candidacy, and it was not an easy task. The older elements of the population were contented with many of the strides that were being made, and the struggle to get their support for the Mangano candidacy was made difficult because of this contentment. Mangano's father, however, was able to build some of the old-line support among the Italians and he emerged rather strong for the 1933 primary contest for the Assembly seat. Again, however, he was beaten, but this time by a more narrow margin.

In 1934, Mangano had his real opportunity. He teamed up with Patty Diamond, the old district leader that was turned out by the incumbent in the 1928 primary. In opposition to Michael J. Reilly, the leader, they also

called upon Mrs. Anna Harper for support. In the 1934 primary, the insurgent team of Patty Diamond for leader, Anna Harper for co-leader and James Mangano for the Assembly was able to claim victory.⁴

The victory by no means meant a silent surrender on the part of the losers. Fights broke out through many sections of the district and the fists were readily complemented by bricks and bats. In the salvation of the day, however, the police from the Butler Street Station were able to quell many of the polling place disturbances.⁵

At the end of the day, former leader Reilly was taken to the hospital, although strangely enough not for injuries received at the physical hands of the opposition, but because of gallstones, the cause of which might even have been traced to the victorious team.

Mangano's position as the Assemblyman from the Eighth was virtually unchallenged and the Italian proved his pop-

⁴ Personal information concerning James Mangano and the affairs of the Eighth Assembly District were obtained from Hon. James V. Mangano in a private interview, March 6, 1962.

⁵ Brooklyn Eagle, September 13, 1934, p. 1, col. 5.

ularity with his constituency by garnering record votes in his district. He ended his service at Albany in 1937, when he bucked the LaGuardia trend to be victorious in his bid for office as the Democratic candidate for Sheriff of Kings County. Ironically, Mangano was victorious in the face of Democratic setbacks. Sixteen years before, another Italian, Mike Laura, running for the same office, Sheriff, was defeated in the face of party victories.

Mangano was re-elected as Sheriff in 1941, but because of the passage of charter revision at the same election, the office was abolished. Mangano had found that while winning the election, he had lost the job.

The Eighth was largely Italian, and the migration of Italian-Americans into the district increased with the passage of time. Mangano was charged with much of the patronage dispensing particularly among the Italians. He became the right-hand of the district leader, and as Diamond advanced in age, Mangano came upon many of his responsibilities. When Diamond died in 1940, and the leadership spot was vacant, the Democratic County Executive Committee, which had the power of temporary

appointment, selected Mangano as the District Leader. Mangano faced opposition, however, from the President of the club, Byrnes, and the co-leader of the District, Mrs. Harper.

Mangano challenged them to a race, and although Mrs. Harper tried to saddle the issue, she was eventually discarded by both candidates. Byrnes chose an Italian co-leader, Mrs. Martel, and Mangano reciprocated by choosing an Irish woman, Mrs. Keogh.

The result was a Mangano-Keogh victory in the last primary fight faced by the present administrator and General Clerk of the County Court.

Another of the early leaders in Brooklyn was Jerome Ambro. Ambro served in the State Assembly from 1924 with the blessings of the district leader. In 1931, however, Ambro had a falling out with the leadership in his Bushwick-Greenpoint Nineteenth Assembly District. The leader, Henry Hasenflug, nominated Victor L. Anfuso to unseat Ambro in the fall primary of 1931. The primary battle was a bitter one that saw the entire strength of the organization machine pitted against Ambro. Early returns showed Ambro to be the winner by a 261 vote majority, but

a re-count showed that the victory over Anfuso was actually by a scant twenty-one votes.⁶

The spirit of the campaign was one of fire, and this was demonstrated by Ambro's driving past Anfuso in an open car and shouting at the organization man as he was leaving his club, "My triumph is a triumph for the people."⁷

Ambro went on to win several more victories "for the people" including the district leadership of the Nineteenth when he beat Hasenflug in the spring primaries of 1932.

The old organization forces were not yet dead, even after losing the district leadership. In the fall primary they tried to unseat Ambro in the Assembly again, and nominated Anfuso to again face Ambro. This defeat for Anfuso was more than convincing, as his remark to the press indicated. Said Anfuso at the end of the primary battle, "I have learned one thing, that politics in the

⁶ Brooklyn Eagle, September 16, 1931, p. 1. col. 4.

⁷ Brooklyn Eagle, September 15, 1931, p. 1. col. 3.

Nineteenth A.D. is not for me." ⁸

Ambro's hold on the district leadership was quite firm, and he passed his leadership on to Joseph P. Marcelle. By 1938, Marcelle and Lentol were the only Italian leaders on the Executive Committee.

The Bushwick section saw the selection of an Italian District Leader in the person of former Deputy Markets Commissioner John A. Valenti. Valenti was the leader of the Twentieth Assembly District until he was elected to a berth on the Municipal Court. His position as leader of the Twentieth was assumed by Joseph Corso, who is today both District Leader and Assemblyman of the Twentieth Assembly District.

Anthony J. Travia, the leader of the Twenty-Second Assembly District received his position as leader of that New Lots District with the death of his predecessor. The passage of long time leader, Francis J. Sinnott, placed the mantle of leadership upon Travia who retains that position today from his 1958 election as the leader.

⁸ Brooklyn Eagle, September 21, 1932, p. 2, col. 4.

In the Twelfth Assembly District, the present leader of that Bay Ridge Democrat district, Ross J. DiLorenzo, 'inherited' the party district leadership.

The last of the district leaders, Meade Esposito, found it necessary to engage in a primary contest to win his spot on the Executive Committee. Esposito, the leader of the Fifth Assembly District, won a primary election in 1960 for district leader against old-line leader, former Assemblyman Harry Morr. Esposito teamed up with Shirley Weiner to beat Harry Morr and his co-leader, Mrs. Helen Lacy, in that primary. In the 1960 primary as well, the Democratic incumbent for the Assembly, James Mistretta, was defeated by the Esposito backed Yoswein in the primary election.

At the present time, the Democratic County Executive Committee of Kings is composed of forty-four members, the leaders and co-leaders of each of the twenty-two Assembly Districts in the borough. In addition, the Democratic County Committee has a corps of officers, not necessarily from the Executive Committee. There are two Italian-American officers of the Democratic County Committee, and ten members, five leaders and five co-leaders, on the

Executive Committee. They are:

Fifth Assembly District
Meade Esposito

Sixth Assembly District
Josephine Bravo, co-leader

Eighth Assembly District
James E. Mangano
Mae DeMange, co-leader

Ninth Assembly District
Violet Maglio, co-leader

Twelfth Assembly District
Ross J. DiLorenzo

Sixteenth Assembly District
Vera I. Condello, co-leader

Nineteenth Assembly District
Dora Vaccaro, co-leader

Twentieth Assembly District
Joseph R. Corso

Twenty-Second Assembly District
Anthony J. Travia

Second Vice President, County Committee
Frank Pino

Sergeant-At-Arms, County Committee
Mark Fasullo

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As has been said before, the Republican Party absorbed its Italian-American adherents more readily than did the

⁹ New York State Red Book, 1961-1962 (Albany, Williams, 1961), pp. 858-859.

the Democrats. Antonio DeMartini, who was also the first Italian elected a club president, became the first Republican since Eugene Amelia to serve on the County Executive Committee. By 1938, there were two Italian Republican District Leaders, Frank DePiano of the Thirteenth Assembly District and Thomas Parisi of the Sixteenth A.D.

Primary fights within the ranks of the Republican Party have not been frequent, noteworthy or particularly violent because of the relatively minimal impact of the Republican Party on the Brooklyn community. Nevertheless, the Republican Party has been the vehicle of expression for many Italians. In addition, the Kings County Republican organization has provided a framework for advancement by Italians within the Party.

Italian-Americans have made, and are still making, constant progress and strides within the Republican Party. At present, the second most important post in the organization, that of Secretary to the County Committee, is held by an Italian-American, Anthony N. Durso. Durso, the right hand of County Leader John R. Crews has attempted to bring vitality to a much stagnated organization that has been contented to take second place in every election

year. The Executive Committee of the Republican Party is structured similarly to its Democratic counterpart. There are forty-four member, half men and half women, from each of the twenty-two Assembly Districts. At present, there are ten Italians serving on the County Executive Committee, eight leaders and two co-leaders. They are:

Fourth Assembly District
Michael J. Chiusano

Fifth Assembly District
Frances Paladino, co-leader

Seventh Assembly District
Albert J. Marino

Eighth Assembly District
Frank J. Macre

Ninth Assembly District
Armand J. Starece

Sixteenth Assembly District
Thomas G. Parisi

Eighteenth Assembly District
Thomas Damato

Nineteenth Assembly District
Joseph Parisi

Twentieth Assembly District
Josephine Cartafalsa, co-leader

Twenty-Second Assembly District
Joseph Soviero

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 847-848.

The Italian representation within the third party movements is also felt today. Salvatore DeMatteo, currently a Liberal Party member, serves as the Secretary of the Liberal Party County Committee of Kings County, having recently replaced Molly Merrell.

One of the most vociferous of third party leaders is a 'Fiorello Goldwater' type political agitator of the United Taxpayers Party. Vito P. Battista, the Chairman of the United Taxpayers Party, is an off-beat politician who has used the pleas of the landlords to further his own political ends. Resorting to fiery campaigns, highlighted by appearances in a barrel, has done the little campaigner small good. Vito still stands, with over-sized hat in hand, waiting to be anointed by the wand of John R. Crews.

As the district leadership represents the people of the party on the direct local level, the State Assembly, with districts identical to the those of the party districts, has become the branch of the state legislature considered to be the most representative of the constituents of a particular area. Composed of 150 members elected in districts throughout the state, the New York Assembly contains its largest delegation from Kings County.

Currently there are twenty-two representatives from Kings, although previous to the last re-apportionment, there were twenty-three. In addition, since 1920, thirty Italians from Brooklyn have served in the lower house.

The first Italian Assemblyman to be elected in modern times was Joseph Lentol, previously mentioned, of the Fourteenth Assembly District. Lentol served in 1919 and 1920, but was denied re-nomination. With that denial came a concentration by Lentol on the District Leader, Dan Carroll, and ultimate victory for the leadership in the primary of 1926.

In 1922, Andrew Yacenda, a regular Democrat running with Republican endorsement as well, was elected after the Socialist incumbent, Henry Jaeger, had been ousted from his seat. This was done by the Assembly on the grounds that Jaeger was not a resident of his district, rather was a resident of New Jersey.¹¹ The victorious Yacenda was a realtor who served as treasurer of the Italian-American Democrats of Kings County and was an active member of the Sons of Italy.

¹¹ James Malcolm (ed), New York State Red Book, 1922, (Albany, Williams, 1922), p. 119.

The only other Italian-American to have been sent to the Assembly from the Fourteenth Assembly District is the current office holder. Edward S. Lentol, the son of Joseph, is a practicing attorney in the local community. He is active in the affairs of Williamsburg, and has represented the Fourteenth in the Assembly since 1949.

The Nineteenth Assembly District in the Bushwick section has sent five Italians to the State Assembly. Of course the boundaries of the district have varied somewhat in re-apportionment, but the composition of the district has not been radically altered. Republicans Demico and Giaccone served in 1920 and 1921 and Democrats Fasullo and Palma in 1922-23 and 1924. These men were previously mentioned.

In 1924, Jerome Ambro was given the Assembly nod by the organization and was victorious in his election bid. He held his seat in the Assembly until 1933, although in the previously mentioned 1931 and 1932 primaries, his position was challenged by the discontented organization.

The extinct Twenty-Third District in East New York-Brownsville was an area that sent several Italians to the Assembly. James F. Ricca, a Republican who fought the

the Socialists with Democratic endorsement served from 1922 until 1927. Although both organizations were willing to back the dual candidacy of Rioca, he was not always uncontested in the primaries, and he faced particularly stiff opposition in 1926.

From 1935, until the merger of the district with the neighboring districts, Italian Assemblymen were always sent from the Twenty-Third. The first Democrat elected was George T. LoRe, who served one term, from 1935 to 1937. In the election of 1936, LoRe sought re-election, but was beaten by Republican Frank Monaco in a Roosevelt off-year. Monaco as well served one term as the Democrats had their revenge in the election of 1938.

In the 1938 election, Robert Giordano, a Democrat was victorious to return the seat to the minority party. Giordano served in the Assembly until 1942. The election of 1942 brought Italian-born Alfred Lama to the Assembly. Lama, an architect, was re-elected every two years to the Assembly from the Twenty-Third.

When the Twenty-Third was eliminated, a large part of the district was given over to the Fifteenth. In the 1944 election, Lama ran from that new district and caused the

retirement of James Amelia, a one-term Assemblyman who represented the Fifteenth in the previous Assembly. Lama has been elected from that district consistently and is the Assemblyman today.

The Eighth Assembly District, the Mangano stronghold in South Brooklyn, has sent four Italian-Americans to the State Assembly, all of them Italians of the Democratic Party. The three former Assemblymen have also gained political prominence after their service in the Assembly.

James V. Mangano served from 1935 until 1938. Charles J. Beckinella, first elected in 1937, served from 1938 until 1944. He is currently a Justice of the New York State Supreme Court. Frank Composto served in the Assembly from 1950 until 1958, when he was elected to the State Senate. The current Assemblyman, thirty-two year old Guy James Mangano, is the son of the leader, and has been in the Assembly since his election in 1958.

The Sixteenth Assembly District in Coney Island sent Carmine J. Marasco to the Assembly in 1935. Marasco, the late County Court Judge, represented the district from 1935 until 1941, with the exception of 1938, when Salvatore DeMatteo was victorious. DeMatteo, currently the Secretary

of the Liberal Party in Kings, was elected on the American Labor Party line, and was the only ALP man elected with that sole designation in Kings County. The Labor Party delegation to the Assembly reached a high point that year with four Assemblymen. Marasco won his seat again at the next election, and in 1941, went on to the State Senate as the first Italian-American from Brooklyn in that body in modern times.

In 1945, another man who was to become a State Senator from the district, Frank Pino was elected to the Assembly from the Sixteenth. Pino served in the Assembly until 1955.

The Twenty-Second Assembly District in the New Lots area and going as far east as the Queens boundary has sent Italian Assemblymen to Albany fairly consistently. The first one was the former Democratic City Councilman Peter H. Ruvolo, who served one term in 1938. Since 1944, the district has sent Italian Assemblymen; one from each party, but has clearly demonstrated an affection for the Democratic candidate.

In 1944, Anthony J. Travia was elected to the Assembly on the Democratic ticket. He made a second bid in 1946, but was not as successful. Travia, subjected to the national

trend against the Democratic party that year, lost his seat by a scant 555 votes to the Republican candidate and District leader, Joseph M. Soviero.

By 1948, however, Travia had his revenge on Soviero as he beat him by 7,101 votes while President Harry S. Truman was pulling the major political upset of the day. Since 1948, Travia, who is also the District Leader of the Twenty-Second, has been sent to the state legislature at every election.

With the death of Democratic Assembly Minority Leader Eugene F. Bannigan, Travia succeeded to the position as Minority Leader of the Assembly, the highest ranking Democrat in that body, and the first Italian-American to hold that office. Travia, as the highest ranking Democrat, has as his Republican counterpart, Joseph Carlino, of Long Beach, the Speaker of the Assembly and an Italian-American.

Bushwick's Twentieth Assembly District has sent one Italian Assemblyman to Albany and has sent him since the election of 1948. Joseph Corso, a lawyer, and Democratic District Leader of the Twentieth, has been the sole representative of the district since 1949.

The Twelfth Assembly District in Bay Ridge has of recent years become a Republican stronghold. The area is largely conservative and is one in which both parties in the past have had to expend much effort in order to win. Frank Vaccaro, a short-term District Leader in 1950, won the race in 1954 on the tails of Governor W. Averill Harriman, and since that time, the district has been subject to national trends.

In 1956, with President Dwight D. Eisenhower heading the ticket, Republican Luigi Marano beat the incumbent, Vaccaro, by more than 4,500 votes. In 1958, however, Governor Rockefeller running strongly in the district, but not as strongly as did Eisenhower, was able to keep Marano in office by 400 votes, 15,501 to 15,101.

It is a tribute to incumbent Marano that in 1960, with Catholic John F. Kennedy running in a Catholic district, Marano was able to win by a sensational 3,800 votes over his Democratic opponent John N. Sciarra.

The Fifth Assembly District is the only other district in Kings County to have sent Italian-Americans to the Assembly since 1920. In a special election in 1954, John A. Monteleone was elected to succeed Harry Morr.

Monteleone was re-elected in the 1954 general election, and again in 1956 and 1958 as well. With Monteleone's resignation from the legislature for the purpose of taking a seat on the Municipal Court, he was replaced by James Mistretta in a special election in 1959.

Mistretta was later contested by Leonard Yoswein in a bid for the Democratic designation, and lost a bitter primary contest in June of 1960. Mistretta retained the endorsement of the Liberal Party in the general election, but was unable to retain his seat in Albany.

The present Assembly delegation from Kings County is composed of twenty-two members. Of that number, there are seven Italians, six of them Democrats. They are:

Eighth Assembly District
Guy James Mangano, Democrat

Eleventh Assembly District
George A. Cincotta, Democrat

Twelfth Assembly District
Luigi R. Marano, Republican

Fourteenth Assembly District
Edward S. Lentol, Democrat

Fifteenth Assembly District
Alfred A. Lama, Democrat

Twentieth Assembly District
Joseph R. Corso, Democrat

Twenty-Second Assembly District
Anthony J. Travia, Democrat 12

The State Senate has had a considerably fewer number of Italian-Americans in that body of fifty members. The first Italian-American in modern times in the Senate was Carmine J. Marasco, who was elected from the fourth Senatorial District in 1940 and 1942. In the election of 1944, Marasco left the State Senate race from his Coney Island district to make a successful bid for a berth on the bench of the County Court.

Republican District Leader Joseph Parisi represented the Fourteenth Senatorial District being first elected in 1944. In 1946, a Republican year, Parisi was re-elected. In 1948, however, with the Truman victory, Parisi was beaten by Mario DeOptatis by 20,842 votes.

DeOptatis faced primary opposition when the Democratic organization tried to deny him re-nomination and placed Francis E. Acquavella against him in the primary. But DeOptatis won the primary designation, and went on to beat Parisi in the general election. DeOptatis was re-

¹² New York State Red Book, 1961-1962, op. cit., p. 129.

elected in 1952 and served in the Senate until 1954.

In a special election in 1956, Assemblyman Frank J. Pino was elected as a New York State Senator from Coney Island's Fifteenth Senatorial District. Pino, active in the affairs of the Italian Board of Guardians, was re-elected in each subsequent election, the last one being in 1960, by an almost four to one margin.

The newest of the Italian State Senators from Kings County is former Assemblyman Frank Composto. Composto was selected to succeed Thomas J. Cuite, when the latter made his unsuccessful bid for Congress against Francis E. Dorn in 1958. Composto representing a South Brooklyn-Brooklyn Heights constituency was re-elected in 1960.

At the present time in the expanded fifty-eight man State Senate, Kings County has nine Senators, two of them Italians and both Democrats. They are:

Thirteenth Senatorial District
(Third & Eighth A.D.s)
 Frank Composto, Democrat

Fifteenth Senatorial District
(16th & 19th A.D.s)
 Frank J. Pino, Democrat 13

¹³ Ibid., p. 53.

Italian-Americans have also made their mark on the city legislature, electing members to both the Board of Aldermen and the City Council. The first Italian-American to serve on the Board of Aldermen since 1920 was Humberto F.X. Savarese, who represented the Fifty-First District as a Republican from that Bay Ridge district in 1921. Savarese failed in his re-election bid and was the only Italian-American to have served as an Alderman until the mid 1930's.

In 1933, when Fiorello LaGuardia was making his victorious bid for Mayor on the Republican and Fusion tickets, he carried into office with him Louis E. Isnardi of Brooklyn's Coney Island area. Isnardi served only one term, however. Also elected with Republican Isnardi were Democrats Charles L. Fasullo of the Fifty-Third District and Peter H. Ruvolo of the Fifty-Sixth District. Fasullo served only one term, but Ruvolo was successful in his re-election bid of 1935.

In the election of 1935, Beldassare Lamberto ran for Fasullo's Aldermanic seat in the Bushwick section on the Democratic ticket and was successful. Lamberto served until November, 1937. In the same election for the Board of Aldermen, Michael J. Calandrello ran successfully

as the Democratic candidate for the City Council in Greenpoint's Thirty-Fifth District.

In 1937, the LaGuardia Proportional Representation plan went into effect. As a result of this system, the City Council became the legislature of the city, replacing the Board of Aldermen. Through a highly involved and technical system, candidates ran borough-wide and the electors chose from amongst them on a preferential basis. The strong and vocal minorities were therefore permitted to have a councilman or two of their own. This did not only apply to political groups, but to ethnic ones as well. Invariably, P.R., as it was called, caused the City Council to be composed of a host of splinter groups. If it were not for the strong Democratic base that made up a majority of the Council, the situation would have been worse.

Each group had its special representative, and the Italian representative was Anthony J. DiGiovanna. DiGiovanna, a Democrat, was elected every two years under Proportional Representation until it was rejected by the voters of the city in a referendum in 1947.

A splinter party candidate, Peter V. Cacchione, was

rejected by the voters in the elections of 1937 and 1939. In 1941, however, Cacchione, who was a member of the Communist Party, was elected to the City Council. Although by no means selected by the greatest number of voters, the oddity of the system, in which Cacchione was the only Communist candidate and party members cast a ballot for him alone, led to his leading of the returns in 1943 and 1945 re-election bids.

Cacchione, who was also the County Chairman of the Communist Party, ran without a party label when the party was ruled off of the ballot. Cacchione was a dynamic campaigner and a tireless worker. As his political future was snuffed out with the repeal of Proportional Representation in 1947, Cacchione ironically died within a week of that event. He fought an untiring battle to preserve a system, Proportional Representation, so freakish as to allow a totally unrepresentative group to speak for the people in the city legislature.

The 1947 death of Cacchione and the appointment of DiGiovanna as a City Magistrate would have left the Italians without their representative had it not been for the special election called that year to fill the DiGiovanna

vacancy. The unofficial system of giving minority groups their legislators was seen in the nominations for the City Council seat. The Republicans nominated Italian born Angelo J. Cincotta; the Democrats, Thomas Mirabile and the Socialists, Sam Marino. In addition, the American Labor Party chose Ada Jackson, a Negro, and the Liberal Party selected John Kelly. The borough-wide special election was won by Mirabile, the Democrat, by 169,290 votes.

With the repeal of Proportional Representation, Mirabile was forced to run from one of the newly created Councilmanic districts. His district was the Bushwick-Greenpoint District, known as both the Ninth and Tenth Councilmanic Districts. Mirabile was constantly re-elected, until he was the Democratic candidate in 1961 for a seat on the City Court. Mirabile won the Judgeship and resigned the Council seat.

The only other Italian-American to serve on the City Council is a Bay Ridge Republican elected in 1961. Angelo Arculeo, a former Assistant Attorney General of New York State, is currently, along with Republican-Liberal Stanley M. Isaacs of Manhattan, the minority in the twenty-six

man City Council. The current President of the City Council, Paul Scervane, from Queens, is partially Italian.

Brooklyn boasts just one Italian-American Member of Congress throughout the history of the borough. Victor L. Anfuso, who currently serves in that office from the Eighth Congressional District was first sent to Congress in 1950.

The Sicilian born Anfuso, who was part of the entrenched machine in Bushwick that was defeated by Jerome Ambro in the thirties, made a bid as an insurgent for the seat of the incumbent Democratic Congressman, Dr. Joseph Pfeifer, a practicing physician. Anfuso attacked Pfeifer, a graduate of St. Francis College in Brooklyn, on the grounds that he was not performing his services to his constituents and had the worst attendance of any Congressman in Brooklyn.

Although Anfuso was given, "an outside chance",¹⁴ he defeated Pfeifer for the Democratic endorsement. When the tally was made, Anfuso had 11,902 to Pfeifer's 9,695, giving Anfuso a plurality and the nomination,

¹⁴ Brooklyn Eagle, August 8, 1950, p. 7, col. 6.

In the 1950 election, Anfuso had little difficulty beating his Republican opponent by a better than a three to one margin. Anfuso received 42,360 votes to 18,655 votes for Republican Joseph Fontanella. The American Labor Party candidate, Antonio Iandiorno received 4,196 and August Classens of the Liberal Party trailed with 3,868.¹⁵

Anfuso led a campaign based upon his anti-Communist record and his fight against the Sicilian Communists in the Italian election of 1948.

With Congressional re-apportionment in 1952, however, Anfuso lost his seat in Congress. Brooklyn lost one Congressman, and since Anfuso was the youngest in point of service, he voluntarily stepped down. He regained the seat in 1954, however, when Representative Louis Heller resigned from his seat to accept a judicial appointment. Anfuso left the Magistrates' bench to which he had been appointed in the interim and was elected to the Eighty-Third Congress. Since that time, Anfuso has been re-elected every two years to the lower house of Congress.

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Brooklyn Eagle, November 8, 1950, p. 3, col. 1.

At present, Anfuso faces a problem similar to the one presented to him in 1952. Re-apportionment promises to eliminate his seat in Congress as Brooklyn must lose another Congressman. Anfuso remains the junior member of the Democratic delegation that is expected to have a district reasonably safe, and is being pressured to step aside. ¹⁶

It had been for many years the joke in Washington and Greenpoint that Victor Anfuso was the only member of the House Agriculture Committee without a single farm in his district.

Italian-Americans have also had the distinction of serving in various state and municipal positions. On the state-wide level, the candidacy of Anthony J. Di Giovanna as the Democratic choice for Attorney-General in 1946 was a feather in the cap of Brooklyn and of the Italian community. Perhaps the greatest achievement for Italians in New York, however, came in 1950, when three

¹⁶ Although in point of service, Hugh L. Carey, a first-term Congressman is the junior member of the Brooklyn Congressional delegation, his district is in the process of being 'Crewsmandered' for Republican Francis Dorn.

This makes Anfuso's district, the Democratic district that will be eliminated. Anfuso has made no comments.

Italians, all from Sicily, made bids for the office of Mayor of the City of New York. Vincent Impellitteri, the Acting Mayor, ran on the Experience Ticket; Ferdinand Pecora was the Democratic choice and Edward Corsi ran for the Republicans. Although they were not from Brooklyn, it was an indication that the political leaders and the voters of the City of New York had given the Italians full political recognition.

Perhaps the most important acknowledgement that can be extended to an immigrant group, however, comes in the area of judicial selection. Judges are usually the most stable and conservative members of the community and are selected not only on the basis of judicial and legal ability, but on the family and political background as well. The Italian-Americans were subjected to rigid standards and it took many years to erase the prejudice on the basis of family names.

The first Brooklyn Italian awarded a position on the bench was Gaspar C. Liota. Liota was appointed a Magistrate by Mayor Hylan in 1921, and for eight years, remained the only Italian-American from Brooklyn in the courts.

The Magistrates Court is a "Court of inferior criminal jurisdiction."¹⁷ It is the lowest of the criminal courts of the city. The judges of the Magistrates Court are called magistrates and are appointed by the Mayor of the City for terms of ten years.

Liota remained the only Italian-American from Brooklyn on the bench until Sylvester Sabbatino was appointed for a ten year term in 1929. Since the Sabbatino appointment, twelve other Brooklyn Italian-Americans have been appointed as City Magistrates. In 1930, Nicholas H. Pinto was appointed, and one year later, when Liota was re-appointed, he was joined by D. Joseph DeAndrea.

In 1938, Fiorello LaGuardia, little known for brilliant judicial appointments, appointed spats wearing J. Roland Sala, an eccentric, who still makes the headlines periodically. In 1941, Alexander Pisciotta, a Republican, was appointed and in 1943, Eugene Canudo was also made a City Magistrate. Canudo failed to serve his full term.

After the defeat of DiGiovanna for the State Attorney-General post in 1946, Mayor William O'Dwyer appointed him

¹⁷ Thelma Smith (ed), Guide to the Municipal Government of The City of New York (New York: Ronald Press, 1960), p. 244

to the Magistrates Court. DiGiovanna resigned in 1948, however, with his election to the New York State Supreme Court-Second Department. Recent bench appointments to the Magistrates Court were of Anthony E. Maglio in 1949, and again in 1959, Victor L. Anfuso in 1953, Vincent J. Ferreri in 1952, A. Lawrence Acquavella in 1952 and Larry M. Vetrano in 1957.

Anfuso resigned in 1954 with his election to Congress, and Acquavella with his election to the City Court in 1959. Former Magistrate Ferreri, whose term expired in January of 1962 read in the newspapers that Mayor Wagner had decided against re-appointing him.

In addition to the above, and the Magistrates appointed by the Mayor, the Mayors of the City themselves are also Magistrates under the City Charter.

Current Italian-American Magistrates from Brooklyn are:

Larry M. Vetrano - term expires July 18, 1962

Anthony E. Maglio- term expires June 30, 1969

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18 Official Directory of the City of New York (New York: City Record, 1961), p. 244.

The civil court similar in status to the Magistrates Court is the Municipal Court. "A statutory court of limited jurisdiction (it) is the lowest court with civil jurisdiction in the city."¹⁹ The Justices of the Municipal Court are elected from districts and also hold their seats for ten years.

The President of the Mike Laua Club, Michael Ditore was the first Italian-American to serve on the Municipal Court in Brooklyn. As such, Ditore was the first elected judge of Italian-American origin in Kings County. Ditore was elected from the First Judicial District in 1929, and re-elected in 1939. Also elected from the Seventh Judicial District in 1939 was Peter H. Ruvolo, the former Councilman and Assemblyman. In 1944, Charles Beckinella went to the Municipal Court after serving in the Assembly. Beckinella was re-elected in 1954, but resigned in 1955 when he was elected to the New York State Supreme Court-Second Judicial District.

In 1945, M. Henry Martuscello, who is known as the "student" was elected to the Municipal Court. Martuscello

¹⁹ Smith, op. cit., p. 239.

resigned from the bench, however, in 1958, when he went to the State Supreme Court.

In 1949, and then again in 1959, Dominic S. Rinaldi was elected to the Municipal Court. With his death, Thomas Mirabile resigned from the City Council to successfully win his seat in the Municipal Court in the election of 1961.

Other Italian Americans who have been elected to the Municipal Court include Louis G. Andreozzi in 1956, Vincent Damiani in 1956, John A. Monteleone in 1959 and John Valenti, also in 1959.

Present members of the Municipal Court of the City of New York are:

First Judicial District

Louis G. Andreozzi - expires Dec. 31, 1965

Third Judicial District

Thomas J. Mirabile - expires Dec. 31, 1970

Fifth Judicial District

Vincent D. Damiani - expires Dec. 31, 1965

Seventh Judicial District

John A. Valenti - expires Dec. 31, 1969

J. A. Monteleone - expires Dec. 31, 1969 20

The City Court is a civil court which is a , "Constitutional court of record with limited legal and equitable jurisdiction in civil suits."²¹ When the court was expanded in 1939, the first Italian-American was appointed to it. In all, three Italian-Americans have served on this court and they still do today.

Sylvester Sabbatino was elected in 1948 and 1958, and his present term expires on Dec. 31, 1968. Other City Court Justices are A. Lawrence Acquavella and Carmine A. Ventiera, whose terms expire on December 31, 1969.

The County Court is a, "constitutional court of record with unlimited criminal jurisdiction."²² The Judges of the County Court are elected for fourteen years, and since 1935, there have been four Italian-Americans from Kings that have served on it.

The first, Peter H. Brancato, was appointed by Governor Herbert Lehman in 1935. Brancato was re-elected

²¹ Smith, op. cit., p. 243.

²² Ibid., p. 251.

in 1936 for the full term. In 1944, Nicholas H. Pinto was appointed by Governor Thomas E. Dewey. Pinto waged a campaign for the position at the next election, but as a Republican in Kings easily lost it to Democrat-Liberal candidate Carmine Marasco. Marasco, who was elected in 1944, was re-elected in 1958. Marasco's death in 1960 caused his replacement by Dominic S. Rinaldi who was elected to his seat and holds it today.

Another prominent jurist on the city level is Juvenal Marchisio, a Magistrate of the Domestic Relations Court. Marchisio is an experienced jurist who has been consistently re-appointed. Another Italian-American of Brooklyn, Leonard Ruisi, has been recently appointed by Mayor Robert F. Wagner as a Magistrate of the Domestic Relations Court to fill a recent vacancy.

On the state-wide level, four Italian-Americans have served from Brooklyn's state courts. The first of these was Henry L. Ughetta, a part-owner of the Brooklyn Dodgers, a National League Baseball team. Ughetta was elected in 1942 as a Justice of the New York State Supreme Court, from the Second Judicial District, for a fourteen year term. In 1951, Ughetta was appointed to the Appellate Division, Second Judicial Department by Governor Dewey.

Ughetta was re-elected to the Supreme Court in 1956, and is still serving on the Appellate Division.

In 1960, Ughetta ran on the Democratic ticket for the highest state court in New York, the Court of Appeals. He was unsuccessful against Republican-Liberal Sydney Foster in a New York State election that showed the state going for Kennedy. The reason for the Ughetta defeat lies in the denial of Liberal Party support in the judicial bid.

The other Justices of the Supreme Court of Italian-American origin are still serving in that capacity. They are Anthony J. DiGiovanna, who was elected in 1948 and must stand for re-election in 1962, Charles J. Beckinella, elected in 1955 and subject to the review of the voters in 1969, and M. Henry Martuscello, who was elected for a fourteen year term in 1952 that will expire in 1966.

The greatest judicial strides made by Italian-Americans from Brooklyn were made in the federal court system. In 1936, an election year, Franklin D. Roosevelt appointed Matthew T. Abruzzo as a Judge of the United States District Court-Eastern District of New York. Abruzzo is still serving. In another election year, 1948, another federal

appointment was made. Harry Truman selected Paul Rao, linked to Brooklyn by way of an honorary degree at St. John's among other things, as a Judge of the United States Customs Court. Rao is still serving on the bench.

Italian-Americans have made contributions that are almost exhaustive to record. They have made them in many areas of government and on many different levels. Dr. Dominic Maurillo serves on the New York State Board of Regents, and former Brooklynite Frank V. Votte directs Veterans Affairs in the State. James Amadei served on the New York State Workman's Compensation Board. In addition, Salvatore T. Abruzzo is a United States Commissioner of Courts and Edward D. Re is the Chairman of the Foreign Claims Settlement Commission, to name just a few. There have been many more, and the number is increasing almost daily.

In addition, aside from the names on the election machines, or on the patronage rolls, there are countless of other Italian-Americans that take part in political campaigns, serve on community councils and, in short, play politically important roles in all areas of concern.

The Italian-American Political History of Brooklyn cannot be concluded so abruptly. The story continues with each political club that is organized, and develops with every election that is staged.

In the eyes of one political leader of Brooklyn, the role of the Italian-Americans in the borough has not been as prominent as it ought. As a result, he feels, Italian-Americans have been subject to constant misrepresentation in the legislative, judicial and executive councils. In addition, however, he expects that in time this situation will be remedied.

Statistics seem to agree with this assertion, but if an observation may be permitted, the day appears to be approaching when the Italian-American will disappear from the ballot completely. People will walk to their polling places and not realize which candidate is Italian and which candidate is not. The reason will not be ignorance, but rather unconcern. As each national group becomes absorbed and accepted, the old national heritage becomes completely impersonal and frequently forgotten. A sad, but perhaps beneficial process, it brings to a conclusion national political history as I have written it.

If this process of amalgamation occurs in the history of Italian-Americans, as it has occurred in the past for others before, and there is little reason to imagine its not happening, the Italian-American Political History will be concluded not because of the laxity of the Italians, or their departure from political activity, but rather because of increased participation in political, social and economic life that makes the Italian-American an essential and fully integrated part of America. It will bring with it the completeness of the American experience.

The day of complete recognition for the Italians is approaching. It will be a day prepared for by the undaunted spirit displayed in the struggles for that recognition.

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